

ARTICLE

The Unbelieved and Historians, Part I: A Challenge

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■ This article includes a video abstract
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Abstract

In 1855, Thakur led a rebellion of the tribal Santals against the British in eastern India. Some historians refused to admit Thakur's involvement in the event because of a three-century-old prejudice against giving supernatural beings agency when we write history. In *Provincializing Europe*, Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that historians must "anthropologize" such beliefs rather than take them seriously. Taking a cue from their less-than-marginal place in scholarship today, we call supernatural beings the "Unbelieved" and the explicit or implicit denial of them "Dogmatic Secularism." We argue that objective historians should not discount, in advance, evidence that points to the existence or involvement of the Unbelieved in history; instead, we should cultivate a sceptical attitude towards all sources. In this, the first half of a two-part essay, we trace the boundaries of this epistemological problem in the scholarship about the Santal Rebellion and beyond.

1 | INTRODUCTION

In the middle of 1855, some ten thousand Santals, a tribal people in eastern India, rebelled against officials' practices of tax extraction as well as against the British administration of justice. The rebellion was instigated by Thakur and other *bongas*, who deputized the two Santal brothers Sido and Kanhu Murmu to spread the revolt. Led by the *bongas* with Santal assistance, many of the rural population of what is now Jharkhand took up arms to join Thakur's insurrection. The rebellion lasted a year before it was suppressed (see Banerjee, 2002), and both brothers were executed by the British. Thakur was never captured.¹

We have a relatively rich collection of primary sources about the rebellion, and these are consistent and explicit in their assigning agency to Thakur and the *bongas*. In the main edict (the brothers employed the Mughal-British administrative term *parwana*) authorizing the revolt, Sido and Kanhu make clear the chain of command: "Thacoor has ordered me saying that the country is not the Sahibs[']. . . Kanoo and Seedu Manjee are not fighting. The Thacoor himself will fight. Therefore you Sahibs and Soldiers [will] fight the Thacoor himself ... This is the order of the Thacoor' " (as cited in Guha, 1983, pp. 28, 284; Guha, 1988, p. 85).² This quotation comes from a document in the West Bengal State Archives that records the judicial proceedings following the revolt, including a description of the *parwana* itself (Guha, 1983). At his own trial, the brother Sido remembered that "Thacoor has written to you to fight the Mahajens & then you will have justice" (as cited in Guha, 1983, p. 54). There is no obvious particular reason to doubt these sources; indeed, outside observers from the period marvelled at the Santals' honesty.³

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Surprisingly, in *Provincializing Europe*, historian Dipesh Chakrabarty, dismissing these sources and the voices they preserve, denies Thakur's involvement. He, moreover, insists that not even the most radical historians working today could accept it (Chakrabarty, 2000, pp. 104–6). For at least a generation now, many historians have worked assiduously to make use of Indigenous sources and Indigenous voices. Why, then, does Chakrabarty discount and even override the Indigenous voices in the source documents to deny Thakur agency?

Even more surprisingly, this attitude is not his alone, for Chakrabarty is describing a discipline-wide blind spot. A survey of the literature shows that historians of the rebellion have embraced a variety of explanations for it, from the encroachment on Santal forests by *zamindar* officials – aristocrats who held land and tax-extraction rights over peasants – to the exploitation of the Santals by *baniya*, money-lenders, or to the sexual violence inflicted on Santal women by European railway officers. They continue, however, to ignore Thakur's relatively well-documented involvement. At this point, we suspect historians would ignore Thakur even if he surrendered to them with his ten-fingered hand a signed confession. What does Thakur have to do to attract our professional attention?

We were aware of this problem before reading *Provincializing Europe*, and indeed, we appreciate the role of the boldness of Chakrabarty's assertions in galvanizing us. Most historians today (even “radical” ones) do continue to refuse to extend agency to Thakur and those like him. In fact, they refuse to acknowledge his existence.

