

HANUMAN'S TALE

The Messages of a Divine Monkey



Philip Lutgendorf

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A Kannada-language poster shows Hanuman's body inscribed with devotional poems; late twentieth century

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*In remembrance of
Eruch, disciple of Meher Baba;
and for Susan, Mira, and Claire*

मोरें मन प्रभु अस बिस्वासा । राम ते अधिक राम कर दासा ॥

My heart, Lord, holds this conviction:
Greater than Rama is Rama's servant.

—Tulsidas (*Rāmcaritmānas* 7.120.16)

Preface and *Prashasti**

This book project, like the posterior appendage of its beloved subject, has grown longer and longer and has hung around for a considerable time. The inspiration for it first emerged during my research, mainly in the Banaras region in 1982–84, on the performance of the *Rāmcāritmānas*, the popular Hindi retelling of the tale of Rama and Sita by the sixteenth-century poet-saint Tulsidas. This research led not only to my book *The Life of a Text* (1991) but to my growing realization that, in the experience and practice of many people, the most vibrant and endearing character in the story wasn't Rama, but rather Hanuman. Given that scholarly literature seemed virtually unaware of this (a circumstance I discuss further in chapter 1), I resolved to write a book that would give Rama's simian associate the prominence he had long achieved in everyday life.

Initial research was carried out under a senior research fellowship from the American Institute of Indian Studies in 1989–90. During this year I was frequently on the move, collecting images, interviews, and popular and scholarly publications from sites in North, central, and South India. The materials I brought back to the United States kept me busy for years, and kept growing as I made return visits to India (several with support from the University of Iowa) and as friends around the world sent me books, news clippings, posters, and (more recently) e-mail messages and Web site addresses featuring everyone's favorite monkey. I made significant progress in organizing and interpreting my "Hanuman archive" during summer vacations and two semesters of developmental leave funded by the

* *Prāśasti* (Sanskrit): the eulogizing of patrons and benefactors.

university, including one at its Obermann Institute for Advanced Studies. An outline for a book of seven chapters (reflecting, by happy coincidence, the usual number of Ramayana subbooks) emerged early on, then it too unavoidably grew: Hanuman, it became clear, would require eight chapters, at least—and though much has been omitted, I had to stop somewhere! The project was slowed by several terms as a department chairman and by many invitations to write conference papers and essays. None of the half dozen articles on Hanuman that I have published during the past decade correspond exactly to chapters in this book, and some of them contain additional material that is beyond its scope. However, portions of several of them are incorporated here, and there was simply no other way to begin chapter 1 than with a revised and updated version of the opening section of my first such essay (Lutgendorf 1994b), though I quickly depart from its content. I am grateful to the editors of *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, *History of Religions*, *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, *Manushi*, and *Religion*, and to Oxford University Press and Sage Publications for their understanding regarding these edited excerpts. Completion of the first draft of the manuscript during 2002–03 was made possible through the generosity of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation and the University of Iowa’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. I especially thank Deans Linda Maxson and Raúl Curto for their encouragement of my research during a period when our university (like most public universities in the United States) was suffering severe budget reductions. Additional support from the university’s vice president for research has helped underwrite the illustration of this volume. I also thank my editor, Theo Calderara of Oxford University Press, for his enthusiasm for this project, and the press’s two anonymous readers for their corrections and good advice on reigning in my prolixity. Production editor Gwen Colvin and copyeditor Norma McClemore provided further valued assistance.

I can never adequately thank, or even properly catalog, all the friends, colleagues, and devotees of Hanuman (the latter category not excluding the former two) who helped me in my work over the years. But I cannot fail to mention, in Banaras, Ramji Pandey of Ramnagar, Chandradharprasad Narayan Singh (“Bhanuji”) of Nagwa, and Ramnarayan Shukla and Veerbhadra Mishra of the Sankat Mochan temple; Ratnesh Pathak guided me on a walking tour of Hanuman shrines in several neighborhoods. In Ayodhya, Nritya Gopal Das provided hospitality, and I greatly benefited from the insights of Pandit Ramkumar Das and (after his death) those of his disciple Sacchidanand Das of Mani Parvat. It was also in Ayodhya that I first met the great Ramayana scholar Bhagavati Prasad Singh of Gorakhpur University, whose work I have long admired. We became friends, and I was fortunate to record a last interview with him only a few days before his death in Vrindaban in January 1994. Also in Vrindaban, I was accommodated and assisted by Shrivats Goswami and the late Asim Krishna Das. In Rewa, Madhya Pradesh, I was hosted and guided by Gokaran and Urmila Shrivastava. In Pune, I was given a memorable tour of Maruti shrines by Sudhir Wagnare and further assisted by Jeffrey Brackett and Anne Feldhaus. In Bangalore, Girish Karnad and Saraswati Ganapathy

provided extraordinary hospitality to my family for a month, and my research in Mysore and elsewhere in Karnataka State owed much to the energetic assistance of M. S. Nagaraja Rao, former director general of the Archaeological Survey of India. At Hampi, I was guided to (what many consider) Hanuman's birthplace and other important sites by archeologists John Fritz and John ("Kim") Malville. Whenever I passed through Delhi I was warmly welcomed and assisted by the staff of the American Institute of Indian Studies and by its director general, Pradeep Mehendiratta, and I also received help from Jagannath Das of the Connaught Place Hanuman temple and from the resourceful Kailash Jha. Jyotindra Jain, who is now dean of the School of Art and Aesthetics at Jawaharlal Nehru University but was previously director of the National Handlooms and Handicrafts Museum, gave me much appreciated help. I spent two pleasant afternoons in the Hanuman Museum at Gurgaon created by K. C. Aryan and his children, Subhashini and B. N. Aryan, who continued to assist me after their father's death. On several visits to Taos, New Mexico, I was warmly received by Dwarka Bonner, Patrick Finn, and other members of the Neem Karoli Baba Ashram community.

It has been my good fortune to do much of the final writing and editing of this book in a peaceful cabin on the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains. I thank the friends in Boulder, Colorado, and environs who have welcomed me and my family to this area: Dorothy Turner, Susan Osborne, Alan Boles, Dennis and Beth McGilvray, Craig Cameron, Stanley and Connie Heginbotham, Tom Coburn, and Jim and Audrey Benedict. The nearby (and, for me, aptly named) Indian Peaks, with their majestic pinnacles and shining snowfields, have inspired me and reminded me of my happy sojourns in the Himalayas and of Hanuman's abiding presence there.

To attempt to cite all the academic colleagues who have guided, chided, and encouraged me over the years concerning this seemingly endless project would easily result in another *Hanumāyana* (see chapter 3 for an explanation of this neologism), as well as something of a catalog of South Asia scholars worldwide; the publications of some of those who are noted here are of course cited at appropriate places. I apologize in advance to those whose names, for reasons of space or faulty memory, I do not list here. But I cannot fail to mention Joseph Alter, Mandakranta Bose, Jeffrey Brackett, Winand Callewaert, Mathieu Claveyrolas, Paul Courtright, Wendy Doniger, Daniel Gold, Robert Goldman and Sally Sutherland Goldman, Linda Hess, István Keul, Nita Kumar, Kirin Narayan, Antti Pakaslahti, William Pinch, Sheldon Pollock, Sumathy Ramaswami, V. Narayana Rao, Peter van der Veer, Anila Verghese, Susan S. Wadley, Phillip Wagoner, and David Gordon White. H. Daniel Smith, professor emeritus at Syracuse University, generously gave me access to his collection of Hanuman posters, as did Patricia Uberoi of Delhi University. Photographer and Hanuman devotee Martin Brading shared pictures of temple murtis, and Carroll Molton and Charles Southwick shared their research on Indian primates. I especially thank Ann Grodzins Gold, David Haberman, and John Stratton Hawley, who (in addition to other assistance) wrote in support of my application to the Guggenheim Foundation.

My treasured colleagues in the South Asian Studies Program at the University of Iowa—including Latika Bhatnagar, Corey Creekmur, Alice Davison, Paul Greenough, Adi Hastings, Meena Khandelwal, Priya Kumar, and Jael Silliman—helped and taught me in numerous ways. I owe special thanks to my closest Iowa colleague, Frederick Smith, for his steadfast friendship, unfailing wit, and ever-surprising knowledge of relevant (and irrelevant) topics. Sue Otto and Gregory Johnson of the Language Media Center generously provided technical support.

My wife, Susan, and our daughters, Mira and Claire, have supported me throughout this project as only loving family members can. Our girls grew up with stories from the *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata* and now enrich our lives with their own epic accomplishments. And having a gifted professor and researcher in clinical health psychology as a life partner has also yielded welcome insights (and not just into Hanuman).

I have dedicated this volume to Eruch Jessawala (1916–2001), intimate disciple and companion of Avatar Meher Baba, and someone whose impact on my life cannot easily be put into words. A man without pretense, a peerless storyteller, and a witness to love and truth, he profoundly touched my heart. But I also want to pay tribute to another dear friend, the late Kaikobad (“Keki”) Desai of Kashmir Gate, Delhi. Together with his wife, Dhun, and daughter, Meher, Keki welcomed, fed, and inspired my family and me whenever we passed through Delhi. A Parsi and a stalwart disciple of Meher Baba, he was also a devoted reciter of the *Hanumān cālīsā*. After Keki’s death, a Hindu neighbor of his remarked to me, concerning the love of the Desai family and the special atmosphere of their apartment in Old Delhi, “Outside, it was kali yuga [the dark age], but in there, always satya yuga [the golden age of truth and righteousness].” Similarly for me now, recalling all that I have received from dear friends and mentors renews the world.

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On Transliteration, Vocabulary, and Style

Although this book is based primarily on Hindi materials, it also draws on sources in Sanskrit and in several modern Indian languages. In the interest of readability and accessibility to general readers, I have tried to minimize the use of italics and diacritics, restricting them to key technical terms and the titles of texts. Indic terms that have entered English-language dictionaries (e.g., Brahman, dharma, karma, mantra, sadhu) are given in their standard spellings, and the names of deities are rendered without diacritics (thus Shiva rather than Śiva, and Vishnu rather than Viṣṇu). The names of historical figures and modern authors are similarly treated (thus Tulsidas rather than Tulsīdās; Radhakrishna Shrimali rather than Rādhākṛṣṇa Śrīmālī); however, in the bibliography, the names of authors who write in Hindi appear twice, first without diacritics (as in the main text) and then, in brackets, in standard scholarly transliteration. Terms common in writings about Indian culture that may not be familiar to some readers (e.g., lingam, murti, puja), are italicized the first time they appear but Romanized thereafter. They are additionally collected, with brief definitions and their standard transliterations noted, in an appended glossary.

The names of characters in the Rama story are rendered as they commonly are in English-language retellings, retaining the final short vowel that is pronounced in Sanskrit and several modern Indian languages but normally omitted in Hindi (thus “Rama” and “Lakshmana,” rather than “Ram” and “Lakshman,” except when citing sources that use the shorter form). I have extended this practice to some other terms shared by most modern Indian languages (thus “bhakta” and “prana,” rather than “bhakt” and “pran”), except in instances where I refer specifically to Hindi usage. However, I omit the

final vowel for some other common terms that have regularly appeared in English-language publications without it (e.g., darshan, prasad, Ramraj). I also use the Sanskritized spelling “avatara” to distinguish this important Hindu concept-word (*avatāra*, the “carrying over” or “coming down” of a deity into an embodied form) from its now commonplace English incarnation (avatar), which carries different resonances.

Throughout the book, the term Ramayana (without diacritics or italics) is used to refer to the broad tradition of literary and oral retellings of the Rama story. Its transliterated equivalent, *Rāmāyaṇa*, is reserved for specific literary works bearing that title. All references to the Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇa* and to the *Mahābhārata* are (unless otherwise indicated) to the twentieth-century “critical editions” of these two works, produced in Baroda and Pune, respectively.

Note on Pronunciation

The letters and symbols used in italicized words have the following approximate English equivalents:

<i>a</i>	“u” as in “but”
<i>ā</i>	“a” as in “father”
<i>i</i>	“i” as in “sit”
<i>ī</i>	“ee” as in “feet”
<i>u</i>	“u” as in “put”
<i>ū</i>	“oo” as in “boot”
<i>e</i>	“ay” as in “say”
<i>o</i>	“oa” as in “boat”
<i>c, ch</i>	“ch”
<i>ś, ṣ</i>	“sh”
<i>n, ṅ, ñ</i>	“n”

Other consonants with subdots (*ṭ, ṭh, ḍ, ḍh, ṇ, ṛ, ṛh*) represent “retroflex” sounds, formed by flexing the tongue back slightly against the upper palate. In certain Sanskrit words (e.g., *ṛṣi, Kṛṣṇa*) *ṛ* stands for a “vocalic r” that is pronounced “ri” by most North Indians and “ru” by most southerners.

Hanuman's Tale

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I

Major and Minor

Hanuman in Hindu Life and Scholarly Discourse

The cult of Hanumat is a relatively late and marginal phenomenon within Vaiṣṇavism.

—Hans Bakker, *Ayodhyā* (1986:II.126)

Hanuman is the most popular deity in this country.

—G. S. Altekar, *Studies on Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa* (1987:265)

On the third of August 1989, a week after I arrived in Delhi to begin a year of research on the apparently ever-expanding worship of Hanuman—the simian companion of Rama, hero of the Ramayana, and now a beloved deity in his own right—a front-page article in *The Times of India* reported that the divine monkey himself had arrived in the capital. Whereas I had come by air, Hanuman (widely hailed as “Son of the Wind” and renowned for his swift aerial exploits in the Rama story) arrived by rail; moreover, he made the journey lying down. Although Hanuman is known to be physically immortal, one of the traditional seven or eight “long-lived ones” (*cirañjīvi*) of Hindu mythology, old age did not account for his supine posture and slow mode of transport. Rather, the explanation was technical and pragmatic: Hanuman arrived, this time, in the form of a 45-foot granite murti (*mūrti*, sacred embodiment) weighing 1,300 tons. Hewn by artisans near Mangalore in South India, the murti was loaded onto a railroad car for its long journey north, arriving in South Delhi, where it was transferred by crane to a flatbed trailer to begin the final 15-kilometer leg of its journey to Vasant Gaon, a western suburb. Although Hanuman is hailed as a master of the eight siddhis (*siddhī*) or occult powers associated with advanced *haṭha* yogic practice,

including the power to expand one's body to immense size and weight and to contract it to infinitesimal dimensions, only the former was in evidence on this occasion, and his progress was slow indeed. Ten days after its announcement of Hanuman's arrival, the *Times* reported that the tires of his trailer had flattened under his weight, leaving him stranded and obstructing traffic for more than three days on Delhi's busy Ring Road. While a pair of hundred-ton jacks labored to raise him in order to change the tires, thousands of worshipful commuters made (according to the paper) "full use of the unscheduled halt to seek Hanuman-ji's blessings."¹ Eventually, the image was delivered to its final destination, where a team of sculptors, likewise brought from Mangalore, put finishing touches on it. By January 1990, the massive Hanuman had been set up facing east, on a high plinth near a tank and several sacred peepul trees. This rustic setting, lying (at that time) at the westernmost edge of the metropolis, was one of the ashrams of Prabhu Datt Brahmachari, an influential sadhu who had his principal establishment in Vrindaban, Uttar Pradesh, and who was reputed to be 120 years old. According to a disciple, Prabhu Datt had selected this site for the monumental icon, which was intended to serve as the centerpiece for a complex containing a Sanskrit college, a training school for priests, and a charitable dispensary, because he envisioned Hanuman standing for all time as a westerly "gatekeeper" (*dvārapāla*) for India's capital, "so that the Pakistanis and so forth cannot attack." For years, the disciple said, his guru had solicited donations to finance the carving and transport of the statue, and in March 1990 he had peacefully breathed his last "at Hanuman-ji's feet," having realized his longtime dream of having "the biggest Hanuman in India."²

There had been other contenders. During the mid-1970s, a group of residents of Mahalakshmi Layouts, a prosperous new suburb of Bangalore, Karnataka State, took up a subscription to create a relief image of Hanuman on a freestanding black monolith atop a local hill, where an army captain, out for a morning horseback ride years before, had reported seeing the god. This vision had first been given tangible form in a painting done on the rock by a member of the Bovi (excavator and rock-cutter) caste, which is native to the area, but as Bangalore expanded into its erstwhile hinterland and as middle-class "layouts" and "colonies" displaced the settlements of Bovis and others, Mahalakshmi homeowners felt it appropriate to reify the vision in sculptural form and to transform the hillock into a neighborhood religious complex. The project eventually attracted the support of some five thousand donors from throughout the city and beyond, and the completed murti, christened "Shri Prasanna Veeranjaneya Swamy" (*Śrī Prasanna Virāñjaneya Svāmī*—"the delighted hero,

1. *The Times of India*, August 3, 1989, p. 1 (captioned photo); August 13, 1989, p. 1, "Hanuman Stranded" (captioned photo).

2. Interview with priest at Vasant Gaon, May 1990. This remark, and the one-upmanship implicit in the accounts that follow, inspired the title of my first published essay on Hanuman, "My Hanuman Is Bigger Than Yours" (Lutgendorf 1994b), portions of which are incorporated in this chapter. The Vasant Gaon complex has developed as planned, and its murti now stands in a marble-paved plaza and is sheltered by an impressive granite superstructure.



FIGURE I.I. The Vasant Gaon murti in 2006

Lord Anjaneya,” the latter being Hanuman’s most common name in South India), carved by an accomplished sculptor at the (then-substantial) cost of twenty-thousand rupees, was consecrated in June 1976 in a ritual presided over by the Jagadguru of Udipi and the Shankaracharya of Shringeri. In time, the 18-foot murti was surmounted by a soaring concrete dome and became the center of a complex including subsidiary shrines to Ganesha, Rama and Sita, and Goddess Lakshmi (for whom the subdivision is named), a large pavilion (*mandapa*) used for yoga classes and other activities, a multiacre park, and a subterranean meditation hall sheathed in black marble. Endowed with such amenities, the site became a magnet for the citizens of India’s “high-tech capital,” and appropriately enough its central image was in time provided with (what the temple manager proudly claimed to be) “India’s only permanent motorized scaffold for *abhiṣeka* ceremonies.” These lustrations of water, milk, yogurt, ghee, or other pure substances may be performed in a sponsor’s presence or commissioned from afar, in which case the patron receives, by airmail, a silver coin stamped with Lord Anjaneya’s image and a basket

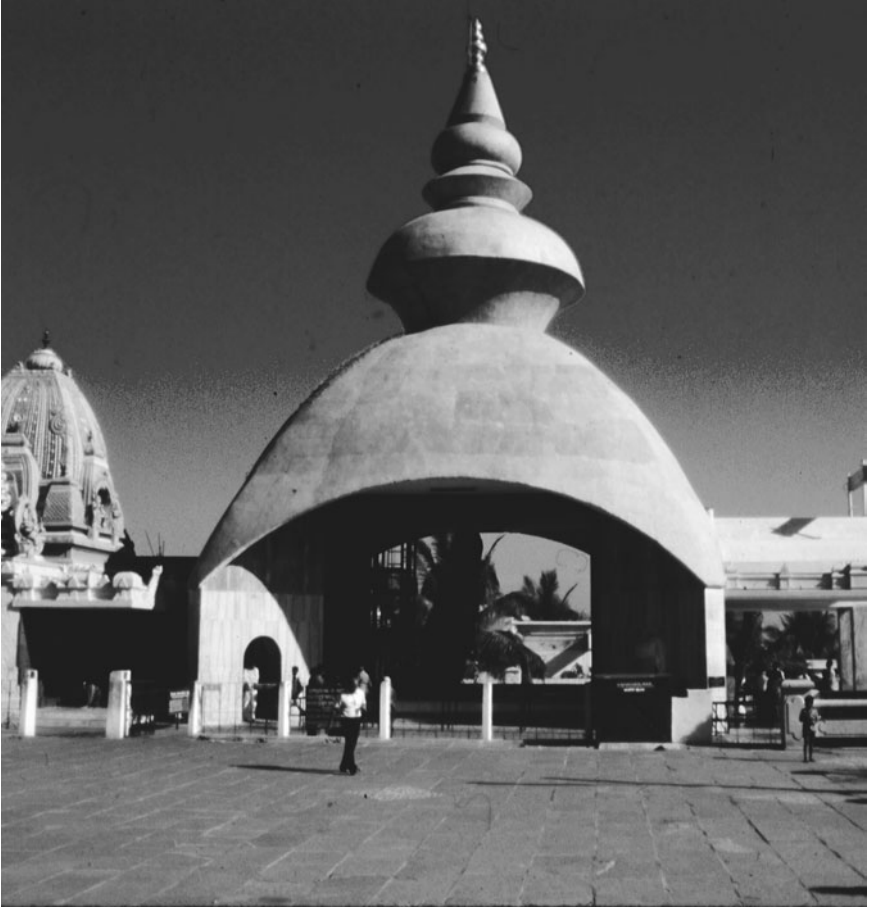


FIGURE I.2A. The temple of Prasannaveer Anjaneya; Bangalore, 1990

of consecrated sweets as his *prasad* (*prasāda*). Many devotees pay to have an *abhiṣeka* performed monthly or annually on a personally significant date, and the temple boasts such subscribers throughout India and overseas. Its silver-crowned murti (which would later be inspected by several of Prabhu Datt's disciples in the course of their own planning) depicts Hanuman "just landing" in Lanka, bearing the mountain with healing herbs to revive the wounded Lakshmana, and displaying delight at the prospect of Rama's warm welcome. According to a brochure available from the Trust Office, the epithet *prasanna vīra* ("delighted hero") alludes to the deity's dual aspects: "Shri Prasanna Veeranjaneya Swamy remains smiling to his devotees and a warrior to evil men." The same publication declares that the murti was "acclaimed to be the highest Maruthi [Hanuman] Idol in the whole of India."

Not for long, however. On October 10, 1982, another elaborate consecration ceremony was performed more than a thousand miles to the north to inaugurate



FIGURE 1.2B. Prasannaveer Anjaneya

the worship of a Hanuman image at Sidhabari in the mountain state of Himachal Pradesh. The guiding genius behind this project was Swami Chinmayananda, a Keralan sannyasi of the Dasanami (*Dasanāmi*) order who was famous throughout India. At 30 feet, Chinmayananda's icon easily topped that of the burghers of Bangalore; moreover, it was placed on a Himalayan hilltop in a roofless temple, was described as seated in *vīrāsana* (the alert posture of an armed warrior), and was said to be performing austerities, "ever diligent and alert in guarding the Hindu culture of the entire Aryavarta." A reconsecration ceremony was held in November 1987, for which Indian and foreign devotees on Chinmayananda's mailing list (his summer "Vedanta Camps" in the United States and Canada attracted many families of Indian background) were invited to commission one of 408 consecrated vessels (*kalaśa*) made of gold, silver, stainless steel, brass, copper, or clay, and filled with milk, turmeric, yogurt, saffron, and vermilion, at costs ranging from U.S. \$20 to \$1,950. These vessels, consecrated with mantras by "erudite and scholarly pundits from the South," would be carried up a ramp by the donor or a proxy, to be poured over the image in its "sky-covered" (*digambara*) enclosure (Chinmayananda 1986).

Raising impressive sums of money from the expatriate Indian community is not the only benefit that having the biggest Hanuman in India can provide, however. In the years following 1987, Chinmayananda became a key figure on the advisory committee of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad ("World

Hindu Council") and took an active role in its campaign to construct a temple at Rama's alleged birth site in Ayodhya, a movement that eventually precipitated the destruction of a sixteenth-century mosque occupying the site, riots and massacres in many parts of the country, and the downfall of the central government (see chapter 8). And yet the Keralan Swami's Himalayan hero enjoyed a statutory reign of less than eight years before he had to surrender his crown to Prabhu Datt's New Delhi colossus, measuring in at a full 15 feet higher and returning the center of gravity to the nation's capital, where heroes are made and unmade, it seems, with the swiftness of the wind.

But the Vrindaban sadhu might not have died so contented had he known that his own achievement would be surpassed—nay, dwarfed—in less than a year. On November 23, 1990, an estimated five hundred thousand devotees of South Indian guru Sathya Sai Baba, including the president of India, R. Venkataraman, several Supreme Court justices, and some twenty-five thousand foreign pilgrims, gathered at his ashram at Puttaparthi, Andhra Pradesh, to celebrate their master's sixty-fifth birthday. To mark the occasion, Sathya Sai Baba gave darshan (*darśana*) to the immense crowd from the stage of a giant amphitheater, the central focus of which was a 70-foot concrete image of Hanuman, completed just in time for the event. As their guru made his appearance against the backdrop of this new record-holder of the mountain-holder, the sea of devotees ecstatically chanted their distinctive mantra, "*Sāī Rām! Sāī Rām!*" (B. Sinha 1991:1,9).

The examples just cited do not exhaust the account of recently erected monumental icons of Hanuman. New Delhi now boasts two sadhu-sponsored murtis that dwarf the Vasant Gaon figure described above: a 91-foot Hanuman at the Chhattarpur Temple complex built by Sant Baba Nagpal between 1972 and 1998, and a 108-foot colossus looming over the Delhi Metro tracks in Karol Bagh, sponsored by Swami Sevagiri and nearing completion in 2006. A 54-foot image was reportedly dedicated at a village along the Allahabad-Varanasi highway in the early 1990s, and another (said to be taller) was installed at Shuktal in Muzaffarnagar District (Soni 2000:294–95, 297). At roughly the same time, three Hanumans, each some 25 feet high, rose along the national highway between Vijayawada and Rajahmundry in Andhra. A 55-ton, 33-foot image with palms joined in the prayerful (*dāsa* or "servile") posture favored by the Shivaishnava sect was dedicated at an educational complex in Mumbai (Bombay) in February 2000 (Ramesh 2000:6). A 32-foot murti in similar pose rose at about the same time in the Chennai neighborhood of Nanganallur, where (despite Hanuman's reverent stance) the presence of only a small shrine to Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana in a corner of the compound dramatized the injunction said to have been given to sponsors by the Shankaracharyas of Kanchipuram and Sringeri: "In the kali yuga, Anjaneya is Brahman, the creative authority. You must make him as big as possible" (Waghorne 2004:27–30). A 36-foot granite icon of "five-faced" (*pañcamukhī*), ten-armed Hanuman—a once-rare "tantric" embodiment of the deity (to be further discussed in chapters 3 and 8)—was completed in June 2003, destined for a new temple on the Tindivanam-Pondicherry highway.



FIGURE 1.3. Visitors at the base of the 91-foot hanuman at Chhattapur Temple, New Delhi, 2006

Representing 26 months of work by three dozen sculptors, it was described in a press release as “the tallest Anjaneya statue in India,” a boast that, of course, should properly have been limited to five-faced ones (T. Srinivasan 2003). Indeed, such bragging rights were widely claimed and even flew, Hanuman-like, across the sea at the start of the twenty-first century, when an 85-foot icon of Rama’s emissary rose at a Hindu temple and cultural complex on the Caribbean island of Trinidad and Tobago. But lest the denizens of Bharat (*Bhārata*, the official name of India) worried that one of their favorite deities had waxed large only to become a “non-resident Indian,” a news service in 2003 announced the completion of a 135-foot Hanuman at Paritala, 240 kilometers from Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh. Representing two years of work by a Christian sculptor named John Babu and an estimated outlay of U.S. \$163,000, this (apparent) new titlist was described as “a marvel in engineering and art . . . the tallest in the country.”³

3. I am grateful to Jeffrey Brackett, Hanuman-watcher extraordinaire, for information on the Kelambakkam, Carapichaima, and Paritala statues, conveyed in an e-mail message in October 2002.

To the above catalog of claims and wonders—dramatic iconographic statements bidding for regional, national or even international prominence⁴—must be added the evidence of many thousands of more modest murtis and temples erected or renovated during the past few decades, dedicated to a god whose popularity, according to the testimony of devotees, was steadily rising throughout the twentieth century. The sponsors of these shrines included villagers and urbanites, farmers, wrestlers, merchants, industrialists, sadhus, government servants, and the acharyas (*ācārya*) or preceptors of an eclectic, cosmopolitan, and increasingly homogenous and self-assertive Hinduism—often styled Sanātana Dharma (*Sanātana Dharma*) or the “eternal way”—not all of whom appear, on the surface, to have a primary interest in the Ramayana tradition. Thus Swami Chinmayananda, a Vedantin or follower of the nondualist school of philosophy associated with the influential ca. eighth-century Shankaracarya, was best known for his exposition of the *Upaniṣads* and the *Bhagavad-gītā*; his rarer discourses on Valmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa* (offered in English) favored a “scientific” and allegorical interpretation of its story that appealed especially to the university educated. Sathya Sai Baba is claimed to be the reincarnation of the widely revered Maharashtrian ascetic Sai Baba of Shirdi (d. 1918), who lived in a village mosque and was probably Muslim by birth; Sathya Sai uses both Shaiva and Vaishnava themes in his successful worldwide ministry (Babb 1986:159–201). Prabhu Datt Brahmachari, who was said to have occasionally been consulted by the prime minister of India, had his principal ashram in Vrindaban, the headquarters of Krishna devotion and a pilgrimage site little associated with Ramayana themes. Yet each of these men chose Hanuman as the vehicle for making a highly visible public statement. Why? What messages does this deity embody and deliver for these patrons and their intended audiences, and how did he come to do so? What factors explain the appeal of the divine monkey, who is now identified by many Hindus as the preeminent “deity-of-choice (*iṣṭadeva*) of the kali yuga,” the present age of discord and moral decay?

Even a casual visitor to India, who is unlikely to seek out any of the sites mentioned above, rapidly encounters Hanuman's form with its distinctive simian face and tail in numerous everyday contexts: as red-lacquered stone murtis placed beneath peepul trees, as a favorite subject of colorful posters and calendars, or as a plastic or brass figurine standing pluckily on the dashboard of countless buses and trucks; indeed, one of his most common epithets—Maruti, or “Son of the Wind”—now designates the peppy Indo-Japanese compact sedans that choke urban thoroughfares. Such ubiquitous manifestations suggest, at

4. It should be noted that colossal Hanuman icons appear to represent only the most numerous examples of a broader vogue for monumental images during the final decades of the twentieth century (e.g., a 60-foot Krishna at the Birla Museum in Calcutta, a 110-foot Vishnu at Chennai, a 133-foot Tiruvalluvar [a poet-sage associated with Tamil nationalism] at Kanyakumari). This phenomenon may reflect both economic factors (especially the growing prosperity of middle-class patrons) and the triumphalism (and perhaps insecurity) of aggressive Hindu nationalism, which was on the rise during the same period. Hanuman's special link to both the middle classes and to the discourse of Hindutva will be considered in chapter 8.

least, Hanuman's association with local places, with religious narratives, and with the protection and swift delivery of travelers. Looking a bit more closely, one finds Hanuman being worshiped by wrestlers and other athletes, by students seeking success in exams, by women hoping to conceive children, and by people suffering from mental and physical illnesses. Many people keep a partial fast in his honor and visit one of his temples on Tuesdays and/or Saturdays, and many also recite a forty-verse poem in his praise before beginning daily activities. Moreover, although Hanuman is best known outside India for his important role in the Ramayana story, within the country his icons are as likely to be found in temples to Shiva or a local goddess as in those dedicated to Vishnu and his Rama incarnation. Hanuman's devotees often point out, with a touch of both irony and satisfaction, that there are, in most regions of India, far more shrines to Hanuman than to his exalted master, and a modest number of temple surveys bear out this claim (see chapters 6 and 8). These observations suggest that a commonplace scholarly assumption ought to be reexamined: namely, that Rama, as the seventh avatara of the cosmic preserver Vishnu, is a "major" god, and Hanuman, as his servant, messenger, champion, and general factotum, is a "minor" one. Such a reexamination will necessarily involve looking both within and beyond the Rama narrative and standard understandings of "Vaishnavism" and will need to consider not only written texts but also oral and visual ones, as well as ritual practice and temple visitation. In view of the evidence (to be presented in the next chapter) that Hanuman's rise to prominence has been, in the *longue durée* of Hindu history, a comparatively recent phenomenon, a reconsideration of his role will also require giving as much weight to modern and sometimes ephemeral texts in regional languages (including folk songs and tales, pamphlets, comic books, and television programs) as to venerable scriptures in the "language of the gods," Sanskrit.

The academic study of South Asian religious traditions during roughly the past half century has indeed been characterized by a willingness to look beyond the ancient authoritative texts and elite practices privileged by earlier Orientalists. The latter tended to essentialize Indian religion as a static archive presided over by Brahman curators and subdivided into sectarian departments (e.g., the denomination-like entities "Vaishnavism" and "Shaivism") dedicated to relatively transcendent, generally anthropomorphic, and mostly male deities—gods who might reasonably be compared (albeit usually unfavorably) to the Judeo-Christian one. In contrast, religious studies scholarship of the postcolonial era has increasingly used phenomenological and ethnographic approaches or has favored an interdisciplinary "toolbox" method combining firsthand observation (when feasible) with all available textual, historical, and iconographic sources; moreover, it has increasingly turned to vernacular and folk sources and has sought out the voices of neglected and disenfranchised groups, especially women and people of low social status.⁵ However, despite

5. For a partial bibliographic survey of such scholarship over the past three decades as well as an assessment of its achievements and lacunae, see Lutgendorf 2003c.

notable exceptions, most of these studies (e.g., of the bhakti or “devotional” orientation that is a central element in Hindu life) have continued to focus on the cults of “major” pan-Indian deities such as Vishnu, Shiva, and (recently) Devi in her several prominent forms. The assumptions that underlie this preference have, I believe, deep roots in the Western academy, and these warrant examination prior to a discussion of existing scholarship on Hanuman and of the contribution that I hope to make in the present study.

Classifying the Gods

Besides being described as a “lesser” or “minor” deity in the Hindu pantheon, Hanuman has also regularly been classified as “tutelary” or “totemic,” and “theriomorphic” or “zoomorphic.” Although such labels may appear to reflect purely objective categories of heuristic use (and in this book I will venture several of my own, suggesting that it may be illuminating in certain contexts to understand him as a “second-generation” or a “middle-class” god), it is important to realize that their coinage and connotations reflect specific historical processes of momentous political, economic, and cultural consequence. All of the terms introduced above, as well as others that have now gone out of academic fashion (such as “fetishism,” “animism,” and “zoolatry”) and indeed the too-often-unexamined commonplaces “polytheism” and “monotheism,” were coined between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries as part of the effort of Anglo-European scholars, in the wake of Europe’s “voyages of discovery,” to come to terms with the diverse lifeways of other peoples. Yet, as Frank Manuel remarked, “Theorizing about the nature of the gods, even other people’s gods, has rarely if ever been an indifferent subject pursued out of pure scientific curiosity” (Manuel 1967:21). Even as it paralleled the subjugation and exploitation of other peoples and their lands, this intellectual enterprise also reflected the in-house fights among the Anglo-European intelligentsia—notably the critique by French “Enlightenment” philosophes of Christianity in general and Catholicism (with its rich iconography and complex heavenly hierarchy) in particular, and the subsequent counterattack in favor of “primitive monotheism” and “natural religion” by the English Deists (F. Manuel 1967:48, 59–70). The “unveiling” (a term much favored by the philosophes) of the religious practices of antiquity and of contemporary but remote lands was thus often a veiled assault on what the authors saw as antirational or atheistic tendencies in their own communities. As a result, much of the vocabulary deployed by early scholarship in the field that would later come to be known as “comparative religions” remains freighted with ideological baggage. The mere substitution of more politically correct terminology (e.g., of “theriomorphic deity” for “zoomorphic fetish”) may not necessarily signal a change in conceptual categories, since, as Manuel wittily warns (turning the terminological tables on the mythographers), “Many an eighteenth century myth is still recognizable beneath its present-day scientific mask and barbarous terminological incrustations” (1967:133). The fact

that, for example, none of the terms introduced above appears to correspond to any category used to discuss gods or their worship in premodern Indic languages (which did not lack a copious discourse on the subject) highlights the “etic” nature of the Anglo-European academic enterprise: its assumption of a uniquely privileged position in relation to the human subjects of its inquiring eye, who were also in many cases the political “subjects” of its sponsoring regimes.

It was only in the second half of the twentieth century, following the widespread collapse of the colonial order, that its knowledge systems themselves became an object of scholarly inquiry—an inherently problematic enterprise because of the dependence of the revisionists on the very vocabulary and concepts they sought to deconstruct, but one that has nonetheless produced notable achievements as well as ongoing controversies. Although this scholarship, which may be loosely classified as the critique of Orientalism, is now too extensive and also perhaps too familiar to be summarized here,⁶ I wish to selectively draw on it in order to focus on those aspects of colonial-era discourse on religion that have, in my view, influenced the scholarly study (or rather, neglect) of Hanuman and his worship, and that have tended to obscure important dimensions of this deity. However, scholarly discourse on religion and culture may not simply mislead its own students; it may also, in due course and through the notably asymmetrical global circulation of ideas, give hurt and offense to people within the cultures it proposes to understand. Such people naturally resist this intellectual imperialism in their own ways, and, in the Indian context, there has long existed a counterdiscourse both in English and in Indian languages that explicitly or implicitly responds to the demeaning implications of certain Western categories; in the final chapter of this study, I take up one aspect of this indigenous response that has special relevance to Hanuman.

One of the most disturbing aspects of the religious iconography of the Indian subcontinent for early European travelers was the presence of divine figures with the physical features of animals. Their response to the veneration they saw being directed toward such deities as Shiva’s bull Nandi, the man-lion and boar avatars of Vishnu, the elephant-headed Ganesha, local snake gods, and of course Hanuman, was generally to write with horror and disgust of the degrading Hindu penchant for “animal worship.” Thus Jean Baptiste Tavernier’s description of the temple sculptures he saw on a visit to Mathura in 1676 noted “an abundance of Apes, and indeed it is an ugly sight to behold so many deform’d spectacles,” and François Bernier in 1699 was similarly repelled by the display of “monsters with two heads or bodies, half man and half beast . . . Satyrs, Apes or Divels” (Mitter 1977:25). Those who were inclined to be sympathetic to the civilization that had produced such icons sought esoteric explanations that might reduce the onus of “animal worship.” The musings of

6. Signal or representative works (some cited below) include F. Manuel 1967, Marshall 1970, Mitter 1977, Said 1978, Inden 1990, and Chakrabarty 2000.

the Italian Pietro della Valle, who traveled in India between 1657 and 1663 (“But I doubt not that, under the veil of these Fables, their ancient Sages . . . have hid from the vulgar many secrets, either of Natural or Moral Philosophy, and perhaps also of History”) anticipate the euhemerist and allegorical interpretations of the next two centuries, as well as the Deist assertion that an esoteric but rational *philosophia perennis* had been concealed, behind “symbolic” images, from the ignorant masses by a philosophical elite (ibid. 29).

