"Islam" in Sanskrit doxography: a reconsideration via the writings of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī

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Abstract

In the ongoing debate regarding the construction of the modern concept of "Hinduism", recent research has considered the ways in which the pre-colonial encounter with Islam may have served as a catalyst in the crystallisation of an increasingly self-aware "Hindu" identity. Andrew Nicholson (Unifying Hinduism, 2010), in particular, has examined the genre of Sanskrit doxography to affirm that such a process of crystallisation was indeed taking place, as the transformations in this genre over time indicate a nascent Hindu identity emerging in the face of the "Muslim threat". This article reevaluates Nicholson's account with reference to the writings of one Sanskrit intellectual operating at the height of Muslim power in South Asia: the figure of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī (fl. sixteenth-early seventeenth centuries). Madhusūdana's short doxography, the Prasthānabheda, *often features in arguments for the pre-colonial roots of the concept of "Hinduism"; Madhusūdana's other doxographical writings, however, are typically neglected. Based upon an analysis of Madhusūdana's* Siddhāntabindu *and* Vedāntakalpalatikā, *this article suggests that a more nuanced consideration of the different audiences and authorial intentions that different doxographers had in mind can offer a modified picture of how early modern Sanskrit intellectuals were responding to the Muslim presence in the subcontinent.*

Keywords: Prasthañabheda; Hinduism; Siddhañtabindu; Vedāntakalpalatika

In the ongoing debate regarding the origin and construction of the modern concept of "Hinduism",[1] one fruitful avenue of research has been to consider the ways in which the

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[1]See Esther Bloch, Marianne Keppens and Rajaram Hegde (eds), *Rethinking Religion in India: The Colonial Construction of Hinduism* (London, 2011); Julius Lipner, 'The Rise of "Hinduism": or, How to Invent a World Religion with Only Moderate Success', *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 10, 1 (2006), pp. 91–104; Brian K. Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians, and the Colonial Construction of Religion* (Oxford, 2005); J. E. Llewellyn (ed.), *Defining Hinduism: A Reader* (Abingdon, 2005); Gauri Viswanathan, 'Colonialism and the Construction of Hinduism', in *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, (ed.) Gavin Flood (Oxford, 2003), pp. 23–44; Will Sweetman, *Mapping Hinduism: "Hinduism" and the Study of Indian Religions, 1600–1776* (Halle, 2003); Robert Eric Frykenberg, 'The Construction of Hinduism as a 'Public' Religion: Looking Again at the Religious Roots of Company Raj in South India', in *Religion and Public Cultures: Encounters and Identities in Modern South India*, (eds.) Keith

medieval and early modern encounter with Islam may have served as an important step in the crystallisation of an increasingly self-aware "Hindu" communal identity.[2] In his book *Unifying Hinduism: Philosophy and Identity in Indian Intellectual History* (2010), in particular, Andrew Nicholson examines the genre of Sanskrit doxographies in order to make the strong case that such a process of crystallisation was indeed taking place: even though "Muslims" are never explicitly mentioned in pre-colonial Sanskrit doxographies, Nicholson contends, the transformations that we can observe in this genre over time are indicative of a nascent "Hindu" identity emerging in the face of the "military and ideological threat" posed by Islam.[3] In this article, I seek to reevaluate and refine this account with reference to the work of one Sanskrit intellectual operating at the height of Muslim power in South Asia: the figure of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī (fl. sixteenth-early seventeenth centuries CE). In particular, I wish to argue that a more nuanced consideration of the different types of audiences that different doxographers may have had in mind—and, thus, the different intentions with which they may have been writing—can open up new possibilities for how to conceptualise early modern Sanskrit intellectuals' reactions to the Muslim presence in the subcontinent.

Nicholson renders his thesis on the basis of several Indian doxographies, including, among others, Cāttaṉār's Tamil *Maṇimēkalai* (c. sixth century), Bhāviveka's *Madhyamakahṛdayakārikā* (sixth century), Haribhadra's *Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya* (eighth century), Mādhava's *Sarvadarśana-saṃgraha* (fourteenth century),[4] Vijñānabhikṣu's *Sāṃkhyapravacanabhāṣya* (sixteenth century), and Madhusūdana Sarasvatī's *Prasthānabheda*. Nicholson traces the deployment of different Sanskrit concepts (particularly *āstika*, "affirmer", and *nāstika*, "denier") and doxographical schemes (categorised as "binary and exclusivist", on the one hand, and "hierarchical and inclusivist", on the other) across these various treatises, identifying a general trend over this broad period towards what we might now call "Hindu unification". What occurs, in other words, is a process wherein philosophical schools that were formerly identified as distinct rivals without any kind of alliance—including Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta—eventually come to be identified as a fundamentally unified tradition. So, whereas an early Vedāntin doxographer, for instance, may have judged Sāṃkhya and Mīmāṃsā to be every bit as "Other" as the various Buddhist, Jain and Cārvāka (Materialist) philosophical schools, by the time of Vijñānabhikṣu and Madhusūdana, Nicholson contends, we find doxographers positing a basic unity amongst the Sāṃkhya, Mīmāṃsā and other traditions that (purportedly) "affirm" the Veda (*āstikas*), as defined against those

E. Yandell and John J. Paul (London, 2000), pp. 3–26; Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India, and "The Mystic East"* (London, 1999); Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Stietencron (eds), *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity* (New Delhi, 1995); Günther D. Sontheimer and Hermann Kulke (eds), *Hinduism Reconsidered* (New Delhi, 1989); et al.

[2] See, e.g., David N. Lorenzen, 'Who Invented Hinduism?', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, 4 (1999), pp. 630–659, and Carl W. Ernst, 'Muslim Studies of Hinduism? A Reconsideration of Arabic and Persian Translations from Indian Languages', *Iranian Studies* 36, 2 (2003), pp. 173–195.

[3] Andrew J. Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism: Philosophy and Identity in Indian Intellectual History* (New York, 2010), p. 196.

[4] The *Sarvadarśanasaṃgraha* is traditionally credited to Mādhava (fourteenth century), though modern scholarship has doubted the attribution, suggesting Mādhava's younger contemporary Cannibhaṭṭa as a more likely candidate, alongside a few other possibilities. See, e.g., Anantlal Thakur, 'Cannibhaṭṭa and the Authorship of the *Sarvadarśanasaṃgraha*', *Adyar Library Bulletin* 25 (1961), pp. 524–538, and Jon M. Yamashita, 'A Translation and Study of the *Pāṇinidarśana* Chapter of the *Sarvadarśanasaṃgraha*' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1998), pp. 22–32.

schools that "deny" it (the *nāstikas*, namely, Buddhists, Jains and Materialists). These early modern thinkers had thus formulated a "proto-Hindu" identity, which, Nicholson asserts, was later taken up by nineteenth- and twentieth-century Hindu reformers to articulate "the world religion known today as Hinduism".[5]

Now, historically speaking, by the late medieval period, "Buddhism was virtually non-existent in India, and Jainism [and Materialism] hardly a threat", so why would early modern doxographers have continued to refute the Buddhist, Jain and Cārvāka schools?; and if these "*nāstika* Others" were indeed effectively absent from the scene, then what, in the absence of this longstanding enemy, could have driven these "Hindu" thinkers to unify the tradition so?[6] Following David Lorenzen in particular,[7] Nicholson contends that the "obvious answer to this question" was the "migration of Muslims into India that led to…eventual political domination".[8] Localities tend to put aside their internal differences and band together, Nicholson observes, in order to withstand "foreign aggression" and "external threat", and the clear candidate to play this role, for early modern Sanskrit writers, was Islam.[9] And so, Nicholson suggests, even though terms such as "Islam" and "Muslim" do not appear in early modern Sanskrit doxographies, there is every reason to suspect that the Buddhists, Jains and Materialists stood, at least in part, as "placeholders" for Islam; when Madhusūdana, in his own turn, "becomes the first doxographer to explicitly associate the beliefs of the *nāstikas* with those of [barbarian] foreigners (*mlecchas*)", we may reasonably infer, Nicholson avers, that he is referring to Muslims and to Islam.[10]

In arguing this case throughout the later stages of his book, Nicholson employs a fairly consistent set of vocabulary to depict the probable reaction of these "proto-Hindu" Sanskrit writers to the Muslim presence in South Asia: descriptors such as "foreign aggression", "external threat", "demonising" the "demonic Other", "pressing concern", and "military and ideological threat" make it clear that Nicholson attributes to early modern Sanskrit intellectuals an overall feeling of jeopardy, anxiety and perhaps even (existential?) fear.[11] Though it is not uncommon for modern scholarship to depict pre-modern Sanskritic

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[5]Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism*, p. 23; see also pp. 196–205. For more on the classical doxographies and their reception among both modern Hindu thinkers as well as European Indologists in the formulation of their own respective notions of the "Hindu tradition", see Wilhelm Halbfass, *Tradition and Reflection: Explorations in Indian Thought* (Albany, 1990), pp. 1–22, 51–85, and Jürgen Hanneder, 'A Conservative Approach to Sanskrit *Śāstras*: Madhusūdana Sarasvatī's '*Prasthānabheda*'', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 27 (1999), p. 575.

[6]Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism*, p. 190.

[7]See Lorenzen, 'Who Invented Hinduism?', pp. 646–655.

[8]Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism*, p. 190.

[9]*Ibid.*, p. 190.

[10]Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism*, pp. 164–165, 191, 196. Nicholson, however, is mistaken in attributing this innovation to Madhusūdana: in the tenth century, Vācaspati Miśra had already associated the Buddhists and Jains (and Kāpālikas) with the *mlecchas* in his commentary on Śaṅkara's *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* II.1.3, building upon Śaṅkara's earlier (eighth-ninth century) critique of these numerous groups and doctrines on the basis of their being, in his view, "external to the Veda" (*vedabāhya*). If this "unifying" process thus began so early—that is, antecedent to any imperial Muslim dominion further east than Sindh and Multan, and certainly prior to Maḥmūd of Ghaznah's (in)famous eleventh century incursions into Lahore, Somnath, and Mathura—then it would call into question Nicholson's contention of Muslim hegemony as the primary motivating factor, or, at the very least, demand further nuancing of the thesis. For these and further complications to Nicholson's argument, see Michael S. Allen's review of *Unifying Hinduism*, in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82, 3 (2014), pp. 879–883 and also his 'Dueling Dramas, Dueling Doxographies: The *Prabodhacandrodaya* and *Saṃkalpasūryodaya*', *Journal of Hindu Studies* 9 (2016), p. 293 (n. 5).

[11]Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism*, pp. 190, 195–196.

attitudes towards Islam in this fashion, Nicholson nevertheless offers little evidence from the doxographies themselves—beyond the broad pejorative resonances that a term like "*mleccha*" carries over the centuries[12]—to justify his choice of vocabulary.[13] And so, if it was the Muslim presence in the subcontinent, above all else, that provoked the perceived need among Sanskrit scholars to fortify, protect and "unify" the "Vedic tradition", it seems a worthwhile endeavour to try to articulate more precisely, and with more textual and hermeneutical nuance, exactly what condition, *vis-à-vis* Islam, Sanskrit doxographers exhibit in their texts: if we can agree that Islam was experienced as a "threat", then exactly what manner of threat, of what character and texture? To this end, I aim below to take a closer look at the writings of just one Sanskrit doxographer, whose *Prasthānabheda* figures centrally in Nicholson's thesis: the figure of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī.

Madhusūdana Sarasvatī and the *Prasthānabheda*

Madhusūdana Sarasvatī (fl. sixteenth-early seventeenth centuries)—a Vaiṣṇava Advaita Vedāntin most famous for his authorship of the celebrated philosophical treatise, the *Advaitasiddhi*—was active during the reign of the Mughal Emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605), his scholarly career possibly extending into the reigns of Jahāngīr (r. 1605–27) and Shāh Jahān (r. 1628–58) as well. His most famous doxographical composition, the *Prasthānabheda*, is actually only a section of his commentary upon Puṣpadanta's *Śivamahimnaḥ-stotra* ("Praise of Śiva's Greatness"), occurring within Madhusūdana's exegesis of the poem's seventh verse, which reads:

> Since the approaches (*prasthānas*) are diverse—the three [Vedas], Sāṃkhya, Yoga, the doctrine of Paśupati, the Vaiṣṇavas—and because of the variety of inclinations—[people think] 'this [way] is best; that [way] is suitable'—for men who favour various paths, straight or winding, you (Śiva) are the one destination, as the ocean is for the [various] waters. (7)[14]

Taking this verse of the *Śivamahimnaḥ-stotra* as his exegetical starting point, Madhusūdana launches into a fairly rudimentary but far-ranging enumeration of the various "approaches" (*prasthānas*) and "sciences" (*vidyās*) that constitute the (in his view) proper "Vedic" tradition. He ultimately categorises eighteen such Vedic *vidyās*, including the Vedas themselves, the "Vedic supplements" (*vedāṅgas*: pronunciation, grammar, etc.), the "auxiliary supplements" of the Veda (*upāṅgas*: the *Purāṇas*, Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta, Sāṃkhya, Yoga,

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[12]The term *mleccha* ("barbarian", "foreigner") has a long history in the Sanskrit language, referring most immediately to any and all foreign, non-Subcontinental communities, thus considered to be entirely outside of and unconnected with the caste hierarchy so closely associated with the Sanskrit language and Brahminical Hinduism. The term hence attributes to its target an impure and uncivilised character more pejorative than even "untouchability" (*aspṛśyatva*). See, e.g., Aloka Prasher-Sen, 'Naming and Social Exclusion: The Outcast and the Outsider', in *Between the Empires: Society in India 300 BCE to 400 CE*, (ed.) Patrick Olivelle (Oxford, 2006), pp. 418, 426–431, 435.