Thakur is a supernatural being. As Chakrabarty explains, historians today “will grant the supernatural a place in somebody's belief system or ritual practices, but to ascribe to it any real agency in historical events will be to go against the rules of evidence that gives historical discourse procedures for settling disputes about the past.” He concludes that “subaltern pasts ... cannot ever enter academic history as belonging to the historian's own position,” for “the historian, as historian and unlike the Santal, cannot invoke the supernatural in explaining/describing an event” (Chakrabarty, 2000, pp. 104–6).⁴

Why might this be the case? Thakur and his kind became *personae non gratae* in historical scholarship when they found themselves standing on the wrong side of modernity in the coffee houses of western Europe around 1700. Beyond that place and before that time, people generally had an open mind about different beings' existence. Disagreements might occur about the existence of some particular being, or, more frequently, about how to categorize or how to interact with some particular being, but the pre-modern mind was receptive to possibility. Smart, self-reflective thinkers called sceptics, found in ancient sources in several cultures, doubted the possibility of having certain knowledge of any kind. Because these pre-Enlightenment sceptics doubted all knowledge, their doubt seemed most dramatic when applied to the most certain-appearing, everyday beliefs, and they would have held no particular vendetta against Thakur and the *bonga*. The idea that beings not easily observable could not exist was held but rarely, such as by the Pokkharasātists in the ancient Ganges valley, and was often ridiculed into obscurity.⁵ In the 17th-century *Anyāpadeśasatakam*, the satirist Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita sarcastically praises the dogmatic secularist, here imagined as a “liberated frog” in a puddle, who does “truly know: / Your little well is all there is! / What could be beyond it?”⁶

Doubting is old and rational; insisting on impossibility is new and unfounded. Around 1700, a handful of European intellectuals in effect re-adopted Pokkharasātism, called it rationalism and scepticism, and mocked the less intellectual but more truly rational and sceptical minds that remained open to possibilities.⁷ Scepticism, a term that has held multiple meanings through its history, suffered its most dramatic reversal: Once an uncertainty about all knowledge, scepticism became a certainty that some kinds of knowledge are obviously false. The French Enlightenment thus gutted what we consider the old, true scepticism, turned its carcass inside-out, and marched it into universities around the world. Within a century, university elites had locked up the old scepticism, now foreign and interesting to them, in a category called “folklore” (Frijhoff, 1979). The *faux*-scepticism that ossified around 1750 still rules the academy, despite our increasing knowledge of how much of a minority viewpoint this was (and, for most of the world, still is).⁸ In Weber's (1991) terms, the world became “disenchanted” and “robbed of gods,” at least in the eyes of the university (pp. 139–49, 282). Scholars generally do not allow themselves to believe in the existence of, or give agency to, Thakur and those like him. We might call this neo-Pokkharasātism, or perhaps Academic Folk Belief, although we do not want to imply that “Indigenous” belief systems share the same unsupported dogmatism.

What do we know about these beings, cast so far beyond the subaltern that few historians can even see them? We refer to them collectively as the “Unbelieved.” This working category encompasses beings called gods, demons, angels, devas, fairies, monsters, genies, spirits, ghosts, *bonga*, *ramhuai*, *zâne*, *duende*, *mogwai*, *aziza*, *aluxo'ob*, and so on. This is a group of tremendous diversity, of global range. Despite this heterogeneity, our historical scholarship often treats them in a consistent, and odd, manner.

This essay isolates a problem in historiography and, building on the like-minded scholars who have preceded us, suggests solutions to improve on it. First, we continue to use the Thakur case study to better illuminate some historians' neglect of him (§2). We then consider this attitude more broadly, and study it as “Dogmatic Secularism” (§3). The second part of this essay turns to possible solutions, both other scholars' and our own.



Sido, Thakur's lieutenant. (Walter S. Sherwill, *The Suppression of the Santal Insurrection* (engraving, as published in the *Illustrated London News*, February 28, 1850). Sherwill was an army officer involved in putting down the rebellion. The *News*, predictably, reports that he “gave out that he had been commanded in a vision from Heaven” (p. 200).)

2 | HISTORIANS AND THAKUR

Before speaking of the more general problem, let us spend some more time with Thakur and his rebels, and with the historians working with the relevant sources. As we show here, this has been a long-running problem, stretching from coffee shops to missionaries, from three-decades-old scholarship to Chakrabarty himself.