The responses of disgust and bewilderment reflected a long history of Christian polemic against the “idolatry” of pagan antiquity, as well as the belief that human beings alone were made “in the image of God” and occupied a special position in his creation, being uniquely endowed with an immortal soul that separated them from all other forms of life. Early Christian writers condemned the divine images of the Greco-Roman world that displayed the forms of idealized human beings, but they were yet more disgusted by the figures of Egyptian deities such as Anubis and Thoth, with the heads and bodies of jackals, baboons, and other specimens of “brute creation”; they regarded the religious systems that had generated them as particularly diabolically inspired. The discourse of “demonolatry” as the dominant explanation for such icons reigned throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance (some specific examples with relevance to simians will be given in chapter 8), although it periodically resurfaced even in the academic writing of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (e.g., in William Crooke’s 1893 study of North Indian folklore—to be further discussed shortly—which quoted extensively from M. D. Conway’s two-volume *Demonology and Demon Lore*, published in 1879). However, it was gradually supplanted, among nonclerical writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, by allegorical or symbolic interpretations, such as the notion of the “tutelary” deity (a term, popularized by Bishop William Warburton in a 1738 study of Egyptian iconography, for a protective beast displayed on a battle-standard or amulet) or of the “totem” (a modification of an Ojibwa word, widely used after 1760, for an animal invoked as a mythical ancestor and communal logo). Such kinder readings downplayed the role of Satan, yet contributed to the developing notion of the “savage mind” as the childlike, unevolved foil of Europe’s vaunted rationality and Reason. According to John Locke, “primitive” people were like children and lunatics, who thought in concrete images rather than in the abstract ideas favored by more evolved minds (F. Manuel 1967:142). Echoed in the writings of such diverse eighteenth-century thinkers as Hume, Warburton, and Vico, this view reflected a post-Reformation distrust of iconography and glorification of conceptual over imagistic language.

The allegorists were counterattacked by authors such as La Créquinière, who after a voyage to India announced that Hindus truly did worship beasts “such as are the vilest among them” (ibid. 17–18). Another assailant was Charles de Brosses, whose *Du culte des dieux fétiches* (1760) popularized the term “fetish,” from a Portuguese word meaning “artificial” and “false.” In a veiled attack on Christian exceptionalism, De Brosses argued that the worship

of animals, in and for themselves and not as “symbols” of anything, was a low-level but universal phase in the evolution of religion. His influential theory of “fetishism” (*fétichisme*) became “so all-embracing that it covered the divinization of or the imputation of sacred power to any object, animate or inanimate” (ibid. 196); it thus constituted an assault not merely on the usual Enlightenment target of Catholic images and relics but, more audaciously, on the very notion of sacred realia, contributing to a discourse of radical desacralization of the world. More ominously, de Brosse compared fetishists to children playing with dolls and placed their cultures on the lowest rung of a “ladder of progress” that was topped by European nations, whose duty it now was to uplift the lowly fetishists through colonization (ibid. 204–9). He thus anticipated by a full century the discourse of social Darwinism, which would provide an insidious but influential “scientific” justification for imperialism (and would contribute, as I explain in chapter 8, to ongoing Indian embarrassment over Hanuman’s tail).

The Renaissance idea that contemporary “paganism” was a degraded remnant of the “primitive monotheism” of Adam, corrupted in the confusion and dispersal that followed the Deluge, thus gradually yielded to the nineteenth-century theory of a universal religious evolution from fetishism and totemism, through polytheism and its multitude of gods (themselves ranked according to an evolutionary scheme that placed zoomorphic deities below anthropomorphic ones), and culminating in monotheism and its ultimate manifestation: the abstract and rational faith of the “higher races” of western Europe. However, the increasingly racist discourse of the colonial era produced an important corollary to this view: the argument that there were cultures in which a once-noble “nature religion” practiced by a superior race had gradually degenerated into barbarous idolatry through interaction and especially miscegenation with less-evolved peoples.

This viewpoint would dominate British discourse during the second half of the nineteenth century, particularly in the aftermath of the Revolt of 1857, an event that, to British eyes, revealed the true “savagery” and ingratitude of Indians. It would also pervade major studies of Indian religion that emerged during this period, such as *Religious Thought and Life in India* (1883) by M. A. Monier-Williams, then Boden Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford University. This much-reprinted work advanced the narrative of a degenerate Hinduism devolving from an ancient, purer, and more rational Vedism through an intermediary phase labeled “Philosophical Brahmanism.” Hanuman (who belonged, of course, to the final phase) was relegated to the chapter “Tutelary and Village Deities,” concerning whom Monier-Williams observed:

Whether the worship of these village deities (*grāma-devatā*) is a mere offshoot or ramification of the religion of Śiva and Viṣṇu is very doubtful. It is much more probable that the village gods represent far earlier and more primitive objects of worship. Possibly they may even be developments of local fetishes once held in veneration by

uncivilized aboriginal tribes and afterwards grafted into the Hindū system by the Brāhmins. (1974:209–10)

After noting the presence of Hanuman as a “very common village-god in the Dekhan, Central and Upper India” and offering brief accounts of shrines to him, the Oxford don ascribed the deity’s popularity to “the veneration in which apes and monkeys of every kind are held throughout India,” which he assumed to date to remote antiquity (ibid. 220–22). Moreover, in describing Hanuman’s “tutelary” function, he invoked psychopathology and superstition, observing that “the great majority of the inhabitants of India are, from the cradle to the burning ground, victims of a form of mental disease which is best expressed by the term demonophobia.” This he contrasted to the (presumably more rational and healthy) desire of a Christian for deliverance “from the evil of sin and from the general evil existing in the world around him” (ibid. 210).

A decade later, William Crooke published two volumes on *The Popular Religion and Folk-Lore of Northern India* (1893), a work that synthesized a century of travel writing and ethnography with Crooke’s own extensive observation, while serving as district officer in Mirzapur, of the beliefs and practices of the rural masses. The success of the work surprised its author, who noted that a large first edition sold out in a few months; a revised 1896 edition remains (thanks to a 1968 reprint) widely used today as a sourcebook on nineteenth-century village traditions. Yet Crooke’s disdainful attitude toward his subject matter (balanced only slightly by his tendency to locate comparable beliefs and practices among the ancients and among contemporary European rustics) shows the legacy of eighteenth-century thought and suggests how this would continue to shape the categories of twentieth-century scholarship on popular Hinduism.

In his preface, Crooke expressed the hope that his work would help colonial officials like himself “to understand the mysterious inner life of the races among whom their lot is cast” and that “European scholars may find in these pages some fresh examples of familiar principles” (1968:1.v–vi). Here Crooke alluded to two centuries of Anglo-Continental theorizing about religion, which had generated many of the categories that would become his chapter and section headings. But Crooke’s aim was even more ambitious than the assemblage of a useful handbook for district officers and foreign scholars. Through the documentation and classification of rustic practice, he aimed, like the mythographers and philosophes before him, to “unveil” an originary mystery of vast import: “I believe that the more we explore these popular superstitions and usages, the nearer are we likely to attain to the discovery of the basis on which Hinduism has been founded” (ibid.). Readers do not have to wait long for this “discovery,” however, for the first page of chapter 1 (titled “The Godlings of Nature”) ventures that the “original form” of Hinduism was “nature worship in a large degree introduced by the Aryan missionaries” (ibid. 1.1). Such a statement presupposes both the Enlightenment theory of an archaic universal religion based on the deification of natural and celestial phenomena, and a more recent one, advanced by British and German scholars, of

an ancient “Aryan invasion” of the subcontinent. Both the phrases “nature worship” and “Aryan missionaries” would have carried a benign connotation for late-nineteenth-century readers, suggesting that “Hinduism,” in its origins at least, was in fairly good shape. Crooke’s next sentence, however, indicates what then went wrong, as the original, missionary-taught faith absorbed “an enormous amount of demonolatry, fetishism and kindred forms of primitive religion, much of which has been adopted from races which it is convenient to describe as aboriginal or autochthonous” (ibid.). Crooke also implicitly warns his British readers against succumbing to the influence of their native subjects, by comparing the sad fate of “Aryan” civilization to that of the Roman Empire, whose similarly assimilative practices “degraded . . . the national character by the introduction of the impure cults which flourished along the eastern shores of the Mediterranean” (ibid. 1.1–2). Yet it is the Indian equivalent of these “impure cults” that District Officer Crooke finds most interesting, and to which he devotes the next six hundred pages.

His enterprise requires, first, a typology of gods, which builds on the capsule history of decline with which he opened. “Everywhere we find that the great primal gods of Hinduism have suffered grievous degradation,” being replaced, among the peasantry, by “a class of deities of a much lower and more primitive kind” (ibid. 1.2–4). By “great primal gods,” Crooke has in mind Vedic and epic-period deities like Indra, Agni, and Brahma, whom he labels *devas* or “‘shining ones’ of the old mythology” (ibid. 1.253). Crooke identifies their “more primitive” replacements by introducing the *deotā* (a variant, somewhat rustic pronunciation of Sanskrit-Hindi *devatā/devtā*), which he translates “godling.” This is an interesting move, because although one can find contexts in which individual Hindus distinguish between “greater” (usually celestial and pan-Indian) and “lesser” (often chthonic and local) deities, such ranking is typically signaled by adjectives (e.g., in Hindi, “great” and “small,” *barā* and *choṭā*). There is in fact no distinction comparable to English “god” and “godling” between the semantic fields of *deva* and *devatā*, and the terms are used interchangeably to refer to divine beings both “great” and “small.” Yet in translating this distinction back into Hindi—making it, in fact, the basis of his study—Crooke in effect imposes a dualist template over a more complex supernatural ecosystem, in which the celestial hierarchy (like the caste hierarchy at the local level) is fluid, negotiable, and dependent on the perspective of the observer, and in which deities move in and out of focus for individual worshipers, assume great importance in specific contexts, or even become the “chosen deity” (*iṣṭadeva* or *iṣṭadevatā*—again, these are used interchangeably) of particular persons. Although it would be an overstatement to claim that Crooke, with his “godling,” single-handedly invents the “minor deity” for Indians—for indigenous categories like *upadeva* or “demigod” had a long-attested if somewhat restricted usage⁷—it is fair to say that, in the

7. The terms *upadeva* and *upadevatā* (likewise interchangeable) occur occasionally in the puranas in reference to such categories of beings as *gandharvas*, *yakshas*, and *apsaras*.

manner of other colonial scholars, he reifies and systematizes a more fluid cultural phenomenon, thereby also significantly influencing the manner in which later observers, from outside and even from within the Hindu tradition, would view and describe it.⁸

The rest of Crooke's work is devoted to cataloging and ordering this reification, first under broad chapter headings ("The Heroic and Village Godlings," "The Godlings of Disease," etc.), and then, more sporadically, through hierarchical assignments. These get a bit murky, which is not surprising given the complexity of the terrain that Crooke aims to cover and the (unknown but interesting) subjective judgments he delivers.⁹ Thus he proposes that Ganesha, along with "the beast incarnations of Vishnu," is "now admittedly within the inner circle of the first class" of deities, whereas Hanuman and his half-brother Bhima (in the form of the "village godling" Bhimsen) represent "survivals in a somewhat debased form of the second-rate deities or heroes of the older mythology" (ibid. 1.83–84). This suggestion of a demotion of Hanuman since epic times is countered, however, on the next page by Crooke's announcement (accompanying his observation that the deity's shrines generally have Brahmans or ascetics as pujaris) that he has "been definitely promoted into the respectable divine cabinet" (ibid. 1.84). In each case, of course, the question of *whose* judgment has secured the "inner-circle," first-class status of Ganesha, the partial "debasement" of the "second-rate" Hanuman and Bhima, and the ensuing "promotion to respectability" of the former, is not addressed.

To make rankings murkier still, Crooke's entry on Hanuman, which follows the above passage, begins with the assertion that he is "First among the heroic godlings," a reference to his common epithet of "great hero" (*mahāvīra*, *mahābīr*; ibid. 1.85). Comprising four text pages and two full-page illustrations—one of the longest entries on a single deity in Crooke's opus (in contrast, Ganesha receives a half page, and Bhairava two and a half) and among the most sustained treatments that Hanuman would receive in English prior to the late twentieth century—the entry includes valuable if terse

8. In modern Hindi writing about Hanuman, *upadevatā* is used by one author in the service of a distinctive rationalization of his simian form. In this context, it appears to be a back-translation of the English "demigod" (S. Singh 1984:6–7; see chapter 3). For a provocative analysis of how colonial-period authors reified notions of caste, see Dirks 2001.

9. Crooke notes that "the last Census has unearthed an enormous number" of localized deities in North India (ibid. 1.83), and he regularly makes use of census data in his entries, often ending them with remarks such as "According to the last census Gūga had thirty-five thousand worshipers in the Panjāb and one hundred and twenty-three thousand in the North-Western Provinces" (ibid. 1.213). Usually no further analysis follows these statements, and one is left to speculate on what the figures mean beyond testifying to the perverse prolificacy of popular Hinduism. At the least, they might be taken to suggest that for some 158,000 people in 1891, Guga (according to Crooke, a hero worshiped by both Hindus and Muslims, especially for protection from snakebite) was not a "minor deity." For Hanuman himself, Crooke offers a somewhat more nuanced demography: "The worship of Hanumān appears, if the Census returns are to be trusted, to be much more popular in the North-West Provinces than in the Panjāb. In the former his devotees numbered about a million, and in the latter less than ten thousand persons. But the figures are probably open to question, as he is often worshipped in association with other deities" (ibid. 1.89). On the "demographics" of present-day Hanuman worship, see chapter 6.



FIGURE 1.4. A small, *sindur*-covered Hanuman under a peepul tree, rural Rajasthan, 2006

ethnographic observations (e.g., on Hanuman's veneration by wrestlers) as well as some slanted prose and dubious scholarship, both of which would prove enduringly influential. Crooke's observation, early in the section, that "It is almost certain that the worship of Hanumān does not come down from the earliest ages of the Hindu faith" (*ibid.*) is both arguably correct (see chapter 2) and faintly damning—a suggestion (like the assertion that he is a "somewhat debased form" of a "second-rate" hero) that Hanuman is symptomatic of the "decline" of Hinduism. This is also implied by Crooke's description of the deity's ubiquitous but "rude image, smeared with oil and red ochre"—an invocation of the barbaric (*ibid.* 1.87). Hanuman's simian form also poses, for Crooke, the old problem of why human beings would "debase" themselves by adoring "lower" species. Good folklorist that he is, Crooke notes (correctly, as I will show in chapter 8) that "it is a belief common to all folk-lore that monkeys were once human beings who have suffered degradation" (*ibid.* 1.86). Yet this observation does not deter him from immediately citing, with apparent approval, the breezy remarks of Sir Alfred Lyall, who argues that to suppose the Hindu reverence for monkeys to derive from respect for Hanuman is "plainly putting the cart before the horse," since an

archaic cult of monkey worship is “evidently at the bottom of the whole story” (ibid., citing Lyall 1882:13). No evidence is offered for this “evident” conclusion; rather Lyall’s “proof” is his opinion that “to my mind, any uncivilized Indian would surely fall down and worship at first sight of an ape” (ibid.). Interestingly, Sir Alfred implies that he has not actually seen this behavior (as, indeed, he could not have), yet his certainty concerning what “any uncivilized Indian” would do is endorsed by Crooke—despite the fact that the latter’s own fifty-eight-page chapter on animal worship (incorporating lore concerning horses, donkeys, tigers, dogs, goats, bulls and cows, buffaloes, elephants, cats, rats, mice, squirrels, bears, hares, crows, domestic fowl and “sundry sacred birds,” alligators, fish, eels, tortoises, frogs, and insects) contains not a word about monkeys. Indeed, Lyall’s mental conviction would produce one of the hardest clichés of Hanuman scholarship, invoked by generations of Western and Indian authors down to the present day. A second cliché, also drawn from Lyall (though it already had a hundred-year history), follows immediately: “Then there is the modern idea that the god was really a great chief of some such aboriginal tribe as those which to this day dwell almost like wild creatures in the remote forests of India; and this may be the nucleus of fact in the legend regarding him” (ibid.).¹⁰ This reading of Hanuman, which revives the eighteenth-century euhemerist interpretation of gods as deified historical persons (see F. Manuel 1967:85–125), would likewise assume, for subsequent generations of scholars, the status of an “obvious” truth, despite the absence of evidence to support it.

The four-page entry in Volume 1 is not the only reference to Hanuman in Crooke’s study. Chapters on other categories of “godlings” periodically cite him as one invoked in spells of exorcism and to cure snakebite (1968:1.150–51), as the legendary ancestor of communities in Rajasthan and Gujarat (2.153–54), and as a deity worshiped by Santal tribals (who, “like all uncivilized races, have a whole army of fetishes”) in the form of a red-painted trident (2.181). But other sections of Crooke’s work bear examination for issues they raise relevant to later scholarship on Hanuman and other popular deities. The specter of animal worship and its supposed causes looms large in Crooke’s 55-page chapter, “Totemism and Fetishism” in Volume 2, and one passage bears quoting at length for the light it sheds on this *bête noire* of Anglo-European theorizing.

To begin with, at a certain stage of culture the idea of the connection between men and animals is exceedingly vivid, and reacts powerfully on current beliefs. The animal or plant is supposed to have a soul or spirit, like that of a human being, and this soul or spirit is capable of transfer to the man or animal and *vice versa*. . . . These principles, which are thoroughly congenial to the beliefs of all

10. Lyall is in fact closely paraphrasing Monier-Williams in *Indian Epic Poetry* (1863:6); see chapter 8.

primitive races, naturally suggest a much closer union between man and other forms of animal or vegetable life than people of a higher stage of development either accept or admit. (ibid. 2.147)

The passage, which invokes the “ladder of progress” theory of cultural evolution, takes for granted that Crooke’s readers belong to a “higher stage of development” than the people he is describing and hence do not harbor the “idea” of a connection (presumably, any “feeling” of one may be discounted) between themselves and animals, nor the delusion that animals or plants might have “soul or spirit.” Crooke is thus able to rapidly establish “principles” that should appear self-evident to his readers and which he can then invoke more crudely in introducing the “Animal Worship” chapter that follows: “In the first place, no savage fixes the boundary line between man and the lower forms of animal life so definitely as more civilized races are wont to do” (ibid. 2.201). Indeed, the preoccupation in both chapters with “fixing boundary lines”—between species no less than between human societies at different “stages” of development—is one that resonates not merely through much colonial era discourse about India, but also through the responses of many human societies to anthropoid primates. That the form and persona of a monkey deity might serve, in part, to *challenge* human-set boundaries, expressing spiritually rich messages, sacred paradoxes, and even a species-specific “embodied theology” (and here I anticipate an argument to be developed later) seems not to have occurred to Crooke.

Lyall’s definition of “fetishism,” approvingly cited by Crooke, displays a similar concern with boundary-setting, in this case between the way in which “savages” and “civilized people” view material objects. Like Fontenelle in the eighteenth century, Lyall takes as self-evident the proposition that “things” (including animals) can hold no consciousness, energy, or divinity—a “fact” that primitives do not yet grasp—but he adds the suggestion that the imputation of “some mysterious influence or faculty” to objects depends on their being visually odd: “The original downright adoration of queer-looking objects is modified by passing into the higher order of imaginative superstition” (ibid. 2.159). Echoes of this assumption will still resonate more than half a century later in Eliade’s more empathetic concept of the “hierophany” (Eliade 1959:11), but I cite it here for its relevance to Western theorizing about Hindu icons (all of which, in accord with a century of Continental scholarship, Crooke categorizes as “fetishes”), and particularly the roughly carved or “self-manifest” (*svayambhū*) ones that Crooke describes as “rude stones . . . smeared with ruddle or red ochre” (1968:2.166). Nearly everyone, myself included, who writes in English about Hindu practice still grapples with terminological issues when it comes to sacred “images.” Indeed, what should we call them, given the linguistic legacy that Judeo-Christian thought and its reactionary Enlightenment have bequeathed to us? Whereas Indian-English authors usually favor “idol,” a word that Anglo-Americans unblushingly apply to media celebrities but only condescendingly to deities, latter-day scholars generally

prefer more neutral-sounding words such as “icon,” or “image”; in this book, I vary these at times with the Sanskrit-derived “murti.”¹¹ Readers should bear in mind that, where resident temple images are concerned, such labels encompass the semantic fields of words like “manifestation” and “embodiment” (since the deity is understood to be ontologically present) as well as “persona” (since most murtis are felt to possess a locale-specific character).

Although Crooke hardly enjoys the status of some of the “idols” of twentieth-century academia (Freud, Marx, Foucault, etc.), I have discussed his work at length as a representative specimen of a discourse that has been hard to shake, in part because it is embedded in the very language that scholars use. The “obvious” conclusions about village gods promulgated by Crooke would be authoritatively repeated by later authors. Among these was E. Osborn Martin, whose 1914 *The Gods of India* evidenced Crooke’s influence in its long sections “Inferior Deities and Godlings” and “Animal and Bird Worship,” its historical sketch of a degenerate Hinduism that “opened its doors to a vast amount of demonolatry, fetish-worship, and merely local belief,” and its predictable invocation of “the prevalence of monkey worship” to explain the cult of Hanuman, which it characterized as “crude and primitive indeed” (202, 226).¹² To be sure, Martin still wrote during the heyday of Empire and, moreover, like many nineteenth- and early-twentieth century scholars of comparative religion, was himself a religious: a Methodist minister who had served as a missionary in India and Ceylon for thirteen years. Yet even after subcontinental independence and several generations of academics trained under less overtly sectarian agendas, the specter of Crooke’s (and the Anglo-European world’s) confrontation with “animal gods” and with the “subsidiary” divine powers to which post-Reformation theology could offer no non-diabolical accommodation¹³ still hovers over some introductory works on Hinduism, if only as a lingering miasma that the author must obliquely

11. In her study of modern temples, Joanne Waghorne similarly grapples for an adequate translation of indigenous terms, settling on “image-body” (2004:6, 243 n. 1). According to Mathieu Claveyrolas, some devotees use the term “murti” more restrictively to designate a human-fabricated image that has subsequently been “enlivened” through Brahmanical rituals of “establishing life-breath” (*prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā*), and the term *svarūpa* (“self-form”) for a spontaneously-manifested or “found” image (also called *svayambhū*) that requires no ritual enlivening (2003:86–87). In everyday speech, however, murti and *svarūpa* are often used interchangeably. In addition, *vīgraha* (a “separated” or individualized form) is also sometimes used in formal contexts, and *pratimā* (“likeness, symbol”) refers especially to temporary embodiments, such as clay images crafted for display during festivals and later dissolved in a body of water.

12. Martin also proffers the euhemerist theory of Hanuman as “the chief of some such aboriginal tribe like those who to-day dwell almost like wild animals in the hill-tracts of Central India” (1924:226), thus paraphrasing Lyall paraphrasing Monier-Williams.

13. In its inability to countenance any subsidiary divine powers, Christian theology, especially after the Reformation, severely limited the mythic vocabulary of the West, particularly with regard to landscape, even as it condemned cultures whose religious understandings were often centered in localized sacred powers. Thus in the United States, we find today many striking natural sites, revered as sacred by Native Americans, that became, in the impoverished geomantic vocabulary of the first European settlers, only a monotonous series of Satanic loci (e.g., Devil’s Lake, Devil’s Tower, Devil’s Punchbowl, Devil’s Millhopper, Devil’s Postpile, etc.). Lyall’s theory of the fetishization of “queer-looking objects” gives a secularized nod to this distrust of immanent and tangible sacrality.

address and counter. Consider, for example, the single reference to Hanuman (not atypical of the treatments he receives in entry-level works) in R. C. Zaehner's *Hinduism*, set in the context of an explanation of "theriomorphic" deities. In the perception of most Hindus, Zaehner explains:

animals are different from humans in degree only, not in kind. Like us they have souls, and so it is quite natural that many of the lesser deities in the Hindu pantheon should appear in animal form—deities like Hanuman, the monkey king whose devotion to Rāma is held up as a model of what human devotion to God should be, and like the elephant-headed Ganesha, one of Śiva's sons, who should be invoked at the inception of any important undertaking. (1962:233)¹⁴

Zaehner's passage offers a friendlier approach to "theriomorphism," but its apologetic tone seems intended to gloss over the magnitude of the conceptual barriers to which it alludes. In its effort to help Western readers sympathetically comprehend why Hindus worship certain gods, it makes a nod to two millennia of Christian debate over whether animals have souls, hints at the primitiveness of the natural, and potentially opens up—through the suggestive notion of a (formless?) deity appearing in a particular form—the vast and often vexed discourse of both cultures on incarnation and iconographic embodiment. It also, of course, invokes the category of the "lesser" deity, to which it casually consigns both Hanuman and Ganesha; this is, indeed, the usual approach in such writings (cf. Bouquet 1962:135–36; Chaudhuri 1979:178; Flood 1996:108, 145–46; Lipner 1994:283; some other introductory texts fail to mention Hanuman entirely, e.g., Renou 1962, Klostermaier 2000).¹⁵ Finally, it underscores a conventional understanding of Hanuman as simply a misty-eyed devotee of Rama—a misconception that even a glance at Crooke (who notes Hanuman's close association with Shiva and Devi) might have tempered. Despite these problems, Zaehner's capsule assessment is correct to a degree—for, as I will argue, Hanuman's "subordinate" status (though the adjective must be carefully qualified) is one of the keys to his efficacy, and his fervent attachment to Rama (but perhaps as often to the *name* of Rama, and to Sita and other divine women) is certainly one of his trademark virtues. Yet it is just as clearly inadequate to explain the range of contexts and practices in which he centrally figures.

14. Apparently, "lesser" deities also do not warrant diacritics; note "Hanuman" (not Hanumān) vs. "Rāma" and "Ganesha" (not Gaṇeśa) vs. "Śiva"! The misnomer "monkey king" suggests the Chinese folk deity who is so labeled (and whose relationship to Hanuman is both complex and controversial; see chapter 8).

15. Bouquet's *précis* exemplifies the persistence of euhemerist and historicist cliché: after jauntily characterizing Hindus as "an AD people with a BC mind," he proceeds to liken several of their major deities to those of Egyptian and Greco-Roman antiquity. Then turning to "half-animal deities," he describes Hanuman as "partly a quasi-totemistic creature, partly perhaps a half-forgotten memory of some aboriginal beings called 'monkeys' by the proto-Nordic invaders" (Bouquet 1962:135–36; on the Indian career of such fallacies, see chapter 8).

Telling the Tale

Having cautioned readers against externally imposed scholarly typologies, I will now propose one that is at least rooted in Hindu narrative: namely, that Hanuman belongs to the category of “second-generation” deities, one of whose characteristics is that, as the offspring of other gods, their parentage and birth stories figure prominently in their epithets and mythology. Two other members of this category may be mentioned at once, as they bear a number of affinities with Hanuman: Skanda/Kartikeya and Ganesha. The former, the six-headed youth or *kumāra* who rides a peacock and commands the army of the gods, has received modest scholarly attention (e.g., Clothey 1978; Collins 1997; Zvelebil 1991) since, as C. J. Fuller notes, under the name of Murugan, he “is almost certainly the most popular deity among Tamils, and he is firmly identified as their regional deity” (1992:40). Ganesha enjoys still wider veneration, and—perhaps because of the antiquity of his mythology and the fact that his iconography strikes outside observers as drolly appealing—has been treated in numerous studies (e.g., Brown 1991; Courtright 1985; Getty 1971; Grewal 2001; Grimes 1995; Nagar 1992; Thapan 1997). Like Hanuman, both Ganesha and Skanda have a plethora of variant birth stories, the tenacious persistence of which suggests that they contribute valued ingredients to their curriculum vitae. Significant too is the fact that both are closely connected with Shiva, indeed are his sons, and (as the next chapter will show) this is true of Hanuman as well. Like them, Hanuman is often approached as a facilitator of “mundane” ends, a role that is sometimes disdained in elite Hindu discourse. Paul Courtright’s comment on Ganesha could as well apply to Hanuman: “To those who look to Hinduism primarily for its mysticism and spirituality, Gaṇeśa does not seem to embody profound religious significance; rather he appears tainted, trivial, perhaps even vulgar” (1985:7). Although it is not my intent to perform the academic equivalent of the competitive image-enlargement with which this chapter opened, I do question Courtright’s assertion that Ganesha is “the most popular and universally adored of the reputed 330 million deities that make up the Hindu pantheon” (ibid. 4). The elephant-headed god is popular throughout India, certainly, and his images are as ubiquitous as they are readily recognizable. He is routinely invoked (as Zaehner noted) at the beginning of undertakings for the removal of obstacles that might hinder their accomplishment, and for this reason his form often appears above the doorway of homes. Yet even in Pune, Maharashtra (the city and state most closely associated with his cult and home to a modern festival in his honor), his shrines are outnumbered almost four-to-one by those to Maruti, as Hanuman is locally called (Ghurye 1979:164).¹⁶

16. Joanne Waghorne, citing the growing popularity of Hanuman in Tamil Nadu, reports on a unique and recently installed murti in the Adyar neighborhood of Chennai that is half-Ganesha and half-Hanuman



FIGURE 1.5. One of Hanuman's most popular icons, in which he bears a club and a mountain of healing herbs; poster, late twentieth century

The quotation from Hans Bakker with which I opened this chapter suggests one reason for the scholarly neglect of Hanuman, for Indologists were seldom interested in religious phenomena that lacked an authoritative body of (preferably pre-Gupta) textual underpinning. The judgment that Hanuman is “late and marginal”—ironically, made within the context of a groundbreaking monograph on the likewise “late” and neglected cult of Rama—depends on one’s perspective. Documentation of Hanuman worship dates back roughly a thousand years, but this is already “late” for classical Indology and brands his cult the product of an age contaminated by the cultural intrusions of Islam; to make matters worse, some of its most significant manifestations have appeared only in the last few centuries. In addition,

(à la Shiva and Parvati combined as *Ardhanārīśvara*). The temple was originally to Ganesha alone, but devotees reportedly witnessed a “miraculous transformation” of the murti during an arti ceremony and decided to celebrate it in a permanent form. The dual image is now housed in a similarly innovative oval-shaped sanctum (2004:23–25).

Indology, perhaps influenced by Christian sectarianism, has emphasized cults that can be subsumed under the labels “Vaishnava” and “Shaiva,” categories that the worship of Hanuman, as I will show, frequently challenges.

When I began research for this book in the late 1980s, English-language scholarship on Hanuman was slim indeed. Camille Bulcke's 1960 article “The Characterization of Hanuman” presented some material drawn from his influential Hindi treatise on the evolution of the Rama narrative, which contained a long section on Hanuman (1999:520–51). Leonard Wolcott's 1978 article in the *Journal of Asian Studies*, based on fieldwork in the Bhojpur-speaking region of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, rightly emphasized Hanuman's intimate association with Shiva and with the elemental power of shakti; more recently, Ian Duncan supplemented Wolcott's insights with data from a village in Madhya Pradesh (Wolcott 1978; Duncan 1999). Among contributions in book form, K. C. and Subhashini Aryan's *Hanuman in Art and Mythology* (1975) is especially valuable for its illustrations, many in color, of icons in the authors' private collection. The prolific sociologist G. S. Ghurye fittingly devoted a long chapter to Hanuman (containing both valuable documentation and testy opinions) in one of his last works, *The Legacy of the Ramayana* (1979).

Since I began my work, there have been significant additions to the range of English- and European-language scholarship on Hanuman. Joginder Narula's slender but rich volume *Hanuman, God and Epic Hero* (1991) offers a comprehensive survey of Sanskrit texts and draws on some of the same Hindi-language scholarship that I have used; though modest in its interpretive conclusions, it offers several insights that have been suggestive for me. Joseph Alter's ethnographic study of the practice and ideology of North Indian wrestling, *The Wrestler's Body* (1992), contains a chapter on the sport's patron deity that has contributed directly to my articulation of the paired themes of shakti and bhakti. Arshia Sattar's dissertation, *Hanumān in the Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmiki* (1990), emphasizes Hanuman's “categorical ambiguity” and, through focusing on him, presents an insightful, “decentered” analysis of the Sanskrit epic. Sattar's last chapter, analyzing his multiple interventions as narrator in the Valmiki epic as well as his subsequent link with the Rama story, is titled “Hanuman's Tale.” In selecting this phrase for my own book title, I acknowledge Sattar's prior use of it but allude to a still wider complex of meanings, as I explain below. Catherine Ludvik's 1994 volume on Hanuman is largely devoted to a comparison of his portrayal by Valmiki and Tulsidas, but also presents, in its opening and concluding chapters, some broader and more provocative theses. Shanti Lal Nagar's mammoth but meandering compendium, *Hanumān in Art, Culture, Thought, and Literature* (1995), also contains useful material and illustrations, as does his subsequent treatment of the important Ahiravana story (1996). Recent monographs by Mathieu Claveyrolas (2003, in French) and by István Keul (2002, in German) present detailed findings based on field research at Hanuman shrines in Banaras.

Two works in Hindi, published in the mid-1970s, have proved to be especially valuable sources and will be cited many times in the pages that

follow. The popular religious magazine *Kalyāṇ* (“beneficence”), published monthly since the 1920s from Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, issues an annual “special issue” that is actually a book-length anthology of articles and illustrations. Its 1975 *Śrī Hanumān aṅk* (“Lord Hanuman Issue”) contains nearly 200 articles. Many of these are pious and predictable homilies by then-prominent religious personalities, but a number break new ground or reflect high-quality traditional scholarship; especially useful is an extended “biography” of the god and a catalog of his shrines throughout India (see chapters 3 and 6). The signal work of modern Hindi-language scholarship on Hanuman is Ray Govindchandra’s *Hanumān ke devatva tathā mūrti kā vikās* (“Development of the divinity and iconography of Hanuman,” 1976),¹⁷ a comprehensive textual and iconographic study that served as a major resource for Narula’s and Nagar’s writings; my own debt to it will quickly become apparent. Like much Hindi scholarship on religious topics, Govindchandra’s discourse sometimes has a devotional flavor, though this never becomes cloying or gets in the way of his sweeping and truly impressive survey of texts and images; he also shares the obsession of a number of modern Indian scholars with the “historicity” and verisimilitude of the Ramayana and its characters. And perhaps because he was immersed in the milieu of Hanuman devotion and wrote for a primarily North Indian readership, Govindchandra shows no interest in the description of contemporary shrines or practices.

What of my own approach? If I ever harbored the illusion that I could write “The Book” on Hanuman in English—a definitive and encyclopedic treatment of this protean god—I have shed it as I slowly worked my way through the small library of books, pamphlets, images, and tape recordings that I collected in India during a year of research in 1989–90 and that has continued to grow through shorter return visits and through the kindness of friends and colleagues who regularly send me materials. Tulsidas’s Hanuman remarks at one point to the virtuous demon Vibhishana, alluding to the base status of monkeys, “One who utters our name in the morning will go without food that day” (*Rāmcaritmānas* 5.7.8), but my own experience has been that, on the contrary, to utter Hanuman’s name at any time in the presence of almost any Hindu is to be treated to a feast of opinions, stories, and personal anecdotes. Everyone, it seems, has a favorite temple or image that is “very powerful” and that must be visited for a study to be complete, and everyone has a favorite story that ought to be included. And a surprising number of people claim to know somebody who has actually *seen* Hanuman and is eager to tell the tale. All such material that has come my way has contributed to my own understanding of Hanuman’s personality and appeal, and some of it indeed appears in the pages that follow. But its abundance has convinced me

17. I cite “Govindchandra” as the author’s surname, following the order in which the names appear on the title page of his book. Some other scholars reverse them and treat “Ray” (a common North Indian caste name) as his surname.

that there can be no definitive book on Hanuman: this “minor deity” with a penchant for expanding beyond all bounds is too “major” to be ensnared in a narrow scholarly noose. The focus and limitations of the approach that I have chosen should thus be clarified.

As my punning title implies, I am equally concerned with storytelling and with iconography; in the latter domain, especially with the representation of a divine being marked by an obligatory (and to some, troubling) bestial appendage that gets lost, like so much in oral tradition, when my narrative is “reduced to writing” (for reflection on Hanuman’s tail and its own “messages,” see especially chapter 8). Within the Ramayana, Hanuman is identified as the first teller of the tale of Rama (as when he narrates it to Sita in Lanka and to Bharata in Ayodhya), and later tradition also celebrates him as the author of the first (and best) written version, an opus regrettably lost (see Story 34 in chapter 4). In seeking to tell “Hanuman’s tale,” I will thus inevitably be concerned with that other great story of love and loss, self-sacrifice and world-renewal, told *by* Hanuman (and others) and which has so profoundly influenced the cultures of South and Southeast Asia during the past two millennia. But I am also and more centrally interested in the tale(s) told *about* Hanuman by his historical and contemporary devotees: a growing body of narrative that selectively edits, suggestively encompasses, and ambitiously expands on the Rama story to become (as I will argue in chapters 3 to 5) an emerging “epic” in its own right. I am additionally concerned with the interpretive tale(s) told about Hanuman and his worshipers by scholars, including myself, and this leads me to my equally punning subtitle. Hanuman’s role as “messenger” (*dūta*) will be familiar to anyone who knows the Rama story, and the messages (and parcels) he delivers within that tale bring hope, encouragement, and healing to its characters. For later Hanuman devotees, this role expands beyond the Rama tale into a cosmic mediation that makes him the ideal go-between to respond to their personal needs. But in writing of the “messages” of this medium, I also have in mind that other, more speculative enterprise by which one may seek to decipher the cultural and psychosocial “messages” encoded in the narrative, iconography, and worship of a deity. What messages does the divine monkey convey to devotees (and potentially, via a book about him, to interested readers) about the world, about the gods, and about themselves?