[13]For his most compelling, though still rather modest, evidence to this end, see Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism*, pp. 192–196.

[14]*Trayī sāṃkhyaṃ yogaḥ paśupatimataṃ vaiṣṇavam iti prabhinne prasthāne param idam adaḥ pathyam iti ca | rucīnāṃ vaicitryād ṛjukuṭilanānāpathajuṣāṃ nṛṇām eko gamyas tvam asi payasāmarṇava iva* (Puṣpadanta, *Śivamahimnaḥ-stotra*, verse 7). I have made use of the Sanskrit text as published in William Norman Brown (ed.), *The Mahimnastava, or Praise of Shiva's Greatness* (Poona, 1965), p. 10.

etc.), and the "auxiliary Vedas" (*upavedas*: medicine, military science, etc.).[15] As the manu-script evidence indicates, this section of Madhusūdana's commentary was subsequently min-imally redacted in the form of an independently circulating treatise, which came to be known as the "*Prasthānabheda*" ("The Varieties of the Approaches").[16]

Madhusūdana employs the terms "approach" (*prasthāna*) and "science" or "knowledge-discipline" (*vidyā*) in quite a range of senses, referring, at one and the same time, to (1) the *śruti* itself (the Veda); (2) the methods for the proper study and ritual performance of the Veda; (3) other supplementary "scriptures", such as the Epics and *Purāṇas*; (4) philosoph-ical, theological, scriptural-exegetical, legal and practical knowledge-systems, all construed as somehow continuous with the Veda; (5) the foundational texts (*śāstras*) of each of these knowledge-systems; and also (6) the respective rituals, conduct or praxis enjoined by those same knowledge-systems. Madhusūdana is clear in presenting these *prasthānas* as being complementary to one another, rather than as competing "schools".[17] In light of the opening assertion with which he initiates the *Prasthānabheda*—namely, that all of these *prasthānas* are aimed, directly or indirectly, at the Lord (*bhagavat*), who is their unifying, over-arching object of interest and intent (*tātparya*)[18]—the imagery invoked in the root verse of the *Śivamahimnaḥ-stotra* seems particularly apt: just as all the rivers, tributaries, streams and even the rain are all ultimately trying to get back the ocean—and, in many cases, work together to do so, as when rain contributes to a tributary, or a tributary contributes to a river, all on their respective ways towards the ocean—just so, all the *prasthānas*/*vidyās* have the Lord as their ultimate object and destination.[19] I have accordingly departed from

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[15]Madhusūdana arrives at eighteen for the number of *prasthānas* on the basis of *Yājñavalkya-Smṛti* 1.1.3, which identifies fourteen "foundations" or "seats" (*sthānas*) of *vidyā* and *dharma*, to which Madhusūdana then adds the four "*upavedas*" ("Auxiliary Vedas"). Accordingly, Madhusūdana's overall outline of the eighteen "approaches" is as follows:

- **4 Vedas**: 1) *Ṛg*; 2) *Yajur*; 3) *Sāma*; 4) *Atharva*.
- **6 Vedic Supplements** or "Limbs" (*vedāṅgas*): 5) *śikṣā* (pronunciation); 6) *kalpa* (ritual); 7) *vyākaraṇa* (gram-mar); 8) *nirukta* (etymology); 9) *chandas* (prosody); 10) *jyautiṣa* (astronomy/astrology).
- **4 Auxiliary Supplements** to the Veda (*upāṅgas*): 11) *Purāṇa* (including the *Upapurāṇas*); 12) *Nyāya* (includ-ing *Vaiśeṣika*); 13) *Mīmāṃsā* (including *Vedānta*); 14) *Dharmaśāstra* (including the *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Sāṃkhya*, *Pātañjala Yoga*, and the *Pāśupata* [Śaiva] and *Vaiṣṇava* traditions).
- **4 Auxiliary Vedas** (*upavedas*): 15) *Āyurveda* (medicine); 16) *Dhanurveda* (military science); 17) *Gāndharvaveda* (theatre, song, and dance); 18) *Arthaśāstra* (statecraft, politics, economics, and moral conduct).

[16]See Hanneder, 'A Conservative Approach', pp. 575–577. As Hanneder suggests, the redaction was most likely executed at the hands of some later writer, though we cannot definitively rule out the possibility that Mad-husūdana might have himself prepared the revised, independent version of his commentarial excursus (p. 577).

[17]Madhusūdana does not employ the term *darśana*, in the sense of a philosophical "school", within the *Prasthā-nabheda*, as is commonly seen in other Sanskrit doxographies.

[18]The opening line of the *Prasthānabheda* reads: "Now, the object (*tātparya*) of all the *śāstras* is the Lord (*bha-gavat*) alone, whether directly or indirectly. Thus, the divisions in the approaches (*prasthānas*) of those *śāstras* are explained here in summary" (Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, *Prasthānabheda* [Sri Vani Vilas Press, 1912], p. 1). What it might mean for a Vaiṣṇava Advaitin to be composing a commentary upon a hymn in praise of Śiva is certainly worthy of examination, though, unfortunately, lies beyond the scope of this article. For a perhaps comparable example of another early modern Advaitin, the Śaiva Appayya Dīkṣita (d. 1592), writing across Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta materials and allegiances, see Ajay K. Rao, 'The Vaiṣṇava Writings of a Śaiva Intellectual', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 44 (2014), pp. 41–65, and Yigal Bronner, 'Singing to God, Educating the People: Appayya Dīkṣita and the Function of *Stotras*', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 127, 2 (2007), pp. 1–18.

[19]Most practitioners within these traditions, of course, would vehemently object to the notion that Madhusū-dana's conception of the Lord is their goal, but this is beside the point, as far as Madhusūdana is concerned—their true object is the Lord, whether they know it or not!

Nicholson in translating the term *prasthāna* as "approach" (in the sense of "path", "way of proceeding", or even "method") rather than "religious source", although, like the term *vidyā*, it encompasses a broad variety of denotations and connotations that is difficult to capture with a single English term.

Madhusūdana then introduces a hypothetical objector (*pūrvapakṣin*), who asks why the six *nāstika* approaches (four Buddhist schools—[1] Madhyamaka, [2] Yogācāra, [3] Sautrāntika, and [4] Vaibhāṣika—plus the [5] Cārvākas and [6] Digambara Jains) are not included among the enumerated *prasthānas*. Madhusūdana tersely retorts that

> those approaches should be disregarded because, like the approaches of the barbarian foreigners (*mlecchas*), etc., they are not conducive to the proper ends of humankind (*puruṣārthas*) even indirectly, since they are external to the Veda (*vedabāhya*). And only the sorts of approaches that are in service of the Veda—conducive to the ends of humankind, either directly or indirectly—are presented here.[20]

Madhusūdana thus affirms his simple (and "unifying") criteria—namely, whether a philosophical school or *śāstra* is "internal" or "external" to the Veda—and then presses on without any further comment on these various *nāstika* traditions. Even though the objector had devoted approximately one sentence each to describing the characteristic tenet of each of these six *nāstika* schools, Madhusūdana never even bothers to refute these doctrines: it is enough to assert that they are *vedabāhya* like the traditions of the *mlecchas*, after which the treatise can move on to its résumé of the properly "Vedic" tradition, which alone contributes to the proper ends of human existence in any meaningful way. This particular deployment of the term "*mleccha*", however momentary, is, of course, important for Nicholson's thesis, which contends that Madhusūdana had felt the Muslim threat so acutely that he felt compelled to insert "Muslims" into the annals of Sanskrit doxography, if only obliquely, where they had never before received mention.[21]

Madhusūdana's doxographical contributions to "proto-Hindu unification" do not end there, however. Echoing a framework that had been utilised in earlier doxographies, Madhusūdana places all the various Sanskrit disciplines of knowledge within a hierarchy, locating Advaita Vedānta at the apex. Although he is here employing a schema inherited from previous writers,[22] Madhusūdana does introduce a significant variation: in articulating, at the conclusion of the *Prasthānabheda*, what makes this "Vedic" community coherent, he (perhaps uniquely among Vedāntin doxographers up to that time) goes so far as to depict all the sages (*munis*) and founders of all the multifarious traditions of "Vedic" thought—Mīmāṃsā,

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[20]*Vedabāhyatvāt teṣāṃ mlecchādiprasthānavat paramparayāpi puruṣārthānupayogitvād upekṣaṇīyatvam eva | iha ca sākṣād vā paramparayā vā pumarthopayogināṃ vedopakaraṇānām eva prasthānānāṃ bhedo darśitaḥ* (Madhusūdana, *Prasthānabheda*, p. 2).

[21]See note 10 above for significant problems with this assertion.

[22]The *Sarvadarśanasaṃgraha* of Mādhava/Cannibhaṭṭa (fourteenth century) is perhaps the best-known Advaita doxography to employ this framework, while another Advaitin contemporary to Madhusūdana, Appayya Dīkṣita, utilises a similar organisational scheme for his *Siddhāntaleśasaṃgraha*. For a more comprehensive account of this feature of Sanskrit doxographical writing, see Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany, 1988), pp. 349–368. Though not technically a doxography, it is nevertheless significant that Nicholson neglects to account for the influential Advaitin allegorical play, the *Prabodhacandrodaya* of Kṛṣṇamiśra (eleventh century), which adopts the same framework but was composed prior to the established Muslim ruling presence in the subcontinent. Such evidence again undermines the suggestion that Islam served as the primary historical catalyst for "Hindu" unification; see Allen, 'Dueling Dramas, Dueling Doxographies'.

Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Pāśupata Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism, etc.—as in fact omnisciently knowing one and the same non-dual truth, and yet consciously teaching different paths for different souls situated at different levels of readiness for knowledge and liberation (*mokṣa*):

> The [true] object (*tātparya*) of all the sages, who are the authors of all these approaches (*prasthā-nas*), is the highest Lord (*parameśvara*), who is non-dual (*advitīya*)… For, it is not the case that these sages could have erred, because they are omniscient (*sarvajña*). However, for those who are plunged into external objects (*bahirviṣayapravaṇa*), immediate entrance into the [highest] aim of humankind (*puruṣārtha*) is not possible. Thus, a variety of modes has been presented by the sages in order to prevent *nāstika*-hood (*nāstikya*) [among the people].[23]

Hence, the highest teaching, according to Madhusūdana, is the doctrine of Advaita Vedānta, which affirms that non-dual *brahman* alone is ultimately real, while the manifest, phenomenal universe is an illusory (*mithyā*) appearance. Most individuals, however, are too deluded by the ensnaring appearances of the world, entrenched in the mistaken view that it is substantially real. They are thus ill-equipped for this highest realisation and require the attenuated teachings of the sages of other *āstika* schools, who *knowingly* preach "partial truths" better within the grasp of most individuals' limited capacities. These attenuated teachings, therefore, guard people against truly fruitless and erroneous *nāstika* stances, while, presumably, also potentially serving as an intermediary crutch or step on the way to Advaita Vedānta.[24] In this manner, although a great many more texts must be examined before we could say so conclusively, we witness in the *Prasthānabheda* a degree of unification of the "proto-Hindu" tradition perhaps unprecedented up to that point in time, painting all of the tradition's luminaries as entirely in accord; some paths are more veridical than others, but none of the *āstika* paths, as Madhusūdana asserts in the concluding words of the treatise, are deserving of censure (*sarvam anavadyam*).[25]

Other doxographies considered: Madhusūdana's *Siddhāntabindhu*

The most "obvious" explanation for Madhusūdana's innovations, in Nicholson's terms, is the perceived threat of the Muslim presence in South Asia, encoded in the language of the *mleccha*.[26] Yet, it is worth restraining ourselves from what may at first seem the immediately evident answer, pausing to consider alternative explanations that may be more readily substantiated within the texts themselves. To this end, it is fruitful to compare the

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[23]*Sarveṣāṃ prasthānakartṝṇāṃ munīnāṃ…advitīye parameśvare pratipādye tātparyam | na hi te munayo bhrāntāḥ sarvaj-ñatvāt teṣām | kiṃtu bahirviṣayapravaṇānām āpātataḥ puruṣārthe praveśo na saṃbhavatīti nāstikyavāraṇāya taiḥ prakārabhedāḥ pradarśitāḥ* (Madhusūdana, *Prasthānabheda*, p. 19).