The documents used by Thakur to authorize the rebellion continue to resist decoding, both by contemporary colonial authorities and by historians writing then and now. Kanhu testified that Thakur gave him a total of 20 papers (as cited in Guha, 1983). They included “an old Book on locomotive[s], a few visiting cards of Mr Burn Engineer,” “part of the New Testament [in another account, the Gospel of John] in Hindee,” and even blank pages (as cited in Guha, 1983, p. 248). Why would Thakur use Christian scripture to communicate to an illiterate Santal peasant? Such incongruities challenge the historian to explore possibilities, even while knowing that definitive answers are probably beyond our reach. Perhaps we get closer as we remember the porous divisions between religions, or remember the possibility of treating documents as material rather than verbal objects – which transforms the blank pages from nothings into something. We might also reflect on the use of codes, messenger pigeons, miscommunication, and other non-standard information media that appear in wars in European history. To leap from an incongruity to denying the existence of an actor, however, is an extreme solution.

If we follow the evidence, we would simply write that Thakur and the *bongas* directed the brothers to rebel. Many historians, however, fail to do so. They consistently state that Thakur's involvement is a “claim” made to “justify” the brothers' rebellion. To be clear, we advocate a sceptical attitude towards the sources, but these “claims” cluster around Thakur disproportionately. In 1965, Steven Fuchs tells us that the brothers “claimed” that Thakur had communicated with them (Fuchs, 1965). Writing two decades later, Edward Duyker can do no better: He explains that the brothers were “claiming” Thakur's commission. Duyker supports the idea that these were “claims” by citing the 1905 account by Francis Bradley-Birt, an assistant magistrate in the Indian civil service, but Bradley-Birt's own language is plain: Thakur “had appeared and spoken” and “gave the brothers a sacred book wherein no words were written” (Duyker, 1987, pp. 33–34). Duyker has added the doubt to his source. As recently as 2013, Atis Dasgupta's article follows the language of *The Annals of Rural Bengal* (1868), by W. W. Hunter, another assistant magistrate, who writes that the brothers “claimed a divine mission” (Dasgupta, 2013, p. 236).

Another long-standing approach is to explain Thakur's role functionally. This appears subtly in Kalikinkar Datta's reference to the “story of a miraculous divine intervention” and comment that “religion often acts as a great stimulating force among the average masses” (Datta, 1988, p. 14). More common is a functionalism that dissolves religion into pragmatism. Elizabeth Rottger-Hogan (1982) reduces Thakur's leadership to an idea in the brothers' heads, “a justification for their violence, a psychological support in their confrontation with outside authorities (p. 82).” Looking

specifically at the documents Thakur gave the brothers, Ranajit Guha (1983) points to their “use by the insurgents to justify turning the world upside down in the Thakur’s name,” thus “merely to legitimize their attempt to remedy the ills of the world by their own arms” (pp. 55, 248). Duyker states that the brothers made their claim simply because it allowed them “to transcend local rivalries and unite previously fragmented communities.” He further explains that the brothers invoked the *bongas* only because their society was experiencing a “crisis and dislocation caused by certain forms of cultural contact” (pp. 110–111).⁹ Here the modern historian’s typical logic mirrors perfectly the interpretation of a later Santal rebellion, in 1871, by the 19th-century Norwegian missionary Lars Skrefsrud, who saw it as “a rabid, socialistic, political agitation, the religion being only a means towards an end” (as cited in Hodne, 1966, p. 275).

Issues of agency and causality go back to the brothers’ trial. Ashley Eden, an assistant special commissioner for suppressing the rebellion, testified that “Seedo and Kanoo must be looked upon as responsible for all atrocities that were committed . . . No adequate causes for the rising has been assigned, and probably none exists, disposition to plunder and murder which is innate in the savage hill tribes, has been worked upon by several causes which it is unnecessary for me to particularize at this place.”¹⁰ The thoughts of missionaries and imperialists of over a century ago reverberate through the sources to echo in the scholarship of some historians today.