In choosing the word “message” over “meaning,” I seek to avoid the implication that Hanuman is understood (by most Hindus or by me) as merely a “symbol” or allegorical stand-in for some abstract bundle of qualities, or that he is experienced as other than a real being with a distinct personality and specialized skills. Nor do I intend to suggest that his persona conceals repressed or subconscious meanings, invisible to most devotees, which I, the privileged observer, will now “unveil.” Many of the “messages” that I discuss in this book will (I hope) seem obvious to Hanuman worshipers, but I can also aspire to assemble, from diverse sources and locations, a complex picture that may be larger and more complete than that known to most individuals.

I see the “messages” conveyed by a deity as fluid and malleable, emerging through the experiences and expressions of worshippers, who exercise considerable agency in shaping (and at times contesting) them; hence these messages also reflect historical contingencies and may change over time. Although the vivid portrait of Hanuman presented in the Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇa* is already suggestive of many of the roles that he assumes in popular worship today (see Goldman and Goldman 1996:53–57 and Sattar 1990 for revealing discussion of these continuities), it will be an argument of this book that Hanuman’s stature, and the range of messages he delivers, has expanded—like the murtis with which this chapter opened—in comparatively recent times, so that he now displays a versatility perhaps greater than that of any other “second-generation” deity. Courtright remarks of Ganesha that “For all his protean dimensions . . . Gaṇeśa is not infinitely changeable. There are things he clearly does not stand for. He does not stand for sexiness or martial power. He is not the embodiment of boundless mercy and self-sacrifice or ascetic rigor” (1985:156). Although many Hindus would concur that Hanuman, like Ganesha, is a “specialist” to whom they turn for the specific services at which he excels, it will become clear to the reader of this book that he has indeed come, over time, to “stand for” every one of the exempted qualities on Courtright’s list (with the possible exception of “sexiness”—though even this is debatable; see chapter 7). Protean, indeed!

In attempting to explicate Hanuman’s implicit “messages,” I am also aware of the limitations both of my sources and of myself, as an outsider to India and to the Hindu tradition. I harbor neither the delusion nor the desire to “exhaust” the meanings of this inspiring and complex god and I caution readers in advance of the inevitably partial and incomplete nature of my effort. I hope that those readers who worship and love Hanuman will recognize, in my interpretation of his messages, something not altogether alien to their own experience, and that those who do not will gain a more appreciative understanding of those who do, and of the object of their reverence.

This book is based primarily on fieldwork and interviews conducted in urban or semiurban locations in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh (principally Ayodhya, Banaras, Chitrakut, Delhi, Hardwar, and Rewa), and most of its primary source texts are in Hindi and its premodern literary dialects. Material from other linguistic regions is sometimes presented in the interest of offering a more extensive account, but it is based on either a limited amount of fieldwork conducted in English and Hindi (during lengthy excursions to parts of Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and Karnataka), or on the research and translations of others. I have done no extended research in villages and none among “tribal” (*ādivāsī*) groups; the small amounts of relevant published material on which I have drawn suggest that sustained investigation in such settings by scholars with appropriate linguistic skills would yield rich additional lore, documentation of divergent practices, and perhaps clues to support (or contest) some of my arguments. My brief sojourns in Karnataka and Maharashtra, two states in which I am not linguistically at home but in

which Hanuman certainly is, helped reveal to me their historical importance in the spread of Hanuman worship (see chapter 2).¹⁸

The plan of the book, after this introduction (which I hope has established why Hanuman is worthy of study) is as follows: Chapter 2 surveys the history of Hanuman worship as it has been reconstructed by scholars; in questioning some of the assumptions underlying theories regarding Hanuman's origin and expanding popularity, it aims as much to raise historiographic questions as to provide (what seem to me to be elusive) historical answers. Chapter 3 surveys popular literature devoted to Hanuman, mainly in Hindi, examining its genres and some ongoing trends in its evolution. Chapters 4 and 5, which I think of as the "heart" of this book (as the *Sundarakāṇḍa* is said to be the heart of the *Rāmāyana*), turn to the content of this literature. It is a special concern of mine to present to English-language readers a representative sample of the many stories about Hanuman that circulate in India, particularly those that are not included in the versions of the Rama epic (e.g., those of Valmiki, Kamban, and Tulsidas) to which they have access through published translations and retellings. Since these stories constitute (as I will argue) a cohesive cycle of divine "biography" (or *caritra*, the characteristic and revealing acts of an exemplary figure), and because it is my hope that readers may find them (as many devotees do) a source of both entertainment and inspiration, I present them in chapter 4 without the distraction of annotations or comments. My notes and analyses appear as chapter 5, which thus parallels the structure of the preceding chapter to offer a "reader's guide" to its tales. The sixth chapter examines the tangible presence of Hanuman in the Indian cultural landscape, focusing on temples and murtis, on the lore of Hanuman's immortality, and on the charismatic persons who have been identified as his avatars. Chapter 7 endeavors to take a fresh look at Hanuman through the lens of gender, arguing that this "men's deity" has enduring and special links with women and goddesses. The lengthy concluding chapter—a kind of *Uttarakāṇḍa* into which (as sometimes happens in Ramayanas) things have been put that did not fit elsewhere—centers on the broad theme of "mediation," arguing that Hanuman's skill as a go-between derives in no small measure from his simian form. It considers an ongoing debate over his monkeyhood within India, examines relevant cross-cultural responses to anthropoid primates, and speculates on Hanuman's invocation by Hindu nationalists and by middle-class devotees. Its final section considers his continuing "growth" in the experience of some worshipers.

Readers will soon learn, if they do not already know, that the "son of the wind" is both powerful and playful, but also a profound scholar and fastidious grammarian. They will best be able to judge whether my long association with him has resulted in any skill with ideas and their verbal expression, but they may already have noted a certain playfulness of tone that seems to have

18. See the work of Jeffrey Brackett (e.g., 2004, Brackett and Dev 2004), who has generously shared with me some of his research on Maharashtrian worship of Maruti.

rubbed off. I have found that Hanuman is, among other things, a deity at the mention of whom people's eyes light up and their faces break into smiles. Storytellers' accounts of his exploits may sometimes evoke tears, but they can also elicit hearty laughter, and this does not seem, to most of his devotees, to be inappropriate or irreverent. I hope readers will understand that my own occasional levity and verbal monkey business is meant as no disrespect to this beloved and fascinating god.

Naming the Hero

Ancient Indian scholars devoted much thought to the mysterious connection between word and meaning—between “signifier” and “signified”—and Hindu worship accordingly gives special emphasis to calling on and praising deities through their names. Most gods have several common ones that refer to their best-known attributes or mythological deeds, and many hymns and praise-poems used in home or temple worship consist largely of strings of epithets that collectively present a sort of résumé of the deity. Such verbal devotion has generated, over the centuries, lengthening lists of names, usually culminating in a magnificent (if somewhat contrived) “garland of a thousand names” (*sahasranāmāvalī*), such as those dedicated to Vishnu, Shiva, and Devi found in the medieval puranas. Hanuman has such a grandiose “garland,” apparently of more recent composition, but most of its epithets are uncommon and little used. However, readers need to be introduced, as this chapter concludes, to the significance of the names by which he is most often identified.

The variant meanings of *Hanumān*—the name most common in Sanskrit¹⁹ and Hindi sources—are themselves illustrative of two principal yet paradoxical themes in narrative and worship. The standard derivation of “one having (*-mān* or *-mant*) a [prominent or disfigured] jaw (*hanu*)”—since the use of the *-mān* suffix to call attention to a bodily feature normally indicates that it is in some way unusual or marked—may allude to the facial physiognomy of higher primates. However, it is more commonly understood to refer to the ancient tale of Hanuman's childhood effort to devour the sun (see Story 4), an act that results in his wounding and permanent scarring. This derivation is thus an ongoing reminder of Hanuman's self-assertive character: prognathism as a mark of pugnacity, as in the English-language cliché of “jutting out” one's jaw defiantly. A less common derivation meaning “one whose self-pride (*māna*) has been killed/destroyed (*han*),” though etymologically shakier, is favored by some modern devotees and clearly has an altogether different flavor. Though it may suggest the handful of tales in which Hanuman's pride is indeed checked (e.g., Stories 15 and 19.a), it resonates more broadly with his selfless service to Rama and Sita and with the surfeit of heartfelt emotion he

19. In Sanskrit, the *saṃdhi*-based variants *Hanumant*, *Hanumad*, and *Hanumat*, as well as spellings with long vowel *ū* (*Hanūmān*, etc.), are also common.

displays toward them. These contrasting understandings of the meaning of “Hanuman” resonate with the iconographic conventions that respectively favor “virile, heroic” (*vīra*) and “servile, self-effacing” (*dāsa*) poses for his sculptural embodiments, as well as with the common formula uttered by worshipers identifying him as manifesting both shakti (*śakti*, “power, energy”) and bhakti (*bhakti*, “worshipful devotion”). There are potential class/caste overtones to this dichotomy as well—the virile and assertive warrior appealing more to lower-class and rural people, and the tearful, self-denying devotee more to middle and upper castes and to urbanites—though this generalization admits of myriad exceptions. Indeed, it will not be giving away too much to say that this study will propose that most Hanuman worshipers want to have him *both* ways, to celebrate (and benefit from) both sides of his persona, and that they can readily shift their focus from one to the other. The paradoxical confluence of self-assertive and self-negating tendencies in the deity’s name, form, and narrative cycle thus appear to encode an archetypal ideal of psychological and spiritual wholeness.

Perhaps his second most common name is *Āñjaneya*, by which he is known throughout much of southern India. This connotes “the son of *Añjanī*,” identifying a mythical princess (also known in Sanskrit and Hindi as *Añjanā*) who was actually a celestial courtesan (*apsarā*, *apsaras*) incarnated in monkey form in consequence of a curse. I will introduce her further in due course, together with Hanuman’s father (or rather, one of his fathers), *Māruta*, the Vedic wind god, from which is derived *Māruti*, “son of the wind,” the name used in much of western-central India. Since the wind himself has other common titles—*Vāyu* and *Anila* (both meaning “wind, air”), *Pavana* (“the purifier”), *Samīra* (“breeze, agitation”), and *Vāta* (“one who blows”)—these may be and often are combined with the several Sanskrit suffixes meaning “son of” or “born from” (*-putra*, *-sūta*, *-ātmaja*, *-tanaya*, *-kumāra*, and others) to produce a whole list of readily recognizable epithets, useful for poets seeking alliteration, rhyme, and metrical fit, and in all their permutations comprising the beginnings of a respectable “garland of names.”

A few others, native to Hindi-speaking regions, are now also known and used more widely. *Bajraṅgbalī* is favored by many North Indian villagers and within both villages and towns by wrestlers (and lately, Hindu militants), especially when calling on the deity as an embodiment of power and protection. Most pandits consider it a rustic corruption of the Sanskrit *vajra-aṅga-valī* or “one having limbs (*aṅga*) [as hard as a] thunderbolt/diamond (*vajra*).” The latter is a potent noun that is fairly loaded with meanings: from Indra’s mythical weapon to a Buddhist term for the enlightened state; in the context of tantra it can also connote the male member, as well as the desirable hardness of this and other muscles. Likewise well known today is the epithet *Saṅkaṭ mocan*, or “one who liberates (from the Sanskrit verb root *muc*, “to release”) from distress/danger” (*saṅkaṭa*). The latter term may refer to specific kinds of acute “distress,” particularly that occasioned by physical illness or by the interference of ghosts. Hanuman’s expertise in healing ills and exorcising their causes is celebrated at a number of important shrines (one of which

I visit in chapter 6), and some of his murtis have become famous in modern times under the name Sankat Mochan. Yet this immortal warrior, protector, and healer also remains, for many of his worshipers, quintessentially a beloved child, and so at one of the most renowned of his healing shrines, he bears the affectionate epithet of Balaji (*Bālā-jī*, “the [divine] babe”), a name that has also achieved wide currency.²⁰ Like the dual understandings of “Hanuman,” this combination of awesome power and diminutive, second-generation status again suggests a confluence of paradoxical yet desirable qualities.

Finally, I must say something about my periodic use of several non-Indic words in reference to Hanuman. Although my identification of him as a “monkey,” suitably translated into the several terms (to be encountered shortly) in common use for simians in South Asian languages, has been unproblematically shared by the majority of his worshipers over the past two millennia, I am aware that, together with my sometimes playful use of other zoological labels (“ape,” “simian,” etc.), it may offend some Hindus today. As I have already noted, in the context of the history of Judeo-Christian and colonial period discourse about other people’s gods, these words have often been freighted with derogatory connotations, variously signaling the diabolical, the grotesque, and the primitive. Hence it is understandable that those who remain sensitive to this discourse and to the damage it has caused may find them troubling. Let me clarify at the outset that, for devotees, Hanuman is assuredly not *just* a monkey and certainly not an *ordinary* monkey (though many affirm that he sometimes presents himself in this very guise); he is a being who defies and straddles (or, more characteristically, leaps over) mundane category boundaries. Yet his “monkeyness”—in Sanskrit, *kapitva*—inevitably persists, because (as I will argue) it is central to the messages he so successfully delivers. Prominently and constantly present in his iconography, narrative, and worship, it is, so to speak, his most tell-tail signifier. And thereby hangs this study.

20. Other possible derivations of this name will be considered in chapter 6. “Balaji” is also an epithet of Shri Venkateshwara (*Śrī Veṅkaṭeśvara*), an embodiment of Vishnu residing in a hilltop palace-temple in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, that is one of modern India’s most celebrated shrines. Although most Hindus do not conflate the two deities, a poster that I saw in two places in North India in January 2006 depicts a “Balaji trimurti” (*trimūrti*, “triple image”), in which the faces of Venkateshwara and of Balaji-Hanuman of Menhdipur, Rajasthan, appear flanking that of Balaji-Hanuman of Salasar (see chapter 6 on the latter two shrines). On the comparable theological audacity of “five-headed” Hanuman, see chapter 8.

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2

A Long and Winding Tail

Hanuman in History and Historiography

Gifted storyteller that he is, Hanuman, the original narrator of the tale of Rama, has something in common with historians, who construct narratives about the human past based on written records and surviving artifacts, albeit without, in most cases, the divine monkey's advantage of having been an eyewitness to the events they describe. Such narratives are never entirely objective, but are shaped by the personality and worldview of the narrator; the Ramayana tradition regards Hanuman's narrative as exemplary not only because of his personal role in it, but because his motive in telling it—devotion to Rama—is thought to have been ideally pure. Yet tradition also maintains that Hanuman's perfect narrative became irretrievably “lost,” surviving only in fragments filtered through the lenses of human storytellers: Valmiki, Kampan, Krittibasa, Tulsidas, and so on.

Notably, these tellers also insert themselves into their tale, thus reminding us of their interpretive role. Historians are not always so candid, and their labors become more problematic when they turn from a simple recounting of *what* happened in the past to the more interesting task of speculating on *why* events transpired, to dress the bare bones of factual record with the flesh of human motivation. I feel strongly that an informed study of history should always include an interrogation of the relevant historiography: a questioning of *why* previous students of the past chose to interpret it as they did. This is especially necessary when dealing with the ancient world and with matters for which tangible evidence is meager and fragmentary. The present chapter offers a brief survey of both the history and historiography of Hanuman worship.



FIGURE 2.1. A Hanuman murti adjoins a Shiva lingam in a modern temple; photo by Frederick Smith

This history, as it has emerged in a modest number of scholarly and popular works, is anchored in two generally accepted facts derived from textual and archeological evidence: (1) that of the sudden appearance, without known literary precedent, of a captivating monkey hero in an epic poem that most scholars now date to the second half of the first millennium BCE; and (2) that of the gradual accumulation, beginning from about 1000 CE, of evidence of widespread worship of this figure. The effort to construct an explanatory narrative around these facts is largely speculative. Its principal manifestations are originary theories about a pre-Valmikian monkey deity or a divinized historical figure, and the argument that the rise of the independent worship of this deity some fifteen centuries later reflected a Hindu response to persecution by Muslim rulers. These theories, I will propose, may reveal more about their authors than they do about the “historical” Hanuman.

However, I should also note that neither of the above “facts” is relevant to most Hanuman worshipers, who accept the Rama story as a more or less literal account of events that transpired in the extremely remote past—in the *treta yuga* (*tretā yuga*) or second eon of the current cosmic cycle, some nine hundred thousand years ago. Hanuman emerges in that narrative, his devotees say, because he *took birth* at that time; hence there is no need to seek his presence beforehand. Similarly, they hold that he has been worshiped ever since then because of his exemplary qualities as well as his continuing physical presence on earth. Yet they, too, have produced many narratives concerning Hanuman’s birth and subsequent career (including descriptions of his activities following the conclusion of the Rama tale) and, like those of academic historians, these reveal the concerns and biases of their tellers. In successively citing the narratives of (what many would term) “history” and “mythology,” categories that academic research relegates to separate disciplines, my intent is to point to their similarities as complementary facets of the human imperative to narrativize: to abstract and reassemble from the totality of past events the structure of a meaningful story.

In Quest of Proto-Hanuman

To traditional audiences, Hanuman is so integral to the tale of Rama that his presence has become axiomatic: “Where Rama’s story is, there is Hanuman.”¹ Perhaps for this reason, the idea that the first *Rāmāyaṇa* poet “invented” this remarkable being, although it might appear to pay tribute to the genius of an ancient Indian bard, has been largely unacceptable to modern Indian scholars. It challenges both the tradition (internal to the poem) that Valmiki himself was told the tale by another and simply recast it in epic form, and also the cherished veracity of the story as a record of the ancient past “as it was”—the literal sense of *itihāsa*, a Sanskrit genre category now used in most Indian languages to render the English word “history.”

The problem of culturally variant notions of “history” indeed swirls around the epic today. The Orientalists’ quest for origins, for the *ur* (and therefore most “authentic”) forms of texts and practices, was combined with a discourse that denied Indians a proper history such as Western people had constructed for themselves and that judged them to have been content with outlandish fables suited to their childlike brains. Awareness of this judgment has led Indian scholars during the past century to assert the historicity of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* through literary, archeological, and purely speculative efforts. With respect to Hanuman, two principal approaches (often pursued in tandem by the same authors, despite the fact that they contradict

1. The well-known Sanskrit praise-poem *Hanumat-stavana* expresses this in its final couplet: “Wherever Raghunath’s glory is sung, there with hands clasped to his forehead/ and eyes overflowing with tears, is Maruti, whom I venerate, the annihilator of demons” (D. Shukla n.d.:112).

each other) have been the euhemerist argument that he was an aboriginal hero who was later divinized (a position I examine further in chapter 8), and the speculation that he was originally a prehistoric “monkey deity.” The *ur*-source of both theories lies in colonial-era scholarship, which is still quoted approvingly in support of it, and it seems especially ironic that “monkey worship,” an Orientalist trope for the primitive and debased, is now an *idée fixe* that apparently seems as self-evident to modern Indian authors as it did to Alfred Lyall in 1882. It has even found its Hindi equivalent in Govindchandra’s *bandar pūjā*, a neologism that is tellingly oxymoronic outside this specific discursive context (Govindchandra 1976:4–8).

A number of monkey figurines have been unearthed in Indus civilization sites, and several of these are of faience, a composite more durable than ordinary pottery and hence perhaps reserved for items of deeper import than toys or knickknacks. But as with other Indus artifacts (e.g., the seal image that some have termed “proto-Shiva”), the interpretation of these objects is highly contested. Yet they are regularly lumped with Fertile Crescent figurines and Egyptian images of the baboon-headed Thoth (see chapter 8), and buttressed with a few ethnographic references (including the alleged wearing of a symbolic “tail ornament” by tribal groups in Andhra Pradesh and Assam, who claim descent from the vanaras of the Ramayana) to confirm a supposedly “universal” human propensity for the worship of simians (e.g., Govindchandra 1976:4–8, 179; Nagar 1995:217–21; Sen 1987:43–46).² Yet in collections of Indian tribal narratives, the majority of those that concern monkeys portray the animals as debased humans who have been punished for a transgression—often a sexual crime—by being made feral and marked with “ugly” faces and rumps (Elwin 1949:225–27; 1954:386–98; cf. Crooke 1968:1.86, and chapter 8 of the present book).³ In *The Indian Theogony*, Sukumari Bhattacharji blandly notes (without citing evidence) that the Vedic Aryans “had to combat, and eventually come to terms with” a monkey cult in the Ganges valley, “an old seat of monkey-worship” (1970:277). Nagar similarly invokes the presence of monkeys in the *Jātaka* tales as proof of Buddhist “veneration” of monkeys, despite the fact that, in the majority of these stories, the animals are portrayed as foolish, deceitful, or pitiable (Nagar 1995:218–19;

2. According to Crooke, a number of colonial-period communities claimed descent from Hanuman. Thus, “The Bhuiyas of Sinhbhum . . . call themselves Pawan-bans, or ‘sons of the wind,’” and he cites one Colonel Dalton’s remark that they are “without doubt the apes of the *Rāmāyaṇa*” (1968:1.88). Similarly, “The Jaitwas of Rājputāna trace their descent from the monkey god Hanumān, and confirm it by alleging that the spine of their princes is elongated like a tail” (ibid. 2.153; for other vestigial tails, see chapter 6); and “The Vaydas of Cutch worship the monkey god whom they consider to be their ancestor, and to please him in their marriage ceremony, the bridegroom goes to the bride’s house dressed up as a monkey and there leaps about in monkey fashion” (ibid. 2.154). Note that all such traditions of “descent” (assuming colonial ethnographic reports to be accurate) implicitly contradict Hanuman’s much-vaunted celibacy (but see Story 21 and chapter 7).

3. One tale concerns Hanuman and reflects knowledge of the Rama story, though hardly “veneration” of monkeys: the Birhor people relate that their ancestors were sent by Ravana to catch Hanuman. They succeeded and meant to kill him, but he tricked them into only setting fire to his tail, which he then used to burn Lanka. For inadvertently aiding Hanuman, the Birhors were rewarded by Rama—with permission to hunt and eat monkeys! (Elwin 1949:201–2).

258–60).⁴ These strained arguments should accordingly be weighed against the stronger evidence that monkeys were generally judged, in ancient India as elsewhere, as at best comical subhuman mimics, and at worst as unclean, lustful, and inauspicious animals. Indeed, I contend that it was the low yet peculiarly liminal status of simians—their problematic position on the boundary between the animal and human realms—that made the elevation of *one* of them to high spiritual status a profoundly significant act.

For some scholars, the most important pre-Valmikian site in which to locate proto-Hanuman is the *R̥gveda*—a double coup, since this is the venerated *ur*-text of both the Brahmanical and Orientalist traditions. Regarded by the orthodox as an atemporal revelation, the *R̥gveda* is believed to contain, in however incipient form, *everything*. Attempts to find allusions to Hanuman and other Ramayana characters and episodes in Vedic hymns predate the colonial period and reflect the efforts of sectarian epic commentators to underscore the *vaidika* authority of their interpretations; such efforts continue to be pursued in some twentieth-century writings. Thus an article in the Hanuman issue of *Kalyāṇ* purports to identify numerous allusions to Hanuman in the Vedic *samhitās* as well as in the *Śatapatha brāhmaṇa*, defending its allegorical interpretation of these texts by arguing that “Vedic custom is, as far as possible, not to describe anything in obvious terms, but rather to use secret words to identify it” (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:37–41). Another article offers analyses of *R̥gveda* hymns in which individual lines are read as allusions to Ramayana events; for instance, an invocation of Agni (*R̥gveda* 10.87.1) is interpreted as Sita’s prayer to that deity not to harm Hanuman when the demons set his tail alight (*Rāmāyaṇa* 5.51.24–27).⁵

Apart from such efforts by pandits, academic speculation on a Vedic precursor to Hanuman has focused on the single *R̥gveda* passage in which a monkey seemingly appears: an enigmatic and much-discussed hymn in the tenth *maṇḍala* or subanthology (10.86). Set as a dialog, mainly between Indra and his wife, it concerns the latter’s resentment of a being identified as a “bull-monkey” or “virile monkey” (*vṛṣākapi*), who is also termed a “tawny” or “yellow beast” (*harita mṛga*). The wife complains that Vrishakapi has usurped or polluted some of the soma offerings that rightfully should have gone to her

4. Monkeys appear in *Jātaka* stories 20, 46, 58, 92, 173, 174, 175–77, 208, 219, 222, 250, 268, 273, 278, 280, 321, 342, 365, 404, 407. Their most positive portrayal is in Story 407, the *Mahākapi jātaka*, which highlights a noble “great monkey,” identified as an earlier incarnation of the bodhisattva, who uses his body to form a bridge to allow his troop to escape danger by crossing a river. However, this is consistent with the standard *Jātaka* format in which future Buddhas, incarnating in lower life-forms, are recognizable by altruistic and self-sacrificing behavior that contradicts the norm of these species. Sattar observes that, except for the few bodhisattva-incarnates, monkeys in the *Jātakas* “represent all that is undesirable in human nature.” She also notes three tales in which monkeys try to pass as human beings in order to obtain food but are eventually found out and punished—a reflection of the common perception of simians as threatening of species boundaries (Sattar 1990:29). For English translations, see *The Jātaka* (1957).

5. The author, Pandit Ramkumar Das, states that these identifications were made some five centuries ago by Nilakantha Suri (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:71–73; cf. Nagar 1995:19–20, 30–33, 99). Although such interpretations appear strained, Hanuman’s hybrid personality, as manifest in his later cult, displays arguable affinities to Vedic deities—especially Agni, Rudra, and the Maruts (see below).

husband and that people are now forgetting Indra; she compares the monkey's strength and virility unfavorably to Indra's own. Indra counters that Vrishakapi is his friend, and the hymn ends with some sort of compromise: the three apparently share oblations in Indra's house.⁶ Several modern interpreters of the hymn (e.g., F. E. Pargiter, H. D. Velankar) have seen in the name "Vrishakapi" an allusion to the Aryanization of an indigenous cult of monkey worship. Pargiter speculated that Hanuman's name may be a Sanskritization of an Old Tamil term for "male monkey," *ana-maṇḍi* (Pargiter 1922:278). Govindchandra endorses this theory and notes that Hanuman is occasionally called "Anumant" in Prakrit literature (Govindchandra 1976:19). He speculates that the Aryans, confronted with a popular Dravidian monkey-deity, first named him "Vrishakapi"; later, when they heard this deity called by his Tamil name, they distorted it to fit a Sanskrit etymology and supplied an appropriate explanatory story (ibid. 24). However, Tamil linguist Murray Emeneau noted that the Old Tamil word *maṇḍi*, attested in the *Caṅkam* literature, can only mean a *female* monkey, and that the unattested compound *ana-maṇḍi* makes no semantic sense; he proposed that the standard Sanskrit etymology, insofar as it can designate a being with a *prominent* jaw or chin, is entirely plausible.⁷ Indeed, rather than searching for a hypothetical South Indian cultic connection, one can observe that both Vrishakapi's aggressive sexuality and his "defilement" of sacrificial offerings suggest actual simian behavior with which poets of northwestern India would have been familiar.

The name or epithet Vrishakapi resurfaces occasionally in later literature, especially in contexts that link Indra, Vishnu, Shiva, a mysterious hero-figure, and Hanuman. Thus the *Harivaṃśa*, a late appendage to the *Mahābhārata*, identifies Vrishakapi as one of the eleven forms of Rudra (Bhattacharji 1970:134), and the praise-poem of the "thousand names of Vishnu" likewise includes it among that deity's epithets (Govindchandra 1976:22). The most extended example is a story in the eighty-fourth *adhyaḃya* of the *Brahma purāṇa*, in the context of a eulogy of the Godavari river and its pilgrimage places, which recounts Indra's slaying by means of Vrishakapi (a hybrid being created through the intercession of Vishnu and Shiva) of a demon named Mahashani (*Mahāśani*, "Great Saturn") and connects it to one of the birth legends of Hanuman. I will discuss this interesting story below in the context of Puranic references to Hanuman, and will only observe here that its author was evidently familiar with *Rgveda* 10.86 and wanted to link it to Hanuman, albeit indirectly (which, in view of the bawdy content of the old hymn, may have been the discreet thing to do).

Several scholars have argued that popular "non-Aryan" folk deities were incorporated into Brahmanic mythology through the category of beings known as yakshas (*yakṣa*), the sometimes beneficent, sometimes menacing guardians of the earth and its natural features, who possessed great strength and

6. Cf. Bhattacharji 1970:276; for translations, see Griffith 1986:596–98; O'Flaherty 1981:257–64; Jamison 1996:76–87. For a longer discussion of this problematic hymn, see chapter 7.

7. I am grateful to Emeneau for these insights, shared during a phone conversation in March 1992.

swiftness and the ability to alter their shape at will and who were propitiated with offerings that included spirituous liquor and the blood of sacrificial animals. In iconography, male yakshas were sometimes depicted with the heads of animals; thus the origins of the elephant-headed Ganesha have been speculatively traced to yaksha worship (Courtright 1985:130). This cult may also have involved the veneration of warriors slain in battle, for yakshas are sometimes termed “heroes” (*vīra*). Vira (or in Eastern Hindi, *bīr*) worship remains prevalent throughout much of India, and hero-stones are commonly smeared with reddish-orange sindur (*sindūr*), as are images of Ganesha, Hanuman, Bhairava, and certain other deities, a practice that some scholars interpret as a vegetarian substitute for the blood offerings to yakshas (Coccari 1989; Harlan 2003:5–7, 136–37).⁸ Further, one of Hanuman’s most common epithets is *Mahāvīra* (*Mahābīr*) “the great hero.” In early Buddhist architecture, yakshas were integrated (or co-opted) as boundary guardians, carved on gateways and doorposts, and this was a function that, centuries later, Hanuman would serve as well, both as a protector of rural boundaries (*kṣetrapāla* or “guardian of the field”), and as a “gatekeeper” (*dvārapāla*) of towns, forts, and temples. All of these factors have convinced some scholars that Hanuman worship was an outgrowth of the yaksha cult (e.g., Bulcke 1960:402; Govindchandra 1976: 22–24; Narula 1991:20–24; the latter provides a useful “checklist” of ten points of resemblance between Hanuman worship and that of yakshas; *ibid.* 21). A. K. Coomaraswamy’s classic study of yakshas (originally published in two parts in 1928 and 1932) offers further evidence to suggest Hanuman’s link to this category of beings, who were “given a spiritual rank intermediate between that of the gods (*devas*) and the lower spirits” (Coomaraswamy 1993:74). Particularly noteworthy is the representation of many yakshas in early Buddhist texts, including their king Kubera, as bearing a mace or club (*gadā*; *ibid.* 36, 67), a feature of Hanuman’s later iconography that lacks a Valmikian source.⁹ Similarly, the association of yakshas with shape-shifting and with animals such as horses and crocodiles, with gateways and boundaries, and with shrines beneath peepul trees, sometimes marked by mounds covered with sindur, all

8. “Sindur” refers to a mixture of fragrant oil (such as sandalwood or jasmine) and any one of a number of substances that produce a deep reddish or orange color. These include cinnabar, aka vermilion (mercuric sulfide), and certain lead or zinc compounds. According to an e-mail communication from Asko Parpola (May 2003), an ancient synonym for sindur is *hiṅgula*, referring to the cinnabar mined at Hinglaj, a volcanic site in Baluchistan long associated with goddess worship (cf. White 1996:66). He adds that female figurines excavated at Mehrgharh, Baluchistan, confirm the use of this substance for adorning the part of women’s hair roughly five millennia ago. In some regions of India, *kumkum* (aka *kumkum* or *rolī*) is another synonym, especially in the context of married women’s use as an auspicious cosmetic. This is sometimes made by mixing turmeric powder and lime juice, but this inexpensive compound is not favored for adorning deities. In North India, the sindur applied to Hanuman has an orange tone and is known as *mahābīrī* (“of the great hero”). In Rajasthan, the sindur coating is often mixed with sheets of metallic foil, the combined compound being known as *mālīpanā* (White 2003:10). I am grateful to John Cort, Asko Parpola, and Kusumita Pedersen for much of the above information. For an excellent treatment of the “smearing” of yaksha-like deities with sindur and other substances to obtain their intercession, see White 2003:9–10. On Hanuman and sindur, see also Story 26 in chapter 4 and its notes in chapter 5.

9. The Goldmans note, however, the epic Hanuman’s propensity for seizing natural and human-made objects (boulders, trees, columns, etc.) and wielding them as weapons (Goldman and Goldman 1996:55–56).

present similarities with Hanuman's literary representation and cultic worship (Coomaraswamy 1993:17, 47, 56–62, 142–47).¹⁰ That Hanuman remained comfortable in the realm of yakshas is suggested by the *Mahābhārata* story that places him, long after his “retirement” from active labor in Rama's cause, near a Himalayan lake guarded by them, where he meets his blustering half-brother Bhima. Later traditions would identify this magical venue as the immortal monkey's retreat in the kali yuga (see Story 39 and chapter 6).

The postulated yaksha connection appears useful for placing Hanuman generically in a category of ancient “folk” deities associated with the earth and with the fulfillment of mundane needs. Yet this originary argument also has its drawbacks. Although yakshas (and their female counterparts, *yakṣīs*) appear frequently in early art, they are commonly portrayed as pudgy, dwarflike men or willowy, voluptuous women, and not as monkeys; the latter also commonly appear, but are treated as a distinct class of beings. Nor do the many allusions to specific, powerful yakshas in early texts mention any in simian form. Of course, this does not preclude the possibility that there may have existed somewhere a popular monkeylike yaksha, and that the author of the *Rāmāyaṇa* had this being in mind when developing the character of Hanuman. Such a hypothesis, however, still places credit for the elaboration and refinement of this character squarely with the *Rāmāyaṇa* poet, and it offers little to explain the gradual rise, more than a millennium later and in a religious context in which yakshas as a class had long become truly marginal, of this particular one as the recipient of widespread worship.¹¹ The scholarly stress on unveiling Hanuman's supposed roots and antecedents, coupled with the lack of serious investigation of his contemporary cult, suggests a desire to project his appeal backward into the remote past and onto cultural “others”—Dravidians, non-Aryans, tribals, “the folk”—invoking the Orientalist trope of the “primitive.” Ostensibly, this somehow “explains” his current prominence, or the (to some) embarrassingly feral aspects of his persona that refuse to go away, even in the most sanitized recastings.

A Short History of the Wind

One way in which the quest for a Vedic Hanuman may have gone astray is by looking for him in the wrong places: in the guise of a monkey god and in

10. It is notable, however, that Coomaraswamy was among the first scholars to question the Orientalist distinction between allegedly “Aryan” and “non-Aryan” elements in Hinduism, as well as between “major” and “minor” deities. He cited the usage of the term yaksha in the *R̥gveda* (even its application to ostensibly “high,” celestial deities), and advocated translating it by the English “spirit” or the Greek *daimon*—both potentially applicable to deities both “high” and “low,” benevolent and malevolent, elite and popular (Coomaraswamy 1993:15–16, 37).

11. Crooke mentions a class of “really friendly agricultural sprites” known as *jāk* and (female) *jākṇī* who are worshiped “in some places.” He sees their names as corruptions of *yakṣa* and *yakṣī* and describes them, in his characteristic way, as “another of these curious survivals from the early mythology in a sadly degraded form” (1968:2.79); one might, of course, ask why the transformation of dangerous, blood-demanding deities into “friendly” ones constitutes “degradation.”

disguised allusions to the Rama story. A perhaps more useful way to elicit the *R̥gveda*'s help in understanding him is to briefly examine its characterization of deities with whom, in later literature, he is closely linked; most notably, with his two (principal) "fathers," Vayu and Rudra/Shiva. I have already noted that various terms meaning "son of the wind" are among Hanuman's most common epithets; these reflect a birth narrative thrice recounted in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (4.65.8–18; 6.19.9–17; 7.35.19–65, continued at 7.36.1–27). In the longest version of the story, the invisible Vayu, smitten with the monkey-woman Anjana's beauty when she wanders on a mountaintop in a self-willed human form, causes her garment to blow off. Such disrobing is a common stimulus, in epic and Puranic narrative, for a lustful god or sage to lose control and release semen; thus the sage Vibhandaka ejaculates on seeing an apsara bathing in a lake (*Mahābhārata* 3.110.10–15), and Shiva ejaculates when Vishvamohini's limbs are revealed (*Śiva purāna* 3.20.4; see Story 2.f). Such an act is not described in Valmiki's restrained narrative, but Anjana feels someone "embrace" her limbs, and she responds by threatening to curse the invisible molester. Identifying himself, Vayu replies that her wifely virtue remains inviolate, but that she will now bear a son who will have his own swiftness and power. This classic instance of "he said, she said" may well be termed a "rape," but some modern commentators prefer to label it an "immaculate conception" (e.g., K. Chaitanya 1992:10). The violator-father reappears in the story of baby Hanuman's wounding by Indra's thunderbolt, when Vayu withdraws to a cave with his injured child and his absence causes the cosmos to suffocate. This dramatic revelation of Vayu's power as the medium of life prompts the gods to bestow numerous boons on his child. In addition, Hanuman's inherent powers—his immense strength and his ability to fly—seem to directly reflect Vayu's influence. Thus, whatever other cultural sources the *Rāmāyaṇa* poet may have tapped in crafting his monkey character, a quite explicit one was the persona of the Vedic god of wind, air, and atmosphere.

Vayu's earliest mythology combines power with intangibility—a not inappropriate combination for the personification of the wind. In the *R̥gveda*, he receives little direct veneration (only five hymns are dedicated to him)¹² but is invoked for his role in the life-giving monsoon cycle. Yet his destructive potential is always implicit, and so he remains "a god who leans more to the dark gods than to the dwellers in the east," and he is classified as one of the "dread gods," whose ranks include Yama, Rudra, and Agni in his devouring and destructive mode (Bhattacharji 1970:8, 40). Yet, as Sattar notes, Vayu also enjoys a special relationship with Indra as the latter's "messenger" (*Vāsavadūta*) and sometimes precedes his master as a "scout," a role that suggests Hanuman's later function as *dūta* or messenger/scout of the Indra-like Rama (Sattar 1990:178–81). Vayu is more beneficent in his (relatively rare) appearances

12. The god is praised under the name Vayu in 4.46–48, and as *Vāta* or "air" in 10.168 and 10.186; in another half-dozen hymns Vayu is featured together with Indra. Note, however, that thirty-three hymns are dedicated to the unruly Maruts, on whom see below.

in the epics and Puranas, being identified with the life-breath and hence as the “lord of life” and “soul of creatures,” and also as learned and eloquent, “expert in the science of language” (ibid. 178–79). Sattar also notes that in later iconography Vayu’s requisite animal “vehicle” (*vāhana*) is a deer (*mṛga*), the liminal animal that makes “paths” (*mārga*) in the forest and that in epic narrative leads Indra-like kings into an otherworld wherein they encounter trials and grow in wisdom (ibid. 202).