[24]Hewing more closely to the language of the text itself, in this concluding section, Madhusūdana enumerates three broad views on the causation of the world that are taught among different *āstika* groups: *ārambhavāda* (doctrine of novel origination), *pariṇāmavāda* (doctrine of real transformation), and *vivartavāda* (doctrine of illusory transformation). According to Madhusūdana, Nyāya(-Vaiśeṣika) and Mīmāṃsā teach the first view, while Sāṃkhya, Pātañjala Yoga, Pāśupata Śaivism, and Vaiṣṇavism teach the second. The third, however, is taught by Advaita Vedānta alone, it being the "culminating" (*paryavasāna*) view at which the other two teachings indirectly aim. Most individuals fail to grasp this ultimate purport (*tātparya*), however, stopping short at their best-possible comprehension of one of the other two views (Madhusūdana, *Prasthānabheda*, p. 18–19).

[25]Madhusūdana, *Prasthānabheda*, p. 19.

[26]Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism*, p. 190.

Prasthānabheda against the doxographical passages of Madhusūdana's other writings, regarding which his *Siddhāntabindu* and *Vedāntakalpalatikā* contain much of the most relevant material. We can begin with the *Siddhāntabindu*,[27] Madhusūdana's commentary upon the *Daśaślokī* ("Ten Verses [on the Self]"), of uncertain authorship though traditionally attributed to Śaṅkarācārya, as Madhusūdana himself attests at the outset of his commentary. Madhusūdana organises his interpretation of the *Daśaślokī* around the famous "great saying" (*mahāvākya*) of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (6.8.7), "*tat tvam asi*" ("That thou art"), long considered by the Advaita tradition to be one of the quintessential scriptural affirmations of the non-dual nature of reality and the fundamental identity between the innermost self (*ātman*) and ultimate Reality (*brahman*). With this *mahāvākya* as his starting point, Madhusūdana correspondingly construes verses 1–3 of the *Daśaślokī* as Śaṅkara's elucidation of the meaning of "thou" (*tvam*, i.e., *ātman*), verses 4–6 as his explanation of "that" (*tat*, i.e., *brahman*), and verses 7–10 as his explication of how the two are ultimately non-different.[28] For long stretches within these *tvam* and *tat* sections of the *Siddhāntabindu*, Madhusūdana adopts a doxographical mode as he pens two separate surveys of the positions held by different philosophical and theological schools concerning the nature of *tvam/ātman*, on the one hand, and *tat/brahman*, on the other, followed by his refutations of these rival positions and his ultimate defense of those whom he terms the "Upaniṣad-adherents" (*aupaniṣada*), that is to say, the followers of Advaita Vedānta.

Early on in the section on *tvam*, Madhusūdana quickly runs through a series of different schools and their respective stance(s) on the self, including, in order: (1) five views among the Materialists (Cārvākas); (2) two views among the Buddhists (Sugata[29] and Mādhyamika); (3) the view of the Digambara Jains; (4–6) Vaiśeṣika, Tārkika (i.e., Nyāya), and Prābhākara (Mīmāṃsā), all grouped together as maintaining the same shared view of the self; (7) Bhāṭṭa (Mīmāṃsā); (8–9) Sāṃkhya and Patañjali (i.e., Pātañjala Yoga), presented as sharing the same view of the self; and (10) the followers of the Upaniṣads (Aupaniṣadas).[30] Each view is presented in only a sentence or so, reduced to just a few phrases or descriptors. Upon finishing this brief résumé, Madhusūdana then asserts what he takes to be Śaṅkara's central purpose in composing the *Daśaślokī*: although everyone, through a general subjective experience of a notion of "I" (*aham-pratyaya*), admits in some way some basic awareness of a conscious self (*cidātman*), the mutually contradictory affirmations of these various teachers (*vādivipratipatti*) render the existence and character of that conscious self ambiguous and uncertain (*sandigdha*). Śaṅkara accordingly composed the verses of the *Daśaślokī* in order to clarify matters.[31] Madhusūdana devotes his commentary upon the first verse, in particular, to

[27]I here reference the Sanskrit editions of Tryambakram Śastri Vedāntachārya (*Siddhāntabindu of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, being a Commentary on the Daśaślokī of Śaṅkarāchārya, with Two Commentaries, Nyāya Ratnāvalī of Gauḍabrahmānanda and Laghuvyākhyā of Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha*, Kashi Sanskrit Series 65 [Jai Krishnadas-Haridas Gupta, Vidya Vilas Press, 1928]) and Prahlād Chandrashekhar Divānji (*Siddhāntabindu of Madhusūdana with the Commentary of Purushottama*, Gaekwad Oriental Series 64 [Baroda Oriental Institute, 1933]).

[28]For a brief overview of the contents of the *Daśaślokī* and *Siddhāntabindu*, see Niranjan Saha, 'An Introduction to the *Daśaślokī* of Śaṃkara and Its Commentary *Siddhāntabindu* by Madhusūdana Sarasvatī', *Sophia: International Journal of Philosophy and Traditions* 56, 2 (2017), pp. 355–365.

[29]From Madhusūdana's description ([*tvampadārthaḥ*] *kṣaṇikaṃ vijñānam iti sugatāḥ*), it seems by "Sugata" he has in mind the same group he calls "Yogācāra" in the *Prasthānabheda*.

[30]Vedāntachārya, *Siddhāntabindu*, pp. 105–113.

[31]*Ibid*., pp. 114–116.

refutations of these rival schools' positions, couched within a lengthy dialectical back-and-forth—the standard Sanskritic style of *pūrvapakṣin* vs. *siddhāntin*, utilising rational argumentation and the citation of scriptural proof-texts—aimed at establishing Advaita Vedānta's doctrine of *ātman*. Many of the *pūrvapakṣa* objections raised therein relate the sorts of critiques that many of these rival schools would typically level against Advaita Vedānta, to which Madhusūdana responds with considerable depth and detail—certainly not the level of dialectical sophistication embodied by his renowned *Advaitasiddhi*, but substantially more philosophically and scholastically advanced than anything to be found within the *Prasthānabheda*.

Given that this *tvam* section of the *Siddhāntabindu* enumerates the various philosophical schools in a roughly comparable sequence as in the *Prasthānabheda* (cf. note 15 above), one might suspect that Madhusūdana here has in mind some sort of hierarchy or alliance of intellectual traditions, wherein certain (presumably *āstika*) traditions are more closely aligned with Advaita Vedānta than certain other (especially *nāstika*) traditions, thus exhibiting the "proto-Hindu unification" that Nicholson accredits to the *Prasthānabheda*. Several features of the text, however, would undermine this suggestion. In the first place, unlike the *Prasthānabheda*, nowhere in the *Siddhāntabindu* does Madhusūdana proclaim any kind of alliance between Advaita Vedānta and any other group; quite to the contrary, he presents all other schools as teaching contradictory doctrines, simply meant to be discarded in favour of Advaita Vedānta. After finishing with the first three verses and initiating the *tat* section of the commentary, for instance, Madhusūdana employs much the same language already encountered above:

> hence, in the first three verses, the meaning of the term 'thou' (*tvam*) was ascertained, preceded by the repudiation (*nirākaraṇa*) of the contradictory affirmations of [other] teachers (*vādivipratipatti*). Now, the meaning of the term 'that' (*tat*) must be likewise ascertained. Thus, the contradictory affirmations of [other] teachers (*vādivipratipatti*), which are to be repudiated (*nirākārya*), will be [presently] explained.[32]

The term *vipratipatti*, repeated twice in this passage and elsewhere, denotes mutual disagreement, opposition and incompatibility, on the one hand, as well as the idea of being mistaken, holding false views or speaking falsely or erroneously, on the other. Both these senses of the word combine here to encapsulate the recurring frame of the *Siddhāntabindu*, wherein all schools other than Advaita Vedānta are deemed to be doctrinally erroneous and meant to be discarded, yet, since the plethora of mutually contradictory *śāstras* is liable to confuse aspirants and practitioners, there is accordingly a need for preceptors of the likes of Śaṅkara and Madhusūdana to disclose the true teaching.

The notion that the *Siddhāntabindu* exhibits an implicit hierarchy or alliance of "Vedic"/ *āstika* traditions is further undermined by the *tat* section of the commentary, wherein Madhusūdana alters the sequence in which the rival schools are presented. For this second round of doxographical writing, Madhusūdana turns to the varying philosophical views regarding

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[32]*Evaṃ tāvat tribhiḥ ślokaiḥ vādivipratipattinirākaraṇapūrvakaṃ tvampadārtho nirdhāritaḥ | samprati tatpadārthas tathaiva nirdhāraṇīyaḥ | tatra nirākāryā vādivipratipattayaḥ pradarśyante (ibid., pp. 306–307).*

the character of *brahman/tat* and its role as the cause of the world (*jagat-kāraṇa*), this time offering several sentences for each school's stance, in the following sequence: (1) Sāṃkhya; (2) Pāśupata (Śaivas); (3) Pāñcarātrika (Vaiṣṇavas); (4–5) Jains and Tridaṇḍins (three-staff renunciants), presented as sharing the same view; (6) Mīmāṃsā, with no distinction drawn in this instance between Prābhākara and Bhāṭṭa; (7) Tārkika (Nyāya); (8) Saugata (Buddhists), again with no distinctions drawn between any Buddhist sub-schools; (9) Pātañjala (Yoga); and (10) the followers of the Upaniṣads (Aupaniṣadas).[33] Although Madhusūdana's ordering is largely constrained by the wording of the *Daśaślokī*'s root verse,[34] it is nevertheless significant that "Hindu" and "non-Hindu" groups are intermixed across this doxographical sequence, with the Jains and Buddhists casually interspersed betwixt the "Hindu" schools without any apparent or acknowledged justification. Indeed, even where the root verse leaves Madhusūdana the freedom to do as he pleases, he opts to blur the purported "boundaries" even further: the *Daśaślokī* verse, for instance, makes no mention of Nyāya, Buddhism, or Pātañjala Yoga, so it was entirely Madhusūdana's independent decision to insert Buddhism between these other two "Hindu" schools. Even more strikingly, while the *Daśaślokī* verse makes no mention of the Tridaṇḍins—a group Madhusūdana elsewhere recognises to be "Vedic"/*āstika*[35]—the commentator nevertheless chose to append them to the *Daśaślokī*'s Jains, grouping the two and hence affirming these two schools, one *āstika* and the other *nāstika*, to profess effectively identical conceptions of *brahman*.[36] Even the *vaidika/vedabāhya* distinction fails to hold up: although, in the *Prasthānabheda*, groups such as the Jains could be summarily cast aside as "external to the Veda" while the Pāśupata (Śaivas) and Pāñcarātra (Vaiṣṇavas) were readily listed among the "Vedic" *prasthānas*, in the *Siddhāntabindu*, in contrast, Madhusūdana refutes all three schools (and, in some manuscripts, the Tridaṇḍins as well) in one swift stroke, declaring them *all* to be manifestly contradictory to both the Veda and to reason, without need for any further explanation: "Pāśupata, Pāñcarātrika, [Tridaṇḍin,] and Jaina thought are [all] untenable (*ayukta*), because they are contradicted (*bādhita*) by reason (*yukti*) and scripture (*śruti*)".[37] Indeed, Sāṃkhya, Nyāya, and Buddhist thought alike are all treated in arguably comparable fashion, with Madhusūdana furnishing numerous scriptural proof-texts to illustrate how, in his view, the Veda plainly contradicts their central doctrines.[38]

In this manner, from various angles, the other so-called "Hindu" schools are repeatedly treated as being just as erroneous as the "non-Hindu", Advaita Vedānta alone encompassing the truth of matters. The *Siddhāntabindu* thus exhibits several textual features that would

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[33]*Ibid.*, pp. 307–317.