More recently, a number of historians have engaged with Thakur, but primarily with him as an idea, rather than with him as a reality. Instead, they assume he did not exist and psychologize the Santals’ belief in him. In his testimony, Kanhu described Thakur as “a white man with only a dootee & chudder he sat on the ground like a Sahib” (Guha, 1983, p. 55). Apparently unable to accept that Thakur could look white or sit on the ground, Guha suggests that Kanhu’s description of Thakur is obviously fabricated: “In what was clearly a case of overdetermination, the power of the colonialist sahib and that of the pen-pushing dhoti-clad babu were telescoped here in a composite vision and raised to divine power” (Guha, 1983, p. 55). Prathama Banerjee, meanwhile, has labored to use post-modern theorists to model a distinctive Santal understanding of time and causality. Her work is not directly concerned with the reality of Thakur, but when she describes him in passing – although insisting that the details are “neither arbitrary, nor merely ‘symbols,’” – her language suggests a highly psychologizing interpretation: Thakur was “dreamt by Sidhu and Kanhu,” his whiteness symbolizing “the invincibility of colonial authority” and his large number of fingers symbolizing “the enhanced power given by wielding the written word” (Banerjee, 1999, p. 219). Burton Stein explains that the Santal merely “mixed” Hinduism and Christianity with “pre-existing beliefs in magic and myth into an ideology of mobilization” (Stein, 1998, p. 280). For Jacques Pouchepadass, Thakur is just a “symbolic factor,” and without real leadership the Santal are “pathetic guerrillas . . . primitives doomed to failure in advance” (Pouchepadass, 2004, p. 314).

Instead of pointing cynically at the Unbelieved, or reducing them to the delusions or propaganda of the Santal, other historians have simply ignored them. Three sentences after warning against the “overemphasis in some of the historical literature on the paternalistic colonial discourse,” Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal’s (2011, p. 69) own narrative assigns leadership of the Santals to Sido and Kanhu, thus ignoring the brothers’ own assignment of leadership to Thakur. C. A. Bayly (1988) astutely locates the economic context of the rebellion, in “the fragile expansion of cash-cropping” and in the encroachment of “pioneer peasants and logging agents” on Santal lands, but he sidelines the main cause of the rebellion (p. 174). He cites only the tinder, ignoring Thakur, the spark. Similarly, Guha (1983) elucidates the context of legal inequities but elevates that context into “one of the most important causes of the uprising” (p. 97, our emphasis).

Guha relies most closely on primary sources and is aware of certain historians’ selective reading of them, our “mixture of myopia and downright refusal to look at the evidence that is there.” Criticizing Suprakash Ray’s account of the rebellion, or “*hul*,” Guha (1988) takes those historians to task who, “driven by the logic of [their] own incomprehension” in the face of religious phenomena, “attribute a deliberate falsehood” to their historical subjects (pp. 82, 81). Although Guha identifies the human Kanhu, not the Unbelieved Thakur, as the “supreme commander” of the Santal, his 1983 *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* perhaps comes closest to escaping the confines of Dogmatic Secularism. Twice Guha does appear to write from outside modern secularism: In one instance, he relates the contents of the main *perwana*: “Thakur appeared clearly to be dissatisfied with the way that the sarkar [i.e., government] had been supporting zamindars and mahajans against the Santals and He quite explicitly ordered the

