to the detriment of other communities’ distinctive affiliations, national or otherwise, Tripp’s argument fails to take into account the astonishing endurance of the Iraqi state, especially in the sanctions era. Besieged and attacked at every turn, Iraq is still in existence as more or less a unitary state, albeit one held in thrall to Western interventionism. Perhaps the only reason that the country is seen as the ultimate failed state is because, in the wake of the Gulf war, it has become fashionable to see the country as an imminent Yugoslavia, ready to break apart the minute that central authority erodes. This anticipated break-up may be illusory, and the country and its people may yet surprise its detractors!

Second, there is reluctance about the term, “Iraq” itself. On page 8, Tripp writes a short paragraph on the fluid parameters of historical Iraq, relying on the descriptions of Arab/Islamic geographers (who regularly used the term al-‘Irāq), only to revert to the anachronistic term of “Mesopotamia” when discussing the pre-Mandate era. Since the term, “Mesopotamia” is of Greek origin and has no echo in the local literature of the region, the reader is entitled to ask what makes “Mesopotamia” any more authentic than “Iraq”, and why is a European loan-word considered more fitting than one that has existed in the region for millennia. There is too much emphasis on political correctness here; any examination, however superficial, of the pre-modern historiography of Iraq will unearth dozens of references to the term al-‘Irāq by journeying scholars or government officials. While it is undoubtedly correct to note that the term itself does not in any way reflect a politicized reality, it nonetheless connotes an association with home, however limited or circumscribed that notion was in pre-modern Iraq. It therefore possesses a flavour and an immediacy that merits recognition, if only en passant, of the historical continuum that ties the present-day Iraq to its illustrious past.

Hala Fattah

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*A Concise Encyclopedia of Hinduism* by Klaus K. Klostermaier is the third book in the series on the major religions of the world published by Onworld, Oxford, the first being on Christianity and the second on Judaism.

The author is a University Distinguished Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Manitoba in Canada and a Fellow of the
Royal Society of Canada. He has lived and worked in India, the land of living Hinduism, for over a decade and studied the sacred texts of the religion in its original languages. His two previous books on the subject, namely, *A Survey of Hinduism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994) and *A Short Introduction to Hinduism* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1998) were highly acclaimed.

Hinduism, after Christianity and Islam, has the largest following in the world, counting to more than 800 million. It may be interesting to note that this religion, as the author states, “has no known founder, no known historic beginnings, no central authority, no common creed”. (p. 1) The term ‘Hindu’ was not coined by Hindus themselves. It was originally used by ancient Persians for the people who lived across the river Indus. So in its origin, the words ‘Hindu’ had the same meaning as the word ‘Indian’. Later the term Hindu was accepted by Hindus themselves.

The *Encyclopedia* begins with an introduction of Hinduism, dwelling briefly upon its history, geography, languages, sacred books, beliefs, various philosophies, etc. The topic ‘Political Hinduism and Hindu Jagaran (awakening)’ is also discussed. All these topics have been precisely dealt with within a compass of only ten pages. But this brief introduction has some inaccuracies of facts as well as of expressions to which I would like to draw attention.

The earliest known literary source of Hinduism is Rgveda. And most of the objective historians, both Indian and European, accept the period circa 1500–1000 BC as the date of its composition. But Klostermaier dates the earliest Vedic hymns to about 4000 BC. The Indian scholars who propose such an early date for the Rgveda, are motivated by non-scholastic considerations interests.

Klostermaier justifies his early dates in a footnote which reads thus: “Recent archaeological and palaeogeographical findings, supported by satellite photography of the former Sarasvati riverbed, suggest a revision of early Indian history along the lines mentioned here”. (p. 14, n. 2) But till the hypothesis is not finally proved, Max Müller’s chronology appears most reasonable.

The author writes: “While the first prime minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru (1947–64), Western educated and a believer in socialism, insisted on India becoming a ‘secular democracy’, under his successor, Bal [typographical mistake for ‘Lal’] Bahadur Shastri (1964–66), organised Hinduism gained considerably in strength”. (pp. 6, 8). This statement makes one feel as if Shastri had some role in strengthening organised Hinduism which is not true. The Visva Hindu Prisad, one of the bodies responsible for the demolition of the Baburi Masjid at Ayodhya in December 1992, may have
have been founded in 1964, but hardly was any Hindu, except for the organisers, aware of this body prior to this unfortunate episode.