[34]Verse four of the *Daśaślokī* reads: "That (*tat*) is not Sāṃkhya nor Śaiva nor Pāñcarātra; neither Jaina nor that which is thought by the Mīmāṃsakas, etc.; because of being of a pure (*viśuddha*) nature, [known] by way of a distinctive apprehension (*viśiṣṭānubhūti*), that (*tat*) unique one (*eka*), auspicious [Śiva], the remainder (*avaśiṣṭa*) alone am I" (*ibid.*, p. 317). Madhusūdana takes advantage of the "etcetera" (*ādi*) to insert the additional groups that he wishes to address, namely, (7) Nyāya, (8) Buddhism, and (9) Pātañjala Yoga. Madhusūdana furthermore appends the Tridaṇḍins to the Jains, grouping them together despite the former not being mentioned in the root verse.

[35]Although Madhusūdana does not employ the vocabulary of "*āstika*" and "*nāstika*" within the *Siddhāntabindu*, we find in the *Vedāntakalpalatikā*, to be discussed below, that he categorises the Tridaṇḍins among the *āstikas*. For background on the Tridaṇḍins, see Walter Slaje, 'Yājñavalkya-*brāhmaṇas* and the Early Mīmāṃsā', in *Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta: Interaction and Continuity*, (ed.) Johannes Bronkhorst (Delhi, 2007), pp. 122–124, 151.

[36]Vedāntachārya, *Siddhāntabindu*, pp. 311–312, 320.

[37]*Evaṃ pāśupatamataṃ pāñcarātrikaṃ jainaṃ [traidaṇḍaṃ] ca mataṃ śrutiyuktibādhitatvād ayuktam* (*ibid.*, p. 320).

[38]*Ibid.*, pp. 317–320, 331–333.

undermine any suggestion of a kinship between Advaita Vedānta and any other schools, while displaying a notable dearth of any positive signs to the opposite effect: Madhusūdana does not even deploy the proto-"Hindu" vocabulary of "*āstika*" vs. "*nāstika*" within the commentary, for instance. Such observations make it difficult to conceive of the *Siddhānta-bindu* as an agent of "proto-Hindu unification", much less to attribute to Madhusūdana such a conscious intention or deliberate agenda therein. Crucially, Madhusūdana also never mentions the *mlecchas* within the *Siddhāntabindu*, nor any other group that could be plausibly read as a coded surrogate for Islam.

Mokṣa and the means thereto: doxography in the *Vedāntakalpalatikā*

Turning to Madhusūdana's other prominently doxographical composition, the *Vedāntakal-palatikā*[39] is an independent treatise dedicated to the subject of liberation (*mokṣa*), leading Madhusūdana into such varied philosophical territory as the nature of knowledge (*vidyā*) and ignorance (*avidyā*), the proper means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*), the various powers and capacities of language (*śabda*) to convey and bring about knowledge, the role of inquiry (*vicāra*) in the realisation of *mokṣa*, and other related topics. Madhusūdana organises roughly the first third of the treatise around a survey of different philosophical and theological schools' views on *mokṣa*, doing so in three roughly sequential subsections. Madhusūdana first presents all the schools' respective conceptions of liberation, variously termed (depending upon the school) *mokṣa*, *mukti*, *apavarga* or *kaivalya*; he then refutes their doctrines regarding the nature of liberation, one-by-one, via dialectical argumentation and citation of "scriptural" proof-texts; finally, Madhusūdana counters each school's account of the *means* (*sādhana*) to liberation. In each of these three rounds of doxographical surveying, with only minor deviation, Madhusūdana adheres to the following sequence of schools: (1) Lokāyata (Cārvāka), (2) Vijñānavāda (Yogācāra), (3) Madhyamaka, (4) Ārhata (Jaina), (5) Kāṇāda (Vaiśeṣika), (6) Tārkika/Nyāya, (7) unnamed group, likely a variety of Mīmāṃsā, (8) Prābhākara (Mīmāṃsā), (9) Bhāṭṭa (Mīmāṃsā), (10) Sāṃkhya, (11) Pātañjala (Yoga), (12–16) Tridaṇḍin, Pāśupata (Śaiva), Vaiṣṇava, Hairaṇyagarbhin (worshippers of Hiraṇya-garbha[40]), and unspecified "others" (*apare*), seemingly grouped together under the broad category of *bhedābheda* ("difference-cum-non-difference"),[41] and (17) Aupaniṣada (Upaniṣad-adherents). A somewhat wider range of schools and sub-schools is taken up in the *Vedāntakalpalatikā* than in either the *Siddhāntabindu* or *Prasthānabheda*, with Madhusūdana occasionally expounding multiple stances on *mokṣa* from within each school, e.g., two views among the Lokāyatas, two views among the Vijñānavādins, two views among the Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsakas, three views among the Tridaṇḍins, etc. Additionally, in the *Vedāntakalpalatikā*,

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[39]I here utilise the Sanskrit editions of Raghunath Damodar Karmarkar (*Vedāntakalpalatikā* [Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1962]) and Rāmājñā Pāṇḍeya, Gaṅgānātha Jha, and Gopīnātha Kavirāja (*Vedāntakalpalatikā Madhusūdanaviracitā* [Benares Government Sanskrit Library, 1920]). See also V. Sisupala Panicker, *Vedāntakalpalatikā: A Study*, Sri Garib Das Oriental Series 188 (Sri Satguru Publications, 1995), particularly pp. 27–34.

[40]I.e., a tradition that practises ritual sacrifice and/or meditation upon the so-called "five fires" (*pañcāgni*), and which is dedicated to the creator-deity known as the "Golden Womb" (*Hiraṇyagarbha*, sometimes identified with Brahmā or Prajāpati—or else, as a form of Viṣṇu, as per the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*).

[41]Regarding the broad variety of distinctive traditions, spanning numerous centuries and initiatic lineages, that Sanskrit doxographers have tended to group under the broad label of "*bhedābheda*", see Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism*, pp. 25–37.

Madhusūdana offers a somewhat more extensive account of each rival school's position(s) than in either of the previous two doxographies, with many schools given one to several paragraphs' worth of explication, including even an occasional quotation from their respective *śāstras*. The *Vedāntakalpalatikā* is overall a more demanding treatise, philosophically-speaking, than the *Siddhāntabindu*, and is decisively so in comparison with the *Prasthānabheda*.

With an organisation that again mirrors (and further expands upon) the sequence of schools as presented in the *Prasthānabheda*, one might again suspect the *Vedāntakalpalatikā* of exhibiting a tendency toward "proto-Hindu unification". The treatise does indeed offer some support for this case, most immediately in its deployment (unlike the *Siddhānta-bindu*) of the vocabulary of "*āstikas*" and "*nāstikas*", however limitedly. The lines are drawn in the *Vedāntakalpalatikā* along an effectively identical boundary: the Materialists, Buddhists and Jains play the role of the *nāstikas*, with everyone else from the above list seemingly falling into the *āstika* category. While the *Prasthānabheda* places primary emphasis upon the idea of being "Vedic"—i.e., it is because the *nāstika* traditions are "external to the Veda" (*vedabāhya*) that they are "not conducive to [any of] the proper ends of humankind" (*puruṣārthas*)[42]—in the *Vedāntakalpalatikā*, in contrast, this Vedic criterion is not specifically brought to the fore, but rather, the *nāstikas*' inability, according to Madhusūdana, to logically and self-consistently entertain a notion of an enduring self (*ātman*) or of *mokṣa* as a permanent, desirable object of human pursuit.[43] Furthermore, though not nearly as exaggerated as the *Prasthānabheda*, wherein the *nāstikas* are cast aside in nary more than a sentence, one could nevertheless make the case that, in the *Vedāntakalpalatikā*, Madhusūdana similarly devotes less space and effort to refuting *nāstika* groups, whereas the *āstika śāstras* are dealt with in comparatively greater depth and detail. One should be careful not to infer too much from this minor disparity, however, as Madhusūdana's engagement with the Materialists, Buddhists and Jains in the *Vedāntakalpalatikā* is more than merely perfunctory; to the contrary, he does present a workable, albeit terse, sketch of their respective stances, and offers viable arguments for disputing those stances, even if less than fully elaborated.

Despite this limited evidence in favour of reading the *Vedāntakalpalatikā* as another instance of Madhusūdana's novel "Hindu-unifying" efforts, several features of the text pose complications for the proposition. In the first place, Madhusūdana never presents any group that is or could be identified with the "*mlecchas*", much less "Islam", meaning that Madhusūdana's single most significant doxographical innovation in the *Prasthānabheda*, per Nicholson's thesis, is entirely absent from the *Vedāntakalpalatikā*. The nearest candidate that could serve as a surrogate for Islam would be the vague category of "others" (*apare*), whom Madhusūdana describes as "prattling on much about that which is fancifully imagined within their own heads, opposed [both] to reason and scripture".[44] Madhusūdana does not in any way connect this group of "others", however, with the *nāstika* Materialists, Buddhists, and Jains (1–4), but rather, only takes them up in the portion of the treatise that treats the Tridaṇḍins, Pāśupatas, Vaiṣṇavas and Hairaṇyagarbhins (12–15), that is to say, the miscellaneous, largely *bhakti*-oriented groups who are treated in brief subsequent to Madhusūdana's

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[42]Madhusūdana, *Prasthānabheda*, p. 2.
[43]See Karmarkar, *Vedāntakalpalatikā*, pp. 14–22.
[44]*Evam apare api svakapolakalpitaśrutiyuktiviruddham eva bahu jalpanti* (Karmarkar, *Vedāntakalpalatikā*, p. 10).

more substantial engagement with the more conventional *āstika* schools. Based upon the doxography's organisation thus, as well as the treatment of the "Pāśupatas" and "Vaiṣṇavas" in the *Prasthānabheda* as seen above, it seems clear that Madhusūdana considers these miscellaneous groups, including the "others", to be *āstikas*; this is further bolstered by the observation that the sole invocation of the term "*nāstika*" within the *Vedāntakalpalatikā* occurs in reference to the Cārvākas, Buddhists and Jains specifically, with no other schools referenced.[45] Accordingly, the most likely identification of these "others", I would argue, would be any of the myriad "Hindu" (possibly *bhakti*- and/or *bhedābheda*-oriented) groups not otherwise addressed within the *Vedāntakalpalatikā*, whether one of the alternative varieties of Vedānta (perhaps Dvaita Vedānta, a central opponent occupying much of Madhusūdana's scholarly attention[46]), other Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, or even Śākta or Tāntrika lineages, or nearly countless other contemporary "Hindu" sects. Even if one were to argue that this "others" category should be read as separable and dissociated from the group of Tridaṇḍins, Pāśupatas, etc. (#12–15), still there is nothing in the description of these "others" themselves that would justify the conclusion that the intended referent is "Muslims" in particular, or even "*mlecchas*" more generally: as already seen above, Madhusū-dana applies the accusation of "being opposed to reason and scripture"[47] to numerous rival schools, ranging from the Jains and Buddhists to the Pāśupatas, Tridaṇḍins, and Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavas—arguably even to the Naiyāyikas, Vaiśeṣikas, and other unambiguously *āstika* groups. Hence, to encounter such a generic description of these "others" and read "Muslims" into it, with any kind of specificity, would require simply an unwarranted leap, as neither Madhusūdana's portrayal of this category of "others" nor its context within the treatise lends support to interpreting it as a stand-in for Islam.