Vayu’s relatively subdued presence in Vedic and Puranic myth is somewhat compensated for by the presence of a troop of other wind gods, the Maruts, said to be forty-nine in number, who are associated with him, though more often with Indra and Rudra. In a Puranic story, the Maruts are born from an act of cosmic violation and murder. Their mother, Diti, formerly gave birth to powerful asuras (called *daityas*, the “offspring of Diti”) who were slain by Indra and his allies. Diti (who is also Indra’s aunt) determines to produce a child who will take revenge on her heavenly nephew. But Indra outsmarts her and, disguising himself as her servant, enters her womb while she sleeps and cuts her fetus into forty-nine pieces. When the fragments cry out, he nervously silences them with the command “Don’t howl!” (*mā rudah*), which supposedly explains their name, though another possible etymology from the verb-root meaning “to die” (*mṛ*) may suggest “the spirits of the dead who hover in the atmosphere in Rudra’s company” (Bhattacharji 1970:132; citing *Matsya purāna* 7.62). Yet the Maruts don’t die, and Indra eventually gives his howling, mutilated cousins dominion over the cosmic winds in his entourage. That the ranks of these gods comprise the square of seven, a number often used in Indian cosmology, may suggest that they pervade all of space.

The wailing of the Maruts recalls another “dark” god, Rudra, “the howler,” who is associated with disease and retribution and accompanied by legions of his own. In some Vedic texts, this deity is likewise called the “father of the Maruts” (Bhattacharji 1970:130). Rudra is both one and many; the apparent prototype for the later epic and Puranic Shiva, he also replicates himself into a swarm of violent deities, numbering eleven or a multiple thereof. The *Taittirīya saṃhitā* declares, “three and thirty in troops the Rudras frequent the sky and earth, the destructive ones, eleven, seated on the waters” (1.4.11, ibid. 130). By the time of the *Mahābhārata*, the Rudras are understood to number eleven, the sons or doubles of an “irate god,” and are said to appear in animal shape. They are associated with spirits and with Shiva’s role as “lord of ghosts” (*Mahābhārata* 12.122.30, 34; ibid. 133). Although Hanuman’s later identification as one of the eleven Rudras, or as the “eleventh avatara” of Rudra/Shiva, may reflect a Shaiva sectarian claim on an increasingly popular god, it also suggests his kinship with, and hence potential control over, a class of awesome and ambivalent deities.

Other skills in Hanuman’s résumé also seem to derive in part from his windy patrimony, reflecting Vayu’s role in both body and cosmos. For example, in Valmiki’s *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, Hanuman twice flies to the Himalayas to fetch healing herbs (and the mountain on which they grow; *Rāmāyaṇa* 6.61, 6.69; see Story 20). In the ayurvedic medical system, bodily illnesses are

understood to result from an imbalance among the three principal humors, among which *vāta* or “wind/air” plays a crucial intermediary role; one medical treatise calls it “the vehicle par excellence” (Zimmermann 1987:147). In his study of the “ecology” of ayurveda, Francis Zimmermann notes the cosmic underpinnings of the “struggle,” within the human body and the physical environment, between fire and water (Agni and Soma), represented by bile and phlegm (*pitta* and *kapha*); “wind is then introduced into this fight, where it remains in an alternating and dominant position” (ibid. 146). Numerous diseases are attributed to an “excess of wind” (*vāta prakopa*), including rheumatism (*vāta-roga* or “wind disease,” a term also applied to mental illness), gout, epilepsy, and paralysis; a mad person is likewise said to be “windy” (Sanskrit *vātūla*, Hindi *bāvlā*). Both mental and physical diseases are also understood to result from various classes of ghosts (*bhūta*, *preta*, *piśāca*), who reside in the air and obey the commands of Rudra/Shiva, the lord of the Marut winds. The terminology of ayurveda also has links with that of yogic philosophy, in which the intermediary element of macrocosmic “wind” is understood as identical with the microcosmic “five breaths” (*pañca prāṇa*) that sustain life. Hanuman’s genealogical link with so essential a medium will inspire many aspects of his later cult.

Valmiki’s Vanara

The extraordinary beings who come to the aid of the human hero of the *Rāmāyana* beginning in its fourth subbook, *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, are described with all the usual Sanskrit terms for “monkey.” According to Govindchandra, the word *vanara* (*vānara*, probably derived from *vana* or “forest” and connoting a “forest being”) is used most frequently—some 1,080 times. *Hari* and *kapi* (both of which refer to the “tawny” color of animals) are used, respectively, some 580 and 240 times; *plavaga* (“leaper”) also occurs 240 times (Govindchandra 1976:178–79). Other words, used less frequently (and not counted by Govindchandra), include *sākhāmṛga* (“branch-animal”), *piṅgalākṣa* (“having yellow eyes”), and then-current names for several primate species (e.g., *golāṅgūla* and *gopuccha*, or “cow-tailed” monkey).¹³ Yet the forest beings of Valmiki’s poem clearly are not ordinary simians: rather, they have certain of the supernatural powers (immense strength and ability to change their shape at will) and characteristic flaws (unbridled sexuality and unacceptable inter-sibling rivalry) of Rama’s demonic adversaries. But whereas Valmiki’s *rakṣasas* (*rākṣasa*) have identifiable precursors in the Vedic literature of the preceding millennium, his *vanaras* apparently do not. Did the poet, then, “invent” them?

13. This may refer to the lion-tailed macaque (*Macaca silenus*), a rare species confined to parts of the Western Ghats (Prater 1948:38). In iconography, Hanuman often appears with a tuft of hair on the end of his tail. On references to primate species in the Valmiki text, see Lefebvre 1994:37–39; *Rāmāyana* 1996:310–11 n. 59, 511 n. 16, 528 n. 9, 531–32 n. 14; Sattar 1990:20–25, 93–99. All argue that *ṛkṣa*, a word understood by the later Ramayana tradition to mean “bear,” is used by Valmiki to connote a monkey species.

In the introduction to his translation of Valmiki's *Aranyakāṇḍa*, Sheldon Pollock analyzes the motif of the boon given to Ravana, which he sees as prefiguring much of the theological development of the later Rama cult. As a rakshasa incarnate on earth, Ravana belongs to the broader category of asuras, the shadowy elder cousins of the celestial devas, who (in the myth of the churning of the cosmic ocean) were cheated of the nectar of immortality by the latter and, taking birth in the terrestrial "world of death" (*mṛtyu loka*), seek to recover it, together with universal dominion, via the performance of austerities. Through these endeavors, an asura generates an energy that gradually "heats" the cosmos, eventually compelling the devas (usually represented by their "grandfather," the creator Brahma) to "cool" the practitioner by granting him a boon. However, because Brahma refuses to give immortality to created beings, the asura generally seeks the next best thing: an exceptionally long life, ensured by securing protection from every foreseeable circumstance that could cause his demise. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Ravana petitions Brahma for immunity from various classes of beings whom he considers to pose a threat to him—not only devas and asuras, but also gandharvas (*gandharva*; celestial musicians and singers), yakshas, and nagas (*nāga*; serpent beings who inhabit the subterranean waters). This petition the grandfather readily grants. What ensues is likewise standard in such narratives: freed from the dread of death, the rakshasa goes mad with power, conquering the world and driving the devas from their celestial strongholds, till the latter beg the grandfather to tell them how the tyrant may be destroyed. At this point, Brahma reveals that the boon contained a loophole: in Ravana's case, his failure to mention human beings (*nara*), presumably because he considered them too puny to threaten him. This leads the gods, at Brahma's suggestion, to petition Vishnu to incarnate and slay their enemy. In Pollock's analysis, the plot device of the "limited boon," already established in Vedic literature, was deployed by the *Rāmāyaṇa* poet to create, in his hero Rama, a new kind of being: "neither a man nor even a 'simple' god, he incorporates the two and so, in a sense, transcends them both" (Pollock 1991:41). Pollock argues that Valmiki's new genus of human hero, incorporating the martial and punitive qualities of Indra and of Rudra/Shiva and the nurturing and administrative functions of Vishnu, embodied concepts of divine kingship and reflected sociopolitical developments on the Gangetic plain during the period that saw the rise of the Mauryan Empire. Similarly, the hero's demonic antagonists (whose characterization Pollock also explores) represented an extension of the asuras, danavas, and daityas of Vedic tradition (*ibid.* 66–84).

Yet between these poles of dharma and *adharmā* lies, as Robert Goldman and Sally Sutherland Goldman argue in the introduction to their translation of Valmiki's *Sundarakāṇḍa*, a realm that is neither human nor demonic, but that partakes of aspects of both (Goldman and Goldman 1996:71–74). This "middle kingdom," situated in the protean world of the forest, belongs to the vanaras, who are described as monkeys covered in lustrous fur of various colors (tawny, golden, or black), and who fight (unlike the bow-wielding human and rakshasa champions) with their nails, teeth, and tails, or by seizing rocks

and tree limbs as weapons. Yet they also possess the power of speech and display many features of human social organization, can alter their bodily shape at will (*kāma-rūpin*), and are endowed with superhuman strength. In fact, like the hero himself, these beings constitute a special hybrid likewise linked to the “limited boon” motif in the frame story of Vishnu’s incarnation. Book 1 explains that these vanaras were begotten on monkey-women by the “lustrous male power” of the gods (*vīrya*, which also connotes “semen”) to produce supernatural allies to assist Vishnu/Rama in his earthly task (1.16). The aural similarity of two common Sanskrit words for “man” and “monkey,” *nara* and *vānara*, invites their periodic pairing in the poetic text, even as it may allude to the morphological similarities they share.¹⁴ In his speech to Ravana in Book 5, Hanuman explicitly links monkeys to Brahma’s boon by warning the rakshasa king that Rama’s ally Sugriva is “not a god, an asura, a human, a rakshasa, a gandharva, a yaksha, or a serpent” (5.49.25–26), and so is exempt from the boon’s provision of safety.

That the plot of the *Rāmāyaṇa* turns on a peculiar alliance of these two hybrid beings who together accomplish a cosmic design—god-man and (man-like) god-monkey, the latter a kind of hyperhybrid—presents a unique narrative circumstance not encountered in other early instances of the “limited boon.” Students of cross-cultural folklore may see other motifs here as well: that of the “helpful animal” (the diminutive but clever supernatural assistant of the hero of *Märchen* and other popular tales) and the persona of the comical sidekick/shadow of a noble and romantic hero. Given that Valmiki’s epic was viewed by later authors as the prototypic artistic creation, it is worth noting that, in classical Sanskrit dramas, the hero (*nāyaka*) is usually paired with a comical and trickster-like sidekick called the *vidūṣaka*: usually a lustful, sarcastic, and ever-hungry Brahman, whom one Sanskrit text describes as “a monkey-like joking companion” (Visuvalingam 1989:204–5).¹⁵

Pollock’s analysis represents an original contribution to a long-running debate concerning the structure and genesis of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Early Western scholars, reading the poem in light of their understandings of Greco-Roman epic as well as their post-Enlightenment prejudice against “superstition” and “priestcraft,” advanced the thesis that an archaic and straightforward saga of a noble earthly prince had been rewritten by Brahmans, who divinized its hero and smothered his story with supernatural elements. This assumption led its adherents to reject large portions of the poem, including the whole of Books 1 and 7 and much of the “fantastic hyperbole” of Hanuman’s exploits in the *Sundarakāṇḍa*. Their views were accepted by generations of scholars, and

14. Although, as noted, probably derived from a word for “forest,” *vānara* is sometimes given an etymology that links it to an exclamation of surprise and categorical confusion elicited by the sight of a monkey: “What, is it a man?” (*naraḥ-vā?*; P. Chaitanya 1987:38).

15. This correspondence was brought to my attention in 1992 by Sunthar Visuvalingam, who observed that the *nāyaka-vidūṣaka* pairing is sometimes traced by Sanskrit authors to the relationship between Indra and a monkey in the Vrishakapi hymn of the *Rgveda* (see chapter 7).



FIGURE 2.2. Rama embraces Hanuman; poster, mid-twentieth century

retain some influence today,¹⁶ despite the fact that a twentieth-century critical edition of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, assembled using the text-critical methods championed by the Orientalists, has settled on a seven-part epic, retaining the

16. See, e.g., Brockington 1984:307–27, and Bulcke 1999:105–16, both of whom attempt to divide the epic into chronological strata. Govindchandra, partly following Bulcke (and earlier Western scholars), argues that the poem evolved from two separate narratives: a northern story of Rama's abdication of the throne of Ayodhya, and a southern one centered on Ravana. According to this argument, Valmiki combined the tales, but needed a fabulous character, already familiar to his audience, to link them. He found this character in a half-man, half-monkey yaksha called Mahavira, "the great hero" (Govindchandra 1976: 304). Although it emphasizes Hanuman's function as an intermediary (here as literally a narrative "missing link"), this theory reflects a Western judgment of the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s two main narrative strands as disparate—a view that has never been shared by Indian audiences—and also the assumption that the Buddhist *Daśaratha jāta*, which retells the Rama story sans Ravana and the monkeys, predates Valmiki's version (for persuasive arguments against this theory, see Goldman 1984:25–29, 32). Sattar's decentered reading of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, using Hanuman as a lens, presents a more positive (and persuasive) account of the monkey hero's indispensability to the epic's overall structure (1990, esp. 210–41).

controversial books and other so-called “interpolations,” as the earliest recoverable prototype. Assuming greater coherence in the narrative as Indian audiences have embraced it, Pollock argues that Rama’s divinity is crucial to both the plot and central themes of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Pollock 1991:15–67). By extending Pollock’s thesis to Rama’s hybrid and fantastic allies, I propose that a more culturally sensitive reading of Hanuman should similarly question the hypotheses of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century academic scholars concerning the divine monkey’s origins.

Since Valmiki’s portrayal of Hanuman has received detailed treatment by other scholars (see Goldman and Goldman 1996:39–57, 62–64; Ludvik 1994:23–134; Sattar 1990:20–85), I will note only a few aspects of this characterization that are relevant to his later cultic career. Whereas the vanaras in general appear (even to Sita) as unlikely companions to the human heroes—a race of often-comical *Untermenschen* who ironically prove to be crucial allies in a perilous quest (not unlike the diminutive and pleasure-loving “hobbits” of J. R. R. Tolkien’s modern fantasy *The Lord of the Rings*)—Hanuman combines simian agility and restless energy with humanlike sagacity, eloquence, and devotion, to emerge as one of the epic’s most complex and fascinating characters. In his first appearance at the opening of *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, when he takes the form of a mendicant to question the Raghu brothers about their presence at Pampa Lake, Hanuman’s learning, refinement, and rhetorical skills earn him Rama’s praise (4.3). These qualities, together with his phenomenal strength, courage, and speed, become especially prominent in the *Sundarakāṇḍa*, where they are combined with a reflexiveness bordering, at times, on the obsessive (as when Hanuman broods over the telescoping sequence of disasters that would ensue from a wrong move on his part; e.g., 5.11.20–48; 5.53.7–16). In this respect, he is implicitly contrasted with his peers, whose “monkeyness” (*kapitva*, *śākhā-mṛgatva*) is repeatedly said to be characterized by “childishness,” “impulsiveness,” and “instability” (*bālyāt*, *cāpalyāt*, *cañcaltā*). Yet Hanuman’s own monkeyness is occasionally highlighted, as in the scene when, momentarily thinking that he has found Sita among the sleeping women in Ravana’s harem, he scampers up a column and kisses his tail (5.8.50; however, he soon correctly reasons that the contented-looking damsel cannot be Rama’s wife).

It is significant that Hanuman enters the narrative as the minister of Sugriva and initially serves Rama due to his master’s alliance with the human prince; however, following his stupendous leap across the sea, Hanuman begins identifying himself (to Sita, Ravana, and his own monkey cohorts) as the “servant” and “messenger” of Rama—a shift that enables his later identification with the spirit of *bhakti* (Sattar 1984:56, 59). He displays particularly heightened emotion in his interaction with Sita in the Ashoka Garden, a key episode that I will consider further in chapter 7. Hanuman is also depicted as the recipient of boons that render him (among other things) physically immortal, another trait that will prove to be of great cultic significance (see chapter 6). Finally, it is worth noting that the Valmiki text makes no explicit reference to Hanuman being celibate, although it stresses his self-control and

sublimation of his personal needs to the commands of his masters. This topic too warrants further treatment, since Hanuman is today regarded as the very archetype of *brahmacharya*, a lifestyle of “good conduct” that centers on celibacy. Bulcke and others argue that this is a later development in his narrative and cult (Bulcke 1999:543–44; Govindchandra 1976:98), and it is one that would be challenged by Jain authors (see below, and chapter 7). It may reflect the growing influence, during and after the first millennium CE, of yogic and ascetic orders, as well as the increasing misogyny of Brahmanical discourse.

Revisionist Retellings

Whereas the copious Sanskrit art literature inspired by the Rama story shows, for roughly 1500 years after Valmiki, few examples of significant expansion of Hanuman's role, Jain literature provides a number of truly “alternative” Rama tales, recast according to Jain concerns with asceticism and noninjury (*ahimsa*) and set within a time scheme of successive eons, in each of which a fixed cast of heroes and antiheroes takes birth. These texts attest in their own way to the influence of Valmiki's archetype, of which the authors were clearly aware. Their purpose was to entertain and edify Jains while at the same time assuring them that they were getting the corrected version of a beloved tale that had been distorted for other audiences. Hence it is interesting to look at their portrayal of Hanuman, who remains a popular secondary hero, for evidence of what elements in his legend could and could not undergo sectarian revision. Although the Jain authors' most provocative innovation—a sexually active Hanuman—will be discussed in chapter 7, here I will focus on Hanuman's overall role in their Rama saga through a synopsis of its apparent prototype: Vimalasuri's *Paumacariya* (“the deeds of Padma,” a Jain name for Rama), a Prakrit epic in 118 cantos composed sometime between the first and third centuries CE (on its disputed date, see Kulkarni 1990:51–54).

Since the Vedic gods are of little importance in Jain cosmology, the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s metaplot of deva-asura conflict is replaced by a series of shifting alliances among more morally ambiguous powers, all of whom belong to the world of samsara (*saṃsāra*). Rama and Lakshmana are great human princes, but Ravana is also a magnificent ruler of the rakshasa “lineage” (*vamśa*), as is Hanuman of the vanara *vamśa*. Both lineages belong to the genus vidyadhara (*vidyādhara*, “bearer of esoteric knowledge”), a category of beings who form a supernatural staple of ancient Indian entertainment literature. Human in shape, vidyadharas live for a very long time, are able to fly, and can assume any desired form. In Vimalasuri's telling, a vidyadhara prince named Pavanagati (“having the speed of the wind”) marries the princess Anjana Sundari (“the beautiful Anjana”) but, because of an imagined slight, refuses to cohabit with her after marriage. Later he relents and visits her in secret, and as a result she becomes pregnant. Her in-laws, unaware of his visit, banish her to the forest where, in a cave, she gives birth to a radiant son. Her maternal uncle rescues her and, while boarding his flying chariot, she accidentally drops her baby; he falls on a boulder and (though suffering no injury himself) shatters

it, foreshadowing his heroic destiny. The boy is raised in his great uncle's island kingdom of Hanuruha, whence he gets the name "Hanuman," which thus has nothing to do with his (quite handsome) jaw. Indeed, the vidyadhara prince is well endowed in all respects and soon assembles a large harem, beginning with the princess Anangakusama, who is the daughter of Ravana's sister Chandranakha ("moon nails," quite in contrast to the "winnowing-basket nails" of her Valmikian prototype, the ogress Shurpanakha) and her husband, Kharadushana (two rakshasa names from the Ramayana rolled into one). Hanuman is thus closely related to Ravana by marriage—why not, since they are both vidyadharas?—and he joins in fighting the Lankan king's enemies. Ravana is so pleased with his prowess that he gives him a niece as a second wife. Hanuman then allies himself with Sugriva, the king of Kishkindha, and in the process acquires a hundred more wives.

At this point, the plot of the *Rāmāyana* intrudes, more or less. Hanuman is initially enraged when he learns that a human prince, Rama, has murdered his father-in-law Kharadushana, but when he and Sugriva meet Rama (who is wandering in search of the kidnapped Sita) they take pity on him. As Ravana's friend, Hanuman offers to go to Lanka to urge him to return Sita. After many adventures (and a seduction) en route, he meets Ravana's brother Vibhishana and then Sita, and fights with her guards, wrecking Ravana's pleasure garden. Unable to convince Ravana to surrender Sita, Hanuman returns to Rama and joins in the war against his former friend, performing many heroic deeds. After Lakshmana slays Ravana (since Rama, a pious Jain, cannot incur the sin of killing), Hanuman lustily joins in a six-year victory celebration. Later, he realizes the delusion of samsara and, accompanied by 750 repentant vidyadharas, takes initiation from a Jain teacher and achieves liberation. Rama, after a long reign, does the same (Kulkarni 1990:15–50).

The modifications found in Vimalasuri's tale are repeated with some variation in other Jain versions, such as the *Uttarapurāṇa* of Gunabhadra (850 CE) and Hastimalla's play *Añjanā-Pavanañjaya* (ca. twelfth century). The former makes Sita the unlucky daughter of Ravana and Mandodari; prophesied to be the cause of her father's death, the baby girl is abandoned in a box on the sea and eventually drifts to Videha, where she is adopted by King Janaka. This meditation on the fatal link between villain and heroine supports a more ambivalent reading of the story, giving additional tragic depth to Ravana's character. It will resurface in many local, non-Jain retellings of the Rama story, especially in southern and eastern India (W. Smith 1994:14, 70–73). It is unclear whether the Jain version was the source of this legend, or whether Gunabhadra's tale itself reflected existing Ramayana folklore filtered through a Jain lens.

The same uncertainty clouds the portrayal of Hanuman and his cohorts. Are the transformations in the story mere twists contrived for the entertainment of the Jain audience—swashbuckling and erotic adventures to be enjoyed without guilt because of the adventurer's eventual renunciation? Or do they suggest, like the story of Sita's parentage, implicit but buried themes in Valmiki's masterpiece? Clearly, names are important here; Jains are to understand that these are the same characters about whom others tell different

tales. Hanuman, his parents and allies nearly all have the same names they bear in Valmiki's poem, though their etymologies are differently explained, and here, too, Hanuman's birth occurs under questionable circumstances and in the forest. His association with monkeys remains, though it is sanitized to the vague but humanoid vidyadhara identity. He is still a great warrior and resourceful messenger whose mission for Rama forms a colorful episode within the larger story. The most striking transformation is doubtless his erotic activity, which is in keeping with his being, according to Jain authors, an avatara of the love-god Kama (a role that must be filled in every cosmic cycle), but should we assume that the assignment of this role to Hanuman was arbitrary? When all the nonhuman characters become fun-loving vidyadhara, why does one in particular, belonging to the "vanara lineage," get to enjoy more monkey business? Perhaps, along with the critique of the verity of Brahmanical storytelling, we see here a reflection of popular lore about virile monkeys, reminiscent of the randy Vrishakapi of *R̥gveda* 10.86. Such lore, submerged in most Indian Rama tales, will reappear in a curious place—literally under the sea—in later popular narratives of Hanuman's deeds (see Story 21 and chapter 7).

Puranic Progress

It is especially in the Puranas—those sprawling compendia of "old lore" assembled over a span of more than a thousand years—that we find evidence of notable development of Hanuman's stature, reflecting recognition among the literate elite not simply of his charm as a narrative figure but of his efficacy as a divine being. Broadly speaking, Puranic texts may be grouped into three categories with respect to Hanuman. The first comprises those that make no mention of the monkey hero, and includes the *Matsya*, *Vāyu*, *Vāmana*, *Varāha*, *Liṅga*, *Brahmāṇḍa*, and *Mārkaṇḍeya purāṇas*.¹⁷ The second group comprises Puranas that mention Hanuman in the context of a retelling of the Rama narrative, but do not significantly expand on his Valmikian role; these include the *Agni*, *Viṣṇu*, *Kūrma*, *Garuḍa*, *Brahmavaivarta*, *Narasimha* and *Kalkī*, as well as the *Bhāgavata purāṇa*.¹⁸ The third category consists of Puranas that show a notable elaboration of Hanuman's narrative or ritual role. Many of the stories included in these also appear in Sanskrit and vernacular Ramayanas composed during the latter part of the Puranic age (from roughly the tenth century onward) and may represent older legends that here are incorporated into written texts for the first time. A prime example is the elaborate story of

17. In addition, even the chronologically late *Devī bhāgavata purāṇa* fails to include him, and the *Kālikā purāṇa* mentions the vanaras as offspring of Shiva, but doesn't single out Hanuman for special attention. My classification of the Puranas follows Bulcke (1999:528–48) and Govindchandra (1976:56–80), both of whom presumably drew on standard bazaar editions such as those of Shri Venkateshwar Steam Press and Navalkishor Press.

18. The *Agni purāṇa* includes a brief and formulaic prescription for constructing an image of Hanuman, "with his two feet pressing down an asura, and with two hands, in one hand a *vajra*" (Govindchandra 1976:57).

Ahiravana (and/or Mahiravana), a subterranean son, double, or brother (or pair of brothers) of the king of Lanka, who comes to the latter's aid during the final days of his battle with Rama and the monkeys. A powerful sorcerer, Ahiravana kidnaps Rama and Lakshmana and carries them to the underworld. To defeat him, Hanuman undertakes an eventful quest in the course of which he impersonates a goddess and meets his own son (see Story 21). Though absent from most recensions of Valmiki, this is a very popular and today virtually pan-Indian tale that is often represented in poster art and temple iconography. Already alluded to in the ca. eighth century *Śatarudrasaṃhitā* of the *Śiva purāṇa* (3.20.34), it was greatly elaborated on in Bengali, Oriya, and Assamese Ramayanas composed from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries, as well as in the ca. fourteenth–fifteenth-century Sanskrit *Ananda rāmāyaṇa* and the sixteenth-century Marathi *Bhāvārtha rāmāyaṇa* of Eknath.¹⁹ The *Śiva purāṇa* also includes a variant birth story in which Hanuman's mother is impregnated with Shiva's seed; hence her son is identified as a "portion" (*aṃśa*) of Shiva himself, and (in another passage) as an avatara of Rudra. This linkage of Hanuman with Shiva is underscored in other stories in the *Skanda*, *Viṣṇudharmottara*, *Padma*, *Brhaddharma*, and *Nārādīya purāṇas*.

The *Brahma purāṇa*'s catalog of pilgrimage places in the Deccan and South includes a series of stories linked (as Puranic tales often are) to specific sites, in this case, to a pair of bathing places near the confluence of the rivers Phena and Godavari in west-central India. The first (retold as Story 2.b in chapter 4) concerns Hanuman's release of his mother and stepmother from a curse, and also endows him with a shadowy half-brother called the "king of ghosts" (*piśāca-rāja*). The sacred bathing places (*tīrtha*) featured in the tale are labeled *Paiśāca tīrtha* ("ghosts' ford") and *Hanumān tīrtha* or *Vṛṣākapi tīrtha* (*Brahmapurāṇam* 1976:84.471–72). The latter name, of course, suggests a link between Hanuman and the Vedic "bull-monkey," and an additional set of two linked tales that follow in chapter 129 (explaining how this place became so powerful) show that the narrator was familiar with the enigmatic *Ṛgveda* 10.86. The two stories may be summarized as follows:

1. Indra slew his enemy Namuchi, decapitating him with a thunderbolt made of foam (*phena*). The thunderbolt entered the earth and released the subterranean stream of the Ganga from the netherworld, creating the river Phena (*Phenā*). Its confluence with the Godavari is comparable in holiness to that of the Ganga and Yamuna. This is the spot at which Hanuman liberated his stepmother from her curse.
2. A daitya named Hiranya ("golden") had a powerful son, Mahashani ("great Saturn"), who defeated Indra in battle and turned him over to his father, who held him prisoner in the netherworld, Patala (*Pātāla*). Later, Mahashani defeated the Lord of Waters, Varuna, who gave

19. For fuller discussion of the Ahiravana cycle, see the notes on Story 21 in chapter 5, and chapter 7.

him his daughter in marriage. The gods appealed to Vishnu to free Indra from captivity. Vishnu dispatched Varuna to Mahashani, who honored his father-in-law's request that he release Indra. To this humiliation, Mahashani added verbal insult, stating that a captive taken in battle was no better than a woman, and that Indra's *vajra* ("thunderbolt weapon," but also "penis") was clearly powerless.

Returning to heaven in disgrace, Indra complained to his wife Indrani about his humiliation. Telling him that chaste women possess the esoteric knowledge to solve all difficulties, she advised him to go with her to the southern forest of Dandaka and to worship Vishnu and Shiva. Bathing at the confluence of the rivers Phena and Godavari, Indra propitiated Shiva, who appeared to him, but explained that his own strength would not suffice to defeat Mahashani, and advised that Indra worship Vishnu as well. In due course, Vishnu too appeared and granted a boon, and Indra asked that the titan be slain. A manlike being named Vrishakapi, whose form combined that of Vishnu and Shiva, then arose from the waters of the confluence. He went to the netherworld and slew Mahashani. As a result, Indra became so devoted to Vrishakapi that he began to neglect Indrani, who became angry and had to be mollified with a speech in praise of the powers of women and of sacred bathing places.²⁰

These tales about the greatness of local pilgrimage sites hint at Hanuman's emerging mythical character. The first offers a variant birth narrative, supplying him with an ill-omened co-mother and spectral half-brother, born from Nirriti, a power even darker and more ambivalent than Hanuman's own tempestuous father (Bhattacharji 1970:80–92), who here wields power over a class of possessing and disease-causing spirits. It also shows that Hanuman and his brother are able to liberate their mothers from their curses by immersing them at sacred bathing places. The name of one of these seems to remind the storyteller of the Vedic Vrishakapi hymn, for which he offers an inventive (and sanitized) exegesis. This has, on the surface, nothing further to do with Hanuman. However, its offending *daitya* ("Great Saturn") is linked to the ominous planet whose astrological influence Hanuman will, in later mythology and ritual, be understood to counter (see Stories 11, 14, and 40). The demise of this demon, who has humiliated (and in effect castrated) Indra, requires the joint efforts of Shiva and Vishnu, who produce a composite being inexplicably named "bull-monkey." The themes of alliance with and power over dark, subterranean powers, the ability to effect liberation from physical affliction, and the motif of a mighty simian composite who fuses the mythical personae of both Shiva and Vishnu will all prove important to the role of Hanuman in later text and practice, and the motif of Indra imprisoned in the netherworld prefigures the plight of Rama in the Ahiravana story.

20. Both stories occur at *Brahma purāṇa* 129.1–127; see *Brahmapurāṇam* 1976:726–39.

The *Brahma purāṇa* mentions Hanuman again in chapter 157, in the context of its eulogy of the pilgrimage site known as *Kiṣkindhā tīrtha*, “where Lord Shiva constantly resides.” This is, of course, the name of the monkey city in Book 4 of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Here, during Rama’s return to Ayodhya, the monkeys are said to have established earthen Shiva lingams, which Rama later tells Hanuman to destroy, their worship having been completed; when Hanuman is unable to uproot the lingams, Rama orders their permanent veneration (*Brahmapurāṇam* 1976:823–24). A more elaborate variant occurs in the *Skanda purāṇa*, with the location shifted to Rameshwaram and with Hanuman’s role greatly magnified; this popular tale would recur in many vernacular sources (see Story 19 and its notes). In Puranas that show Shakta influence, Hanuman’s association with Devi is emphasized, as in the story found in the Bengal recension of the *Mahābhāgavata purāṇa* in which Hanuman persuades the patron goddess of Lanka to leave the city. A variant in the *Bṛhaddharma purāṇa* links Hanuman with both Shiva and Devi, and features him displaying a cosmic form (*virāṭ rūpa*), whereupon the Devi recognizes him as “the Great Lord Shiva himself.” Hanuman then orders her to depart from Lanka, and she complies (see Story 10.b).

Although the Puranas offer detailed instructions for the ritual worship of many deities, such prescriptions are notably absent with reference to Hanuman. Only the *Nārada purāṇa* offers a mantra for Hanuman’s worship and describes the form of a related ritual diagram (*yantra*) and of an icon. It also states that water sanctified through repeated recitation of the Hanuman mantra may be used to dispel ghosts and to cure such maladies as fever and epilepsy. The same text describes Hanuman as an embodiment of the combined power of Shiva and Vishnu and as a master of vocal music, a role that perhaps derives from his association with the chanted recitation of the Rama-katha (*Rāmā-kathā*) and that is mentioned in several medieval treatises on classical music. In these texts, Hanuman is identified as the founder of a musical lineage, and musicians are advised to propitiate him in order to advance in their art (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:49–50; Govindchandra 1976:79–80, 87; Narula 1991:43–44).

Although scholars acknowledge the impossibility of assigning clear dates to individual Puranas (since these mammoth compendia exist in variant versions and appear to have been assembled by successive generations of scribes), several observations seem warranted from the evidence presented above.²¹ The first is that the majority of Puranas that do not mention Hanuman or that mention him only in the context of retellings of the Rama story, are also those held to contain the highest percentage of “early” (i.e., pre-seventh- or eighth-century) material. Those that give prominence to Hanuman and supplement the conventional narrative with seemingly new material belong to what is regarded as the “later” strata (ninth to fourteenth centuries) of these texts, or to Puranas (such as *Śiva* and *Skanda*) thought to contain especially disparate material spanning many centuries. This supports the view that the popularity

21. I use the time frame for dating the Puranas proposed by Doniger (1975:17–18).

of Hanuman, at least among those who communicated religious teachings through writing, was growing at the end of the first millennium CE. A further observation is that Hanuman often appears in Puranas that are regarded as Shaiva in sectarian orientation, in stories that identify him as an *aṃśa* or avatara of Rudra/Shiva, or that link him with the worship of Shiva and Devi. Such an identification was already suggested through Hanuman's link with Vedic storm gods and with ambivalent but boon-bestowing yakshas. The magnification of Hanuman in the later Puranas may thus represent the theological rationalization, in the elite language of Sanskrit, of older and folk practices.

The veneration of Hanuman by Shaiva ascetics, notably by the peripatetic and influential Nath (*nātha*) yogis, has been asserted by a number of scholars, and may help to explain the proliferation of Shaiva elements in his lore. Hanuman's epic attributes include several that would be of obvious appeal to yogic practitioners: he is physically immortal, is linked to medicinal herbs, and manifests several of the powers or siddhis sought through hatha yoga (such as the ability to fly and to expand or contract one's body); moreover, as I have noted, he came to be widely regarded as a strict celibate (*brahmacārī*). The problem with this theory, however, is that the evidence cited to support it is both slim and modern, and its projection into the past hinges on a broader hypothesis concerning the "Vaishnavization" of once-Shaiva popular religion. Scholars who favor such an argument invariably cite the joint veneration of Hanuman and Bhairava by Nathas as reported by George Weston Briggs in 1938, yet Briggs offered no evidence for the historic pedigree of this practice.²² Although scholars have been quick to conclude that such worship was ancient and pre-Vaishnava, it may in fact represent the influence of other ascetic traditions—most notably, that of Ramanandi sadhus (see the final section of this chapter)—during more recent centuries.

Before I turn to vernacular retellings of the Rama story, one late Sanskrit text deserves special notice: the *Ānanda rāmāyaṇa*, or "Ramayana [full] of bliss." This Purana-like epic in nine subbooks is thought to have been composed in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, possibly in Northeast India or Maharashtra (Aklujkar 2000:86, 370 n. 3). It presents the Rama story in compressed and significantly altered form as its first book, and then takes off into extraneous and fascinating lore. This assimilative text influenced many

22. See Briggs 1938, esp. pp. 12, 17, 88, 102, which provide ethnographic evidence of Hanuman worship that practitioners claimed to be "very old." Charlotte Vaudeville, in the introductory essay to her volume *Kabīr* (1974:113 n. 2), cites Briggs as her sole confirmation of the link between the Nathas and the Ramanandis, which is a key element in her argument that Sant poets' historical ties to Shaiva and yogic traditions were gradually effaced by a "Vaishnavization" process—a theory that she applies elsewhere to the religious history of the Braj region (Vaudeville 1976). Peter van der Veer, asserting that "the cult of Hanuman is common to Nath Yogis as a form of Shiva," again cites Briggs and then Vaudeville (van der Veer 1988:103), as does Hans Bakker, when speculating that Hanuman worship represents "assimilation of what originally might have been a folk cult . . . which was more at home within Śaivism, especially within the Gorakhnāth sect" (1986:2.126). Although I do not dispute that some such process *may* indeed have occurred, I feel that some evidence beyond a single account from the 1930s (itself relying on interviewees who are apt to take an ahistorical view of their tradition) ought to be mustered to support it.

later vernacular Ramayanas and is today often cited by traditional oral narrators (specialists who are known as *Rāmāyaṇī*, *kathāvācak*, or *vyās* in Hindi-speaking areas) as an important and venerated source. It will be referred to frequently in chapter 5 as an early textual source for popular tales.

