miniatures, an influence well documented by art historians such as Abolala Soudavar and Sheila Blair. Finally, the religious interchange between Buddhism and Islam in the Ilkhanid and Timurid courts and the establishment of a self-reproducing Muslim community in China proper, the Hui, were also important aspects of cultural exchange directly sponsored by the Mongols. While shadowed by the tragic annihilation of Buddhism in Iran during the 1295-7 persecutions and the obscured by the absence of a native Sino-Islamic literature before the Ming, such religious exchange was undoubtedly an important aspect of Sino-Iranian cultural exchange under the Mongols.

Despite these possible areas of improvement, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* is a superb book and a model of accurate scholarship. All those interested in late medieval China or Iran, in the Mongol empire, or in international cross-cultural contact before European dominance will profit greatly from reading Professor Allsen’s fascinating story.

Christopher P. Atwood

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The much bandied-about thesis of a clash of civilisations doing the rounds these days threatens to become a self-fulfilling prophesy, with prophets of doom the likes of Samuel Huntington being lionised in the press and academic circles. In a religiously plural country such as India, the devastating effect of religiously inspired conflict are particularly real and threatening. Multiple religious identities need not, however, be a source of conflict, as this book seeks to argue. Rather, if carefully managed, religious diversity can be a source of a country’s strength and stability. Never before, it seems, has the art of skilfully negotiating the conflicting demands of diverse religious identities been so desperately needed as it is today.

Gottschalk’s basic thesis is that religious identity is only one of the many identities that people possess. If religion divides people along confessional lines, there are other factors that bring people of different religious persuasions together, including shared race, language, locality, nation and ethnicity. One’s religious identity need not necessarily be the most important or potent of
one’s multiple identities. What determines which particular identity is to be stressed at a particular moment in time is determined by the particular spatio-temporal context in which an individual or group finds itself placed. At one point in time factors such as a common language or race can serve to unite a people across religious divides, while at other times religion could come to the fore. What is particularly crucial in this constant flux of identity politics is the source of the threat or opposition that an individual or group faces in a particular context. If the perceived source is another religious group, then the community’s religious identity is stressed, but this might change if the source of threat, perceived or real, is transformed over time.

This book looks at this understanding of multiple and shifting identities from the perspective of the denizens of a multi-caste and multi-religious village in the north Indian state of Bihar. The village of Arampur, like most other north Indian villages, is home to Hindus and Muslims, “upper” caste landlords and “lower” caste peasants and artisans alike. Gottschalk charts the multiple ways in which different sets of groups in the village define themselves in contrast to other groups. Thus, the “high” caste Hindu Rajput and Muslim landlords, when faced with the threat of peasant insurrection, stress not just their common class interests but also their common origins, as descendants of the founders of the village, two brothers, one of whom converted to Islam several generations ago. On the other hand, in the face of the growing influence of chauvinist Hindu political parties, “high” caste Hindu landlords see themselves as one with their “low” caste servants, pitted against the Muslim “other”.

Oral narratives provide a fertile field of investigation of the complex process of negotiation of multiple identities. Gottschalk examines the diverse ways in which one of the founding myths of the village are told by different individuals and groups in the village. The story of a Brahmin priest who, insulted by the local Hindu king, seeks the help of the Muslim Sul ăn of Delhi to invade the village, and populate it with a new set of inhabitants, both Hindu and Muslim, is told in a variety of ways, stressing a village identity that transcends divisions of religion. So too are the stories told about a Sufi saint buried in the village, whose shrine continues to attract Hindus and Muslims, “high” caste and “low” caste alike. In other words, the author insists that the politics of identity is one that must be understood in the context of a constantly shifting constellation of local power relations. Religious identity is constantly being renegotiated through other, competing identities, such as caste, class and gender.

This book strongly interrogates the notion of monolithic Hindu and Muslim identities invariably and necessarily pitted against each other. The
author insists that religious diversity need not have to inevitably lead to conflict, and thus suggests the possibility of learning from local ways of negotiating multiple identities through dialogue or simply through shared struggles for sheer survival.

Yoginder Sikand


*The Hidden Words* is an English translation of *al-Kalimát al-Maknúnah* of the meditational verses of Mírzá Ḥusayn ‘Alí Núrí (1817–1892), better known by the creed title of Bahá’u’lláh (Glory of God), being the founder of the Bahá’í faith. Of the original verses seventy one are in Arabic and eighty two in Persian.

Of all the works of Bahá’u’lláh, this book is considered to be the best. Walking along the banks of River Tigris, Iraq, in 1858, wrapt in meditation, Bahá’u’lláh reflected in this small volume of verses on the eternal relationship between God and Man, on the purpose of life and the obstacles that lie before man in his journey along the spiritual path.

The translator of this book is Shoghi Effendi Rabbání (1897–1957), who was appointed a Guardian of the Bahá’í community by Bahá’u’lláh’s eldest son and successor, ‘Abbáš Effendi (1844–1921), better known as ‘Abd al-Bahá’, a title chosen by himself. Educated at the Catholic schools in Haifa and Beirut, Shoghi graduated in arts from the Syrian Protestant College (a predecessor of the American University of Beirut) in 1918 and after working as ‘Abd al-Bahá’s chief secretary for about two years, he joined Balliol College, Oxford University, in 1920, studying Political Science and Economics, and seeking to perfect his English. His student career was, however, cut short by the sudden death of his maternal grandfather, ‘Abd al-Bahá’ in 1921, when he was called back to Haifa, and appointed *Wálí Amr’lláh* (Guardian of the Cause of God) according to ‘Abd al-Bahá’s will after putting aside the original line of succession indicated in Bahá’u’lláh’s *Book of Covenant*. Shoghi by now had become as proficient in English as in Persian and Arabic which he had learnt in his childhood. He could also speak French. Taking up the reins of