Even further, upon closer inspection, the very bifurcation between *āstikas* vs. *nāstikas*—part of the bedrock upon which the thesis of "Hindu unification" is built—is somewhat compromised within the *Vedāntakalpalatikā*. Again, the *āstika-nāstika* distinction is only invoked once during the doxographical portion of the treatise, in the midst of the "second round" of surveying. However, Madhusūdana intriguingly puts the words in the mouth of a *pūrvapakṣin* objector, rather than in the "conclusive" and "established" affirmations of the *siddhāntin* respondent. At the start of the passage in question, having examined and critiqued the views of the Materialists, Buddhists and Jains concerning the nature of liberation, Mad-husūdana's *pūrvapakṣin* then concedes: "very well, let it be [granted] that there is no desire for *mokṣa* among the *nāstika* views, on account of [both] the fruit (i.e., *mokṣa*) and the enjoyer of the fruit (i.e., *ātman*) being perishable. But that fault is not present in the *āstika* view".[48] Here the *pūrvapakṣin* deploys the *nāstika* and *āstika* categories in the expected sense, excluding the Materialists, Buddhists and Jains from the "affirmer" category, in this instance on the basis of their rendering both the self and the state of liberation as impermanent, transient objects. The *pūrvapakṣin*, interestingly, portrays the *nāstika* views in the plural (*nāstikamateṣu*),

[45]*Ibid.*, p. 14–22.
[46]See Krishnan Maheswaran Nair, *Advaitasiddhi: A Critical Study* (Delhi, 1990), particularly pp. 18–26.
[47]Karmarkar, *Vedāntakalpalatikā*, p. 10.
[48]*Nanu nāstikamateṣu māstu mokṣakāmanā phalaphalinor vināśitvāt | āstikamate tu nāsti sa doṣa iti* (Karmarkar, *Vedān-takalpalatikā*, p. 18).

while projecting a unified *āstika* view in the *singular* (*āstikamate*), expounding this *āstika* "consensus," so to speak, over the next several pages of detailed discussion. The gist of the *pūrvapakṣin*'s case is that, unlike the *nāstika* schools, all *āstikas* agree, on the grounds of perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference (*anumāna*) and testimony (*śabda*) alike, that *ātman* is eternal (*nitya*) and all-pervasive (*vibhu*), a determination that coherently justifies the pursuit of *mokṣa* as a desirable end.[49] This purported consensus then becomes the occasion for the *pūrvapakṣin* to put forward the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika-Prābhākara view, namely, that a self becomes bound to transmigration (*saṃsāra*) upon the arising of nine specific attributes (*navaviśeṣaguṇa*) within it;[50] the cessation (*nivṛtti*) of these same nine attributes, in turn, constitutes *mokṣa*.[51]

The *siddhāntin*, significantly, flatly rejects the *pūrvapakṣin*'s proposal.[52] In an even lengthier dialectical back-and-forth, Madhusūdana's *siddhāntin* refutes this Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika-Prābhākara conception of the self in a detailed passage spanning several pages, highlighting what he takes to be the internal contradictions and inconsistencies of the doctrine, itself unestablished by any reliable means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*). The *pūrvapakṣin* attempts to salvage his position through resort to the Bhāṭṭa, Sāṃkhya, and Yoga doctrines of *ātman* and *mokṣa*, only for Madhusūdana's *siddhāntin* to reject these possibilities as well, impugning each group for rendering the self's liberation impossible or nonsensical in some way or another. Madhusūdana sums up his overall objection to this assemblage of *āstika* views as follows: "since all these views grant that *mokṣa* is adventitious (*āgantuka*)…[then], by reason of its being occasioned (*janya*), *mokṣa* is necessarily perishable (*vināśin*) [as well], for, the mere fact of being occasioned itself renders [a thing] perishable".[53] In this fashion, by putting the case for an "*āstika* consensus" in the mouth of a *pūrvapakṣin*, Madhusūdana in fact ends up undermining the idea considerably: the replying *siddhāntin* does not directly contradict the sentiment that *āstikas* are somehow united against the *nāstikas* in professing some vaguely shared

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[49]For a useful overview of each of these schools' basic views regarding the nature of *ātman*, see Alex Watson, *The Self's Awareness of Itself: Bhaṭṭa Rāmakaṇṭha's Arguments Against the Buddhist Doctrine of No-Self* (Wien, 2006), pp. 49–70.
[50]The nine attributes in question are: (1) *buddhi* (cognition), (2) *sukha* (pleasure), (3) *duḥkha* (pain), (4) *icchā* (desire), (5) *dveṣa* (aversion), (6) *prayatna* (effort/volition), (7) *dharma* (merit), (8) *adharma* (demerit), and (9) *bhāvanā* (predispositions/past impressions). For a useful overview of this account of the self and the arguments in favor of it, see Kisor Kumar Chakrabarti and Chandana Chakrabarti, 'Toward Dualism: The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika Way', *Philosophy East and West* 41, 4 (1991), pp. 477–491.
[51]Karmarkar, *Vedāntakalpalatikā*, pp. 18–22.
[52]*Ibid.*, pp. 23–34.
[53]*Sarvasmiṃśca mate* (in one manuscript: *pakṣe*) *mokṣasyāgantukatvābhyupagame…janyatvena avaśyaṃ vināśitvam, janyatvamātrasyaiva lāghavena vināśitvaprayojakatvāt* (Karmarkar, *Vedāntakalpalatikā*, pp. 31–32). One could plausibly read "*sarvasmin mate*" here as calling back directly to the *pūrvapakṣin*'s earlier "unifying" phrase, "*āstikamate*". Additionally, though I have not translated the term as it would take our inquiry too far afield, Madhusūdana here justifies his logic on the basis of "*lāghava*", that is, the principle of "parsimony" or "economy". In other words, if one should observe, e.g., that an object is "occasioned" (*janya*)—it is produced, and hence has a beginning—one is then faced with two alternatives: either that object will eventually perish, or else it will endure eternally. The principle of *lāghava* asks us to favour a simpler and more readily intelligible explanation, so long as it is logically sufficient, over a more complex and inscrutable account: on the one hand, we routinely observe in the world around us that every entity that is causally produced ultimately perishes; on the other hand, one would have to posit any of a number of otherwise unseen and unexperienced conditions for a single, one-of-a-kind exception to occur, namely, that *mokṣa* alone, of all entities in the cosmos, is uniquely produced but never perishes. *Laghāva*, in this manner, underpins Madhusūdana's summary refutation in this passage of all non-Advaitin accounts of *mokṣa*. For more on the principle of *lāghava*, see Sitansusekhar Bagchi, *Inductive Reasoning: A Study of Tarka and Its Role in Indian Logic* (Calcutta, 1953), pp. 175–178, and Kisor Kumar Chakrabarti, *Classical Indian Philosophy of Induction: The Nyāya Viewpoint* (Lanham, MD, 2010), pp. 46–50, 67–69.

affirmation of an abiding self, but he does emphatically render such a notion effectively impotent, irrelevant, and uncompelling. Indeed, Madhusūdana clearly announces his intentions to this effect in the opening verses of the treatise:

> I pay obeisance to the revered, wondrous Śaṅkara, extractor of the fruit of immortality, by whom the Upaniṣad, snatched away deceitfully by Mīmāṃsā, was rescued to its [proper] freedom, just as Vinatā, [enslaved] by the mother of snakes (Kadrū), was rescued by Garuḍa... (1)

> After repudiating (*nirdhūya*) the utterances of Jaimini (Mīmāṃsā), Patañjali (Yoga), and Gautama (Nyāya), as well as the views of the Kāṇādas (Vaiśeṣika), Kāpilas (Sāṃkhya), Śaivas, and others, I will propound lucidly [in this *Vedāntakalpalatikā*], with measured speech,[54] the limpid truth (*śuddhi*) in the sense indicated by Śrī Vyāsa, Śaṅkara, and Sureśvara.[55] (4)

> For the sake of ending doubts (*vikṣepa*) regarding what needs to be done (*anuṣṭheya*) on the part of those desirous of liberation (*mumukṣu*), I will describe *mokṣa*, along with the means thereto, through casting aside the [false] opinions of other schools (*parapakṣanirāsa*). (5)[56]

Such blunt utterances, only amplified by additional word-choices and phrases peppered across the treatise (such as variants of the term "*vipratipatti*", discussed above),[57] announce Madhusūdana's orientation clearly: Advaita Vedānta alone teaches the true doctrine of the self and liberation, while *all* other schools—*āstika* and *nāstika* alike—are decisively and fatally mistaken in their views, therefore fit only to be discarded. Whatever tenuous affirmation of *āstika* unity or hierarchy may fleetingly appear, floundering within just one passage of *pūrvapakṣin* dialogue, becomes hardly an afterthought in the context of this inter-*śāstric* rivalry and broadscale contentiousness that frames and pervades the *Vedāntakalpalatikā*, formulated to present Advaita and Advaita alone as veridical. In contradistinction to Nicholson's claim that, unlike Śaṅkara's time-period, "[f]or Madhusūdana approximately eight hundred years later, discrediting Kapila, Patañjali, and the other *āstika* sages was not a viable alternative",[58] we see here in the *Vedāntakalpalatikā* that this alternative was in fact alive and well.

Before drawing this brief glimpse at the *Vedāntakalpalatikā* to a close, one final feature of the treatise merits reflection, if only as a cautionary episode regarding the exegesis of such a text. During the third and final round of doxographical surveying, after refuting the Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika accounts of the means (*sādhana*) to liberation and before proceeding to the Prābhākara, Sāṃkhya, Yoga, and Bhāṭṭa schools, Madhusūdana inserts an especially pithy interlude: "to refute (*nirākaraṇa*) the doctrine of '*aikabhavika*' would [only] bring shame upon the refuter. Since the viewpoint is wholly unfounded, thus it is [simply]

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[54]*Mita*, literally "measured" and synonymous with *pramita*, is here in the sense of "measured/proven/established by *pramāṇa*."

[55]Within the Advaita tradition, Vyāsa is often identified with Bādarāyaṇa, the author of the *Brahma Sūtras*. Sureśvara, in turn, was one of the most influential direct disciples of Śaṅkara.

[56]*Mīmāṃsayā kapaṭato bhujagāmbayeva svādhīnatām upaniṣad vinateva nītā | yenoddhṛtāmṛtaphalena garutmateva tasmai namo bhagavate 'dbhutaśaṅkarāya* (1)...*Nirdhūya jaiminipatañjaligautamoktīḥ kāṇādakāpilaśivādimatāni cāham | śrīvyāsaśaṅkarasureśvarasūcitārthaśuddhiṃ vyañjmi viśadaṃ mitabhāṣitena* (4) | *mumukṣūṇām anuṣṭheyavikṣepavinivṛttaye | mokṣaṃ sasādhanaṃ vacmi parapakṣanirāsataḥ* (5) (Karmarkar, *Vedāntakalpalatikā*, p. 1–2).

[57]See Karmarkar, *Vedāntakalpalatikā*, p. 3.

[58]Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism*, p. 165.

disregarded".[59] The term "*aikabhavika*" might be rendered as "relating to one lifetime" or "possessing one birth", leading R. D. Karmarkar to translate Madhusūdana's phrase as "the doctrine of those who believe only in one life" (*aikabhavikapakṣa*).[60] Now, encountering a phrase such as this and observing Madhusūdana's disdainful, mocking repudiation of it, a reader on the lookout for "Islam" could be forgiven for jumping to the conclusion that we have at last found in the *Vedāntakalpalatikā* a direct reference to Muslims, the most conspicuous disbelievers in reincarnation to populate early modern South Asia. Interpreting Madhusūdana's comment in better context, however, reveals the reading to be misguided: this repudiation of *aikabhavika* doctrine actually refers back to a point considerably earlier in the treatise, during Madhusūdana's first round of doxographical surveying (34 pages prior in Karmarkar's edition), namely, the "unnamed group" (#7) in the above list of schools addressed in the *Vedāntakalpalatikā*.

This very first mention of the *aikabhavika* "school" within the *Vedāntakalpalatikā* offers appreciably more specificity as regards the group's identity:

> But others say, by reason of the principle (*nyāya*) of "belonging to one lifetime" (*aikabhavika*), as a result of the performance of the compulsory (*nitya*) and occasional (*naimittika*) karmas along with the non-performance of the prohibited (*niṣiddha*) and voluntary (*kāmya*) karmas, even without knowledge (*jñāna*) of *ātman*, no future *karmas* will be produced. And due to the destruction of present *karmas* by way of their enjoyment (*bhoga*), they speak of "release" (*apavarga*) as characterised by the disappearance of *karma* in all its parts.[61]

On this account of liberation, crucially for Madhusūdana, knowledge of *ātman* is entirely superfluous; rather, only the correct Vedic ritual regimen, and nothing else, can accomplish the goal. This ritual regimen involves avoiding activities prohibited (*niṣiddha*) by the Veda and hence productive of demerit and negative *karma*, as well as ritual action done out of some personal desire or interest (*kāmya*), which generates meritorious *karma* that nevertheless keeps one bound to the cycle of transmigration (*saṃsāra*). At the same time, in order to avoid the sin (*pāpa*) and negative *karma* that comes from defying the Veda, an individual must continue to perform all the obligatory rituals enjoined by scripture—those at regular, fixed intervals (*nitya*) as well as those prompted by a non-routine context or special occasion (*naimittika*)—both of which, done solely due to Vedic injunction, are deemed not to produce any new *karma*. With no new *karma* being generated during the current lifetime, the only remaining obstacle preventing liberation is the store of *karma* already accumulated (*saṃcita*) by the agent as a result of activity done in *previous* lives.

By most accounts, it would take a multitude of successive lifetimes for this accumulation of past *karma* to spend itself "naturally", hence most schools' insistence upon some additional factor as a feature of the means to liberation, such as the special power of *nitya karmas*, penance, meditation or self-knowledge (*ātmajñāna*) to destroy *saṃcita karma* in an exceptional,

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[59] *Aikabhavikapakṣanirākaraṇaṃ nirākartus trapām āpādayati | kevalaṃ niryuktikatvāt ity upekṣate* (Karmarkar, *Vedāntakalpalatikā*, p. 41).