Regional Ramayanas

Hanuman's bridging of Vaishnava and Shaiva sectarian differences can also be documented through the vernacular Ramayanas that began to be produced from roughly the twelfth century onward, though these texts also reveal a growing preoccupation with another side of his persona: his profound emotional attachment to Rama, which becomes emblematic of the bhakti or devotional sensibility of many authors. In the first of these, Kampan's Tamil *Irāmāvataṅgam*, Hanuman is portrayed as a model devotee and is described as wearing large earrings (*kunḍala*) of the type worn by yogis.²³ Buddharaju's Telugu version includes several important episodes that reappear in later retellings: Hanuman holds Rama's feet in his lap and tenderly massages them during an intimate moment of repose atop Mount Suvela, and he carries the unconscious Lakshmana from the battlefield after Ravana tried and failed to lift the wounded prince (scenes also described by Tulsidas in *Rāmcaritmānas* 6.11.2–8; 6.11a, and 6.54). But Hanuman's warrior side is also much in evidence here; during the fighting in the Ashoka Garden, he slays two battalions of eighty thousand rakshasas each and is identified as an *aṁśa* of Rudra; and his journey to the Himalayas to fetch healing herbs is expanded to include a violent encounter with waylaying villains sent by Ravana, an obviously popular episode that recurs in subsequent retellings (cf. *Rāmcaritmānas* 6.56–57; see Story 20).

In addition to other, Shakta-influenced expansions already noted, Krittibasa's Bengali epic includes colorful stories that probably represent the assimilation of local folk tales; some of these suggest Hanuman's playful, mischievous, and even foolish side.²⁴ Thus when Hanuman finds himself unable to extinguish his flaming tail after burning Lanka, Sita advises him to put it in his mouth; he does so, but then complains that his face has been blackened and that his companions will laugh at him. Rama's wife consoles him with the verdict that henceforth all monkeys will have black faces (Govindchandra 1976:198). Obviously, Krittibasa, like a number of other narrators, took as his model for the epic's monkeys the lithe "Hanuman langur," rather than the red-faced rhesus macaque.²⁵ Vaishnava-Shaiva rivalry

23. *Irāmāvataṅgam* 4.2.35, cited in Govindchandra (1976:183), who notes that such earrings were also common in the iconography of yakshas.

24. The several Krittibasa recensions are discussed by William Smith (1994:30, 37–38), who notes the massive interpolation to which this text was apparently subjected.

25. Govindchandra also records a similar story told by the Santal tribe (1976:371). Some modern popular art likewise depicts Hanuman as a modified langur with characteristic grayish-white fur. Valmiki, on the other hand, usually describes the vanaras' pelts as tawny, red, or golden. On the relationship of various monkey species to Hanuman lore, see chapter 8.

is suggested by an episode that pits Hanuman, as guardian of a magic orchard belonging to Shiva, against the foraging exiles Rama and Lakshmana (W. Smith 1994:128–30; Govindchandra 1976:270; see Story 9.b). Also found here is the beloved tale of Hanuman cracking open with his teeth the gems of a priceless necklace in an effort to see whether they contain the name of Rama, an act of destruction that leads to an emotional epiphany (see Story 25).

Tulsidas's *Rāmcaritmānas* in the Avadhi dialect of Hindi (ca. 1574), which has become the most popular Ramayana in northern and central India, presents a generally more dignified portrait of the monkey hero, stressing his devotion to Rama and making no explicit reference to his Shaiva identity.²⁶ Some scholars have interpreted this as evidence that the Hindi poet sought to downplay Hanuman's folk status as an embodiment of divine power (e.g., omitting his important birth narratives altogether) to stress Vaishnava bhakti and to teach the lesson that "Hanuman's importance lies only in his relationship to Rāma" (Wolcott 1978:654). I will discuss Tulsidas's attitude toward Hanuman more fully in the next chapter, and will only note here that the verses of his *Rāmcaritmānas*, especially its sixty-stanza *Sundar kāṇḍ* that highlights Hanuman's deeds, are widely recited today in the deity's praise, and its author is popularly regarded as the exemplary preceptor of his worship in Hindi-speaking regions. In Banaras, Tulsidas is believed to have established shrines to the monkey god throughout the city, and its most famous Hanuman temple is closely linked to his legend (see chapter 6).

Two other regional works roughly contemporary with Tulsidas's epic deserve mention. The Oriya language *Dāṇḍi rāmāyaṇ* (also called the *Jagmohan rāmāyaṇ*) of Balramdas includes much of the folklore introduced in the Bengali version as well as some apparently new material. It emphasizes Hanuman's role as Rudra-avatara and stresses his celibacy by terming him "one having an adamantine loincloth" (*vajra-kaupīn*; W. Smith 1994:32 and ff.; Govindchandra 1976:229). Eknath's sixteenth-century *Bhāvārtha rāmāyaṇa* in Marathi similarly declares Hanuman to have been born wearing a loincloth. According to Bulcke, it shows the substantial influence of the *Ānanda rāmāyaṇa*, as in a variant birth story in which Anjana becomes pregnant after swallowing some of the divine *payasam* (rice pudding) that emerged from King Dasharatha's sacrificial fire and was snatched by a bird from the hand of one of his queens (Bulcke 1999:533; Govindchandra 1976:230; see Story 2.g).²⁷ Eknath also reports Rama telling Hanuman to be present wherever

26. However, much of the text is presented as a narration by Shiva to Parvati, and several lines are commonly interpreted as showing Shiva's delight at "recalling" his own deeds as Hanuman. Traditional scholars also point out that whereas Shiva is invoked before Rama in the invocatory verses to Books 1 to 3, he is praised after Rama in succeeding books (which contain Hanuman), since it would now be offensive to Hanuman to present him before his master (Jayramdas 1942:295–96). On such interpretations, see Lutgendorf 1991a:48 n. 110.

27. Hanuman's blood (or, anyhow, rice pudding) kinship with Rama is carried still further in many Thai, Laotian, Malay, and Javanese versions in which Hanuman is the monkey-son (conceived by more standard means) of either Rama and Anjana or Rama and Sita (see Govindchandra 1976:239, 242, 249–50, 258).

the Rama story is retold, an injunction that has influenced popular lore concerning the monkey's immortality and immanence (see chapter 6).

A further boom in the output of Hanuman-related literature occurred in North India during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and is reflected in hundreds of surviving manuscripts of hymnals, tantric manuals, and story anthologies. Many of these would be printed in the twentieth century, appearing in a plethora of bazaar chapbooks and tomes with such titles as *Hanumān upāsna* (The propitiation of Hanuman), *Hanumat śatak* (One hundred songs to Hanuman), and *Śrī Hanumān jīvan caritra* (The life story of Lord Hanuman), as well as in proliferating editions of the *Hanumān cālīsā* and of Tulsidas's *Sundar kāṇḍ* (which, like Valmiki's equivalent book, was often printed separately from the rest of the epic for the convenience of reciters). This popular literature will be examined in greater detail in chapter 3 and will form the basis for the stories presented in chapters 4 and 5.

Talking Pictures

The history and range of Hanuman's iconographic representation has been the subject of a number of studies (Aryan and Aryan 1975; *Kalyān* 1975: 422–28; Govindchandra 1976:305–54; V. R. Mani 1992; Nagar 1995:106–56). Since the most detailed of these are available only in Hindi, I will briefly summarize their findings here, although a complete survey of the iconography of Hanuman is beyond the scope of this book.²⁸ The historical study of early images is often frustrated by difficulty in dating them; published estimates of the age of individual murtis sometimes vary by several centuries. That most images, even large ones, lack inscriptions may itself be indicative of nonelite sponsorship. The problem is compounded for murtis that remain in active worship because these are regularly coated with layers of oily sindur that dries to a lacquerlike finish. Over time, this radiant coating, beloved to devotees, obliterates sculptural details and gives many popular Hanumans a lumpy, rounded appearance, with deep-set eyes (since these remain uncoated). However, published surveys suggest that the evolution of Hanuman's visual representation (leaving aside the not implausible theory that he was worshiped from ancient times in aniconic stones and mounds placed at the base of peepul trees, as he still is in some places)²⁹ followed a chronology roughly paralleling that of the textual sources described above. Thus the earliest surviving sculptures of Hanuman, dating from the Gupta period, occur in friezes of Ramayana scenes in which the monkey hero is not singled out for particular attention. These continue to appear in both Shaiva and Vaishnava temples throughout the so-called medieval period, and Chola-period

28. E.g., Govindchandra identifies seven basic types of murtis (1976:311). Some specific temple icons will be noted in chapter 6, and the increasingly popular "five-faced" Hanuman will be treated in chapter 8; see also Lutgendorf 2003a.

29. Thus the Rajasthani vira-stones described in chapter 6; cf. the images in Mookerjee 1987:19, 25, 27.

bronzes from South India include some tableaux of the Ramayana triad (Rama, Sita, Lakshmana) with Hanuman kneeling or standing to one side in a “servile” (*dāsa*) pose, with palms joined and tail hanging between his legs. A single, independent Chola image (in which Hanuman’s right hand touches his lips, as though expressing astonishment) has been attributed to the late ninth century and may also have originally belonged to such a temple tableau (Govindchandra 1976:326).

Although some researchers claim that freestanding murtis intended for worship began appearing as early as the beginning of the eighth century, the oldest to bear an inscription, found in the ruins of a small monastery on the edge of the western group of temples at Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh, bears a date corresponding to 922 CE. Two other large images from Khajuraho may date to roughly the same period, and may indicate the endorsement, by wealthier patrons, of Hanuman’s popular cult, albeit outside the principal temples. All of these images display the characteristically energetic “heroic” (*vīra*) pose with erect tail and one hand raised (either holding a weapon or mountain peak, or poised to deliver a slap) and one foot suppressing a male or female demon—a pose that recurs, with variations, to the present day. In subsequent centuries, such images appear at many locations in North and central India. A giant with upraised arm, crushing a demon pair, was found at Indore in Madhya Pradesh; a ca. tenth-century image from Singhbhumi, Bihar, has both feet trampling a demon, and a goddess standing between his legs (perhaps illustrating the Ahiravana story); a seated twelfth-century image from Goa portrays Hanuman with one arm raised to deliver a blow; a (ca. thirteenth-century?) mustached image from Mallar (Bilaspur district), Madhya Pradesh, shows him crushing a demon pair.

The real iconographic boom, however, begins in about the fifteenth century, and hence roughly coincides with the elaboration of Hanuman’s deeds in later Puranas and regional Ramayanas. It includes the first five-faced (*pañcamukhī*) images, a fierce (*ugra*) manifestation that has ancient roots in both Shaiva and Vaishnava iconography. Some images appear in sectarian settings: Hanuman appears standing with folded hands and limp tail, sometimes in monumental form, as a door guardian in Shrivaiṣṇava temples in the South.³⁰ Of special significance (and to be discussed in the next section) are the hundreds of Hanuman images found at Hampi in Karnataka, dating from the Vijayanagara period (fourteenth to sixteenth centuries), during which Hanuman evidently enjoyed special veneration. These images typically show Hanuman striding or leaping forward, with one hand holding a lotus and the other raised above his head, palm forward, in a gesture that some interpret as the “fear-dispelling” *abhaya-mudrā* and others read as his

30. For example, a 16-foot image appears in a ca. sixteenth-century temple at Suchindram, near Kanyakumari, and another large image is found in the Padmanabham temple in Trivandrum. At about the same period, an image of Hanuman was installed in the shrine to Rama at the Shrivaiṣṇava headquarters, the great temple complex at Shrīrangam (Govindchandra 1976:341).

readiness to deliver a blow; an image in this pose, placed at the doorway of the Kal Bhairav temple in Banaras, is referred to by local people as “slapping Hanuman” (*tamācā Hanumān*). Also distinctive in Vijayanagara murtis is the treatment of Hanuman’s tail, which emerges stiffly from his *laṅḡṭā*-clad hindquarters and then arches gracefully over his head, forming a near-corona around his body; from this sometimes hangs, directly above his head, a small bell. In Maharashtra, a series of seventeenth-century Maruti temples are popularly associated with the career of the renowned Swami Ramdas (see below). Subsequent images appear in forms that have remained more or less constant into the present century: flying or leaping, bearing a club and mountain peak and subduing a demon with one foot; or carrying Rama and Lakshmana on his shoulders while trampling on a demon. In Sita-Rama temples, he usually appears as a worshipful attendant, standing or kneeling close to the divine couple.

Hanuman’s form also appears on the coins of a number of dynasties, beginning with the twelfth-century Kalachuris of Ratnapur (Madhya Pradesh), who favored a flying image, bearing a mountain and mace and slaying demons. The Varman kings of the Chandela dynasty use similar designs, with an image of Hanuman on one side of the coin and the name of the king on the reverse. The Kadamba dynasty of Hangal (eleventh-twelfth centuries) issued gold coins with a flying image of Hanuman, inscribed with the consonant “*ha*” in the four directions. The founders of Vijayanagara, Harihara I (1336–56) and Bukka I (1356–77), who claimed links with the Kadambas, also issued similar coins and displayed Hanuman on their royal standard (*Kalyān* 1975:422–23; Govindchandra 1976:350–53). The heraldic display of Hanuman by kings in this period suggests a new context in which he is invoked to make a political statement. The next section will consider possible interpretations of that statement and of the broad chronology of texts and images that I have outlined above.

A Tale in Three Movements

The preceding section has shown that, beginning from roughly the ninth or tenth centuries, there occurred a steady and at times dramatic proliferation of narratives and images suggesting the growing theological and ritual importance of Rama’s monkey companion. However, it did not attempt to construct an explanatory narrative for these manifestations of Hanuman’s increased prominence. One that has acquired wide currency in twentieth-century scholarship, especially in India, attributes the rise of devotion to Hanuman and indeed to Rama to the response of Hindu society and its martial and priestly elite to the changed political and cultural context created after ca. 1000 CE by the incursions and eventual conquests of Arab, Turkic, and Afghan peoples.

In a much-cited 1993 article, Sheldon Pollock documented the appropriation of the Ramayana narrative in the “political symbology” of northern India beginning in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, a usage of the text that he found to be strikingly absent (together with any evidence for the temple

worship of Rama himself) from the archeological and literary record of the preceding millennium. Pollock examined royal inscriptions such as one dated 1168, in which King Prithviraj II, describing his battles with “the mighty *Hammira* [Turkic or Muslim] warrior,” did not simply compare himself to Rama, but claimed (as no Hindu king had done before him) to *be* Rama incarnate, battling for a threatened dharma. Pollock also studied texts such as the Sanskrit epic *Prithvirājavijaya*, composed shortly before the final defeat of King Prithviraj III by Muhammad Ghuri in 1193, that described Turks and Pathans as the “rakshasas of the kali yuga” (1993:272–77). Through these and other examples, Pollock traced a pattern of the divinization of kings and the demonization of threatening “others” that capitalized on ancient themes in the Rama story and that paralleled, chronologically and geographically, the consecration of temples to Rama on the fringes of Muslim-controlled territory (ibid. 281–84).³¹

Pollock’s findings echo those of others, such as Hans Bakker, who observed in his history of Ayodhya that the expansion of the Rama cult “had to wait until historical circumstances would favor such a development . . . when the Hindus were driven into a defensive position by Muslim power” (1986:1.66). They also appear to accord well with some of the data I have presented on the proliferating cult of Hanuman, especially with his role as demon-slaying protector and fearsome avatara of Rudra/Shiva, whose destructive power, as Pollock has also observed, was commonly linked to the chastening role of the king (1991:64–66). In a study of an early Tamil version of the Ahiravana cycle, Kamil Zvelebil similarly postulated that Hanuman represented “the ideal expression of the valour, skills, and shrewdness of the medieval South Indian warrior class who have to keep up the struggle against a terrible foe—the Muslim invader” (1987:xli). Even the chronology and geographical distribution of regional retellings of the Rama story appear to reflect the eleventh-century Islamic chronicler al-Biruni’s famous boast that “Hindu sciences have retired far away from those parts of the country conquered by us, and have fled to places which our hand cannot yet reach” (*Alberuni’s India* 1971:22). The earliest vernacular Ramayanas, after those in Dravidian languages—for example, Madhava Kandali’s Assamese *Rāmāyaṇa* (ca. 1350), the first major Ramayana in a New Indo-Aryan language; Krittibasa’s Bengali version (ca. 1475), and Balramdas’s Oriya *Dāṇḍī rāmāyaṇa* (ca. 1500)—were composed in far northeastern areas remote from centralized Islamic hegemony or under the control of culturally dissenting Muslim regimes.³² Not until 1574, under the relatively tolerant regime of the Mughal emperor Akbar—whose commissioning of an illuminated Persian translation of Valmiki suggests to Pollock an effort to reduce the alienness of the Mughals in the eyes of their Rajput feudatories (1993:287)—did a storyteller in the Gangetic heartland

31. The epic themes of divinized king versus demonic outsider are examined in greater detail in Pollock’s introduction to his translation of Valmiki’s *Aranyakāṇḍa* (1991:15–54, 68–84).

32. According to William Smith, Krittibasa’s patron may have been the Muslim king Rukannuddin Barbak Shah, who patronized Bengali poetry, in part, to show his independence from the sultans of Delhi (1994:38).

produce a major vernacular retelling (Tulsidas's *Rāmcaritmānas*), and the most visible expansion of the Rama cult in the region occurred only after the disintegration of the Mughal Empire, under the patronage of resurgent Hindu rajas (e.g., of Banaras, Rewa, Tikamgarh) and the Shi'ite nawabs of Awadh (Lutgendorf 1991a:133–37, 259–65; van der Veer 1988:37–40).

Yet the thesis that renewed elite interest in the worldview of the Ramayana was closely linked to Brahmanic Hinduism's fateful collision with its Islamic "other" also raises troubling questions, as Pollock noted in the concluding portion of his article (1993:288–93). How much weight should one give to a relatively small body of inscriptions and texts as indicators of the Hindu *Weltanschauung* of several hundred years? To what extent did the royal rhetoric and ideology of Sanskrit inscriptions and court panegyrics reflect or influence popular perceptions and practices? Did fear and hatred of invaders constitute the primary cause for the rise of devotion to Rama and his simian companion? As Pollock realized, these questions are hardly academic in the communally charged climate of contemporary India. His argument would appeal to present-day Hindu nationalists as a challenge to the view of secularist Indian historians that modern interreligious conflict on the subcontinent was largely a byproduct of the colonial policy of "divide and rule" and that perceptions of Muslim regimes as a threat to "Hindu religion" (or indeed the modern homogenized notion of that religion) hardly existed in precolonial times. Pollock's article appeared a year after a Hindu mob demolished the Babri mosque in Ayodhya, claiming it had been erected on the site of Rama's birthplace and precipitating outbursts of horrific violence in many parts of the country. In this climate, Pollock's thesis seemed to counter the assertion by leftist Indian intellectuals that the "politicization" of the Ramayana was a new development in India's cultural history.

A similar argument about the rise of Hanuman worship, generally deployed with more virulent polemic, has indeed become commonplace in post-Independence India. An extended example of this rhetoric is found in one of the last publications by sociologist G. S. Ghurye, *The Legacy of the Ramayana* (1979), which includes a long chapter on the worship of Hanuman and another on the "Rama Cult and Indian History." Although Ghurye addresses a number of issues that have preoccupied many scholars (e.g., he endorses the theory of an "historical" Hanuman who was not a monkey, but a "monkey-tailed" person; p. 141), and provides much valuable documentation of shrines and folk practices, especially in Maharashtra and the southern Deccan, the main thrust of his argument is that the medieval Hanuman was a "power-packed" and energizing deity intended to arouse a Hindu community oppressed by Muslim tyranny and enervated by pietistic mystical traditions. Though this argument extends some thirty pages, a few excerpted passages will suffice to convey its breathless and belligerent tone. Thus Ghurye repeatedly asserts that the image of "Kodanda Rama" (*kodaṇḍa Rāma*, "Rama with the bow")

... appears to have been evolved by the intelligentsia of the South soon or immediately after they felt the shock and saw their

countrymen and fellowmen and their culture being shattered and mangled by the Muslims, that began to pour into the South in the later years of thirteenth and the very early years of the fourteenth century. . . . The challenge posed by the Muslim invaders and ruling Muslim tyrants called for a political upheaval and it appears, Rama with his long distance military weapon, the bow, and his being an incarnation of Vishnu for the express purpose of disposing of such oppressors and tyrants and religious bigots as Ravana was, the one God Hindu intelligentsia quite naturally and correctly decided upon, for using as the rallying point and source for the regeneration of the fighting spirit of the Hindus. (1979:256–57)

Ghurye cites several historical figures and periods in support of his claims; he embraces the argument of other historians that the Vijayanagara Empire was a bulwark of Hindu culture against an Islamic onslaught and “the first birth of nationalism in Southern India,” and he asserts that the Vaishnava teacher Madhvacharya “sponsored” the Rama cult in Karnataka to further this aim (ibid. 257). Turning to his native Maharashtra, Ghurye argues that the worship of Rama and Hanuman was promoted by Swami Ramdas and his disciple Shivaji as a nation-building tonic for a people “who were simply tired of the Muslim tyranny” and as an antidote to the effete pietism of the Varkari saints, devotees of the God Vithala/Vithoba of Pandharpur, who is often associated with Krishna (ibid. 164, 259). North India, according to Ghurye, did not fare so well, for its elite, hard-pressed by repeated waves of Muslim conquerors “had managed to forget their power-packed gods ready to fight and resist injustice or aggression” (ibid. 167). The best that they could manage in response was the inclusive bhakti of Ramananda (whom Ghurye praises because his spiritual lineage would give rise, some centuries later, to “fighting ascetics”), and the “soft and peaceful” Rama devotion of Tulsidas, which Ghurye condemns as enervating and likens to the “much softer and amorous story of Radha-Krishna” (ibid. 231–32).

Ghurye’s arguments and the examples he cites are echoed in other academic and popular writings about Hanuman, which cite, usually without evidence, “Muslim tyranny” as an explanation for the deity’s rise to prominence, and then invoke a standard series of leaders as exemplars of the “Hindu response”: Madhva and his sixteenth-century successor Vyasara in the Vijayanagara kingdom, Swami Ramdas in Maharashtra, and Ramananda and his followers in the Hindi belt (e.g., Nagar 1995:238–40). In North Indian accounts, Tulsidas generally fares better than he does in Ghurye’s and is presented as a fervent Hindu nationalist, promoting devotion to Rama and Hanuman not only through his poetry but by constructing temples and martial-arts gymnasias in order to energize the downtrodden Hindus of the Gangetic plain (e.g., *Kalyāṇ* 1975:136). Although a thorough examination of these claims would require the efforts of historians skilled in several regional languages (e.g. Marathi, Kannada, Telugu) as well as Sanskrit and Persian, I will venture a brief reconsideration based on English and Hindi sources, to

raise questions concerning what appears to me to be a simplistic explanation distorted by twentieth-century communal hindsight—a “master narrative” that ignores not only the history of more complex interactions between individuals and communities but also the socioeconomic context of historical change.

The fact that Muslim elites, who identified with a cosmopolitan and trans-regional urban civilization founded on a proselytizing religion with powerful truth claims, resisted the assimilation that had brought previous waves of invaders under the umbrella of Brahmanical ideology no doubt signaled a crisis of patronage for some of the custodians of Sanskritic traditions. Yet the percentage of the population most directly affected by such cultural dislocation was relatively small (Pollock concedes that it is, in fact, “difficult to locate fundamental cultural discontinuity caused by these events” and that “Sanskrit cultural production” appears to have continued even in centers of Islamic rule; 1993:286 n. 28). Moreover, the contents of regional Ramayanas reveal a preoccupation with paradigms other than that of divine king versus demonic outsider—most notably, with the characterization of Rama as a transcendent deity who took birth as an exemplar of love and compassion. This theme had already begun to be explored in the Tamil poetry of the Alvars (though the majority of these focused on Vishnu/Krishna), whose lives long predate the arrival of Muslim invaders in India but who seem to have benefited from a protracted Hindu sectarian struggle against the entrenched Jain and Buddhist communities of South India, with which they competed for royal patronage (Dehejia 1988:26–31).³³ The proliferation of vernacular Ramayanas followed an earlier pattern of the spread of emotional Krishna bhakti from south to north (Hardy 1983:3–48), and although the Tamil poet Kampan probably wrote in the late twelfth century, there is no evidence that he had Muslims on his mind when he created his baroque, emotion-saturated retelling of Rama’s deeds; significantly, his rakshasa villains are complex and sympathetic titans and his Ravana is modeled on the ideal of the ancient Draavidian king (Hart and Heifetz 1988:28–29). The evidence I have already presented suggests that the earliest Puranic association of Hanuman with Rudra/Shiva long predates major Muslim invasions, and the expansion of his militant role in the Telugu and Bengali Ramayanas of subsequent centuries can be as clearly situated against a background of Vaishnava-Shaiva/Shakta competition as against one of anti-Muslim rhetoric. The *Rāmcaritmānas*—composed by a Sanskrit-educated pandit in a pilgrim center that had been periodically attacked by Muslim iconoclasts, and a text much quoted in recent years by Hindu nationalists—is characterized by a pietistic outlook in which “Yavanas” (Muslims) are said to be saved by the power of Rama’s name, rakshasa evil is broadly shared among human beings, and the corruption of kings in the kali yuga is equaled only by that of Brahmans (Lutgendorf 1995:261–67). Even

33. Dehejia notes that the seventh-century Shaiva saint Sambandar referred to the Jains as “unclad monkeys,” typically invoking simians to mock despised human “others” (Dehejia 1988:28).

more difficult to situate against a background of Hindu-Muslim animosity is the fervent devotion to the name of Rama characteristic of such Sant poets as Kabir and Ravidas and their many successors, whose formless supreme deity reveals Nath yogic influence while yet retaining resonances of Vaishnava mythology.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will examine three of the periods, personalities, and "movements" that are routinely cited as exemplary of a Hanuman cult conceived in response to an Islamic menace. The career and poetic corpus of Tulsidas, who is also frequently invoked in this argument, will be considered in the next chapter.

Anjaneya in the City of Victory

The rulers of Vijayanagara lived in a complex religious and political environment and contended with rivals both Hindu and Muslim. Although the patron deity of their capital was Virupaksha, a form of Shiva, the Vaishnava deities they favored included Narasimha, Krishna, Rama, and Venkateshvara. That Hanuman enjoyed special popularity in their capital is attested by hundreds of surviving images and shrines, from bas reliefs to freestanding stellae, that establish him (in the words of art historian Anila Verghese) as "the most ubiquitous of all the minor deities in Vijayanagara" (1995:90).

Like other scholars, Verghese points to the influence within the kingdom of the sect known as the *Mādhva sampradāya*, and particularly of its preceptor Vyasaraya, who is said to have been the guru of one of the empire's most powerful rulers. As I have noted, Ghurye cited the historical founder of this sect, Madhva (aka Anandatirtha, ca. 1238–1317)³⁴ as instrumental in the early articulation of a Hindu response to Islamic conquest, and he particularly stressed Madhva's devotion to an image of *digvijaya-Rāma*—"Rama, conqueror of the cardinal directions" (1979:250). Themes of "victory" (*vijaya*) are indeed pervasive in the hagiographic literature created by Madhva's early followers (e.g., his most influential biography is titled *Madhva-vijaya*, "The triumph of Madhva"), but they are invoked in reference to their teacher's triumphs over philosophical and theological rivals: Buddhists, Jains, the Shrivaiṣṇava followers of Ramanuja (ca. 1017–1137), and, especially, Madhva's archenemies, the Advaitin followers of Shankaracharya (ca. 781–820), whose concept of a nondual ultimate reality Madhva staunchly opposed with his own "doctrine of essences" (*tattva-vāda*, most commonly labeled by non-Madhvas as *dvaita* or "dualism"). Madhva asserted that the ultimate reality of the Upanishads, *brahman*, was identical with Vishnu-Narayana, the supreme god of the Bhagavata tradition, and his commentaries gave special emphasis to Mukhya Prana (*mukhya-prāṇa*) or the principal life-breath, which he associ-

34. There is disagreement among scholars over Madhva's dates, some placing his birth as early as 1199; his death date is sometimes given as 1278. For an evaluation of the arguments, see B. N. K. Sharma 1960: 1.102.



FIGURE 2.3. A bas-relief of Hanuman in Vijayanagara style in a rock-cut temple near Badami, Karnataka, 2003

ated with the Vedic wind god Vayu and identified as cosmic medium par excellence, Vishnu's principal helper. According to Madhva, whenever Vishnu incarnates on earth, Mukhya Prana/Vayu accompanies him and aids his work of preserving dharma. Later sectarian writings identify three principal incarnations of Vayu in the current cosmic cycle: Hanuman, the friend and helper of Rama in the *treta yuga*; the strongman Bhima in the *Mahābhārata*, set at the end of the *dvapara yuga* (the Madhvas venerate this Pandava brother, rather than Arjuna, as Krishna's most intimate associate); and Madhva in the *kali yuga*. Moreover, since the Lord himself does not appear on earth until the end of the *kali* age, the incarnate Vayu/Madhva serves during this period as the sole "means" (a sectarian gloss on the name *madhva*) to bring souls to salvation.

The importance of Hanuman in this theology is evident and may reflect older folk practices in the Tulu region of Karnataka, where Madhva lived, but

it is also possible to read the elevation of Vayu as a theological response to the Shrivaiśnavas' emphasis on Lakshmi and Garuda as compassionate intercessors with the Lord. The leaders of both sects were high-status Brahmans, and the claims of competing groups of Vaiśnava Brahmans for aristocratic patronage hinged both on authoritative commentaries on Vedic scriptures (here the Madhvas distinguished themselves with their scholasticism) and on offering potential worshipers the most effective access to the remote, transcendent Lord. Since the Shrivaiśnava preceptor Ramanuja was revered as an incarnation of Garuda, the Madhvas claimed their founder to be an equally (or more) efficacious intercessor. However, the early history of the sect, prior to the Vijayanagara period, shows little cultic emphasis on Hanuman. Although Madhva's disciple Narahari Tirtha is said to have obtained, from the king of Orissa, powerful images of Rama and Sita that were given by Hanuman to Bhima at the time of their encounter in the Himalayas, Madhva's own devotion was primarily to a childlike image of Krishna, which he established in the principal temple of the formerly Shaiva center of Udipi. The later literature of the sect similarly stresses Krishna, the *Mahābhārata*, and the *Bhāgavata purāṇa*, rather than the Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇa* (which, conversely, was especially favored by Shrivaiśnava commentators).³⁵

It is worth noting, in light of Ghurye's assertions, the single reference to Muslims in Madhva's early biography. "Demonization" is indeed practiced by the guru's biographer, Narayana Panditacarya (ca. 1300)—but against Advaitins, not Muslims, for in the prelude to the biography, Shankaracharya is said to have been the reincarnation of the evil yaksha Manimat, slain by Bhima in the *Mahābhārata*. His kali yuga followers are described as running amok, burning monasteries, destroying cattle pens, and using magic to kill women and children; they hypnotize Vaiśnava theologians into mindlessly parroting their erroneous "doctrine of illusion" (*māyā-vāda*; Grierson 1908–26:8.232–33). Madhva is born to put a stop to this, and in the course of his lifework he makes two journeys to the Himalayas, where he receives instruction from the immortal sage Vyasa, the archetypal expounder of post-Vedic lore. On the second of these trips (which a modern commentator places in the period 1260–71), Madhva must cross the Ganga and enter Muslim territory, whereupon he is arrested and brought before the "King of Delhi." Here the modern reader might expect a scene of confrontation, but instead, the Muslim king is praised by the author as a man of learning who rules the

35. B. N. K. Sharma's two-volume study, *A History of the Dvaita School of Vedānta and Its Literature* (1960) contains few references to Hanuman and little indication that he was of importance to the Madhva elite. However, Hanuman may have played a greater role in popular Madhva practice (which, for premodern times, is little documented). Today, Madhva Web sites (such as *dvaita.org*) prominently display his image and stress the doctrine of the three avatars of Mukhya Prana, and his worship at Udipi centers on an image said to have been brought from Ayodhya by Vadiraja Tirtha (ca. 1480–1600). It is customary to have darshan of this murti before approaching that of Krishna in the main temple. (I am grateful to Deepak Sarma for this information; see also Sarma 2004:120.)

country “with mercy and kindness,” and when Madhva addresses him “in elegant Persian,” the king is delighted, heaps him with honors, and enables his onward journey (Padmanabhachar 1909:83–84). In this passage as elsewhere, the text highlights Madhva’s extraordinary verbal skills, which recall those of Hanuman in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and of Vayu in the Puranas, and are explicitly identified with Mukhya Prana, who is also the cosmic medium of sound. Madhva’s identity with Vayu/Hanuman/Bhima is further suggested by other details of his legend: his childhood love of the forest; his immense strength, which is sometimes deployed in slaying demons; his colossal leap (when summoned by his mother for dinner) from a nearby hill to his village home; and, especially, by his ability, throughout his life, to consume staggering quantities of food (ibid. 35, 42, 59).³⁶

Sectarian accounts claim that Madhva himself visited Vijayanagara and that subsequent teachers in his lineage wielded great influence over its rulers, culminating in the elevation of the Madhva guru Vyasarayya (aka Vyasatirtha, 1478–1539) as royal preceptor to the empire’s most celebrated monarch, Krishnadevaraya (1509–29). However, other evidence supports a more limited view of Madhva influence at court, and recent research on the “city of victory” questions not only such claims, but also the twentieth-century narrative of Vijayanagara history composed by such scholars as S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar, B. A. Saletore, and Nilakanta Sastri, who viewed “Hindu-Muslim conflict as being the cause and principal shaper of the Vijayanagara kingdom,” and who characterized the city and empire as “the last glorious chapter of the independent Hindu India of the South” (Stein 1989:4, 9). Verghese’s detailed study, based primarily on archeological and epigraphic sources, shows that the capital city was religiously eclectic, and that its three ruling dynasties were liberal in their support of gurus, monasteries, and temples. The oldest shrines in the city celebrate the local goddess Pampa Devi and her consort Virupaksha (*virūpākṣa*, “squint-eyed”) a manifestation of Shiva. The former was also associated, from at least the eleventh century, with the Pampa Lake of the Ramayana, where Rama and Lakshmana, searching for Sita, were entertained by an “untouchable” ascetic woman named Shabari and then were directed by her to the nearby refuge of the monkey king Sugriva (on the Shabari episode, see Lutgendorf 2000b). Thus, even before the founding of the Sangama dynasty in ca. 1340, the site of its future capital was equated with the monkey city of Kishkindha, and local landmarks had acquired Ramayana associations—for example, a cave in which Sugriva reputedly hid the jewels

36. After describing how Madhva followed up a large meal by consuming two hundred plantains offered by his host (on Hanuman’s reputed fondness for this fruit, see chapter 6), a modern biographer notes understatedly, “The Master . . . possessed a digestion of unusual vitality” (Padmanabhachar 1909:59). Note also a later meal in Goa in which Madhva consumed 4,000 bananas and thirty pots of milk (ibid. 91). Such accomplishments, indicative of a robust “digestive fire” (*jaṭharāgni*), are highly admired in Indian folklore and are associated with “wolf-belly” Bhima, his half-brother Hanuman, wrestlers, yogis, and hot-tempered (and ever-hungry) Brahmans.

that Sita dropped from the sky when she was being abducted by Ravana; and a site identified as the royal “honey orchard” that Hanuman’s cohorts looted in their joy at having located Sita (Verghese 1995:45–46). Despite these associations, the patronage of the early rulers seems to have been primarily directed toward Shaiva institutions, especially the great temple to Virupaksha on the bank of the Tungabhadra River, and Verghese argues that the preceptors of the first kings were tantric yogis belonging to the Kalamukha sect, although the rulers also displayed reverence (and made land grants and other gifts) to Advaitin teachers based in the monastery of Shringeri, as well as to iconoclastic Virashaivas (“heroic” or “extreme” devotees of the formless Shiva).

Although the Vijayanagara rulers were broad-minded in their religious endowments—a policy that also extended to patronizing the composition of inclusive texts such as the *Sarvadarśanasamgraha*, summarizing the tenets of all major schools of philosophy³⁷—there is evidence of a gradual shift in preference from Shaiva to Vaishnava institutions. A landmark in this process was the Ramachandra temple, probably constructed during the reign of Devaraya I (1406–22), an edifice that literally inscribes the narrative of the Ramayana into the heart of the urban “royal center.” Its careful placement at the intersection of axes running to the cardinal directions through other epic-connected landmarks (one of which is Anjanadri Hill, Hanuman’s reputed birthplace; cf. Malville 1994) suggests its special significance for the regime and, indeed, a grand ideological design conflating the reigning monarch with the epic god-king. Such a move may appear to fit Pollock’s thesis regarding the political deployment of the Rama narrative by other Hindu kings several centuries earlier. Yet subsequent royal patronage, particularly during the increasingly militarized sixteenth century, came to center on Krishna, especially in his child form and as Vithala, whose primary abode is in the temple town of Pandharpur in current-day Maharashtra (and whose cult, like that of Krishna in general, Ghurye scorned as “soft”). A temple to Bala-krishna, the child-god, was consecrated in 1515 by Krishnadevaraya, who gave it the most lavish endowment of any institution in the realm; its central murti, incidentally, was a piece of booty captured from the Gajapati ruler of Udayagiri (modern Orissa), and the temple was built to celebrate that victory over a powerful (Hindu) neighbor. Krishnadevaraya and his successors in the Tuluva dynasty made it the special focus of their largesse, to the point of abandoning, during the rule of Sadashivaraya (ca. 1542–65), the dynastic tradition of making complementary endowments to Shaiva shrines such as the Virupaksha temple. Later Shaiva texts would blame the sack of the city by Muslim-led forces, following a disastrous defeat in 1565, on this insult to the ancient tutelary deity of the site. Indeed, Verghese suggests that the desecration of Vaishnava temples that ensued (which mysteriously spared major

37. Pollock has suggested that the writing of such compendia was itself reflective of an increasing self-awareness of a “Hindu” identity, produced as a result of contact with an Islamic “other” (1993:286).

Shaiva sites) may have been abetted or even carried out by disgruntled Shaivas (1995:137–38).