sahibs to quit Santal territory and withdraw to the other side of the Ganges or face the Thakur's rain of fire" (Guha, 1983, pp. 66, 72). Admittedly, Guha may be artificially adopting the viewpoint of the *perwana* for rhetorical effect, but on the surface, he does here treat Thakur seriously. In a second passage, Guha relays a report that "oil and vermilion in leaf cups were sent by Sido and Kanhu and taken round from village to village to placate the bongas so that they might help in the fight." Guha then dryly remarks, "Considering the outcome of the fight it is by no means certain that the *bongas* were sufficiently placated" (Guha, *Elementary*, p. 239, citing Desmanjhi, 1945). Again, although the humour may suggest we cannot accept his sentence at face value, at first read, this does take the Unbelieved seriously. Rottger-Hogan (1982), too, does apparently give agency to Thakur: "'Thacoor' appeared at the house of four Santal brothers . . . [and] made known the demands of the Santal in the form of an order or 'perwannah' " (p. 90). Although the quotation marks may signal disbelief, Rottger-Hogan does allow Thakur to take action and leadership. The account most loyal to the sources is, ironically, *The Church Missionary Intelligencer*: "The divinity delivered to the brothers a sacred book, and the sky showered down slips of paper" ("The Santals," 1870, pp. 24–5). (This, however, is in fact a long quotation from Hunter's *Annals*, which the *Intelligencer's* editor had extracted without including Hunter's doubt, which he signalled, in the long tradition we cited above, with the word "claimed.")

Two decades after the rebellion, and even into the contemporary period, the Santal still explained the failure of the insurrection not in terms of superior British strength but in terms of their own failure to adequately follow their traditions and Thakur's directives (Duyker, 1987, pp. 35, 112). The failure of the *hul* neither was nor is seen by Santals as Thakur failing them. The Santals failed Thakur. Our historicising the involvement of Thakur in the *hul* does not end in 1856; he is still an active agent in history, and history's processes are still being explained by Santals through Thakur's actions and non-actions. An 1849 article in *Friend of India* characterizes history written by Indians as the "mere narration of events without speculation on causes and effects" (as cited in Bayly, 2000, p. 227). Using this passage as an example, Bayly (2000) points out the "subordinating and recasting [of] Indian knowledge" done by some 19th-century European historians (p. 224). Many historians today continue this habit of *a priori* subordinating, recasting, and dismissing Santal and other Indian history as told by the Santals and other Indians.

3 | DOGMATIC SECULARISM

Ethnologist William S. Sax (2009) clearly lays out modern assumptions about the scholar's scope: "I need not pronounce on the ontological status of gods, ghosts, individuals, or limited liability companies, but only note that each of these agents is associated with a particular historical and cultural context, and that varying theories about who (or what) can be an agent have wide-ranging implications for other parts of life, including illness and healing" (p. 95). In practice, however, there is an explicit or implicit denial of gods' and demons' existence status. Even many religious historians tend to write atheistically, and sometimes scholars in religious studies condemn the acceptance of the reality of religion as the only unacceptable methodology (Arnal, 1998; Clossey, 2007). Just as Thomas Jefferson used scissors to cut the miracles out of his copy of the New Testament, some historians have simply removed the Unbelieved from their progressive, Enlightened version of history.

Why do so many historians persist in their possibility-denying Dogmatic Secularism? When confronted with a reality, such as that of Thakur, that he cannot understand, Chakrabarty (2000) recommends "anthropologizing" it (p. 105). Could we follow his lead by anthropologizing Dogmatic Secularism? Would it be possible to explain the social causes behind our blind spot? What psychological reassurances do denying the existence of the Unbelieved offer? Such questions seem patronizing, rude, and abusive, although perhaps less so when directed at doctoral peoples than when directed at tribal peoples.

If we are too polite to overinterpret Dogmatic Secularism, we might still fruitfully take time to study some of its contours. The most prominent is that, especially with regard to religion, the gap between historian and historical subject yawns hideously. Antti Pakaslahti describes a dialogue, or "not really a dialogue but a composition of two intermittent monologues," between a patient and a psychiatrist in northern India as "quite surrealistic, at times like

an Ionesco play. The patient talked about spirits, devotion, and rituals, the psychiatrist about hysteria, depression and therapy." Pakaslahti marvels at the ability of each to not communicate with the other: "The doctor considered the patient to be an uneducated believer in black magic and super-natural beings. The patient was wondering what on earth the psychiatrist was trying to say with all his complicated, strange words which made no sense to him" (as cited in Smith, 2006, p. 85). We find this psychiatrist emblematic of some historians of religion, and we might even argue that the patient is saner than the doctor.