[60] *Ibid.*

[61] *Apare tu aikabhavikanyāyena ātmajñānamantareṇāpi niṣiddhakāmyayor ananuṣṭhānāt nityanaimittikānuṣṭhānāt ca na āgāmikarmotpādaḥ | vidyamānasya copabhogena kṣayāt sakalakarmocchedalakṣaṇam apavargam āhuḥ* (Karmarkar, *Vedāntakalpalatikā*, p. 7).

accelerated manner. This *aikabhavika* school, however, proposes an alternative, namely, the conviction that the entirety of one's prior accumulated *karma* is in fact the cause of only one's *current* lifetime, of no causal relevance for any future births beyond it. On this explanation, accordingly, all of one's accumulated *karma* comes to fruition (*bhoga*) by the conclusion of the present lifetime, and hence naturally exhausts itself upon the moment of death. If, additionally, no new *karma* has accrued during the course of that same lifetime, then the individual is liberated, there being no *karma* left, old or new, to effect a subsequent birth. Given the pronounced investment in Vedic ritual and its categories on display here (even to the exclusion of any role for self-knowledge), the most likely identification for this *aikabhavika* group would be a less established variety of (Pūrva-)Mīmāṃsā (alongside the better-known Bhāṭṭa and Prābhākara schools), a suggestion further bolstered by similar descriptions and identifications penned by other Sanskrit writers.[62] Madhusūdana evidently considers this duo of views—viz., (1) *saṃcita karma* has no causal extension beyond a single lifetime, and (2) *ātmajñāna* has nothing whatsoever to do with liberation—to be so plainly absurd that to bother refuting it would be worse than a waste of one's time. Needless to say, however, any suggestion of an Islamic identity for this *aikabhavika* group must be definitively ruled out, and should serve as a reminder for present-day readers of the inherent risks involved in trying to fill in the "gaps" and "silences" of pre-modern texts. Too often, we only succeed in filling those gaps with our own views and expectations. Hence, it is worth revisiting

[62] For more on the *aikabhavika* doctrine and its connection with Mīmāṃsaka thought, see Devandahalli Venkatramiah (translation), *Śāstradīpikā (Tarkapāda) of Pārthasārathi Miśra* (Baroda, 1940), pp. xxiii–xxvi. Śaṅkara refutes a version of the *aikabhavika* doctrine in his *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* IV.iii.14, as does Ānandagiri—with explicit reference to the term "*aikabhavika*"—in his commentary upon Śaṅkara's *Bhagavad Gītā Bhāṣya* 18.66. Sureśvara, in his own turn, refutes a version of the doctrine, very close to the iteration presented in the *Vedāntakalpalatikā*, while disputing a Mīmāṃsaka *pūrvapakṣin* in his *Saṃbandhavārttika* 40–43 (see Telliyavaram Mahadevan Ponnambalam Mahadevan [ed.], *The Saṃbandha-Vārtika of Sureśvarācārya* [Madras, 1958], pp. 25–27, and Dinesh Chandra Bhattacharya, 'Post-Śaṅkara Advaita', in *The Cultural Heritage of India, Volume III: The Philosophies*, [ed.] Haridas Bhattacharyya [Calcutta, 1975], pp. 260–261). Some have suggested that the *aikabhavika* theory finds its nascency in the *Vaiśeṣika Sūtras* (5.2.15–18), although there it lacks the specifically Vedic ritual regimen that one finds in the *Vedāntakalpalatikā*'s later iteration of the doctrine (see S. Sankaranarayanan, 'Date of Śrī Śaṅkara – A New Perspective', *Brahmavidyā: The Adyar Library Bulletin* 59 [1995], pp. 142–147). Some in the later (Nyāya-)Vaiśeṣika tradition would indeed embrace this very same Vedic ritual regimen (see, e.g., Praśastapāda's *Padārthadharmasaṃgraha*), however, to my knowledge, these later (Nyāya-)Vaiśeṣikas do not endorse an *aikabhavika* view, but rather, tend to view both knowledge and ritual activity *together* (*jñānakarmasamuccaya*) as the joint *sine qua non* for liberation (see, e.g., Kedar Nath Tiwari, *Classical Indian Ethical Thought: A Philosophical Study of Hindu, Jaina and Bauddha Morals* [Delhi, 2007], pp. 101–112). In light of the evidence, accordingly, it seems likely that Madhusūdana has a particular *Mīmāṃsaka* identity in mind in his reference to *aikabhavika*. To be sure, most Mīmāṃsakas advocate some version of *jñānakarmasamuccaya*, though some secondary scholarship accredits a "ritual only" stance to the Bhāṭṭa school, from whence it is just one additional step (namely, the belief that all *saṃcita karma* is spent by the conclusion of a single lifetime) to a full-fledged *aikabhavika* doctrine. This confusion over the Bhāṭṭa school is perhaps the result of Kumārila Bhaṭṭa's own arguably conflicting accounts of liberation between his *Ślokavārttika*—which can be read as promoting a ritual-only position—versus his *Tantravārttika*—which favours a *jñānakarmasamuccaya* model (for some of the conflicting interpretations of these discrepancies in modern scholarship, see John Taber, 'Kumārila the Vedāntin', in *Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta: Interaction and Continuity*, [ed.] Johannes Bronkhorst [Delhi, 2007], pp. 159–184). Conceivably, the former (*Ślokavārttika*) view of Kumārila might have become an historical basis for an *aikabhavika* doctrine or "school" of the sort addressed here by Madhusūdana. To add a further layer of complexity to this *aikabhavika* notion, it is also conceivable that the idea owes something to the debates over "*ekabhavika*" ("possessing one birth" or "single coming to be") as addressed in *Yoga Sūtra* 2.13 and its commentaries, which similarly query the relationship between *karma*-generating activities and one vs. multiple subsequent rebirths. See Yashodhara Wadhwani, '*Ekabhavika Karmāśaya* in *Yogabhāṣya* 2.13', *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute* 36, 1/4 (1976–77), pp. 164–170; Gerald James Larson, 'Pātañjala Yoga's Theory of 'Many-Lives' through Karma and Rebirth and Its Eccentric 'Theism'', *Religions* 9 (1), 4 (2018), n.p.; and T. S. Rukmani, 'Philosophical Hermeneutics within a *Darśana* (Philosophical School)', *Journal of Hindu Studies* 1, 1–2 (2008), pp. 120–137.

Madhusūdana's "*mleccha*" in the *Prasthānabheda* to consider more carefully whether modern scholarship has fallen into the same trap.

Madhusūdana Sarasvatī and early modern Sanskrit doxography reconsidered

These two alternative and less-studied examples of Madhusūdana's doxographical writing, accordingly, do not at all echo the distinctive, innovative features of the *Prasthānabheda* that Nicholson highlights: neither treatise mentions a *nāstika*-proximate "*mleccha*"—or any other term that could be construed as a surrogate for Islam—nor does either text present an explicit or even functional hierarchy of Vedic traditions, much less a coordinated, covert effort by all *āstika* sages to incrementally guide the population towards Advaita Vedānta. What could account for this discrepancy between the three compositions? Modern scholars generally consider the *Vedāntakalpalatikā* and *Siddhāntabindu* to be two of Madhusūdana's earliest works, given that at least one of them is referenced in nearly all his other writings. These two texts, furthermore, are generally believed to have been composed around the same time, since they both mention one another.[63] Meanwhile, the *Śivamahimnaḥ-stotra-ṭīkā*, (of which the *Prasthānabheda* is a part) explicitly references the *Vedāntakalpalatikā* and contains an arguable reference to the *Siddhāntabindu*.[64] It seems fairly certain, therefore, that both the *Vedāntakalpalatikā* and *Siddhāntabindu* were composed prior to the *Prasthānabheda*. Could it be that events in Madhusūdana's life in the intervening years prompted him to develop new perspectives, or to emphasise or render explicit certain views kept quieter in his younger years? One could only speculate that, as Madhusūdana travelled across different regions of South Asia, or, perhaps, as his status grew more prominent and he took on new responsibilities (e.g., as a leading *paṇḍit* in Banaras and defender of Advaita Vedānta against the recent polemics powerfully put forth by the Dvaitins),[65] he might have progressively perceived a need for certain types of teachings over others. Or else, if Madhusūdana's contacts with Muslims grew over the years—perhaps even at the Mughal court, as popular memory recollects him[66]—this might have prompted Madhusūdana towards a re-envisioning of the contours and boundaries of his own religious and intellectual community.

All such suggestions, of course, are inescapably speculative, as most suggestions would be that are based upon Madhusūdana's tendentious biography. And so, more concrete evidence must be sought elsewhere. On this front, we can refer to two more of Madhusūdana's

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[63]See, e.g., Sadashiva Kātre, 'Terminus Ad Quem for the Dates of Madhusūdana-Sarasvatī's Three Works', *Journal of the Ganganatha Jha Research Institute* 7 (1949), pp. 184–186.

[64]Regarding the cross-references between and chronological order of Madhusūdana's various writings, see San-jukta Gupta, *Advaita Vedānta and Vaiṣṇavism: The Philosophy of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī* (London, 2013), pp. 7–11, and Divānji, *Siddhāntabindu*, pp. ii–xiii.

[65]Regarding Madhusūdana's career as a prominent Banaras *paṇḍit* and his leading role in responding to the Dvaita polemic, particularly as articulated in Vyāsatīrtha's *Nyāyāmṛta*, see Christopher Minkowski, 'Advaita Vedānta in Early Modern History', *South Asian History and Culture* 2, 2 (2011), pp. 205–231.

[66]Regarding popular memory and oral traditions narrating Madhusūdana's purported contacts with Emperor Akbar and the Mughal court, see John Nicol Farquhar, 'The Organisation of the Sannyasis of the Vedanta', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (July 1925), p. 483; William Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 30–33; Dīnānātha Tripāṭhī, *Madhusūdanasarasvatīcaritam* (New Delhi, 1994); and Swami Jagadiswarananda, 'Sri Madhusudanasarasvati', *Vedanta Kesari* 28 (1941), pp. 308–314. Concerning the Mughal court's recognition of Mad-husūdana as one of the great Sanskrit scholars of the age, see Dineshchandra Bhattacharyya, 'Sanskrit Scholars of Akbar's Time', *Indian Historical Quarterly* 13 (1937), pp. 31–36.

writings: the *Bhaktirasāyana*, a treatise on *bhakti* (devotion) and aesthetics, and the *Gūḍārthadī-pikā*, Madhusūdana's commentary upon the *Bhagavad Gītā*, itself also containing consider-able discussion on the topic of *bhakti*. Based on Madhusūdana's cross-references, it is clear that the *Bhaktirasāyana* pre-dates the *Gūḍārthadīpikā*, the former being one of his earliest compositions. As Lance Nelson argues in his comparison of the presentation of *bhakti* between the two texts, a significant discrepancy has occurred: in the *Bhaktirasāyana*, says Nel-son, the young Madhusūdana boldly affirms for *bhakti*, against the grain of nearly all preced-ing Advaita tradition,[67] a status equal to, if not surpassing, that of *jñāna* (knowledge), as he defends the former as an independent means to *mokṣa* available to all regardless of gender or social background. In the "more sober" *Gūḍārthadīpikā*, in contrast, Madhusūdana "domes-ticates" *bhakti* into more conventional Advaitin sensibilities, restricting the attainment of the highest levels of *bhakti* only to male Brahmins who have formally renounced the world (*saṃnyāsa*).[68] While it might be tempting to attribute this shift to Madhusūdana's "exuberant youthfulness" versus his "sober maturity", Nelson disagrees, given that, in the *Gūḍārthadī-pikā*, Madhusūdana repeatedly refers his readers back to the *Bhaktirasāyana*, which "disallows the simple explanation that, having changed his mind, he had repudiated the teaching of his earlier work". Instead, Nelson proposes that, between the two works, Madhusūdana "is sim-ply speaking to different audiences and adjusting his discourse accordingly", aiming to bring educated *bhaktas* closer to an Advaitin perspective, in the first case, and to recommend *bhakti* to his fellow Advaitin renunciants, in the latter.[69]

Although I view Nelson to have somewhat overstated the discrepancy between the *Bhak-tirasāyana* and *Gūḍārthadīpikā*,[70] he has nevertheless offered up a promising key: the question of *audience*. The *Siddhāntabindu* and *Vedāntakalpalatikā* are, philosophically speaking, rather challenging texts, clearly meant for certain varieties of advanced readers, while the *Prasthā-nabheda* is written in a far more basic and accessible style. Indeed, Madhusūdana announces his intended audience in the early stages of the *Prasthānabheda*, affirming that the text was written "for the sake of the cultivation of *bālas*".[71] Now, a *bāla* could be a "novice" or some-one "inexperienced" or "lacking in knowledge"; the most literal sense of *bāla*, however, is that of a "youth" or "child". Accordingly, if we take Madhusūdana at his word, it means that the *Prasthānabheda* was intended for young students at the early stages of their studies, a suggestion that accords with the simple language of the text and its overall introductory character. Or, even if *bāla* should be read in the sense of a "novice" or even someone a bit "dull", the overall principle would still stand. If we reflect, additionally, upon the original

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[67]Nelson, like many if not most scholars of Advaita Vedānta, tends to overstate the purported "incompatibility" between *bhakti* and Advaita Vedānta prior to Madhusūdana, overlooking important predecessors in articulating an Advaitin path to *mokṣa* via *bhakti*, including Vopadeva (fl. 1275), Hemādri (fl. 1275), and Śrīdhara Svāmin (*circa* 1350–1450). See, e.g., the latter's *Subodhinī* commentary upon the *Bhagavad Gītā* and commentary upon the *Bhāga-vata Purāṇa*; see also Anand Venkatkrishnan, 'Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta, and the Bhakti Movement' (unpublished PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 2015).