Klostermaier, being a scholar of religion, sees history as a conflict between various religions. He writes: “By the early eighties the Sikhs began seriously agitating for an independent state. When operation ‘Blue Star’ ended with shoot-outs at the Golden Temple in Amritsar, Sikhs turned their hostility not only towards the Indian government but also towards Hindus in general”. (p. 8) The statement is like putting the cart before the horse. The reviewer lived, throughout this dark period in the history of Punjab, in that state and closely watched the incidents. The indiscriminate shooting of Hindus and Nirankaris (which many a time included clean-shaven Sikhs also) had begun long before the operation ‘Blue Star’. And paradoxically, it were the Sikhs who suffered worst at the hands of the proponents of the independent state. For an insight into this so-called movement for an independent state, the author must see the book *Terrorism in Punjab* (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1999) by Harish Puri, J.S. Sekhon and P.S. Judge.

On p. 13, the author writes: “... some individuals like Sivaji... attempted and partially succeeded in reaffirming political power for Hinduism”. An objective view of Shivaji’s conflict with Aurangzeb shows that the Maratha leader was fighting not for the sake of Hindu religion but for achieving political power for himself. Aurangzeb, owing to his own political constraints, did not confer upon Shivaji a *manṣab* of 7000 which he was demanding. If Aurangzeb had conferred that *manṣab*, presumably we would have seen Shivaji serving under the authority of the emperor.

Now we move to the main text. Hinduism, having a history of more than three millennia, and spread over a large geographical area, has so many gods and goddesses, and such a variation of rituals and beliefs that even a comprehensive work can not claim to cover all of them. The book under review is an attempt to provide a reference work for the scholars as well as the lay readers interested in Hinduism. Some 700 articles of the *Encyclopedia* encompass concepts, doctrines, rituals, symbols, places, areas and rivers, scriptures, commentaries and other writings, the gods, goddesses and supernatural beings, heroes and heroines, demons and villains, ancestors and sages, rulers and dynasties, religious leaders and reformers, traditional and modern scholars and associations.

The articles are concise and updated. For example, the 14-line article on Ayodhya also records the demolition of the Baburi Masjid by Hindu activists in December 1992. The network of cross-references between related entries adds to the value of the work.
In the category of religious leaders and reformers, the inclusion of a charlatan like Sathya Sai Baba (1926– ) seems arbitrary. Osho (Rajnish) deserved better because despite all his weaknesses, he was a good scholar.

The entries have some mistakes. For example, the word for the coloured spot in the middle of the forehead of a woman, indicating her married status, is ‘bindi’ and not ‘bindu’ (p. 40).

The main text comprising entries is followed by a chronology which starts from c. 400 BC, the period to which the author assigns the composition of the earliest Vedic hymns, and ending in 1998 when Bhartiya Janta Party minority government was established in India. Some lines in the chronology are also likely to create misunderstanding. For example, the entry against the period c. 1526–1757 reads “Moghul rule in India, destruction of most Hindu temples in North and Central India”. (p. 219) It presents a wrong picture of the Mughal rule which was, for the most part, quite tolerant of Hinduism.

The dates c. 1900 BC and c. 1400 BC for the “Age of Ramayana” and “Early version of Mahabharta” respectively, are too early. A book written at the end of the twentieth century should give the dates which are based on scientific studies and not on traditional beliefs.

The first three appendices give lists of the philosophical schools of Hinduism, Hindu scriptures, the ten principal schools of Vedanta. The last appendix lists various stages of the Eightfold Practice of Yoga: Astanga Yoga.

This is followed by a bibliography classified into various sections like General, Geography, History, Sacred Books, Religions, Philosophies, Political Hinduism, Art and Architecture, and Individual Personalities. A significant omission is Nirad C. Chaudhuri’s Hinduism: A Religion to Live By, first published in London by Chatto & Windus in 1979, and later reprinted several times in India and Europe, it is one of the finest books on the subject.

But for a few typographical errors here and there, the book has been beautifully published. It is illustrated with two maps, 17 figures and 26 photographs. The sketches of deities are based on classical sculptures. But in some of the drawings, particularly in that of Surya, the Sun, the face expressions are poor. Photographs of original sculptures would have been better. The black and white pictures seem to have been printed from colour slides, hence these are a little dark. The pictures of Hindu deities have been taken from their popular representations in calendars, which has impaired their quality.

Despite a few weaknesses, the book will serve as a handy, easy-to-refer book on the subject.

Subhash Parihar

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