Despite Madhva claims of Vyasaraya's influence on the greatest Tuluva kings, Verghese convincingly shows that these rulers were equally devoted to the Madhvas' chief rivals, the Shrivaiśnavas. Krishnadevaraya made seven pilgrimages to their temple at Tirupati and placed Shrivaiśnava priests in charge of all the major Vaiśnava shrines in the capital (*ibid.* 58, 65, 71). The claims that the Tuluva kings were formal converts to Madhva dharma is found in the biography *Vyāsayogīcaritām* by Somanatha (ca. 1480–1540), a disciple of Vyasaraya. The same text states that the Madhva guru was responsible for the installation of 732 images of Anjaneya (Hanuman's usual epithet in the southern Deccan) in the kingdom—the first example of what will come to be a common claim regarding Vaiśnava preceptors. Indeed, the ruins of Vijayanagara today contain a very large number of such images, and although most of them are undated, archeological evidence suggests that few if any predate the founding of the empire, since, in Verghese's words, "Hanuman worship is a post-thirteenth century phenomenon in Karnataka" (*ibid.* 90). A number of the images (e.g., a bas-relief at Madhuvana that dates to the early fifteenth century) are large; this is not especially noteworthy, however, because Vijayanagara art favored monumentality, and the capital contains even larger images of other popular deities.³⁸ In contrast, most of the hundreds of Anjaneyas, carved in bas-relief on boulders or on simple stone slabs and found "all over the city . . . in the most unexpected and even remote places," are of modest size (*ibid.* 91–92). The fact that most bear no dedicatory inscriptions also weighs against the claim that Vyasaraya was instrumental in establishing them, for it is hard to believe that this venerable pandit would not have caused at least some of them to bear a record of his name, as was the case, for example, with the Narasimha image he installed in the courtyard of the Vithala temple in 1532 (*ibid.* 37). Vyasaraya may have been personally responsible for two images of Anjaneya, however, both of which are mentioned in the *Vyāsayogīcaritām*: the *yantrōddhāraka* image ("bearing a yantra" or sacred diagram), and a four-armed (*caturbhūja*) image placed near the cenotaph of a sectarian leader. Both of these are unique images for the site and bear esoteric significance for members of the Madhva sect. The former depicts Hanuman seated in meditation inside two intersecting triangles, his knees braced with a cloth band such as is sometimes used by yogis to help support themselves; such a band is a normal feature of images of *yoga-Narasimha* (a meditating image of the man-lion avatara of Vishnu, also popular among Madhvas). The latter image shows Hanuman holding a mace and a manuscript in two of his hands, alluding to Bhima and Madhva, respectively, and thus presenting "a composite image representing all the three incarnations of Vayu" (*ibid.* 92).

38. For example, there is a 12-foot Virabhadra (an awesome emanation of Shiva) at the Mudu Viranna temple, a 15-foot monolithic Ganesha on the southern slope of Hemakuta Hill, and the famous 22-foot Narasimha consecrated by Krishnadevaraya in 1528, just north of his great Balakrishna temple (Verghese 1995:24–25, 37, 46).

The majority of Anjaneya murtis, however, depict him in the heroic posture described earlier: in midstride, with upraised right hand and tail curving in an arc that encloses his figure.³⁹ Many are roughly carved and may have been coated with oil or sindur; their donors are nearly always anonymous. All these facts reflect, in Verghese's estimation, a cult for which "the greater support came from the populace rather than from the court." Only a few of these Anjaneyas appear to have been housed in small temples, and those that remain in worship today typically have non-Brahman pujaris (ibid. 91).

In light of this evidence, the textual claims associating huge numbers of Hanuman icons with Vyasaraaya appear to represent an exaggeration by Madhvas attempting to credit a widespread and popular religious movement to the influence of a sectarian leader. Although the attitudes of historic Madhva preceptors toward popular religion are not well documented, the Brahmins of this sect have subsequently become notorious for their hyperfastidious adherence to purity and pollution taboos, resulting in carefully maintained aloofness from other strata of society.⁴⁰ That Vyasaraaya was socially more liberal than his predecessors in the lineage is suggested by his reputed patronage of Kannada-language devotional poets of the Haridasa tradition (*Haridāsa*, "servants of Lord Hari/Vishnu"). He is said to have both enjoyed and composed such vernacular poetry, but again, the sectarian account seeks to credit him with having "founded" this widespread popular movement, centered (like the royal cult of the sixteenth century) on Lord Vithala of Pandharpur. Thus the *Vyāsayogīcaritam* asserts that Vyasaraaya "convened" two assemblies or societies (*kūṭa*): one of scholarly Brahmins (*vyāsa-kūṭa*), the other of humble devotees-singers (*dāsa-kūṭa*). Though the guru's broad-mindedness is applauded in the text, one may also note the characteristic Brahmanic drawing of boundaries between an intellectual-spiritual elite and simpler and baser folk, and between Sanskrit and vernacular artistic expression (*mārga* and *deśī*).⁴¹

If Madhva theology and patronage provide only a partial explanation for the apparent efflorescence of popular devotion to Hanuman during the

39. As previously noted, the tail is sometimes adorned with a pendant bell, which Madhvas say represents Mukhya Prana, who controls the etheric flow of sound. Similarly, bells used in Madhva temples often bear Anjaneya's image. (I am grateful to Madhva scholar S. K. Ramachandra Rao for this information, conveyed during an interview with him in Bangalore in January 1990.)

40. The Madhva apologist Padmanabachar, writing in 1909, notes, "Madhvas, and more especially their women-folk, are known to go to ridiculous lengths in their touch-me-not exclusiveness. . . . If one thing more than another characterizes the members of this sect, it is their elaborate rules and practices to be immune from contamination of touch" (78, 116). Such attitudes were bitingly satirized in the 1965 Kannada novel *Samskara* by U. R. Ananthamurthy.

41. I have already noted the dearth of sources on Madhva popular practice, which might shed more light on Hanuman's importance to average sectarian initiates. In the novel *Samskara*, the eminent Madhva scholar Pranesacharya seeks the solution to a dilemma regarding potential pollution by poring through voluminous Sanskrit manuscripts of sectarian doctrine. When he is unable to find a textual answer, he crosses the river to worship in a humble Maruti temple in the forest (depicted in the 1970 film version directed by Pattabhirama Reddy as a tiny cell containing a rough-hewn, oil-covered image in Vijayanagara style). Here, abandoning his scholasticism, the desperate Pranesacharya resorts to elementary folk divination: asking the god to signal a decision by causing an offered flower to fall either to the right or to the left. In Ananthamurthy's alienated modern fable, Maruti remains stubbornly noncommittal (Ananthamurthy 1978:53-54, 62-64).

Vijayanagara period, then it is worth considering what other factors might have contributed to this phenomenon. Recent research by Burton Stein and others on the history of the empire and its successor kingdoms has given greater attention to the economic bases of these polities and has challenged the prevailing historical narrative of Hindu-Muslim tension as the kingdom's *raison d'être*. Stein views Vijayanagara as a "transition state" between the "segmented" kingdoms of earlier times and the more centralized and bureaucratized regimes of the modern period. One unplanned effect of the massive concentration of wealth and population in the imperial core, he argues, was the increasing urbanization of southern India, spurred on as much by the construction of massive temple complexes and fortifications as by the "increased exploitation of lower orders of the society by both local and central authorities" (1989:106). Paradoxically, such centralization and exploitation also led to the expression of new voices; on the religious level, to the proliferation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of localized "scriptures" ("place narratives" of the *māhātmya* and *sthalapurāṇa* genres) as "new shrines 'explained' themselves and their status in new texts" (*ibid.* 105), as well as to an outpouring of vernacular lyric poetry such as that of the socially low Haridasas. Further, within the "new towns" of the period, Stein points to a "redefinition of 'lower orders'" relative to the South Indian caste hierarchy, as artisans and cultivators of the (traditionally lower ranked) "left" castes began to demand the same privileges as those of higher status "right" occupational subdivisions (*ibid.* 107–8).

Stein's observations, taken together with the material evidence assembled by Verghese, suggest a pattern that will be repeated in succeeding centuries: a gradual shift in population from rural to urban areas, accompanied by new opportunities leading to realignments in the social and economic hierarchy. As people move, their gods move with them, and so a rustic deity associated (perhaps for centuries, as Bulcke and Govindchandra have argued) with material blessings, accessible power, and a beloved epic narrative, and typically worshiped on the borders of settlements, begins to acquire a foothold in newly urbanized areas. His images are no longer found only at the city gates; they appear in small shrines that spring up in every quarter. Such shrines, unattested for the most part in textual or epigraphic records and tended primarily by non-Brahman officiants, represent the self-expression of new patrons who are drawn to this deity by (among other things) themes in his mythology that are congruent with their own circumstances and goals.

Ramdās and Maruti

In Maharashtra, where Hanuman is usually called Maruti, it is often said that every settlement must contain, at the minimum, one shrine to him and one to a local goddess and/or to Shiva (a pairing that points to a special relationship that bypasses the classical Rama narrative and that I explore more fully in chapter 7). The standard explanation for Maruti's ubiquity, at least in modern writings, is the influence of Swami Ramdas ("Rama's slave," also known as

samartha, “powerful, efficacious”; 1608–81). There are striking similarities between the traditional biographies of Vyasaraya and of Ramdas. Both are said to have been royal preceptors and intimate advisors (*rāja-guru*) to powerful kings who are, nowadays, held to have been exemplars of an aggressive Hindu dharma. Both are supposed to have established an enormous number of religious institutions in which devotion to Hanuman was prominent; hagiographies credit Ramdas with the establishment of 1,100 “monasteries” (*matha*) under directly appointed disciples, as well as with a chain of famous Maruti temples—11 in the standard account, but a staggering 1,200 in others (e.g., Majumdar 1950:18). Both are said to have combined a defense of orthodox Brahmanical prerogatives with a championing of the devotion of humbler bhaktas. These parallels lead me to wonder whether they may reflect not so much historical events as an emerging ideal-typical pattern in Vaishnava hagiographies.⁴²

That Ramdas was the guiding genius to his contemporary, King Shivaji (1630–80), founder of the Maratha state, is part of the master narrative of Indian nationalism, championed by leaders of the Independence struggle and by generations of Maharashtrian writers. It is now firmly lodged in Indian school textbooks and especially in the worldview of contemporary Hindu nationalists; questioning it can, under certain circumstances, provoke riots. Like the South Indian historians of Vijayanagara, Maharashtrian scholars have constructed a narrative in which Ramdas’s religious activities, a century after those of Vyasaraya, are seen as intimately linked with the Marathas’ continuation of (what S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar called) “this great national war of the Hindus” (cited in Stein 1989:5). A good example of the standard narrative is *Rajguru Ramdas* (1979) by V. P. Bokil, who observes that the “spiritual luster” of Ramdas and the “martial fire” of Shivaji “were to combine in a thunderbolt to smash down the Muslim domination” (1979:13). Stewart Gordon’s more recent research challenges the date of 1649 conventionally assigned to the first meeting of Ramdas with the king and places this event in 1672, and he also questions the extent of the former’s influence over the latter, pointing out that Shivaji displayed courteous interest in a wide range of religious teachers, including Sufis (1993:66). Moreover, Gordon observes that (as was the case with the earlier Madhva biographers of Vyasaraya), it was in the interest of Ramdasi sectarian leaders, who assumed control of the many institutions associated with their guru’s name after his death, to depict him as the king’s preceptor.⁴³

The biographical literature on Ramdas is voluminous and mainly in Marathi (for a survey, see Bokil 1979:15–18; Tulpule 1979:394, 431). A full

42. Gordon has pointed out, in discussing Ramdas’s alleged relationship to Shivaji, that it recapitulates patterns of state formation in medieval Tamil Nadu that required an aspiring king to acquire a Brahman spiritual preceptor (Gordon 1993:81).

43. As early as 1928, Wilbur Deming in his study *Ramdas and the Ramdasis* observed that “the present effort on the part of certain writers to magnify [Ramdas’s] political contribution is not supported by the evidence” (128). For a more recent assessment of the possible relationship of Shivaji with Ramdas and other saints, see Laine and Bahulkar 2001:27–32.

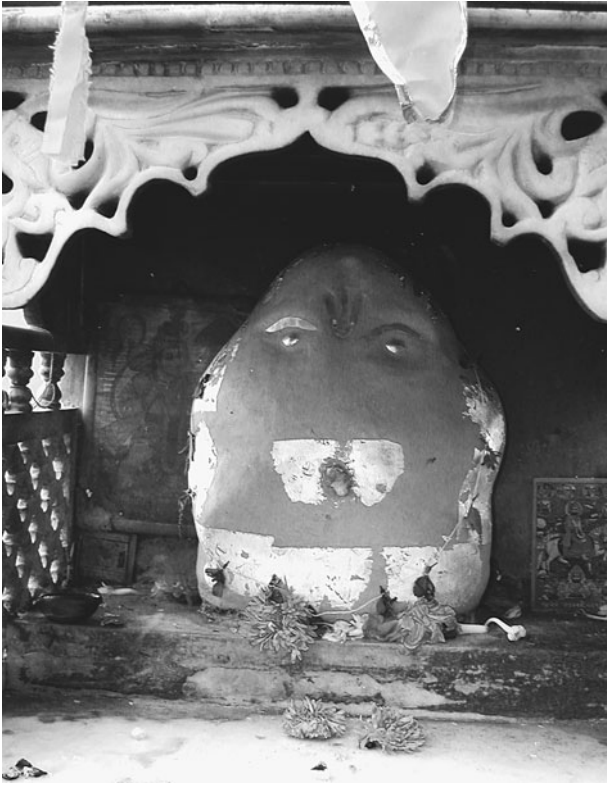


FIGURE 2.4. The Maruti of the wholesale vegetable market, Ahmadnagar, Maharashtra, 2005

consideration of it, with special reference to Ramdas's role in promoting the worship of Maruti, must await the research of scholars familiar with that language. Here I will consider a single influential biography available in English translation: the ca. 1790 *Santavijaya* ("triumph of the saint"), the last work of the energetic hagiographer Mahipati (1715–90). Consisting of twenty-five chapters of mixed prose and verse, it comprises, in Justin Abbott's 1932 translation, nearly four hundred pages.⁴⁴ I am under no illusion that this work, composed more than a century after Ramdas's death, presents the "historical" Ramdas; as literary historian S. G. Tulpule has observed of Mahipati,

44. Abbott was an American Christian missionary in Maharashtra who became captivated by Mahipati's writings and eventually issued them as an eleven-volume series, *The Poet-Saints of Mahārāṣṭra* (1926–35). Despite his vocation, his prefaces to these volumes indicate his broad mindedness and frequent sympathy with Mahipati's Varkari devotional spirit; one modern Marathi writer has even called him "the American incarnation of Mahipati" (cited in Tulpule 1979:432 n. 657). His translation of the *Santavijaya* carefully preserves many Marathi technical terms and avoids Christian glosses (a common problem with missionary translations); however, it omits most of the lyric *abhangā* verses into which Ramdas and his disciples frequently break.

“it is not for history that one reads his biographies. . . . Mahipati is read to know the pulse of his time, to breathe in through him the religious atmosphere that prevailed then” (1979:431). Yet Tulpule also praises Mahipati’s “industry and diligence” and pronounces his writings “fairly trustworthy” and the source of “an amazing amount of valuable information” (ibid. 430–32). I am interested in Mahipati’s portrait of Ramdas based on materials current in the mid- to late eighteenth century, a period when Maratha power was at its zenith. Given this time frame and the work’s title, one might expect the *Santavijaya* to present a triumphalist vision of the conventional Ramdas of Marathi historiography, such as Tulpule himself largely projects in his brief portrait of a “spiritual activist” bent on “the emancipation of the Hindus from the slavery of the Muslim rulers” (ibid. 395–96). Yet this is not, in my reading, the Ramdas who emerges from Mahipati’s account. The hagiographer unquestionably believed that Ramdas was Shivaji’s guru, and substantial portions of the *Santavijaya* focus on their relationship; yet this is not one of savvy realpolitik and communal strategizing, but of fervent love born out of Shivaji’s recognition of Ramdas as the living incarnation of Rama’s greatest devotee. Mahipati’s Ramdas is a reclusive ecstatic who spends much of his life trying to escape from Shivaji (who repeatedly attempts to offer him his kingdom and to seek initiation as a renunciant) and even from his own closest followers, retreating into the hills and forests, where (true to the nature of his favorite deity) he delights in climbing trees to meditate in their branches.

The long biography contains eight brief references to Muslims; of these, one is to Sheikh Muhammad of Chambharagonde, whom Ramdas meets on a pilgrimage to Pandharpur, and who is described as “a great bhakta, a man of bhakti, knowledge, and indifference to worldly things, who expressed his thoughts in poetry” (Mahipati 1932:142).⁴⁵ A second is to the Muslim servants of Shivaji, who join in the ecstatic dancing during one of Ramdas’s *kīrtana* or song-sermons (ibid. 364). Two more are brief allusions to the stringencies of Muslim rule; for example, Mahipati notes that in the kali yuga, “corrupt Muhammadan kings are ruling, and continually troubling their subjects,” but this is accompanied by a litany of other kali-age woes, such as corrupt Brahmans and ineffective mantras (ibid. 185). Two more allude to Aurangzeb’s campaigns in the Deccan, and these highlight both his aggression and his broad minded piety, noting that, although he “brought distress on cows and Brahmans . . . whenever he saw any miraculous deed, he was ready to bow in reverence” (ibid. 161). Thus, when Aurangzeb’s army attacks Sajjargarh fort where Ramdas is residing, Maruti sends an army of monkeys to protect it; Aurangzeb, impressed by the power of “the Hindu *fakīr*,” orders the Mughal

45. This is the Marathi poet cited by Tulpule as Sheikh Mahammad of Śrīgonde (1560–1650), whose writings epitomize a “fusion of the Sūfi and Bhakti cults,” and “who is traditionally taken to be an avatāra of Kabīr” (Tulpule 1979:377).

army to retreat (ibid. 374–75).⁴⁶ Finally, there occur two confrontations between Ramdas and Muslim officials who are harassing devotees; each ends with the saint lecturing the erring official on the spiritual brotherhood of Hindus and Muslims and composing lyric devotional poems “in the Musalmani language” (presumably Persian or Deccani Urdu), which are admired by his listener (ibid. 161–63, 297–301).⁴⁷

According to Mahipati, Ramdas had more prolonged problems with Brahmins; five lengthy passages depict their arrogance, their jealousy of the saint’s influence at court, and their strident opposition to Ramdas’s unorthodox behavior based on what they call “his own private opinions.” They especially object to his initiation of women, placing them in charge of monasteries, and permitting them to give spiritual discourses; and his insistence on using the Marathi language rather than Sanskrit (ibid. 210–17, 320–22).⁴⁸ Moreover, Ramdas’s first initiated disciple is a barber, and when he permits a Brahmin to become the latter’s pupil, he again arouses the ire of pandits, who (like Aurangzeb) are calmed only by the miraculous appearance of Maruti, this time on Ramdas’s shoulder (ibid. 78, 340–43). When the pandits try to humiliate Ramdas by attacking his writings, he has an outcaste (*mahār*) woodcutter lecture them to remove their ignorance (ibid. 322). And when Shivaji first asks Ramdas his caste, the latter laughs and says that he belongs to “the monkey class,” like the companions of Rama, who had no concern for worldly status (ibid. 92).

Ramdas’s intimate association with Maruti is a pervasive theme of the *Santavijaya* and must have loomed large for the eighteenth-century listeners to whom Mahipati preached the oral discourses on which his hagiographies are thought to have been based (Tulpule 1979:430). “Association” is a misnomer, however, because Mahipati’s Ramdas is Maruti incarnate—hence one of a number of charismatic individuals who have been hailed as avatars of Hanuman (see chapter 6 for fuller treatment of Ramdas in this context). According to Mahipati, Maruti comes to Ramdas three times a day for twelve years, coaching him in the difficult sadhana of repetition of a thirteen-syllable mantra 35 million times, a practice that ultimately wins him a vision of Rama (Mahipati 1932:28–30, 43). The rarity of such experiences suggests Rama’s

46. This is an apparent multiform of an older tale in which Hanuman sends an army of monkeys to attack the palace of the “king of Delhi” when the latter has unjustly imprisoned Tulsidas for refusing to perform a miracle. It appears in Priyadas’s ca. 1712 commentary on the Vaishnava hagiographic classic *Bhaktamāl* (see Growse 1983:xlvi for a translation of this story).

47. In the second example, Ramdas uses force, taking the form of Maruti and slapping with his tail a Muslim “police captain” who is attempting to forcibly convert one of the guru’s disciples; the captain faints in terror, and when he revives, apologizes for his behavior (Mahipati 1932:300).

48. According to Tulpule, the most accomplished author among Ramdas’s intimate disciples was Venabai (1628–1700), a widow whom he initiated against the wishes of her family and placed in charge of his *maṭha* at Miraj. She later wrote a *Sitāsvayamvara* (an account of Sita’s marriage) that shows “the tenderness of a woman’s heart,” particularly in its heartrending account of Sita’s departure from her natal family (Tulpule 1979:401).

status as supreme God (there is little mention of his earthly rule as a dharmic king); by contrast, Maruti appears on almost every page of the biography, sometimes as a common, playful monkey, and sometimes as a blinding vision, occasionally vouchsafed to the guru's intimate disciples, as in Venabai's dazed account: "I saw a man as if made of light. His robe was as if of gold. At his back I saw a tail. . . . I fell on the ground in a faint" (ibid. 199). He also appears in the images made or ordered by Ramdas. Mahipati details the saint's installation of twelve images "with his own hand," some of which are also of his own design. These include an image in the reverential *dāsa* pose as well as a potent Maruti described as "a terrible and hideous image in the heroic posture" (ibid. 238). Mahipati also mentions tiny golden amulets of Maruti that Ramdas designs and gives to his disciples, including Shivaji, to fasten to their upper arms for protection; for as the poet explains, "Maruti is the son of the Lord of Life" (ibid. 241). Ramdas's reputed skill at drawing his patron god, as well as the tradition that he would never eat without first offering food to him, has led to many local foundation legends in which the wandering Ramdas, lacking an installed murti, draws Maruti with charcoal on a wall, then covers him with a curtain while he partakes of ritually offered food (*bhoga*); when the curtain is withdrawn, the ephemeral image is found to have become a permanent and "awakened" bas-relief.

In summary, Mahipati's Ramdas is neither a hater of Muslims nor a lover of Brahmans, but he is an ecstatic devotee—and embodiment—of Hanuman, who is shown to appeal to all strata of Maharashtrian society, from woodcutters to kings to Qazis. Yet Ramdas's religious liberalism is accompanied by a one-pointed devotion to Maruti and his master that elevates them above all other deities. Thus at Pandharpur, his devotion causes Vithala/Krishna to appear to him bearing a bow and arrow (a transformation found in an older story concerning Tulsidas in Vrindaban; see Growse 1983:xlvii), and he discourages the people of Kolhapur from worshipping their local goddess, calling her "a shadow" of Rama (Mahipati 1932:195). With Shiva's approval, he drives away from a cremation ground the spirits who demand blood sacrifices and installs an image of Rama in their place (ibid. 280–82).

Mahipati was not a member of the sect that traced its origin to Ramdas, and by the time he wrote his biography, this "Ramdasi" order, having produced no leaders of the literary or spiritual caliber of Ramdas, was already in decline; the next century would see its influence greatly reduced and many of its centers neglected (Deming 1928:165–66). Because the *Santavijaya* stands outside this sectarian tradition, however, it perhaps offers a better indication of the lasting impact of Ramdas on the people of Maharashtra. By Mahipati's time, this legacy consisted partly of Ramdas's writings. Although Ramdas composed two versions of the Ramayana, these never attained popularity.⁴⁹

49. These retellings, one long and one short, are both confined to the events of the *Kiṣkindhā*, *Sundara*, and *Yuddha kāṇḍas*, the three Valmikian subbooks in which Hanuman plays the greatest role; see Tulpule 1979:395.

But Mahipati praises the *Dāsabodha* (a wide-ranging collection of teachings compiled over more than twenty years, which combine Advaitin and Vaishnava themes in the tradition of the twelfth-century poet-saint Jnaneshvara), and also a series of praise-poems (*stuti*) to Maruti, several of which continue to be recited today. And of course, there was Maruti himself, a god who had probably been present in the region as a village guardian but had received little notice in the writings of earlier poet-saints.

Mahipati's life of Ramdas leaves the impression of an extraordinary individual who played an important role in the proliferating worship of Hanuman in the Deccan, but it challenges the conventional view that he promoted Hindu militancy and Brahmanical authority. A fuller reexamination of the modern master narrative should also consider the social forces at work in Ramdas's time and during the century that followed. Stein remarked that the Marathas, rather than the Nayak kingdoms of the South, were in many respects the true successors of Vijayanagara (1989:146), and Gordon's historical study of the Marathas points to similar "modernizing" processes at work in their polity: the rise of new towns such as Satara, Bombay, Pune, and Nasik; the increasing centralization and monetization of the economy; and accelerated social mobility that challenged the power and influence of old elites (Gordon 1993:15, 87, 185). The latter process was epitomized by the allegedly Shudra leader Shivaji's own carefully staged ritual transformation into a Kshatriya prior to his royal consecration in 1674 (Vajpeyi 2004). The comparable rise of the Marathas, from an assortment of cultivator and pastoralist groups into a self-conscious "martial caste," adhered, according to Gordon, to "a well-established pattern for the creation of new caste categories that arise in response to new possibilities for upward economic mobility" (1993:15). These possibilities stemmed particularly from the expanded opportunities for military service that the period offered, through a labor market that drew on "cultivators, iron-workers . . . tailors" (*ibid.*) and peripatetic religious ascetics. As I have already suggested, such a transformed environment, increasingly competitive in many arenas other than simply the religious and communal, seems to have favored Hanuman.

The Armies of Hanuman

I now come to the third link in the narrative chain that has been forged to explain Hanuman's rise to prominence: the influence of militarized sadhus or holy men during the eighteenth century, and especially those of the Ramanandi order (*Rāmānandī sampradāya*), who claim descent from the shadowy but revered teacher Ramananda (ca. fourteenth century) and who worship Hanuman with special zeal. The conventional explanation of sadhu militancy has been that ascetics were obliged to form "armies" during the period of Islamic rule in order to defend fellow Hindus, their holy places, and their women from aggressive and rapacious Muslims (Lorenzen 1978). Such claims draw on fictional narratives such as Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's 1882 novel about armed ascetics, *Ānandamath*, and on early-twentieth-century

oral accounts filtered through the lens of such colonial-era historians as J. N. Farquhar (Pinch 1996b:145–46, 148–51). They were recapitulated in the pamphlet literature produced in Ayodhya during the 1970s and '80s by those pressing the claim that a local mosque marked the site of Rama's birthplace and of a magnificent "Janambhoomi" temple (*janma bhūmi* or "birth site") destroyed during the reign of Babar (e.g., Ramgopal Pandey 1963, Tripathi 1984). The pamphleteers asserted that for centuries, armies of sadhus, assisted by thousands of other Hindus, had fought dozens of bloody battles in the attempt to win back the site. This narrative was widely disseminated during the 1980s through video- and audiocassettes produced by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad after it made the Ayodhya issue the centerpiece of its attack on the alleged "pampering of minorities" by the Indian government. However, although it is indeed true that Vaishnava ascetic orders formed armed groups called "armies" (*senā, aṇi*) during the eighteenth century and that many of the members of these armies worshiped Hanuman as their deity-of-choice, the well-documented causes of this militarization were altogether different from those given in twentieth-century communal accounts.

Whereas the roots of martial asceticism in India may lie in ancient practices related to the agonistic nature of sacrifice and the renunciatory consecration of warriors, it emerged as an historically documented phenomenon out of the rivalry, during and after the sixteenth century, between groups of wandering holy men known as Sannyasis (*sannyāsī*, also Romanized "Sanyasi": those who have taken *sannyāsa* or "renunciation"), who worshiped Shiva, and those called Vairagis (*vairāgī*, aka eastern Hindi *bairāgī*, "detached ones"), who worshiped Vishnu. The former, also known as Dasanamis and Gosains (*dasanāmī*, *daśanāmī*, "having ten names"; *gosāim*, probably from *gosvāmī*, "lord of cattle/lord of the senses"), claimed to accept initiates primarily from the upper strata of Hindu society and hence asserted their superiority over the allegedly more inclusive and predominantly lower caste Vairagis. Such status claims, combined with rivalries over long-distance trade (in which both groups engaged) and patronage by local elites, sometimes resulted in pitched battles, particularly at the large melas (*melā*) or "bathing fairs" regularly held at pilgrimage sites like Hardwar, Prayag, and Ujjain, where great numbers of sadhus and pilgrims gathered. These bloody encounters led to the formation of armed divisions within each order, known as Nagas (*nāgā*, from Sanskrit *nagna* or "naked," though not all of them were literally so; J. Sarkar n.d.:86–101; Pinch 1996b:154–55). Pre-twentieth-century accounts unambiguously assert that it was the superior strength and organization of Sannyasi nagas—reflected in bloody victories over Vairagis at melas in 1640, 1760, 1789, and in the takeover of Ayodhya by Shaivas in 1699—that prompted the formation, during the early eighteenth century, of Naga divisions among both the Ramanandis and sadhus who worshiped Krishna (Burghart 1978:126; Pinch 1996b:154–55; van der Veer 1988:144–46). Yet the subsequent success of these militarized subsects, not merely in defeating their Shaiva rivals but in acquiring wealth and prestige through mercenary service, reflected other circumstances specific to the period.



FIGURE 2.5. A Ramanandi sadhu worships Hanuman in a cave shrine near Chitrakut, Madhya Pradesh, 1990

The Mughal Empire created a vast military labor market in northern and central India that became, according to Dirk Kolff, a “proliferating redistributive apparatus” bringing economic benefit and enhanced self-esteem to numerous “marginal” agricultural and artisanal castes (1990:18–19). The opportunity for honorable imperial service as a *naukar* (a term derived from a Perso-Mongol word meaning “retainer” or “comrade” in the service of a warrior clan) often led to claims of enhanced status at the local level: *julāhā* (weaver) became *sayyid* (“descendant of the Prophet”), *kumbī* (cultivator) became *marāṭhā* (martial landholding caste), *gvālā* (cowherder) became *rājput* (“son of a king”); the military economy functioned as “a major generator of socioreligious identities” for those who had few other opportunities for advancement (ibid. 18–20, 58, 196). The militarization of religious orders during the same period may thus be viewed not merely as a response to intersectarian rivalries but as another manifestation of a broader process of social mobility. When the Mughal regime disintegrated after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 and North and central India reverted to a pattern of decentralized rule by local rajahs and nawabs, military service remained a potentially lucrative career path. Apart from protecting religious centers (such as the “rediscovered” sacred sites of Vrindaban and Ayodhya, which benefited from Mughal policies encouraging trade and pilgrimage) and themselves engaging in long-distance trade, militarized ascetics found employment with nearly all the polities of the period, and they seem to have shown little preference for patrons; rajahs,

nawabs, large zamindars (landlords) and Maratha warlords all hired them, and the most successful Nagas rose to high military rank and were rewarded with villages and lands of their own (Cohn 1964; Pinch 2006).

Renunciation had always been one way to escape the constraints of caste hierarchy, since it typically led to a loosening (though not, as in theory, to a complete severing) of limitations based on birth status. This was particularly true of the Ramanandis, who were tolerant of a broad spectrum of beliefs and practices and were reputed to accept initiates from all strata of society, in deference to the oft-quoted maxim of their founder: "Do not ask about anyone's caste or community; whoever worships the Lord belongs to him."⁵⁰ This attitude may have reflected the influence of Nath yogic and *nirguna* Sant traditions (which emphasized, respectively, individualized practices to achieve occult power and immortality, and the worship of a formless deity independent of temples and priests),⁵¹ as well as the Ramanandis' adopting as their scripture-of-choice, during the seventeenth century, the *Rāmcaritmānas* of Tulsidas, a work that was itself conservative and hierarchy-affirming in letter, but inclusive and hierarchy-challenging in spirit, and that boldly presented itself as a divine revelation in folksy vernacular. The Ramanandis grew, according to Richard Burghart, through their appeal to "the servant castes, untouchables, women, and former Hindus who had converted by choice or threat of force to Islam"—groups who, he says, in the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries comprised roughly three fourths of the population of the Gangetic plain (Burghart 1978:126). In consequence, the Ramanandis became the dominant ascetic order in North and central India by the end of the eighteenth century.

The history of the order as reconstructed by Peter van der Veer based on sectarian texts and on interviews with contemporary sadhus and mahants shows several distinct phases, each of which produced a subject that supplemented but did not supplant its predecessor. The earliest was probably the Tyagis (*tyāgī*, or "renouncer," also generically labeled Vairagi, especially in sixteenth and seventeenth century texts), who nominally followed Ramananda and revered the Rama mantra, but in practice closely resembled Shaiva groups such as the (similarly liberal) Nath yogis and the (more conservative and Brahman-dominated) Dasanamis. They typically lived in roaming bands (*jamāt*), staying briefly in wilderness encampments where they practiced hatha yoga and self-mortification (*tapasyā*) and worshiped Vishnu, Hanuman, and Bhairava/Shiva in the form of portable aniconic stones daubed with sindur. As I have already noted, it was the Vaishnava Tyagi/Vairagi sadhus' rivalry with Shaiva Dasanamis and Gosains that led to the founding of Naga fighting

50. *Jāti-pāti pūchāī nahim koī / hari ko bhajai so hari kā hoī //*; from Pitambar Datt Barthval, *Rāmānand kī Hindī racnāem* (Banaras: Nagari Pracharini Sabha, 1955, p. 49, cited in Pinch 1996a:48). This *caupāī* is inscribed over the gateway of the famous Hanuman Garhi temple in Ayodhya, which is run by Ramanandi Nagas (see chapter 3).

51. On the likely origins of the Ramanandis, see Burghart 1978; van der Veer 1988:90–95; Vaudeville 1974:36–39, 110–17.

lineages, the second phase in van der Veer's model. Sectarian documents contain accounts of pitched battles for control of sacred sites claimed by both groups, such as the "hill of Hanuman" (*Hanumān ṭilā*) in Ayodhya, which today bears the temple of Hanuman Garhi but was previously home to a Dasanami *maṭha*.⁵² Once the hill was secured, the nawab of Awadh, Safdar Jang (1739–54), formally gave it to the Naga mahant Abhayramdas (the "fearless servant of Rama") and permitted him to build an akhara on it (*akhārā*, literally a martial arts "gymnasium," but in this context, a residence for armed sadhus). Safdar Jang's successor Asaf-ud-Daulah (1775–93) allowed his Hindu chief minister Tikaitray to construct the fortified hilltop temple that stands to this day (van der Veer 1988:143). Like many of the court officials, Tikaitray was a Kayasth, belonging to a caste that was formally classified as Shudra by Brahman legalists but that had specialized in literacy and record-keeping. In van der Veer's analysis, Kayasths were, like the Nagas themselves, an "upwardly mobile" community, anxious to assume the patronage prerogatives of the martial castes (ibid. 37–38). Through mercenary employment and nawabi and Kayasth largesse, the Nagas of Hanuman Garhi prospered.

To be sure, other gods were invoked by militarized ascetics; those devoted to Krishna formed eleven "armies" that marched under the banner of Garuda, and Dasanami Nagas generally worshiped Bhairava, Hanuman's darker peer among the avatars of Rudra. Yet the worship of Hanuman by sadhu soldiers may have reflected more than mere mythological preference, as is suggested by its gradual spread even beyond the Ramanandi *sampradāya*. Hanuman was adopted as patron deity by Nagas of the Dadu Panth (*Dādū panth*, "the path of Dadu"), who were followers of the low-caste poet-saint Dadu Dayal ("Dadu the compassionate," ca. 1544–1603). A cotton carder who lived in what is now the Jaipur region of eastern Rajasthan, Dadu was a Sant or "true one" in the tradition of Namdev and Kabir, and like them he sang of a formless supreme being (*nirguṇa*, "without attributes") who resided in the heart and was equally approachable by all. Dadu rejected both Hinduism and Islam and especially scorned the worship of murtis. His early followers revered the formless name *Rāma* (regarded as the "true name" of God and dissociated from the Ramayana story), although in time Dadu's own songs, collected in a sectarian scripture called the *Dādū vāṇī* or "voice of Dadu," also became an object of veneration. The Dadu Panth gained adherents and influence in the Jaipur region and, during the eighteenth century, its renunciant order likewise formed an

52. Inside Hanuman Garhi, there is on display a pile of trident-weapons (*triśūla*) allegedly captured from the Gosain defenders of the hill in the early eighteenth century. Similarly, some have claimed that the central image of Hanuman in the fortress-temple—visible only as a crowned face framed by heaps of garlands—actually conceals a large lingam. Van der Veer notes that pre-Ramanandi worshippers on the hill are said to have included local Muslims, who considered it a shrine to Hathile Pir (the vocative of *haṭhīlā*, "stubborn, obstinate," which is also one of the thousand names used in Hanuman's ritual worship), one of the Panch Pir or five Sufi adepts (*pīr*) who were once widely worshiped in northeastern India (van der Veer 1988:149–50; on the Panch Pir, see Crooke 1968:1.205–6). Van der Veer also speculates that the site may originally have belonged to the Naths, in which case its layering of successive occupiers (Naths to Gosains to Ramanandis) accords with what David White calls the "archaeology of Hindu sectarianism" in parts of northern India (2003:20).

armed Naga subdivision for defense against Sannyasi attacks (Thiel-Horstmann 1991:255–57). Subsequently, Panthi mercenaries played a significant role in the armies of Jaipur State and of nearby Bharatpur, battling Sannyasis, Marathas, and any other enemies of their royal patrons; in 1857, the Maharaja of Jaipur sent Nagas to the aid of besieged British forces battling the Indian “mutineers.” The proper sectarian attitude of Dadu Panthi sadhus toward Hindu murtis and their shrines is well expressed by the remark attributed to Mangaldas, one of their mahants, when told in 1779 that a nearby Krishna temple was going to be attacked by a force sent by the weak Mughal sovereign in Delhi to collect overdue revenue: “We are followers of the Formless (*nirguna panthi*); what have we to do with protecting temples?” (Hastings 2002:9) Sometime during the second half of the eighteenth century, however, Dadu Panthi Nagas began worshiping Hanuman with the standard accoutrements of Hindu puja (incense, flowers, sweets, etc.) and placing his image on their battle standards, and a later sectarian mahant, Govind Das, is credited with having established twelve temples to the god in eastern Rajasthan (ibid. 11–12). In sectarian accounts, this shift was explained by a suitable tale: Hanuman appeared to a mahant in a dream and promised him victory if the soldiers would worship him, but the mahant (echoing Mangaldas) protested that this would not be appropriate for *nirguna* adherents. Hanuman (ever accommodating) agreed to let them simply place his image on their flag; the Nagas, who indeed conquered under this sign, then magnanimously began performing his puja (ibid.). This Dadu Panthi “adoption” of Hanuman seems to have occurred during the time of civil war in Jaipur State (1768–1818), a turbulent period that, paradoxically, brought the Nagas “vastly increasing growth in numbers as well as wealth, influence, and royal favors” (ibid. 8). It is not surprising that many of these upwardly mobile soldiers were drawn to an opportunistic deity who combined self-assertive shakti and success with self-sacrificing bhakti and subordination to military superiors.