[68]Lance Nelson, 'Madhusūdana Sarasvatī on the 'Hidden Meaning' of the *Bhagavadgītā*: Bhakti for the Advaitin Renunciate', *Journal of South Asian Literature* 23, 2 (1988), pp. 83–85.

[69]*Ibid.*, p. 84.

[70]It is beyond the scope of this article to take up Nelson's argument in detail, although Anand Venkatkrishnan has already indicated some of its weaknesses; see the latter's 'Love in the Time of Scholarship: An Advaita Vedāntin Reads the *Bhakti Sūtras*', *Journal of Hindu Studies* 8 (2015), pp. 139–152 (particularly n. 11, pp. 150–151).

[71]*Atha saṃkṣepeṇaiṣāṃ prasthānānāṃ...bheda ucyate bālānāṃ vyutpattaye* (Madhusūdana, *Prasthānabheda*, p. 3).

context of the *Prasthānabheda* before it was re-rendered as an independent treatise, one could readily imagine a slightly different though still comparable story: taking advantage of the *Śivamahimnaḥ-stotra*'s status as a devotional poem intended for broad popular appeal, Madhusūdana could conceivably have intended his exegesis to fulfill a function of public education.[72] Given the cross-sectarian context of the commentary, wherein a Vaiṣṇava Advaitin offers an interpretation of a Śaiva hymn, Madhusūdana may well have grasped the opportunity to promote a vision of a coherent, ecumenical "Vedic" tradition, a vision plausibly edifying in various ways for an educated but non-scholarly "Hindu" public at large. One could certainly imagine such a gesture, furthermore, as Madhusūdana's response, at least in part, to a perception of public confusion or anxiety over the Muslim presence in the subcontinent—although we should, once again, be circumspect in how we fill in the *Prasthānabheda*'s textual "silences", as cautioned above.

In considering the respective audiences for the *Siddhāntabindu* and *Vedāntakalpalatikā*, in contrast, a starkly different set of probable motives emerges. Madhusūdana informs us of his intended audience at the outset of the *Siddhāntabindu*: while accrediting to "Śaṅkara's" *Daśaślokī* the purpose of helping "all souls" (*sarvān jīvān*), whether directly or indirectly (*sākṣāt paramparayā vā*), to discriminate between Self and non-Self,[73] Madhusūdana asserts that his *Siddhāntabindu* commentary, in turn, represents "some efforts" exerted "for the sake of instructing those who are lethargic (*alasa*) in the study of Vedānta *śāstra*".[74] Madhusūdana adds at the conclusion of the commentary that the *Siddhāntabindu* was composed for the sake of his direct pupil, Balabhadra (fl. c. 1610), who repeatedly solicited his preceptor to produce such a composition.[75] I here take Balabhadra to be something of a "nagging graduate student", so to speak, maybe a tad on the underperforming or lazy side, with Madhusūdana responding accordingly to the needs of his pupil (who was perhaps not quite living up to his full potential at the time!). Given Balabhadra's standing as one of Madhusūdana's most prominent and central disciples, along with perhaps Puruṣottama Sarasvatī (fl. 1600) and Govinda Śeṣa,[76] it makes sense that the *Siddhāntabindu* would be considerably more advanced and scholastically demanding than the *Prasthānabheda*, that is to say, something of a pedagogical stepping-stone on the way to the formidable academic heights embodied by the *Advaitasiddhi*, upon which Balabhadra would ultimately compose his own commentary (the *Advaitasiddhivyākhyā*). The *Vedāntakalpalatikā*, in turn, could be said to represent a level of scholarship somewhere "between" the *Siddhāntabindu* and *Advaitasiddhi*, that is, an earnest philosophical inquiry into the question of *mokṣa* aimed more squarely at the establishment of the truth as an end in itself, while comparatively uninterested in more secondary pedagogical or practical concerns. Madhusūdana states his purpose to this effect at the outset, embellishing upon the treatise's title via extended metaphor:

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[72]Though it would require a more extended examination of the *Śivamahimnaḥ-stotra-ṭīkā* to substantiate this suggestion, I have in mind here the sorts of public pedagogical functions of cross-sectarian *stotras* that Bronner outlines in his 'Singing to God, Educating the People' (see pp. 15–17).

[73]This language of guiding the populace towards Advaita Vedānta, either directly or indirectly, interestingly echoes Madhusūdana's framing of the entire collective of *āstika* "approaches" in the *Prasthānabheda*.

[74]*Vedāntaśāstraśravaṇālasānāṃ bodhāya kurve kamapi prayatnam* (Vedāntachārya, *Siddhāntabindu*, pp. 4–8).

[75]*Bahuyācanayā mayā ayam alpo balabhadrasya kṛte kṛto nibandhaḥ* (Vedāntachārya, *Siddhāntabindu*, pp. 462).

[76]See Minkowski, 'Advaita Vedānta', pp. 207, 214.

this *Vedāntakalpalatikā* ('Creeper Vine of the Paradisal Tree of Vedānta')—growing upon the celestial tree of the true purport of 'the embodied self' (*śārīraka*), manifesting the utmost splendor "through the fruit of fixity in the knowledge of *paramātman*" by way of flower-clusters of sound reasoning (*sattarka*)—should be approached intently (*upāsanīya*) by those of sound intellect (*sudhī*).[77]

The clear focus in this text is to discern the reality of *mokṣa* and the means thereto, a query that presupposes an intelligent audience already thoroughly steeped in Sanskrit learning and well-trained in philosophical method.

And so, perhaps, while composing the *Prasthānabheda* for his "young" students, "novices", or those simply lacking in knowledge, Madhusūdana might have wished to present a unified outline and vision of the entire "Vedic" Sanskrit curriculum, highly respectful of all its branches of learning, even while gently steering students towards an Advaita worldview and away from anything "*vedabāhya*". The potential benefits of such a tone and content for, e.g., a new student just beginning a Sanskrit education, in terms of cultivating an affection and attachment to the "Vedic" tradition, is not too difficult to imagine. The more advanced and already committed students of the *Siddhāntabindu* or *Vedāntakalpalatikā*, in contrast, could readily dispense with such propaedeutic pleasantries. Accordingly, it may be the case that the *Prasthānabheda*'s unique presentation of the unanimous founder-sages (*munis*) is less some principled, path-breaking revolution in doxography and "Hindu" self-identity, and more a particular teaching tool applied to a specific context and neophyte audience—a context and audience that, notably, are not generally shared by the other, comparatively more intricate doxographies of the other authors upon whom Nicholson's argument is based. The passing reference to the *mlecchas* is, of course, undeniably present in the *Prasthānabheda*, an expression which certainly could be merely generic and customary for the sake of introductory framing; on the other hand, it is difficult to definitively rule out the reference as indeed Madhusūdana's response to Islam, however terse and opaquely presented. Certainly, one could plausibly locate the propaedeutic *Prasthānabheda* within a broader early modern Advaitin efflorescence of brief, introductory pedagogical works, often bereft of dialectical argumentation, such as Sadānanda's *Vedāntasāra* (and, to a lesser extent, Dharmarāja Adhvarīndra's *Vedāntaparibhāṣā*).[78] The new social, intellectual, and institutional realities posed by Mughal sovereignty may have occasioned a fresh need for such innovative educational materials, although, as Minkowski rightly points out, such historical conditions under Muslim rule are often assumed and rarely, if ever, demonstrated.[79] At the very least, I would suggest that conceiving the *Prasthānabheda* as a "propaedeutic student primer" opens up the possibility of viewing Madhusūdana's unification of the *munis* in a new light, suggesting less a beleaguered (proto-)Hindu increasingly fearful of the "threat" of Muslims—and desperately trying to hold his tradition together—and more a teacher offering a (perhaps strategically) exaggerated account of the unity of the Vedic tradition to young students and a broader "Hindu" public, in the hopes of nudging them along in the "right" direction.

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[77]*Sattarkapuṣpanikaraiḥ paramātmabodhaniṣṭhāphalena dadhatī paramāṃ vibhūtim | śārīrakārthasuraśākhigatā sudhībhir vedāntakalpalatikeyam upāsanīyā* (Karmarkar, *Vedāntakalpalatikā*, p. 2).
[78]See Minkowski, 'Advaita Vedānta', pp. 210–213.
[79]*Ibid.*, pp. 221–223.

Yet, it is instructive to pause in order to further query this standing explanation for the apparent "unificatory" trend of early modern Hindu thought, namely, the oft-repeated and oft-assumed "Muslim threat". As much as this threat may have been imposing itself, it should also be recalled that the early modern era was a period of marked fertility and productivity for Sanskrit intellectuals.[80] The world of Sanskrit scholarship, by all appearances, was doing just fine, seemingly abundantly confident in its longstanding foundations and epistemologies: the astounding *śāstric* sophistication of a text like the *Advaitasiddhi*, wherein Madhusūdana engages in intricate *navya-nyāya*-style polemics against the Dvaitins (with nary a Muslim on the radar), attests well to this intuition. Madhusūdana's compositions, I would argue, do not at all betray the signs of, e.g., an "epistemological crisis" of the sort articulated by MacIntyre,[81] and which would become increasingly common under British colonial rule. This "Muslim threat", insofar as it was indeed a threat, must have been a peril of a different sort, demanding a more nuanced hermeneutic and vocabulary than modern scholarship currently offers for reconstructing the experience(s) of early modern Sanskrit intellectuals under Muslim rule. Madhusūdana regularly projects an apparently untroubled certainty that his tradition—be it Advaita Vedānta specifically, or the "Vedic tradition" more generally—provides everything that could be needed for that which, according to his writings, is most vitally important: liberation (*mokṣa*), knowledge (*jñāna*), devotion (*bhakti*), and so forth. Indeed, read along these lines, an attitude of genuine indifference towards Muslims would seem every bit as likely as one of fear.[82] Furthermore, with such an elaborate and extensive Sanskrit intellectual tradition already before him, and with so much work to be done to engage and respond to it, Madhusūdana perhaps had little time, energy or inclination left to worry about or reflect upon the Muslims inhabiting the territory around him.

Accordingly, in preliminary search for this more nuanced hermeneutic, and without reverting to an exclusively internalist historical methodology, one could nonetheless make productive use of the internal logic of Madhusūdana's and others' writings to make plausible sense of a number of the historical developments and conundrums of early modern Sanskrit that Nicholson and others have highlighted. We have seen Nicholson contend above, for instance, that early modern Sanskrit's continued doxographical engagement with the effectively absent Buddhist and Jain traditions is most "obviously" explained as a veiled anxiety in the face of "Muslim…political domination".[83] However, the *Siddhāntabindu*, structured

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[80]See, e.g., Sheldon Pollock's 'New Intellectuals in Seventeenth-Century India', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 38, 1 (2001), pp. 3–31, and his 'The Death of Sanskrit', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43, 2 (2001), pp. 393–394.

[81]See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, 1988), pp. 361–362.

[82]This remarkable indifference or "Indocentrism" of "'orthodox' Hindu thought" has, of course, already been effectively described by Halbfass (*India and Europe*, pp. 172–196). The foregoing, however, might encourage us to further nuance Halbfass' account: what may appear, through one lens, as a staggering self-isolation systematically closed off *a priori* from "any serious involvement with…the 'other'" (pp. 186–187), may also appear, through another lens, as an intellectual tradition's abundant confidence in itself to consistently realise its own, most central truth-claims, hence utterly without need, desire, or even curiosity to venture anywhere else.