Perhaps the most common interpretation of religion, the most common way to avoid its reality, is that people engineer religious truths to meet social or psychological needs. Robin Horton, himself reacting against an "anthropological orthodoxy" that reduces religion to symbols, improved our understanding only slightly by reducing religion to tools. For him, a religious idea is merely an "instrument for explanation, prediction, and control," useful when faced with "the interpretative challenge of social change." When a traditional people, "insulated from the macrocosm of the wider world," encounter modernity, for example, they improve their religious toolkit by changing their concepts to better understand their new society (Horton, 1971, pp. 101–2). Such tools, more essentially useful than symbols, are still artificial fabrications. Horton's influence has meant a generation of scholars believe that, to use Paul Landau's description of this approach, "the notion of the high god emerged in colonized societies not primarily due to missionaries but because local explanatory and magical paradigms failed to account for the changing world" (Landau, 2005, p. 213). That is, if missionaries had not brought new religious information, desperate and confused Indigenous peoples would have had to make it up themselves. On the other end of the spectrum, we see assumptions that primitive peoples use religious ideas as political tools, as in Geoffrey W. Conrad and Arthur A. Demarest's *Religion and Empire: The Dynamics of Aztec and Inca Expansionism*. The more likely, and human, explanations lie somewhere between these assumptions that religious peoples are either extremely ignorant or extremely cynical.

More recently, there have been some cognitive scientists who have reduced the Unbelieved to the category of "minimally counterintuitive (MCI) concepts,' a limited set of cognitively optimal 'templates' that appear to govern the proliferation of supernatural beings." MCI gods are ideas optimized to make it easier for believers to remember them, and talk of them to others. They are powerful not for their miracles they perform but because they are memorable and marketable.¹¹

Sometimes scholars recognize their interpretations as a sort of knowledge that is different from their subjects' knowledge. Too often, however, the scholar's interpretation and the believer's knowledge are put into competition, and the scholar inevitably wins. (It was hard, in writing the last two sentences, to break free from the habit of downgrading the subjects' knowledge into the category of "belief.") At times, this victory is explicit. Geoffrey Koziol (1992) contends that "members of a culture are often less knowledgeable about the meanings of their rites and symbols than the scholars who visit them" (pp. 289, 308). More alarming, perhaps, is when some historians confuse their interpretations with their subjects' intentions. Emma Anderson (2007), for example, explains that the "official purpose" of missionary baptisms was "rendering the exotic, dangerous 'other' familiar" (p. 92).

It is easy to imagine that, when explicitly asked, many of the historians cited here might assert that they do take their subjects' religious beliefs seriously, that they avoid contradicting the truth of those beliefs by making no declarations of absolute truth at all. What they write in practice, however, can betray deep-rooted assumptions. Indications of doubt, subtle or otherwise, cling to the Unbelieved while humans move relatively unencumbered through our histories. Take the words of the human revolutionary Sido: "Thakur recruited me, and my brothers helped me." We repeatedly see variations of "Sido's brothers helped him, and he claimed 'Thakur' recruited him." We never see, "Recruited by Thakur, Sido claimed that 'his brothers' helped him." We believe those parts of our sources that resonate with our prejudices; we discount those parts of our sources that we can smartly identify as literary tropes, or psychological projections, or the fulfillment of social needs. British reports that the Santals were unusually honest align with the "noble savage" trope of guileless primitives. Because it takes an extra mental step, flattering our intelligence, it is tempting to conclude that the reports reflect a stereotype rather than a reality. Thus, we doubt those reports, and we doubt the assertions of the Santals. Doubting fits squarely within the

historian's duties, but in practice, we irrationally doubt some aspects more than others. Like the jurors and casuists of medieval and early-modern Europe, our professional ancestors, we make probabilistic assessments of the evidence available to us.¹² Unlike them, we apply our calculus only after removing the Unbelieved from the realm of possibilities.

Most dangerous is not how Dogmatic Secularism appears in print, but what it excludes. Two of this essay's authors while graduate students had been admonished to rewrite vignettes in order to achieve a greater distance from the sources and their reality. A senior colleague, unofficially but with concern, has called for the "institutionalization" of another of us, for proposing a study of the history of lycanthropy that takes its subject at face value.¹³ Another distinguished historian agreed with us but declined to do so in print. Even if our profession is not actively censoring a more sceptical, critical, and open-minded approach to history, the widespread implicit assumptions against the Unbelieved make it difficult to write, or even think, freely.