The close of the eighteenth century saw the consolidation of British power in much of India and, with it, a decline in the opportunities available through armed asceticism. The British distrusted such ragtag (or even naked) lower class warriors, whom they had fought in the so-called “Sannyasi and Fakir Rebellion” of 1770–1800, and preferred to employ soldiers from more trusted communities such as Sikhs, Rajputs, and Pathans, on whom they bestowed the title of “martial races.” Although Naga battalions remained in the employ of a number of princely states (that of Jaipur was finally disbanded only in 1938), they saw relatively little military activity, and hence limited opportunity for gain, as the Pax Britannica settled over the subcontinent. Yet the opportunistic Ramanandis as a whole did not stop flourishing, and even “fighting,” under changed circumstances of patronage and in the more stable political environment of the times. Hanuman changed (and flourished) along with them.

Under British hegemony, local rajas were relieved of the Kshatriya obligation of internecine war and were given large stipends to spend on “cultural” activities. Religious patronage was an approved display of wealth, and so in the nineteenth century, Vaishnava sites such as Vrindaban and Ayodhya saw a

boom in the construction of endowed temples and dharamshalas, a pattern of patronage that would be continued in the twentieth century by mercantile and (later) industrialist sponsors. Generally, these new patrons were sensitive to social status and desired only Brahman officiants in their temples. Such efforts had begun in the early eighteenth century, when the rulers of Jaipur sought to impose their vision of Vedic orthodoxy on the unruly sadhu lineages within their realm. One corollary of this vision was an idealized model of “four great [Vaishnava] sects” (*catuḥ sampradāya*), within which there were only fifty-two recognized guru-disciple lineages (known as *dvāra*, or “doors,” i.e., to Vishnu). Though the template was largely fictitious, one goal of the schema appeared to be to tighten Sanskritic and twice-born caste standards within ascetic society; thus the Kabir Panthis (who had long been considered “Vaishnavas,” e.g., in Nabhdadas’s famous hagiography *Bhaktamāl*, or “garland of devotees,” composed in ca. 1600) were now formally declared non-Vaishnava, and Ramanandis were ordered to stop initiating women and untouchables and permitting common dining among sadhus of all social backgrounds (Burghardt 1978:130–31; Horstmann 2002:158–62). Ramanandi mahants in the kingdom formally agreed to this, but their cohorts may have continued their liberal practices beneath a veneer of court-imposed orthodoxy (Pinch 1996:28).

Ignoring upper-caste prejudices would become more difficult, however, when sadhu bands, no longer employed as mercenaries and under increasing pressure from colonial authorities, began to settle down in pilgrimage places like Ayodhya, a phase that van der Veer terms “sedentarization” and that was marked by the piling-up in shrine rooms of sacred stones and small murtis permanently deposited by once-roaming *jamāts* (van der Veer 1988:178–79). The patrons of the nineteenth century—petty rajas and urban merchants—favored temples in which fully sculptural murtis were presented for darshan in lavish costumes and opulent settings, mirroring bourgeois notions of ancient Kshatriya splendor. The Ramanandis of Ayodhya obliged, becoming (in theory at least) more conservative and producing their own Brahman pujaris to staff new temples like Kanak Bhavan (the “golden house”), built in ca. 1883 by the wife of the Maharaja of Orcha, supposedly on the site of Rama and Sita’s private residence (ibid. 273). The sedentarization of Ramanandis in such centers as Ayodhya and (later) Janakpur and Chitrakut, together with changing trends in Vaishnava theology and practice under the influence of the Krishna bhakti tradition, gave rise to the third Ramanandi subdivision: that of the Rasiks (*rasika*, literally an “enjoyer of *rasa*,” “juice” or “emotional essence”). They worshiped Rama and Sita as divine lovers, reigning eternally in a celestial Ayodhya known as Saket, which was inwardly accessible through guided visualizations. Whereas the Tyagis and Nagas worshiped Hanuman as an immortal yogi and avatara of Rudra/Shiva and favored a semi-socialist organization involving shared resources and power, the Rasiks focused more on the “servile” aspect of Hanuman’s mythology and preferred establishments under hereditary Brahman gurus (ibid. 171). Moreover, in keeping with their doctrine that all souls are feminine in relation to the Lord and can reach him

most readily through the divine mother Sita, they assigned Hanuman the alter-ego of Charushila, one of the principal maidservants (*sakhī*) of the “inner palace” of Saket, whose task was to promote the never-ending loveplay of the cosmic couple. Here too, s/he remained the perfect go-between, carrying love notes and quids of perfumed betel between the divine lovers as they dallied in luxurious bowers along the River Sarayu. The transformation may appear incongruous to outsiders (as it did to van der Veer, and apparently to some Tyagis), but large numbers of sadhus and lay devotees seem to have accepted it; the immortal monkey was simply changing with the times, to reflect a prominent trend in Vaishnava culture during what scholars of Hindi literature now term “the ornate period” (*rīti kāl*).⁵³ Although it has faded, along with the influence of the Rasik tradition, from the mainstream of Hanuman's contemporary cult, the Charushila persona continues to be invoked in some sectarian literature.⁵⁴

However, sedentarization did not spell the end of the “fighting” tradition of the Ramanandis. Their liberalism in matters of social status continued to be expressed in the twentieth century, in part through tumultuous internal debates that involved the rewriting of sectarian history. At issue was the order's supposed spiritual descent, via Ramananda, from the Shrivaiishnava sect of South India, ultimately traceable to the twelfth-century theologian Ramanuja. Although this hoary link had often been a matter of pride for Ramanandis, when improved transportation and communication brought actual Shrivaiishnava teachers to Ayodhya and into regular contact with Ramanandis, the latter discovered that they were regarded as decidedly second-class citizens within this Brahman-dominated southern tradition. Familiarity with the Shrivaiishnavas bred anger at their contemptuous attitudes, and in the 1920s a group of radical Ramanandis (supported, not surprisingly, by the Naga mahant of Hanuman Garhi) imaginatively recast the spiritual genealogy of their order, writing Ramanuja and his followers out of it and establishing a direct connection between Ramananda and Rama—via Hanuman, of course, who was the first great preceptor of the lineage (Pinch 1996:61–80; van der Veer 1988:95–107).

Though the controversy may appear to have been only a case of inter-sectarian bickering, William Pinch's research shows that the Ramanandi taste for inclusiveness did not exist only on (forged) paper, but was actively translated, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, into collaboration between sectarian sadhus and peasant and artisan groups ardent to improve their lot in society. Castes such as the Ahirs (aka Gvalas or “cowherds,” the most numerous caste in rural north India during this period), the agriculturist Kurmis and Koiris, and the Kahars (palanquin bearers and water carriers) had been formally relegated to Shudra or “untouchable” (*achūt*) status

53. On the Rasik tradition of the Ramanandis, see van der Veer 1988:180–93; the most thorough study is B. P. Singh 1957 (in Hindi); for a summary of some of Singh's research, see Lutgendorf 1991b.

54. As it is in the recent *Śrī Hanumān rāmāyaṇ*, to be discussed in the next chapter.

by Brahman legalists, a judgment that British officers dutifully reified in the hard copy of decennial census reports beginning in 1871. Now, however, these castes began agitating for higher rank, usually as Kshatriyas who had fallen on hard times. This agitation, conducted through voluntary organizations, broadsides and chapbooks, quasi-scholarly caste histories modeled on Orientalist tomes, and periodic acts of protest, was frequently encouraged and supported by Ramanandi sadhus—often men who, before joining the *sampradāya*, had belonged to the respective caste. There was, of course, something in it for the sadhus beyond improved self-esteem, for most of these caste groups had formerly professed Shaiva allegiance and taken initiation from Sannyasi Gosains. Now Vaishnavized and with Ramanandi preceptors, these newly awakened Kshatriyas began exercising the traditional royal prerogative of endowing temples and dharamshalas in pilgrimage centers, institutions that would be especially welcoming to pilgrims from their own caste (Pinch 1996:81–114). The discourse of “caste uplift” also required villains, and though one target was upper caste Hindus who had discriminated against these groups, another was Muslims, whose ancient “invasions” were often invoked as the historic cause of the fall of caste ancestors from Kshatriyahood (ibid. 92, 118–21). And of course, assertive neo-Kshatriyas also tended to emphasize their superiority over groups still lower in the hierarchy than themselves. While recognizing all this, Pinch argues that, in the context of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century North India, the Ramanandi order gave “access to personal dignity” to large numbers of low-status people and effected “an important rupture in the culture of caste” (ibid. 139). Other research has highlighted the leadership role played by Ramanandi sadhus in peasant revolts on the Gangetic plain in the early 1920s (G. Pandey 1982), and even, beginning in the late nineteenth century, in the reimagining of “untouchable” Chamars in Madhya Pradesh as “Ramnamis” (*Rāmnāmī*), proud bearers of the purifying name of Rama (Lamb 2002:60–75).

Conclusion

If a divine monkey, possibly emerging from the ancient popular worship of chthonic yakshas, was originally positioned more on the dark side of the Vedic cosmos (as his links with Rudra and the Maruts suggest), Valmiki’s masterpiece forever cemented his link with the luminous realm of the celestial Vishnu. The literary and iconographic evidence I have examined in this chapter suggests that Hanuman subsequently kept a foot in both camps—or, more appropriately, flew in the air between them. As the perfect servant of a deity who preserves the order of the cosmos, Hanuman has appealed to some as a self-effacing defender of the status quo and its beneficiaries; a subaltern who knows his place and keeps his tail down in the presence of his betters. However, many others have seen in him a self-assertive and tail-waving champion who energizes and inspires the less privileged. Although modern authors have often explained the chronology of Hanuman’s rise as a reaction

to the presence of Islamic regimes in the subcontinent, I have proposed that each of several historical instances of his proliferating worship may also be related to localized intersectarian competition and to increased social mobility. The efflorescence of his cult in narrative, iconography, and ritual also corresponds roughly to the chronology of “vernacularization”—the increasing expression, during the second millennium CE, of diverse voices in regional languages, often indicative of the aspirations of nonelite communities and their religious preceptors. The emergence of an extensive popular literature devoted primarily to the monkey god, however, occurs still later, and its most accelerated phase, dating from the nineteenth century, is connected not simply to sectarian initiatives, social realignments, and creativity in regional languages, but also to the advent of a new and dramatically equalizing technology for the dissemination of messages: the printing press. This print-promulgated literature, with special reference to the Hindi-language regions of North and central India, is the subject of the next chapter.

3

Prayers, Recipes, Memoirs

Hanuman in Hindi Popular Literature

From the outside, Ayodhya's Hanuman Garhi (*Hanumān garhī*, "Hanuman's little fort"), the famous temple built by Ramanandi warrior-sadhus in the late eighteenth century, indeed looks to be a fortress. Its thick sloping walls, commanding one of the highest points in the city, are adorned with old cannon, and its entryway, approached by a flight of sixty marble steps, ends in a massive wooden gate that appears designed to withstand a siege—and in fact does at annual festivals such as Rama's birthday (*Rāma navamī*), when hundreds of thousands of pilgrims come for their obligatory first audience with (as many of them say) "Ayodhya's real king." But once within the gates, the impression is quite different; one seems to be standing inside a *text*. Beneath one's feet, virtually every marble-paving slab bears a dedicatory message (e.g., "Hail to the great monkey hero! Presented in memory of the honorable heaven-departed Kariya Nishad by his son Mithai Ram and his respected wife Atvari Devi, of Muhavra Ki Vari town, district Gorakhpur, 20 April 1985"), and the side walls are similarly inscribed with votive plaques, and with prayers, hymns, and stories, some carved into the marble and others painted on large signboards. Here and there, worshipers stand reciting aloud from the sacred signage: the forty verses of the *Hanumān cālīsā*, the eight stanzas of the hymn to the "liberator from distress" (*Saṅkaṭ mocan aṣṭak*), the forty-four songs of the *Hanumān bāhuk*, said to be especially good for curing physical ailments, the sixty stanzas of the *Sundar kāṇḍ*, the beloved fifth book of the *Rāmcaritmānas*, and the litany of the "thousand names of Hanuman" (*Hanumat sahasra nāma stotra*).

On one side, there is a verandah to which one can climb to escape the ever-jostling crowd in front of Hanuman's audience window. Here one finds shelves stocked with scores of little



FIGURE 3.1. Worshippers inside Hanuman Garhi, Aodhya, 1990

pamphlets—most in various stages of dog-eared disintegration—containing the same texts for individual recitation.

Although Hanuman Garhi is a renowned pilgrim shrine, there is nothing exceptional about the dense inscription of its interior, which has become a fairly standard feature of Hindu temples built or renovated during the past half-century. The displayed texts are intended to assist in a process that is millennia old—the verbal praising of the gods in order to win their favor—and so central to religious practice that the most common Hindi term by which one can translate “worship” is actually the compound, *pūjā-pāṭh*, “offerings/adoration (and) reading/recitation.” Yet the display of worship texts is a comparatively new phenomenon. Premodern temples sometimes contained inscriptions recording the names and gifts of principal patrons, but other temple narratives were largely iconographic, conveyed through sculpted panels that could be “read” by pilgrims or explicated to them by guides. Liturgical texts, especially those in Sanskrit, were typically the preserve of specialists or sectarian initiates, though their restrictedness was continually challenged and expanded, over the past millennium, by the composition of new praise-poems in local languages, some of which achieved wide popularity and came to be memorized by worshippers. The rise of such vernacular literature as one corollary of the so-called “bhakti movement” has been the subject of much scholarly research. But the transformation gradually wrought on popular religious practice by the advent of print technology in South Asia, beginning in the late eighteenth century, has

received less attention. It contributed not only to the dissemination and standardization of many texts and to the gradual rise of literacy, but also led to the veneration by Hindus of the sacred word in its visual as well as its aural form—a process that may also have been influenced by the example of scripture-oriented communities such as Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians. Gradually, the word-made-inscription itself became an embodiment of sacrality. This was not without precedent in the Hindu tradition—for in tantric sects, inscribed formulas were worshiped within geometric diagrams known as yantras, and God’s “body made of speech” (*vānmayā-śarīra*) was sometimes literally envisioned as an icon formed of minute letters—but it was new to public temple worship.

To Joanne Waghorne’s insightful observation that “there are many messages written in temples that do not appear as inscriptions” (2004:102), I would add that modern temple inscriptions also make statements that go beyond what they “say.” When members of the Birla industrialist family, soon after Independence, embarked on a philanthropic program of temple building in major cities and pilgrimage centers, they made it a policy to inscribe the interiors with texts, usually in Sanskrit and including Vedic mantras, that had traditionally been accessible only to initiated males of “twice-born” (*dvija*) status. Since the Birla temples were to be open to all Indians, the texts were explicitly meant to serve a democratizing and educational purpose, to demystify Brahmanical authority, and (implicitly) to advertise the broad mindedness of the patrons. Yet because many of these texts are not among those that most worshipers use in their devotions, they also serve, like the enshrined deities, as objects for darshan. This function finds its logical extension in tour-de-force temples dedicated to specific scriptures, such as the Tulsi Manas Temple in Banaras (mid-1960s), in which the thirteen thousand lines of the *Rāmcaritmānas* are inscribed on two levels, or the Valmiki Bhavan in Ayodhya (mid-1980s), which houses the four-times-longer Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa*. In such buildings, the inscribed text (often quite cramped and extending from floor to lofty ceiling) seems scarcely meant to be “read,” but only to be viewed and admired—a sort of liturgical wallpaper, wrapping visitors in its aura of sacral authority and linear prolixity.

What does this new convention mean? Clearly it offers a different way of relating to sacred texts than via oral/aural performance. The latter unfolds as a sonic, ephemeral, and time-bound experience, brokered by a human intermediary. In the new temples, authority shifts from the human bearer of the words to the words themselves, which are experienced as reified and eternal. The effect may be two-edged: liberating and democratizing on the one hand, allowing accessibility and individual choice, yet also depersonalizing and hegemonic, fostering the dissemination to a heterogeneous audience of increasingly homogeneous texts.

I open this chapter with these issues, which relate to Hindu worship in general and hence go beyond the subject of this book, because I am convinced that literacy and the mass dissemination of sacred texts have played a role in the rise, during roughly the past century, of a more standardized form of religious practice that embodies some of the paradoxes suggested above and

that has also been especially conducive to the worship of Hanuman, a deity open to both socially “progressive” and “reactionary” readings. These contrasting themes are abundantly present in a literature that is no less abundant (and as visible, in the North Indian milieu, as the texts that adorn the walls of Hanuman Garhi), and to which I now turn, considering first the contribution of the man widely regarded as its founding father.

Tulsidas and His Texts

Like Madhva and Vyasaraya in the southern Deccan and Ramdas in the Maratha country, Tulsidas (the “servant of *tulsi*,” a fragrant shrub beloved to Vishnu)—often referred to simply as “Goswami-ji” (the suffix *-ji* connoting both respect and intimacy)—is hailed today as the great preceptor of Hanuman worship in the densely populated Hindi-speaking regions of northern and central India. He too is said to have installed a series of powerful images of the deity in the pilgrim city of Banaras (aka Varanasi, Kashi), where he spent much of his life. Indeed, because the poet is associated with only a single small Sita-Rama temple in that city, one may even hear the claim (as I once did from the chief Ramayana-reciter in Banaras’s most famous Ramlila pageant) that, “Goswami-ji was *not* a devotee of Lord Rama; he was a devotee of Hanuman!” It is also commonplace nowadays to find Tulsidas hailed as a champion of orthodox Brahmanical values and as a leader who promoted Hanuman worship in a time of alleged Islamic persecution, “to inject the powerful blood of heroism into the veins of the enervated Hindu race” (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:136). Finally, Tulsidas is revered as the author of some of the most popular hymns and prayers to Hanuman, and his name occurs as an authoritative “stamp” or “signature” (*chāp*, *bhaṇitā*) in the closing verses of a praise-poem regularly recited by millions of Hindus throughout the world: the *Hanumān cālīsā*.

Each of these claims warrants examination in the light of the extensive twentieth-century scholarship on the great Hindi poet and his work. For although the historical Tulsidas remains an elusive figure, relatively more is known about him than about the three other recognized giants of the “devotional era” of Hindi literature (*bhakti kāl*)—Kabir, Mirabai, and Surdas. Tulsidas became the subject of an extensive hagiographical literature, but the veracity of its longer accounts is doubtful, and most scholars rely instead on the internal evidence of his poetry and on a handful of references to him by contemporaries.¹ His termini are widely accepted (1532 or 1543–1623),² and within them a number of dates can be established with some precision. There is good evidence that he was born into a Brahman family, lost his parents and

1. On the chronology of and controversy over the Tulsidas biographies, see Lutgendorf 1994. For decent translations of the major hagiographic texts, see M. Gopal 1977:68–115. More scholarly life-sketches may be found in Allchin 1964:32–47 and M. Gupta 1977:63–93.

2. The arguments for assigning his birthdate—none of which strike me as especially convincing—may be found in Allchin 1964:33 (arguing for the later date) and in M. Gupta 1977:64–65 (preferring the earlier one).

endured poverty and humiliation as a child, but eventually received a solid traditional education. It is also apparent that he achieved considerable fame during his lifetime and that this caused hostility in some quarters. But perhaps the most important fact about him is that he was literate; documents survive that are apparently in his own hand, and his writings give evidence of meticulous craft, even, in a few cases, to the point of existing in more than one draft. Modern scholarship has likewise arrived at a broad consensus regarding the extent of this corpus; although as many as thirty-seven works have been attributed to Tulsidas, most scholars recognize only twelve or thirteen as authentically his.³ Finally, there has also developed a consensus regarding the rough chronology of these works, based on overall style, internal and external clues, and occasional dated verses (V. Mishra 1977:94–102). This makes it possible to speculate on the great poet as an evolving personality.

The tradition that Tulsidas established numerous Hanuman murtis around Banaras—the most common number cited is eleven (alluding to the eleven Rudras), but some claim an even dozen (pointing to the twelve songs to Hanuman in the poet's *Vinay patrikā*)—figures in the lore of many temples today. Yet the lists I elicited from devotees and scholars were inconsistent, apparently reflecting individual preference.⁴ None of the premodern biographies of Tulsidas mention such a series of images, although one, the controversial *Gautamcandrikā* (ostensibly dating to 1624) mentions him worshiping daily in “the cave of Hanuman,” which may refer to the low-ceilinged room containing a tiny murti in the house built for Tulsidas in the Assi neighborhood. Yet in the absence of clear historical evidence such as inscriptions, the claims made for numerous temples may reflect no more than the exalted reputation that the saint-poet now enjoys in Banaras and the desire of local people to associate favorite shrines with him.

The poet's social attitudes have generated voluminous analysis, including some by me (Lutgendorf 1991a:356–60). Like Ramdas, he was consistent in his praise of Brahmans as “gods on earth” (*bhūsur, mahisur*), although he likewise seems to have encountered hostility from some of them for his vernacular writings, which stress that salvation is accessible to all persons through repeating the name of Rama. A list of his intimate companions contained in one of the controversial biographies includes several of very low or outcaste status as well as one Muslim (Allchin 1964:38), and it is probable that he had cordial relations with Abdur Rahim Khankhanan, a Mughal courtier who served as administrator of Banaras from 1591–93 and who was also an accomplished Hindi poet (M. Gupta 1977:86). This suggests a broad mindedness in matters of caste and creed that is sometimes lacking in those who today claim him as their preceptor. Elsewhere I have discussed his use of the trope of the “dark age,” which is sometimes cited as evidence of his

3. The variation in number depends on whether one counts the *Hanumān bāhuk* as an independent work or as an appendix to the *Kavitāvalī*. On both, see below.

4. For a published list, see Sundd 1998:187.

anger over Muslim rule (Lutgendorf 1995:261–67). Here I reiterate that a careful reading of Tulsidas's poetry leads me to conclude that for him (as for Mahipati's Ramdas), the kali yuga is essentially the human condition: an irreversible malaise that infects everyone. His is a humbly pietistic rather than a belligerently social-activist stance, and he has more to say about the corruption of religious leaders (including himself) than that of rulers. But as Pollock (1993) has argued, Tulsidas's narrative-of-choice (of his six longer works, four are retellings of the Rama story) always offers, to those seeking it, the option of reading its hero as a dharma-crusader against demonized others, and this interpretation has been championed of late by the unscrupulous and the bigoted. I see no evidence, however, that Tulsidas was either.

Was he, as the Ramayani told me, more a devotee of Hanuman than of Rama? Here I will cautiously advance a theory that Tulsidas's attitude toward Rama's simian associate changed over the course of his life. I accept the literary chronology that posits certain works as early on grounds of style.⁵ Of dated works, the *Rāmājñā praśna* (1564) is also early, and like the great *Rāmcaritmānas*, dated a decade later, is a retelling of the Rama story. The former is a short work intended for use in divination; it follows the Valmiki account, omitting most of the innovations that would appear in the 1574 epic. Of Tulsidas's remaining works, three are anthologies containing material that probably spans a long period, yet postdates the *Rāmcaritmānas*. Thus the hymns of the *Vinay patrikā* may have been composed over more than a decade, but the work seems to have been complete by about 1611. The first six sections of the *Kavitāvalī*, devoted to another retelling of the Ramayana, may likewise have been assembled gradually, but its final section, a rambling meditation on the travails of the kali yuga that contains uncharacteristically personal details, must have been the product of the poet's old age. It refers to an astrological event datable to 1612 and to outbreaks of plague in Banaras known to have occurred between 1615 and 1623; the final verses seem to look ahead to the poet's death. The forty-four songs of the *Hanumān bāhuk* are typically treated as an appendage to this work, which they resemble both metrically and stylistically. Chronologically, they appear to belong to the same period—the poet's last years.

The poetry of Tulsidas expresses devotion to a number of deities, including Shiva, Parvati, and Ganesh, but above all to Rama and his intimate companions. That Rama was the supreme God for Tulsidas is allegorically revealed by the hierarchical arrangement of the praise-poems in *Vinay patrikā*, whereby, as Vishvanath Mishra notes, “the poet has employed the metaphor of the Mughal Court . . . after passing through seven courts and with the help and recommendation of the Lord's courtiers, he finally succeeds in obtaining the Lord's approval of his petition for compassion” (1977:102; naturally, it is Hanuman

5. E.g., the *Vairāgya sandīpanī*, a poem in praise of renunciation, and the *Ramlalā nahacchū*, an exuberant song describing the ceremony of cutting Rama's nails before his marriage. See the chronology outlined by Vishvanath Mishra (1977:94–102), which reflects broad agreement with the research of Ramnaresh Tripathi, Mataprasad Gupta, and F. R. Allchin.

who hands over the “petition” for Rama’s seal). It is revealed as well by the intense focus on Rama of most of the poet’s early works, culminating in the *Rāmcaritmānas*, which repeatedly stress Rama’s absolute divinity. What is not generally noted is how muted a role Hanuman plays in the latter text. Although the Hindi epic’s *Sundar kāṇḍ* is frequently recited by modern devotees, who find it both “beautiful” (*sundar*) and empowering, one need only read it against Valmiki’s equivalent book to note its subdued and abbreviated treatment of Hanuman. Of course, Tulsidas’s version is shorter in all respects, but it is also disproportionately briefer in its treatment of some of Hanuman’s most dramatic deeds and is much less attentive to the development of his personality. His heroic leap over the ocean, which Valmiki extends into the single longest chapter in his epic (380 lines), is collapsed by the Hindi poet into just twenty-four; his long quest for Sita in Lanka, comprising eleven chapters in the Sanskrit epic (5.2–12), is reduced to a mere three lines (5.5.5–7); and the episode of the burning of Lanka, which Valmiki extends over three chapters (5.51–53), merits just a dozen verses (5.25.5–9, 5.25, 5.26.1–6). Much could be said about the choices Tulsidas makes within individual episodes; certainly, his *Sundar kāṇḍ* also adds incidents and details absent from Valmiki (e.g., Hanuman’s extended dialog with Vibhishana at 5.5.8–5.8.5). But I believe his overriding strategy in the epic is to foreground devotion to Rama and his name, from whose “song of glory” (*jasā gāthā*) no character or incident is permitted to distract. This strategy has also been noted by Leonard Wolcott, who assumes that it is characteristic of all of Tulsidas’s writings (Wolcott 1978:654–55).

It is not. The observation holds true for the earlier works, but not for the later ones, with the epic lying roughly at midpoint. From about 1590 onward, there is a perceptible change. Stylistically the poet enters the period of his most mature and technically brilliant production. The *Rāmcaritmānas* is, of course, a work of sweeping vision and overall high poetic quality. But the later lyric collections, especially *Vinay patrikā* and *Kavitāvalī*, attain an unprecedented super-saturation with stylistic embellishments (e.g., alliteration and internal rhyme), dense allusion, and ingenious conceits that place them in a class by themselves.⁶ In these hymns, when the poet chooses to focus on Hanuman, as he does in the twenty-sixth song of the *Vinay patrikā* (the opening and closing verses from which are given below in F. R. Allchin’s translation), these devices are deployed in the service of a mood of intense adoration of Hanuman that is quite absent from the *Rāmcaritmānas*.

Hail, monkey-king, in prowess as the lion, great god, abode of joy
and auspice, skull-bearing Shiva,
Ray-garlanded sun for the terrible night of existence, brought on by
the wicked, infatuation, pride, anger, and lust! (1)

6. Vishvanath Mishra calls the *Vinay patrikā* “the most important work of Tulsi Das” (1977:101). Allchin sees the *Kavitāvalī* as “poetry of unequalled quality and profundity” (1964:42). Both works have appeared in accurate and readable English translations by Allchin (1964, 1966).

Hail, you pounder of time, qualities, karma and Maya, set in a vow of immovable wisdom, intent on truth, following the path of religion, Accomplished ones, the host of gods and lords of yogis ever serve you, and like the sun you are the banisher of the darkness-fears of prostrate Tulsi Das! (9; 1966:99–100)

To be sure, this is one of only twelve songs to Hanuman in the prologue to the long “petition letter,” the majority of whose 279 songs are addressed directly to Rama. Yet several features of these songs warrant comment. The first is that (as in the opening verse above) Tulsidas addresses Hanuman as Shiva/Rudra, and he repeats this in four other songs.⁷ As I noted in the previous chapter, this identification predates Tulsidas by at least five centuries and must have been part of the common religious lore in his time. It is notable, therefore, that it is absent from the *Rāmcaritmānas*; although Shiva is indeed present as one of the admiring narrators of the deeds of Rama, no explicit connection is drawn between him and Hanuman.

The second and related point is that the songs in *Vinay patrikā* allude to mythical events and to aspects of Hanuman's character that stand apart from the conventional Rama narrative, or are only obliquely hinted at within it. Thus the hymn cited above extols his power over evil spirits and his metaphysical knowledge (26.7,8), while Hymn 28 calls him “breaker of the pride of Bhima, Arjuna and Garuda, protective banner of Dhananjaya's [Arjuna's] chariot” and also “*Sāma*-singer, granting devotees' desires, Vamadeva, and affectionate brother of Shri Ram!” (28.3,5). A verse in Hymn 29 calls him “Skilled creator of the Great Drama, crest-mark of ten million poets, triumphant over the singing-skills of the proud Gandharvas!” (29.3). All these lines allude to stories—found in the *Mahābhārata* and in a number of Puranas, *śāstras*, and poetic works—that contribute to Hanuman's greater “biography.” Though merely alluded to here, these tales will increasingly be brought together, in succeeding centuries, in narratives focusing on Hanuman rather than on Rama.

The still-later *Kavitāvalī*'s sequential retelling of episodes from the Ramayana contains a singular passage devoted to Hanuman. The account of his burning of Lanka—given such short shrift in the *Rāmcaritmānas*—is here expanded to twenty-two stanzas, comprising the bulk of its fifth section. The emphasis is on a horrific epiphany of Hanuman's world-destroying wrath, suggesting the climactic vision of Krishna's cosmic form in *Bhagavad-gītā* 11.

Says Tulsi, in the sky with that great tail extended shone he,
Seeing him the warriors gibbered, he was as terrible as Death,
As a treasury of brightness, as a thousand fiery suns,
His claws were terrifying, his face all red with anger. (5.4; 1964:
94, 100)

7. “Rudra incarnate,” 25.3; “first among the Rudras,” 27.3; “Vamadeva,” 28.5; “O trident-handed Shiva,” 29.5.

This vision of destruction, containing allusions to the cosmic annihilator Rudra/Shiva, may reflect the period in which it was composed. The years 1599–1619 in Banaras marked what astrologers called *Rudra-bīsī*, the dangerous “twenty-year cycle of Rudra.” In the midst of this came the perilous conjunction of Saturn with Pisces (*Mīn kā Śani*) in 1612; both these events are referred to in the *Kavitāvalī*. The year 1611 or 1612 saw the death of Todar Mal, Tulsidas’s benefactor and friend. The years that followed were marked by outbreaks of plague that caused Tulsidas to cry out for mercy to Shiva, Rama, and Hanuman (*Kavitāvalī* 7.169, 176, 181).

There are other autobiographical hints in *Vinay patrikā* and *Kavitāvalī* as well. Tulsidas, whose success in the decades after 1574 had caused him to be identified as the reborn Valmiki,⁸ later found himself assailed by critics among the religious elite of Banaras, who may even have made an attempt on his life (M. Gopal 1977:49). His personal difficulties worsened after 1611 or 1612, when he began to suffer from agonizing rheumatic pain centered in his arms but at times spreading throughout his body, and accompanied by painful, bloody boils. In this acutely localized physical pain, as opposed to the more diffuse pain of the human condition that had preoccupied him in the *Vinay patrikā* and for the relief of which he appealed to Rama, Tulsidas turned to Hanuman. In the midst of (what Allchin has termed) “a new introspection” that produced “poetry of unequalled quality and profundity,” Tulsidas composed the forty-four stanzas known as *Hanumān bāhuk*.⁹

The collection opens with fourteen stanzas that praise Hanuman in the most extravagant terms and repeatedly affirm that one who is under his protection can know no affliction.¹⁰

Sea-crossing snatcher of Sita’s sorrows, sunrise-colored,
 Of long arms and fearsome face that dooms death himself,
 Brazen burner of Lanka’s flameproof fortress, of arched brows,
 Annihilator of the arrogance of titans, tempest’s son,
 Says Tulsidas: Accessible through adoration, you are ever near to aid
 your servants
 Who praise, revere, remember, and repeat your name; you end
 their agonies! (1)

8. E.g., *Kavitāvalī* 7.72, “now the world even likens me to the great sage Valmiki,” which may refer to the eulogy of Tulsidas in the hagiography *Bhaktamāl* of Nabhadās (129), composed in ca. 1600 (Allchin 1964:40). Gupta speculates that Tulsidas became head of a *maṭha* or religious establishment in Banaras during this period, thus earning the title *gospāmī* (M. Gupta 1977:90).

9. The meaning of the title is not readily apparent. Sanskrit *bāhuka* is an adjective meaning “servile, dependent”; it was taken as a name by King Nala in a famous *Mahābhārata* story (3.50–78) after he lost his kingdom in a gambling match and became magically disguised as a deformed cook and charioteer. In this sense the title may be read as “Hanuman’s Dependent.” But *bāhuka* can also mean “arm,” “strength,” and “monkey,” and thus may punningly allude both to the poet’s physical affliction and to Hanuman’s desired assistance. I tentatively translate it (sacrificing some of these allusions) as “the arms of Hanuman.” (I am grateful to Harish Trivedi for some of this information.)

10. The translations are my own.

It is in these songs that, for the first time, the poet sometimes refers to Hanuman, not Rama, as “Tulsi’s Lord” (e.g., *Tulsī ko nāh*, stanza 6; *Tulsī ko sāheb*, stanza 11). Here, too, we find whole songs devoted to the greater myth cycle of Hanuman, such as the story of his walking backward while learning the Vedas from the sun god (stanza 4), or of his roaring on the battlefield during the *Mahābhārata* war (stanza 5).

Beginning in stanza 15, a tone of complaint appears; the poet asks his champion why he is withholding favor. Stanza 20 contains the first specific reference to “this agony in my arm,” and thereafter, the concluding verses of each stanza implore the divine monkey-physician to relieve it, employing every ingenious device—poetic and psychological—to secure his intervention. At times, Tulsidas muses like a latter-day Job, asking how it is possible for such suffering to persist when he is under God’s protection.

Survey earth, eternity, and the triple worlds with four eyes,
one won’t spy another accomplished one like you.
Destiny, Death, the Guardians—the whole moving and
immobile mass of beings is in your hand; Lord, consider your
majesty!

Tulsi’s your special servant, his heart’s your abode,
yet, God, he seems to have a surfeit of suffering.
This limb pain’s like a wild creeper, so seize
its spreading roots in monkey-play and yank them out! (24)

Whether from my own sins, or just the triple-torment of this
world,
or someone’s curse, this arm pain’s passed expression or endurance.
I’ve tried every tonic, spells, talismans,
propitiated a whole herd of gods—all in vain.
But who is there—creator, preserver, destroyer, or anyone else
in illusion’s net—who doesn’t bow to your command?
Rama-envoy, Tulsi’s yours, you’ve accepted him yourself,
and Hero, your indifference pains him even more than his pain. (30)

The final eight stanzas display a mood of greater introspection, as the poet muses over past misdeeds that may be the cause of his present suffering. In several of these songs, the words of address shift back and forth from Hanuman to Rama and occasionally to Shiva, suggesting that there is essentially no difference between them, especially to one in terrible distress.

The songs of the *Hanumān bāhuk* are characterized by what Allchin calls “an urgency that is new in Tulsi” (1964:42). With the consummate artistry characteristic of the poet’s later writings (apparently, even when racked with pain, Tulsidas produced brilliant verse), they offer a personalized portrait, rare in premodern Indian literature, of human suffering, struggle, and hope. But they are something more: an anguished cry to the one god whom Tulsidas evidently thought could relieve his distress. They show that the great poet and scholar, in an especially dark period of his last years, turned not to the

“purifier of the fallen” (*patita-pāvana*), Rama, but to the “liberator from distress” (*saṅkata mocana*), Hanuman, a deity who was invoked by suffering people seeking help in mundane contexts. In the *Hanumān bāhuk*, Tulsidas isn’t looking for salvation, just for a little relief from pain. Although the text doesn’t say so, it became a matter of common belief that he found it, and that the stanzas chart not simply the anatomy of an illness but a healing journey that can be revisited by others. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the *Bāhuk* enjoyed great popularity, attested by the large number of surviving manuscripts.¹¹ Devotees regarded it as a text of particular power and efficacy, capable of winning Hanuman’s favor. In the twentieth century, its continuing appeal is indicated by the fact that a Gita Press edition went through thirty-eight printings prior to 1988; it is also included in most popular anthologies intended for Hanuman worship. In Banaras, I was told that the first question the late Maharaja Vibhuti Narayan Singh would ask an aspiring *Rāmcaritmānas* expounder was “Have you memorized the *Hanumān bāhuk*?” A negative reply would mean that the newcomer’s discourses were not worth hearing, since the devout king considered this text (and its presiding deity) a kind of “key” to Tulsidas’s oeuvre. Yet although the *Bāhuk* continues to be recited, its popularity has lately been overshadowed by shorter and simpler texts also bearing the poetic signature of Tulsidas, which are likewise thought to quickly win the divine monkey’s favor: the *Hanumān cālīsā*, *Bajraṅg bāṇ*, and *Saṅkaṭ mocan aṣṭak*. Before I consider the impact of this literature, I will first briefly discuss its attribution.