[83]Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism*, p. 190. Although it is equally worth querying just how "absent" the Jains really were in this period such that Nicholson would consider them effectively irrelevant to early modern "Hindu" doxographers' genuine concerns: on the vibrant and varied intellectual activities of early modern Jain communities, including within the Mughal court, see, e.g., Paul Dundas, *History, Scripture and Controversy in a Medieval Jain Sect* (London, 2007); Audrey Truschke, 'Dangerous Debates: Jain Responses to Theological Challenges at the Mughal Court', *Modern Asian Studies* 49, 5 (2015), pp. 1311–1344; John Cort, 'Bhakti as Elite Cultural Practice: Digambar Jain Bhakti in Early Modern North India', in *Bhakti and Power: Debating India's Religion of the Heart*, (eds.) John

around a comprehensive clarification of the *mahāvākya* "That thou art", suggests a markedly distinct rationale: the Advaita tradition has long considered the hearing of such *mahāvākyas* to be the central if not sole means of achieving liberation, but doubts and confusions over the semantics of these Vedic utterances prevent the dawning of realisation within the aspirant.[84] Refuting the Materialists, Buddhists and Jains, along with all other schools, accordingly, performs the crucial soteriological function of clearing away delusions and mental uncertainties over the meanings of the *mahāvākya*'s words—are "you" really your body? Your consciousness? Is "that" God the creator of the world? What, then, is "your" relationship with "that"?—without which *mokṣa*, that highest of human ends (*puruṣārthas*) for Madhusūdana, is simply not possible. In other words, in answer to the question, "[w]hat could possibly have been the use of vilifying a school that had disappeared almost completely from the Indian subcontinent?",[85] the framework of the *mahāvākya* permits the reply: even if practitioners of those particular *nāstika* traditions were no longer to be found around every corner, doubts posed by their ideas and arguments could still be ever-present and, hence, requiring continued response.

Similarly, what I have etically referred to as the question of "audience" could be more emically tracked with this very same question of "human ends/*puruṣārthas*". Madhusūdana's explicit sphere of interest, in the *Prasthānabheda*, is those "approaches" that are conducive, directly or indirectly, to any of the four proper aims of human existence, viz., *dharma* (righteousness/duty), *artha* (wealth), *kāma* (pleasure) and *mokṣa*. A text such as the *Vedāntakalpalatikā*, in contrast, is framed around *mokṣa* exclusively, entirely unconcerned with any of the other three "lower" *puruṣārthas*. As such, it should come as little surprise that the multifaceted scope of the former treatise coincides with a capacious acknowledgement of multiple diverse *śāstras* directed at a variety of hierarchical goals, whereas the latter work, aimed at *mokṣa* alone, can admit only one *śāstra*. Now, none of these "internalist" accounts of the doxographies' interior logics are at all incompatible with Nicholson's more externalist narrative of Sanskrit's slow, centuries-long grappling with the inexorable reality of Muslim rule; most certainly, both could be true at one and the same time. I would suggest, however, that modern scholarship could stand to benefit considerably from putting the two varieties of explanation into better and more consistent conversation with one another.

Conclusion

So what, in the end, are we to make of Madhusūdana's innovative formulations and affirmations within the *Prasthānabheda*, in light the work's substantial discrepancies with the author's other doxographies? Our brief foray into the three treatises here suggests that these

Stratton Hawley, Christian Lee Novetzke and Swapna Sharma (Seattle, 2019), pp. 95–104; Shalin Jain, 'Piety, Laity and Royalty: Jains under the Mughals in the First Half of the Seventeenth Century', *Indian Historical Review* 40, 1 (2013), pp. 67–92; Lynna Dhanani, 'The Continuation of Hymn-Making in Old Gujarati during Muslim Rule' (unpublished paper delivered at the 45th Annual Conference on South Asia, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 21 October 2016); and Tillo Detige, "*Guṇa kahūṃ śrī guru*': *Bhaṭṭāraka Gītas* and the Early Modern Digambara Jaina *Saṅgha*', in *Early Modern India: Literatures and Images, Texts and Languages*, (eds.) Maya Burger and Nadia Cattoni (Heidelberg, 2019), pp. 271–285.
   [84]Regarding the mechanics of how the *mahāvākyas* prompt liberation, see Jacqueline Suthren Hirst, *Śaṃkara's Advaita Vedānta: A Way of Teaching* (London, 2005), particularly pp. 138–160.
   [85]Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism*, p. 191.

innovations, purportedly spurred on by the "Muslim threat", do not quite constitute the ground-breaking moment in "Hindu" unification and self-identity that they are often depicted to be. The *Prasthānabheda*'s linking of the *nāstika*s with the *mleccha*s, for instance —suggested by Nicholson to be a covert method of importing "Islam" into Sanskrit doxography for the first time—is an articulation not shared by the other two works. Indeed, neither the *Siddhāntabindu* nor the *Vedāntakalpalatikā* contain any convincing candidate for a surrogate for "Muslims" or even *mleccha*s more generally. If Madhusūdana wished to make a point to his readers about Islam, then it was too insignificant a point to warrant mention in his other, considerably more erudite and substantial doxographies, which instead continue to engage Materialist, Buddhist and Jain thought with interest and investment, as in previous generations of Sanskrit doxography. These observations are only compounded by the complication, noted above, that Madhusūdana was actually *not* the first doxographer to make this *nāstika-mleccha* correlation, as Nicholson contends; rather, Vācaspati Miśra, at the very least, had already asserted the connection in the tenth century, meaning that Madhusūdana not only had direct precedent in earlier doxographical materials, but precedent that even pre-dates widespread Indo-Muslim political hegemony.[86] The cumulative evidence, accordingly, undermines the novelty of Madhusūdana's *nāstika-mleccha* formulation, the importance of this assertion for his own scholarly thought and oeuvre, the degree to which the Muslim conquests can be considered the primary motivating factor, and the extent to which "Islam" can be read into the terms *mleccha/nāstika* in much more than a generic, non-specific, non-pointed way.

The most genuinely unprecedented innovation within the *Prasthānabheda*, on the other hand, appears to be Madhusūdana's depiction of all the *āstika* founder-sages as in fact unanimously acknowledging one and the same non-dual Reality, and yet propounding intentionally attenuated doctrines for the sake of those lacking the capacity to grasp the fullness of the truth, viz., Advaita Vedānta. Although, as Nicholson helpfully observes,[87] Madhusūdana is likely adapting a strategy found in the *Purāṇa*s (and possibly the Buddhist tactic of *upāya* or "expedient means"), it nevertheless seems that Madhusūdana has here devised a doxographical technique and degree of "Hindu" unification unseen among doxographers before him. Even in this regard, however, the evidence undermines certain aspects of this novelty while suggesting greater continuity with the past—even the pre-Islamic past—than has hitherto been recognised. Neither the *Siddhāntabindu* nor the *Vedāntakalpalatikā* echoes this unique feature of the *Prasthānabheda*; even further, the two treatises make little to nothing of even the basic notion of an *āstika-nāstika* divide, repeatedly refusing even a vague semblance of an *āstika* alliance. Hence, whereas Nicholson contends that the late medieval period witnessed a rise of *āstika* unification to such a degree that, "[f]or Madhusūdana…discrediting Kapila, Patañjali, and the other *āstika* sages was not a viable alternative",[88] the *Siddhāntabindu* and *Vedāntakalpalatikā* demonstrate that this option remained vibrantly compelling in modes largely continuous with Sanskrit writing even prior to widespread Indo-Muslim rule, à la Śaṅkara, Vācaspati Miśra and many others.

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[86]See note 10 above.
[87]Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism*, pp. 93–96, 165.
[88]*Ibid.*, p. 165.

Additionally, the question of audience further complicates the narrative. The exceptionally introductory character of the *Prasthānabheda* lends itself to a pedagogically exaggerated depiction of *āstika* unity, such that one might wonder to what extent the view is genuinely peculiar to Madhusūdana or "his time", or else whether the affirmation is predominantly just a product of the propaedeutic objectives of the composition. In other words, perhaps other Advaitin doxographers might have crafted similar affirmations had they set out to write a comparably introductory work, as, to my knowledge, only very few did. The matter is only further complicated, once again, by the texts and data that Nicholson's argument overlooks: a popularising Advaitin work such as Kṛṣṇamiśra's allegorical drama, the *Prabodhacandrodaya*, already depicts, in the eleventh century, a trenchant *āstika*-vs.-*nāstika* divide, both camps populated by a cast of *śāstra*s and schools nearly identical to Madhusūdana's arrangement,[89] complete with a hierarchical *āstika* alliance—(allegorically) "at war" against the *nāstika*s—with Advaita Vedānta at the apex.[90] Now, the *Prabodhacandrodaya* was probably composed just a few decades after Maḥmūd of Ghaznah's campaigns in the subcontinent (1001–1025 CE), meaning that Kṛṣṇamiśra either innovated these mature, fully-formed *āstika/nāstika* categories in a surprisingly rapid, dramatic, and yet deeply "camouflaged" response to the first Muslim advances beyond the far west of Sindh and Multan, or else, far more likely, these categories were chiefly the product of centuries of competition with Buddhists and Jains prior to the advent of Islam. To be sure, Kṛṣṇamiśra does *not* depict a hidden philosophical unanimity among the *āstika* sages as the *Prasthānabheda* does, and yet, the starkness of the war allegory, with all *āstika*s fervently lined up for coordinated battle against the *nāstika* forces of King Delusion (*mahāmoha*), makes the developmental "jump" to Madhusūdana's articulation seem rather small indeed.

By way of summary, Madhusūdana's three forays into doxography examined here demonstrate far greater continuity with earlier precedent than is typically acknowledged, whether through his *Siddhāntabindu* and *Vedāntakalpalatikā*—both of which exhibit disinterest if not outright rejection of an *āstika* "unity," preferring the well-worn model wherein a single school alone is veridical and all others false—or else through the *Prasthānabheda* itself— whose *mleccha-nāstika* correlation had already been articulated in Advaitin Sanskrit literature even pre-dating widespread Muslim hegemony. The *Prasthānabheda*'s hidden "consensus" among the *āstika munis* does seem (so far as has yet been uncovered) to be Madhusūdana's original innovation, and yet, the *magnitude* of the innovation is somewhat undermined in light of the foregoing. Perhaps this exaggerated *āstika* alliance is better conceptualised as a strategic feature of works aimed for broader public consumption, as in the popularising *Prabodhacandrodaya*, and hence only obliquely indicative, at best, of a scholar's fundamental operative categories or religious self-identity. Indubitably, the Muslim presence in the subcontinent cannot remotely be ruled out as a catalyst for transformation: doxographical compositions do seem to proliferate during the periods under Muslim rule, alongside other more propaedeutic and pedagogical works[91] and encyclopedic

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[89]As with Vācaspati Miśra, the major distinction between Kṛṣṇamiśra's and Madhusūdana's respective lists is the former's inclusion of the Kāpālikas ("skull-bearing" Tantric Śaivas) among the ranks of the *nāstika*s.

[90]See Allen, 'Dueling Dramas, Dueling Doxographies', particularly pp. 275–279, 288–290.

[91]Minkowski, 'Advaita Vedānta', pp. 210–211.

*nibandha*s,[92] suggesting certain shifts in the concerns of "Hindu" scholars that could very conceivably have been driven by a "Muslim threat". The push toward "public" or "novice" education, especially, of which the *Prasthānabheda* could be considered an instance, seems a particularly significant transformation, to my eyes, and may suggest a genuine *popularization* of a "unified" view of the tradition in the face of Muslim political dominance. Nevertheless, the *origins* of most of the central concepts and categories operative in the *Prasthānabheda*'s vision of "Hindu" unity—i.e., Madhusūdana's particular articulations of *āstika* vs. *nāstika*, *nāstika*-as-*mleccha*, *vaidika* vs. *vedabāhya*, etc.—appear to have been already established by Advaitin writers largely prior to the arrival of Islam. These profound continuities with earlier, even pre-Islamic, eras should suggest a cautious pause before jumping to claims of an existential "threat" experienced by "Hindu" scholars vis-à-vis Muslim rule: on my reading, at least, it seems just as likely that Madhusūdana was genuinely indifferent towards Muslims and unshakenly confident in his own tradition to furnish the truly needful. Any final adjudication of the matter, however, will require the evidence of the multitudes of texts from across these broad centuries that still await proper study.

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[92] See Sheldon Pollock, '*Rāmāyaṇa* and Political Imagination in India', *Journal of Asian Studies* 52, 2 (1993), p. 286.