Why do we ignore the well-documented existence of so many beings? Why do we gloss over the effects, and silences, and weirdness of that documentation? Is there any way we can cultivate a more sceptical attitude, a pre-Enlightenment perspective unburdened by dogmatic presuppositions, towards the Unbelieved's existence? The second part of this essay considers answers to these questions and solutions to this historiographical problem. It surveys some of the last 20 years' boldest scholarship in approaching the history of religion from a more open-minded perspective and gives our own tactical and strategic suggestions for how to take religion more seriously. We hope that readers will take advantage of this publication intermission to brainstorm their own suggestions and welcome feedback directed to our authors or to isaz_info@sfu.ca.

NOTES

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² The word "thakur" has a wide semantic range, which rarely strays from ideas of lordship. Contemporary sources often preface the word with the definite article to refer to the supreme commander, to distinguish him from subordinate *thakurs*. See Yule, 1903, p. 915.

³ W. S. Sherwill notes that "the truth is by a Sonthál held sacred," and Hunter that they generally "disdained equivocation or falsehood." Sherwill, 1854, 32; Hunter, 1868, 240. See Guha, "Prose," 80.

⁴ By Chakrabarty's own admission, *Provincializing Europe* is "cryptic." His article published two years earlier, "Minority Histories, Subaltern Pasts" (Chakrabarty, 1998), suggests interest in and sympathy for the indigenous perspective. *Provincializing Europe*, however, appears to go against this earlier approach and sees Enlightenment thought as not only one of many ways of thinking but also the best of many ways of thinking, "a gift to us all," and explicitly rejects "shunning European thought" or "rejecting or discarding" it. We argue, however, that a fundamental component of European thought should be abandoned (Chakrabarty, 2000, pp. 16, 255).

⁵ Majjhima Nikāya 99.8–14, in Nāṇamoli and Bodhi, 2005, pp. 810–3. See Popkin, 2003.

⁶ Translation by Siegel, 1987, p. 86. See Unni, 1995, pp. 47–56.

⁷ It is difficult to specify when we stopped believing in the Unbelieved, partly because of the diversity of "we" and of the Unbelieved, and partly because the subject matter seems to interfere with our ability to remember. Keith Thomas collected instances of English Elizabethans remembering when faeries were still believed in – a generation ago, or 30 years ago, or a hundred years ago, always just on the edge of contemporary memory. Just as for decades sociologists have predicted secularization's imminent arrival, for centuries the Unbelieved had only recently entered oblivion (Thomas, 1971, 607–8). For secularization, see Clossey, 2015, pp. 141–4. For overviews of the complex history of "superstition," see Smith, 2008, and Qian, 1998, pp. 316–8.

⁸ For example, see Barnett, 2004 and Trapnell, 1994. For the enduring belief in witchcraft, see Behringer, 2004.

⁹ Duyker is referring to La Barre, 1971.

¹⁰ Seedoo Manjee's trial (December 4, 1855), from *Report of Cases*, 1856, p. 859.

¹¹ See Keitt, 2013, p. 331, and Boyer, 2001.

¹² See Whitman, 2008 and Hacking, 2006.

¹³ Although he does not explicitly grant reality to beliefs in lycanthropy, Carlo Ginzburg (2013, p. 140) suggests giving them agency and influence over our psyches, and asks whether we are "the ones who think up myths, or is it myths who think us up?"

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The co-authors are the current officers of the Institut für die Späte Altzeit (ISAZ). Although its ultimate origins are obscure, the terms it still uses to mean research (*ransaka*, whence the English "ransack") and annual meeting (*khural dai*) point towards medieval Sweden and Mongolia, respectively. Its modern history began in 2013, when it was repurposed on the Helm Crag fell as a scholarly association for the promotion of research that defies the assumptions and agendas of western modernity.

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