These are not the only “Tulsidas” poems that stand outside the canon of his writings as generally accepted by scholars. The fame of Tulsidas, like that of Kabir, Mirabai, and Surdas, led to the ongoing practice of composing works, short and long, that bear the *chāp* (poetic signature) “Tulsidas” or “Tulsi says . . .” Such attribution cannot be considered literary fraud in the modern sense as it generally had no material motive, though it did seek to claim the authority of the poet-saint (Hawley 1988). It has also been pointed out that “Tulsi” and “Tulsidas” became relatively common names after the sixteenth century, particularly among Ramanandis, and that some of its later bearers were poets who asserted a special link with their namesake.¹²

In discussing the attribution of these works, and especially of the *Hanumān cālīsā*—which has recently acquired a popularity possibly exceeding that of any other short text in the Hindu tradition—it is well to distinguish between historical authenticity on the one hand and perceived spiritual efficacy on the other. To my knowledge, none of the major Indian scholars of Tulsidas accept the claim that the three works cited above are actual compositions of the historical poet. They occur in none of the lists of his writings

11. E.g., the library of the Nagari Pracharini Sabha in Banaras has thirty-six manuscripts of the *Hanumān bāhuk*; that of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan in Allahabad has fifteen.

12. E.g., Tulsi Saheb of Hathras (1763–1843), author of the *Ghaṭ rāmāyaṇ*, who claimed to be the reincarnation of Tulsidas of Banaras.

found in his biographies, and stylistically, despite a few borrowings of lines and phrases from his known writings, they do not reflect the literary quality that he apparently labored to achieve. Cruder in vocabulary and also containing redundancies, they lack, as the great scholar of Rama-related literature Dr. Bhagavati Prasad Singh remarked to me in 1990, the “compactness and force” that is characteristic of Tulsidas. Moreover, they are poorly attested in manuscript archives. Manuscripts of the *Cālīsā* are rare; none predate the mid-eighteenth century and most are from the nineteenth, suggesting a date of composition sometime in the eighteenth century.¹³ The manuscripts and early printed versions that I have seen also show significant variations (e.g., different ordering of lines and variant verses) suggesting that the version currently in use reflects the standardizing effect of print during the twentieth century. Since the text is short and readily memorized, had it truly been a product of the great poet that had escaped being set down in manuscripts of his writings but preserved only by oral tradition, it would seem odd—assuming it carried the reputation it now enjoys—that the tradition would not have preserved it better. As a text for *anuṣṭhān* (ritual worship or propitiation) the *Cālīsā* is thought to possess great power, and traditionally such texts have been carefully preserved, syllable by syllable. The *Rāmcaritmānas* itself, vast as it is, came early on to be so valued by its audience that its expounders went to great lengths to assert the purity of the text (which they both memorized and copied) on which their interpretations were based (Lutgendorf 1991a:141). Such reverence does not appear to have been applied to the *Cālīsā* until very recently.

However, “spiritual authenticity” is another matter. During my last interview with the late B. P. Singh, in 1994, I asked him whether he considered the *Cālīsā* to be by Tulsidas. Himself a devoted *Cālīsā* reciter, he answered firmly “No,” but then added that he was certain that it was written by some “adept and saintly man” (*siddh puruṣ*), because of its evident effectiveness. This assessment, shared by countless devotees, raises the question of what, exactly, the text does. I suggest that quite apart from the benefits it is said to bestow—inner peace and the granting of favors—the *Cālīsā* and a handful of other texts that approach it in popularity represent a technologically based democratization of the sacred word that has literally empowered millions of people in self-chosen, self-performed, and ultimately self-affirming religious activities. Of the nineteenth-century manuscript copies that I have examined, several are very crude and appear to have been hastily written; they were not the products of trained scribes copying texts for wealthy patrons, but may have been the jottings of individuals who wanted the poem for their own use,

13. The Nagari Pracharini Sabha collection contains eight copies (compared to its thirty-six copies of the *Bāhuk* mentioned earlier); that of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan in Allahabad contains three, among them an alleged 1753 manuscript; however, when I requested to see it in 1990, I was told that it could not be located. The Sarasvatī Bhandar Library of the Maharaja of Banaras has only a single *Cālīsā*—a printed copy from 1867, compared to four manuscripts of the *Bāhuk*. The Vrindaban Research Institute Library has four *Cālīsā* manuscripts, three undated and one dated 1893.

perhaps as a backup for memorization—no doubt because it was their perception that it “worked.” How well it “works” is also reflected by the modern proliferation of *cālīsās* to other deities, including Shiva, Ganesha, Devi, and Bhairava.¹⁴ In a modern exegesis aimed at Anglophone readers (who, it seems, may experience doubts about the text’s quality and authenticity), B. L. Kapur writes, “In view of our training in the western tradition of 19th–20th century nationalism-cum-rationalism, many of us remain only half-hearted in reciting ‘Calisa’ as a daily routine to ensure either earthly rewards or spiritual advancement” (1974:14). To make such reciters more wholehearted, Kapur devotes 170 pages to allegorical and quasi-scientific rationalization of the poem, and to proofs that its “seemingly random and indirect references” actually encode a profound literary and metaphysical design worthy of Tulsidas’s genius (ibid. 107).

What I have said above regarding age and manuscript transmission of the *Cālīsā* also applies to the *Saṅkaṭ mocan aṣṭak* and the *Bajraṅg bāṇ*, two texts that are likewise popular for ritual worship, though they do not approach the ubiquity of the *Cālīsā*. It should be noted that, apart from beseeching Hanuman’s blessings, all three texts offer a précis of his mythical biography, which devotees thus tirelessly rehearse.¹⁵ The eight stanzas to Sankat Mochan invoke the god as “liberator” from *saṅkaṭ*—literally, “constriction,” but a word that has come to imply particularly dreaded misfortune, as in the English “dire straits.”¹⁶ The epithet applies to a number of temple icons of Hanuman, the most famous of which is in the southern part of Banaras and associated with Tulsidas; the poem may have been inspired by one of these, or may have preceded their association with this epithet. Its eight-line stanzas, set in the rhythmic *mattagaṇand* meter, each end with the refrain:

Who in the world doesn’t know, Monkey,
that your name is Sankat Mochan?

Sung versions recorded by Hari Om Sharan and other popular singers are available on cassette and are often broadcast over temple loudspeakers on Tuesdays and Saturdays. The seventh stanza contains a précis of the popular Ahiravan story, and its inclusion is a further argument against this charming poem being the work of Tulsidas. For, although he must have been familiar

14. An anthology of hymns for use by pilgrims to the Balaji temple at Mehndipur, Rajasthan, includes *cālīsās* dedicated to Bhairav and Pretraḥ, Hanuman’s two assistants at this shrine (see chapter 6), as well as to Shiva and Durga (*Camatkāri* 1988:315, 320, 352). There also exists a *Gyāna cālīsā* of unknown date, but attributed to the yogic adept Gorakhnath (White 1996:242), and one even encounters satirical *cālīsās* dedicated to political leaders. I have been unable to determine when or how the number forty (*cālīs*), which is also associated with West Asian mystical traditions (e.g., Jesus’ forty-day fast in the wilderness, and the similar Sufi practice of *cillā*), assumed importance in Indian esoteric practice.

15. Translations of the *Hanumān cālīsā* and of the *Saṅkaṭ mocan aṣṭak* are offered in the appendix to this volume.

16. *Saṅkaṭ rog* (“distress disease”) is another name for leprosy, and the term may also refer to possession by malevolent ghosts (*bhūt-pret kā saṅkaṭ*); on the latter usage, see chapter 6.

with this heroic exploit of Hanuman (which had already appeared in some regional Ramayanas prior to his time), he never refers to it in his attested writings—not even in the *Hanumān bāhuk*. My assumption is that, since it was not found in the Valmiki or *Adhyātma* texts, the literary Ramayanas that Tulsidas seems to have regarded as most authoritative, he refrained from invoking it.

The *Bajraṅg bān* (Arrow of the iron-limbed [Hanuman]) has a format similar to that of the *Cālīsā*, beginning and ending with a couplet in *dohā* meter, bracketing a series of *caupāi* verses. But its printed versions show a wider range of variations in individual lines and it appears to be coalescing more slowly than its celebrated cousin.¹⁷ Like the *Hanumān bāhuk*, it is recommended especially for times of danger or distress, and its tone is both more pleading and more urgent than that of the *Cālīsā*. Hanuman is praised, but he is also repeatedly reminded that his help is overdue. Its memorization is especially recommended for the development of courage and self-confidence.¹⁸ Three verses contain a series of mantras (e.g., *hrīm*, *hum*) of the sort often used in tantric worship, especially to invoke deities in their fierce or protective forms, and another line seems to list bodily locations, perhaps to which the mantras are being applied as a protective “shield” (*kavaca*), another common tantric practice. The inclusion of such features reflects the association of Hanuman with certain esoteric ritual practices, a phenomenon that has itself generated a substantial literature to which I now turn.

Coming to Power

“Tantra” (literally “weaving,” and hence a “systematic structure”) is an elusive term that covers an extremely broad range of phenomena. Perhaps rooted in ancient practices for the attainment of altered states of consciousness, it also shows the influence of the Vedic sacrificial religion, especially of the magical spells and rites prescribed in the fourth or *Atharva veda* (ca. 900 BCE). During the first millennium of the common era, tantric ideologies and techniques influenced all the indigenous religions of South Asia. Although tantric practices have sometimes been associated with nonelite communities, they were readily adopted by Brahmans and also came, at various periods, to enjoy a vogue in courtly circles. In addition, there has long been a flourishing lore

17. One anthology of ritual texts for Hanuman worship warns readers, with regard to the *Bajraṅg bān*: “You don’t get the correct text in the market. There are many errors, therefore this correct version is being printed. The text has been taken from a very old manuscript” (Shrimali n.d.:117). In fact the text provided shows great variation from most other printed versions, with fifty-eight *caupāis* versus the usual thirty-five; the compiler does not identify his source.

18. For example, “Every Indian and foreign soldier should keep this unerring weapon in his heart, throat, and voice” (Shrimali n.d.:117). The Hanuman issue of *Kalyān* includes an article on “The Extraordinarily Miraculous *Bajraṅg bān*” that offers anecdotes concerning its use as a “secret psychological technique” to bring success in interviews, examinations, and other challenges; this is attributed to Hanuman’s mastery over the restless mind, which resembles the wind (1975:512–13).

about tantric practitioners. Because tantra is understood to connote a body of esoteric knowledge capable of generating awesome supernatural powers and even immortality, known or suspected tantrics—particularly those of the “left-hand” path who may ritually engage in normally forbidden practices such as extramarital sexual intercourse and the consumption of meat and alcohol—have been both admired and feared. They are believed to have the power to invoke supernatural beings to carry out their will, especially deities in their dangerous wrathful (*raudra*) aspects, or to practice “black magic” (Hindi *mūṭh*, literally a “fist”) through fatal curses and spells. Hence to call an image or ritual “tantric” (*tāntrika*) is usually to suggest that it is charged with ambivalent occult energy or that it offers a secret shortcut to esoteric knowledge and powers. Tantric texts themselves often claim that they are especially effective in the kali yuga, when Vedic rituals have lost their power. Despite such claims and a reputation for accessibility to all (including women and low-caste people), the most revered tantric texts are in Sanskrit, and the rituals they prescribe often dauntingly complex.

The Hanuman of Valmiki’s *Rāmāyaṇa* would appear to be an exemplar of many tantric values: a creature of a lower order, he transcends his condition through his own pugnacious efforts and rapidly acquires divine boons and occult powers; he is taught esoteric knowledge by the sun god and gains physical immortality and freedom from illness, which he also has the power to cure. Linked with the powerful Vayu, Agni, and Rudra, he exercises control over malevolent beings. His verbal skill is suggestive of mastery of the power (and goddess) of speech, which has been associated since Vedic times with knowledge of mantras. His journey to Lanka and exploits there are said to display the eight siddhis, such as magical flight, the ability to find hidden things, and the power to enlarge or shrink one’s body.¹⁹

Yet, in the vast literature of medieval tantric schools, Hanuman proves once again to be a “marginal” and chronologically late presence. The editors of *Kalyāṇ* noted the absence of references to Hanuman in such authoritative Shakta compendia as the *Kulārṇava* and the *Śāradātīlaka* tantras, and the presence of only a few references in the *Prapañcasāra tantra* and in the ca. seventeenth-century *Tantrasāra* of Krishnananda.²⁰ Govindchandra similarly remarks on the absence of any mention of Hanuman from the huge *Pāñcarātra* literature, Vaishnava texts containing a great deal of tantric material, produced mainly in southern India during the first millennium of the common era, and he cites only a few examples from later texts. One of these is the *Agastya samhitā*, a ca. twelfth-century North Indian text that, according to Hans Bakker, represents a link between southern *Pāñcarātra* traditions and

19. For modern accounts of Hanuman’s display of the eight siddhis, see *Kalyāṇ* 1975:151, and Sundd 1998:300–301.

20. The dating of the older tantras, like that of the Puranas, is an inexact science. Gupta, Hoens, and Goudriaan date the *Kulārṇava* to “between about 1000 and 1400 A.D.,” the *Śāradātīlaka* (attributed to the Kashmiri Shaiva Lakshmanadeshika) to the eleventh century, and the *Prapañcasāra* to the tenth or eleventh centuries (1981:94, 131, 135).

later northern Rama devotees such as the Ramanandis, for whom it became an authoritative text for temple ritual (Bakker 1986:1.77). Although this text is mainly devoted to the worship of Rama and to the elaboration of a Rama-centered theology, its thirty-second chapter contains a mantra for the invocation of Hanuman, who is said to grant spiritual liberation and to dispel malevolent spirits (Govindchandra 1976:82, 85).

The centrality of mantra in tantric practice—reflected in the belief that the esoteric “seed formula” (*bīja mantra*) for a given deity is identical with that deity and capable of summoning or controlling him or her—led to the compilation, especially after about 1100 CE, of large digests of *mantraśāstra* (“treatises on mantra”), containing hundreds of mantras with explanations for their use. It is only in some of the later examples of this class of work, such as the *Mantramahodadhi* of Mahidhara, composed in Banaras in about 1589, that we begin to find short chapters devoted to Hanuman—an indication of his growing popularity among literate religious specialists during the period that corresponded to the floruit of Tulsidas.

Short texts dedicated more exclusively to Hanuman's tantric worship, with rituals that utilize mantras accompanied by mental visualization (*dhyāna*) and mystic diagrams (*yantra*), appear in significant numbers in manuscript form only in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Some of these also contain instructions for making protective amulets or for the assemblage of a “shield” (*kavaca*) made of mantras—a sort of verbal armor extending a deity's protection over one's body and soul.²¹ Many of these texts claim to be excerpted from older works, especially the Puranas, and are set in the dialog format characteristic of the latter, although their teachings are usually identified as “highly secret.” Thus we encounter titles such as *Śrī Hanumān rahasya*—“the secret [worship] of Lord Hanuman”—as well as numerous *kavaca* texts invoking the god in protective multiheaded forms, the most common being a five-headed (*pañcamukhī*) form, but also including forms with seven or eleven heads.²²

Esoterica Made Easy

Printed descendants of “tantric” Hanuman texts now abound in religious bookshops and form one category of a corpus of (usually inexpensive) works devoted to the monkey god and collectively concerned both with his life-narrative (*jīvan-caritra*) and with his ritual worship (variously referred to as *pūjā*, *upāsna*, *ārādhna*, or *anuṣṭhān*). At one end of the spectrum are texts primarily or even solely concerned with ritual (e.g., S. S. Mishra 1971,

21. Van der Veer cites the popularity of the *Hanumat kavaca* among Tyagi sadhus (1988:123); it is possible that this text may have been composed by Ramanandi preceptors during the period (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries) when the Ramanandis were challenging the dominance of Gosains and Dasanamis, who used older Shaiva *kavacas* in their worship.

22. For an example of such a *kavaca*, and discussion of the growing popularity of five-headed Hanuman during the twentieth century, see chapter 8.

D. Shukla n.d.), and at the other, those devoted exclusively to the proliferating tales of Hanuman's glorious deeds (e.g., Dube 1989, B. Mishra 1987, S. Singh 1984; these "biographies" will be considered in the final section of this chapter). Others lie in between, covering both topics in a single convenient anthology (e.g. Gopal 1989, D. Gupta 1980). A smaller number are focused on site-specific manifestations of the god, such as "Balaji" in Menhdipur, Rajasthan, who is celebrated in the locally published *Camatkārī navīn barā Hanumat upāsna saṅgrah* ("Miraculous new jumbo anthology for Hanuman's propitiation"), a 576-page work that (as its title page announces) includes:

the life-story of Shri Balaji Maharaj, procedures for worship, numerous witty anecdotes of the cleverness of Hanuman, yantras and tantras for powers, the *Sundar kāṇḍ*, Hanuman's fast-story [*vratkathā*], hundreds of bhajans to Balaji, Krishna, Ramachandra, Shiva, Kaila Devi, etc., numerous artis, the Devi's *lāṅguriyā* songs, and other things suitable for reading and recitation. (1988)²³

All such works are sold in bookshops that cater to Hindi-language readers and that typically carry, in addition to a wide range of religious texts, self-help manuals on topics ranging from yoga and astronomy to herbal medicine, diet, hypnotism, and sex, as well as popular novels, books of cinema songs, and collections of jokes. At such a shop, a request for "books on Hanuman-ji" generally yields a small pile of specimens ranging from crudely printed, misprint-plagued pamphlets of prayers and hymns, assembled by anonymous compilers and selling for a few rupees, to expensive hardbound volumes written in Sanskritized Hindi by pandits who offer distinctive interpretations of anthologized texts.

I have been using "ritual worship" and "propitiation" to translate a variety of Hindi terms that connote practices intended to be "fruitful" (*sa-phal*)—aimed at producing results of benefit to the worshiper or, in certain cases, of harm to someone else. At the more bhakti-oriented, Vaishnava end of the spectrum of Hanuman devotion, there is a certain embarrassment about such practices, reflecting the notion that divine worship ideally should be selfless and "without desire" for results (*niṣkāṃ*). Thus *Kalyāṇ* relegates tantric ritual to its final pages, and prefaces these with a "Request Concerning Ritual Worship" by the Gita Press's founder Hanumanprasad Poddar, reminding readers of the superiority of desireless devotion over rites that seek divine assistance (1975:483–84)—but it then offers thirty double-columned pages devoted to precisely such ends. Most texts, however, are unapologetic about their readers' presumed objective in turning to Hanuman. Pandit Dinanath Shukla's *Śrī Hanumat upāsna*, for example, offers as its frontispiece a yantra consisting of three concentric circles of *bīja*-mantras surrounding an

23. The Balaji shrine and its rituals of exorcism are described in chapter 6, and some of the *lāṅguriyā* songs—a special category of Hanuman-related texts—are discussed in chapter 7.

eight-petaled lotus, in the center of which the reader's name is to be inscribed; the caption explains: "If this is written on birch bark and worn in an amulet case, obstacles such as ghosts and demons etc. do not bother you." The preface matter-of-factly notes:

In this world, hardly anyone undertakes any activity without the desire to obtain some result. . . . In the kali yuga, the worship of Rama's devotee Hanuman has proven to yield the quickest and most abundant benefits. (n.d.:5)

If the ethical propriety of petitioning (or arm-twisting) the gods for favors is of little concern to the authors of these manuals, procedural correctness is another matter. Introducing his 160-page book on *Hanumān upāsna* (one of a series of tantric manuals published by Diamond Pocket Books of Delhi), Pandit Radhakrishna Shrimali stresses the need for "knowledge of the order, proper pronunciation, and use of mantras. . . . For just as calling out the name of one among several sleeping persons causes that person to awaken. . . . so only when mantras are correctly pronounced do they become effective and awaken the deities" (n.d.:1). Shrimali's metaphor suggests the notion, basic to tantric ideology, that divine powers lie in a dormant state and that activating them requires correct performance of verbal codes. He adds that the goal of such practice is "to effect identity with a chosen deity. . . . and his embodied qualities, virtues, physical attributes, and power" (ibid. 5).

Shrimali's book exemplifies modern tantric manuals devoted to Hanuman. In paperback format and sold (in 1990) for the modest price of Rs. 10, it devotes only five of its 160 pages to stories of Hanuman's deeds (recounting his adventure as an infant of seizing the sun, which resulted in his becoming further empowered by divine boons) before turning to prescriptions for his propitiation through yantras and mantras, together with explanations of the rationale for these procedures. Throughout the book, there is a curious alternation between passages that stress Hanuman's accessibility and the simplicity of his worship, and ritual recipes that are formidably complicated. Thus the chapter on yantras opens with an encouraging passage:

Hanuman is a god who can be worshiped in all places and at all times, by all persons. Anyone, anywhere, at any time can become freed of distress by remembering him. . . . Although incomparable in courage, heroism, splendor, and intensity, Hanuman-ji is very simple-hearted, compassionate, and detached. . . . He constantly roams around in the guise of an ordinary monkey, but when a devotee calls out he takes any form, according to the circumstances, to make the impossible possible. (ibid. 25)

Yet almost immediately, the author begins prescribing more elaborate and specific means of getting Hanuman's attention, such as wearing the color red (said to please him), and offering him red-colored foods and flowers.

Concerning yantras, Shrimali explains that they must not simply be drawn in the prescribed manner, but must then be empowered (*siddh karnā*) through the repetition of mantras. Once this is accomplished, a yantra can be used to achieve desired ends, as indicated in the following sample prescriptions:

1. A yantra of sixteen squares inscribed with various nasalized consonants (*naṃ, chaṃ, jaṃ, caṃ*, etc.), is to be written out a total of 125,000 times over the course of fifteen, seventeen, twenty-one, twenty-five, or twenty-seven days, followed by 108 fire oblations (*havan*) and gifts of food and clothing to Brahmans. If done “according to prescription,” this ritual is said to guarantee a vision of Hanuman as well as the attainment of his grace (*ibid.* 28–29).
2. A fear-averting yantra, described as “comparatively simple,” consists of a magic square with numerals that add up to seventy-nine. It should be drawn on birch bark with a pomegranate-twigg pen, dipped in ink made of five scented oils, at midnight on the second of a lunar fortnight when the moon is waxing. The yantra is to be worshiped with incense and a lamp, and 108 recitations of *Om Hanumate namaḥ* (“Om, salutations to Hanuman!”). Thus activated, it is to be buried in a two-foot deep hole near the entrance to the place in which one feels fearful. “From this practice, the fear-inducing essences (*tattva*) of that place will be destroyed” (*ibid.* 31).
3. A prescription for a yantra to prevent black magic begins with a discourse lamenting the prevalence of witchcraft (*mūṭh*) in our times. “A person against whom it is directed is lost; no one can save him.” In this terrible practice, grains of black lentil, charged with mantras, are thrown by a witch at a person, animal, or property. The victim begins to bleed from the nose, suffers a burning sensation in the chest, and quickly dies. Notes Shrimali, “Witchcraft can cause a tree to wither, a domestic animal to go into convulsions and die, and a flourishing house to fall into ruin. History tells us that it was much used by Buddhist monks in their lust for power.” To avoid it, a nine-part circular yantra inscribed with letters and numerals should be drawn on birch bark at midnight on the moonless night of Holi, using black ink made of *dhatūrā* (a poison sacred to Shiva). The writer must be naked, and must inscribe his name in the center of the circle. After worshipping it with the usual round of 108 mantras, he is to wear it concealed in a turban or hat (*ibid.* 39–40).

A succeeding chapter devoted to mantras again stresses the necessity of following directions, and then offers similarly elaborate prescriptions for specific ends, such as the two below:

1. A mantra to ensure success on a journey consists of an apparently meaningless Hindi couplet to be recited 12,500 times daily for three days, followed by 1,250 fire oblations. Thereafter, it can be used at any time by reciting it nine times into the palms of one’s freshly washed

hands, and by then lightly running them over one's head, chest, arms, and legs. Then, "wherever one goes, one will definitely meet with success" (ibid. 46).

2. A mantra for curing migraine headaches is to be recited seven times while blowing the ash of burned cow dung in the afflicted person's face. Although many mantras consist of long strings of difficult Sanskrit formulae, this one includes a nursery-rhyme-like Hindi stanza that makes direct reference to the invoked deity and the presenting complaint:

Om salutations! Born in the forest, monkeys climb trees,
leap from branch to branch and eat raw, wild fruits.
Half they tear, half they split, half they let fall.
When Hanuman-ji roars, migraine goes away! (ibid. 47)

Other mantras are offered for gastric complaints, toothache, and for the activation of a peacock-feather fan to "sweep away" ghosts, particularly from small children. The latter prescription adds an element of coercion; after being placated with various offerings, Hanuman is told that, if he fails to carry out the suppliant's wishes, "You will have disgraced Mother Anjani's milk!" (ibid. 46, 48, 56; cf. Story 24).

The examples above are representative of rituals prescribed in a number of other widely available manuals that may be said to typify the more proletarian end of the literature devoted to Hanuman's ritual propitiation. But the same bookstores often carry other texts offering less explanatory passages and evidently designed to appeal to an audience with training in Brahmanical ritual. An example of this type is *Hanumad rahasyam* ("Esoteric worship of Hanuman"), edited by Pandit Shivdatt Shastri Mishra. A clothbound book published in Banaras in 1971 and in its third edition in 1990 (when it sold for Rs. 16), it opens with a benediction from Swami Karpatri, a leader of the elite Dandi or "staff-bearing" Brahman lineage of the Dasanami order. The narrative portion of the book comprises a mere four pages and recounts just one of Hanuman's popular birth stories. The largest item in the anthology is a ninety-six-page ritual recipe in Sanskrit attributed to one Nathunarayan of Jaipur, who allegedly wrote in 1897. The list of required ingredients runs to sixty-eight items, including costly spices, oils, and scents, and the terse Hindi gloss alludes to procedures that would be impossible for anyone but an orthodox *vaidika* Brahman (e.g., "Then enter your ritual-fire area and perform *homa* according to your liturgical lineage," S. S. Mishra 1971:30). Much of the manual is generic, however, and apart from occasional invocations of Hanuman (who is first mentioned thirty pages into the text) could be applied to any deity. There are more than twenty pages of mantras to accompany *nyāsa*, the "superimposition" of divine powers on the limbs of the worshiper's body (ibid. 33–57). Hanuman then briefly returns as the subject of a visualization, followed by twenty more pages of mantras to accompany fire-oblations (ibid. 64–86). The manual concludes with a passage likewise characteristic of such works: after final instructions that advocate carrying out the entire ritual

three times a day, it offers, in the event that this is not possible, a series of acceptable and rapidly diminishing substitutions, such as performing it twice, or only once, or merely on the full or new moon days of each month, eventually paring everything down to the offering of a single water-libation accompanied by a “pure mind” (ibid. 94–95).

Pandit Mishra’s anthology includes other Sanskrit texts, and each of these is attributed to a venerable source. Thus its section on mantras (including a recipe for gaining power over enemies by making an image of Hanuman out of clay and ash from a cremation ground, and another for summoning up a private *vetāla* or demon to carry out one’s will) is said to be excerpted from the *Mantramahodadhi*, and its account of the Hanuman *Vrat-kathā* (concerning which, see below) is said to be from the *Bhaviṣyottara purāna* (ibid. 103–15, 256). Only in its final thirty pages does it incorporate, along with instructions for their use, the Hindi-language prayers—*Hanumān cālīsā*, *Bajraṅg bān*, and so on—that are most familiar to modern devotees (ibid. 266–302); however, this is perhaps appropriate in what is, after all, billed as a book of “esoteric secrets.” I will discuss the possible audience for such a work shortly, but first I will consider another ritual that is generally included in such anthologies.

The Hanuman Vrat-kathā

The word *vrāt* (“fast” or “vow”) refers to a disciplined religious observance undertaken for one’s own benefit or that of another. A *vrāt* typically involves the observance of certain restrictions for a prescribed period, generally of twenty-four hours or less—for example, abstaining from certain foods and from sexual intercourse, or sleeping on the floor—as well as the performance of rituals (often involving the preparation of special foods), and the reading or hearing of a story called a “vow-narrative” (*vrāt-kathā*). This may offer a charter myth for the *vrāt* or an admonitory tale of a worshiper who failed to carry it out properly, with dire consequences that are eventually reversed through correct performance. *Vrats* may be connected with the solar week (e.g., the Friday *vrāt* in honor of Goddess Santoshi Ma), lunar month (e.g., the *ekādaśī vrāt* on the eleventh of the waxing or waning fortnight), or luni-solar year (e.g., *Bhaiyā dūj*, a fast observed by women in honor of their brothers on the second of the bright fortnight of the autumn month of Karttik). Although *vrats* may be performed by both sexes, they are especially common among women, for whom they constitute a major form of personal, often household-based ritual that is largely independent of male and priestly intervention (Pearson 1996).

Where Hanuman is concerned, the word *vrāt* is commonly applied in two contexts. As one of Hanuman’s special worship days, Tuesday is sometimes referred to as a weekly “Hanuman-*vrāt*.” Many devotees refrain from taking food or even water until they have had Hanuman’s *darshan* in a temple and recited the *Cālīsā* on Tuesday morning, and some nonvegetarians abstain from eating meat and eggs on this day out of respect for Hanuman. The other context in which Hanuman is linked to a *vrāt* is through an elaborate *vrāt-kathā* incorporating ritual instructions as well as an admonitory tale. This

story occurs with little variation in all the *upāsnā* anthologies I have examined. Its format of multiple narratives set within a frame-dialog is typical of Puranic texts.

A group of sages led by Shaunaka ask the bard Suta to describe some new vrat suitable to all four social orders and that bestows progeny, wealth, and wisdom. Suta recounts how the sage Vyasa taught this vrat to King Yudhishtira and his brothers when they were living in forest exile. Vyasa too began with a story, explaining that this vrat had previously been taught by Lord Krishna to the Pandavas's wife, Draupadi, and that through her performance of it, her husbands acquired vast wealth and universal sovereignty. Per instructions, Draupadi wore around her neck a yellow string with thirteen knots. One day, Arjuna noticed this and asked why she was wearing it. When Draupadi explained that it was for the Hanuman-vrat, Arjuna mocked her: "That monkey adorns the pennant of my chariot! Just tell me, how can a lowly branch-dwelling animal, a beast who eats wild fruits, give one all riches? The problem is that the weak intellect of women comes under the sway of monkeys and other subhuman creatures. You can't fool me with these vrats!" Shocked, Draupadi explained that Krishna himself had taught her the ritual. Arjuna retorted that Krishna was a trickster, always playing games; she shouldn't take anything he said seriously. He then ordered Draupadi to remove the string from her neck and throw it away. Draupadi took off the string, but concealed it in the palace garden. Vyasa explained that Arjuna's insult was the root cause of the Pandavas's subsequent loss of their kingdom and thirteen years of exile.

Vyasa then told a second story, set in the treta age during the life of Rama. After Hanuman brought Rama to Sugriva, he revealed the vrat to them both, saying it was part of the boon he received from Indra. A celestial voice confirmed that Hanuman's words were true, and Hanuman then urged Rama to perform the vrat in order to recover his wife and kingdom.

The vrat should be undertaken on the thirteenth of the bright lunar fortnight of Margashirsha during the ascendance of the constellation Abhijit. One should tie thirteen knots in a yellow string, place it in an auspicious water pot, and summon Hanuman with the mantra *Om namo bhagavate vāyunandanāya* ("Om, salutations to the blessed son of the wind!"). One should then worship him with yellow perfumes, yellow flowers, and sixteen puja offerings. From wheat flour, one should shape thirteen round sweetmeats (known as *mālpūā*) and should also prepare thirteen betel quids. One should offer food and a monetary gift to thirteen Brahmans. This procedure should be carried out annually for thirteen years, during which one should wear the knotted string around one's neck. Vyasa further explained that Rama, Sugriva, and Vibhishana all were able to recover

their kingdoms through this vrat. Impressed by the story, Yudhishtira and Draupadi undertook the vrat, and as a result the Pandavas won back their own kingdom in a single year.

Several elements in this story merit comment. The characterization of Arjuna as arrogant is in keeping with his portrayal in a number of episodes in the *Mahābhārata* (e.g., his jealousy of the tribal warrior Ekalavya whose skill at archery surpasses his own; see *Mahābhārata* 1.123.10–39, 1973:270–72), and the reference to a heraldic monkey on the pennant of his chariot is likewise consonant with the epic; both of these themes are also highlighted in a well-known tale from Hanuman’s own “biographical” cycle (Story 38). Here, however, the Pandava prince’s arrogance reflects a dismissive elite male attitude toward the ritual practices of women, including vrats and the worship of “animal” deities. The actual procedures of the vrat—the simple knotted string activated with a short mantra and then worn as a talisman, and the homely offering of *mālpūā* cakes and betel—are likewise suggestive of nonelite practice. The story elevates this humble worship by audaciously identifying its incorrect performance as the cause of the central drama of the great epic (a feat that requires ignoring much of the plot of the *Mahābhārata*, yet seems acceptable within the narrow framework of the vrat story) and by stamping it with the *imprimatur* of two divine incarnations as well as the immortal sage Vyasa.

Secrets on Sale

The numerous self-help manuals for Hanuman’s “tantric” propitiation appear, to an outsider, to embody several paradoxes. Sold at low cost in bookshops that cater primarily to those of modest education, they stress the ease of Hanuman worship even as they prescribe elaborate rituals requiring hard-to-obtain ingredients. They assert the danger of ritual error and the necessity of having a guru’s guidance even as they attempt to circumvent this with step-by-step directions. They invoke the authority of Sanskrit mantras and of Brahman priests even as they offer allegedly “secret” rituals to any literate person willing to make a small monetary outlay. They are ubiquitous enough that they must have an audience—since this type of ephemeral literature does not survive unless it sells—yet in my research I encountered few worshipers who expressed interest in such texts. More commonly, I was told that the great appeal of Hanuman results from the simplicity and informality of his worship: the fact that he displays “quick satisfaction” at the mere chanting of Rama’s name or the recitation of the easy, vernacular *Cālīsā*. Several people contrasted him, in this respect, to the goddess, who likes to hear herself praised in the long Sanskrit eulogy *Durgā saptaśatī*, yet who may be angered if one mispronounces a word (see Story 22).

The copious lore of tantra has perhaps always been disproportionate to the actual number of its practitioners, at least in its more demanding forms; in any case, those who actually pursue tantric practice may choose not to talk about it. In Banaras, my inquiries into tantric Hanuman worship eventually

led me to an aged Maharashtrian pandit living on one of the southern ghats. This man, who was in his eighties when I interviewed him in 1990, was said to be an adept at Hanuman's tantric *upāsna*, through which he had acquired supernatural powers and the unique privilege of being permitted to touch and personally serve all the murtis of the god in the city, including Sankat Mochan, which is otherwise strictly off-limits to all save the temple's own mahant and priests. When I interviewed this venerated man, he proved to be quite friendly but, not surprisingly, was disinclined to discuss his own ritual practice. As for the printed manuals, he gleefully noted that their texts were corrupt and that no one could follow them without the guidance of a guru, in which case the printed version would be superfluous anyway. He doubted whether they attracted many actual practitioners, and when I pointed out their wide availability, he simply shrugged his shoulders and chuckled—as if to invoke P. T. Barnum on the ubiquity of suckers.

Yet his own acquired skills were soon displayed when, in the course of our conversation, a young man entered the pandit's small room. After a brief, whispered exchange, the old man felt the newcomer's pulse, then placed his hand on his own throat and blew repeatedly into the other's face. The pandit's middle-aged son explained to me that the visitor was seeking help for a medical condition that had proven resistant to standard treatment, and that many people came to his father in such circumstances. The pandit was concentrating on memorized mantras that he had previously "activated" through ritual repetition; now summoning their power, he was communicating it to the other man through his breath. All these practices were indeed described in the popular books we had just been discussing. Healing by blowing (*phūṅknā*) is common in rural North India, where its practitioners are often of low social status and sometimes heal while in a state of possession by a local deity. Here the practitioner was a learned Brahman, and "possession" (in the usual sense, involving loss of self-control) was not part of the ritual, but was replaced by memorized Sanskrit formulae that enabled him to tap the power of his presiding deity: the "son of the wind," who also has a special association with prana or the vivifying breath.

Certainly it is not necessary for a ritual to be widely practiced in order for it to possess authority, particularly if it is reified in a printed form that purports to embody the secret wisdom of ancient texts. Like certain novice cooks, some devotees may derive satisfaction from the mere possession of books containing elaborate recipes that they are themselves unlikely to ever try. They do not doubt that Hanuman, as an avatara of Shiva, would respond to such propitiation, but they also trust that he equally responds to their recital of simple hymns like the *Cālīsā* and the *Banjraṅg bān*. Such largely symbolic invocation of "tantric" ritual is similarly suggested by pamphlet-sized versions of Tulsidas's *Sundar kāṇḍ* that are printed in red ink and advertised on their covers as "suitable for tantric puja." The invocation of Hanuman in these "tantric" texts and contexts is indicative both of his own growing popularity and also of broader processes at work in modern popular Hinduism, concerning which I shall have more to say in my final chapter. I now turn to the

other major corpus of popular literature concerning Hanuman: that devoted to his expanding “biography.”

Getting a Life

Hanuman’s tendency to “grow” and to assume a more prominent role in the Rama narrative may already be identified in its literary archetype, for the *Sundarakāṇḍā* of Valmiki’s *Rāmāyaṇa*, wherein Hanuman substitutes for Rama as the active hero, has been termed “an epic within an epic” and identified as the “heart” of the great poem (Goldman and Goldman 1996:37). Yet the Sanskrit poet framed this singularly incandescent book within a wider narrative that unambiguously subordinated all other characters to Rama. The focus began to shift, however, in certain Rama-related narratives composed after the fifteenth century CE and was first notable in southern and eastern texts. Especially significant in this respect is the story of Ahiravana, an elaborate tale of non-Valmikian pedigree that again arrests the flow of the greater epic to follow Hanuman on an independent quest to fight forces of evil and rescue his human master. Citing the elaboration of this story in the literatures of Bengal, Orissa, and Assam, William Smith remarks on the development of “what might be called Hanuman literature” (1994:153), and Kamil Zvelebil, discussing its comparable proliferation in premodern Telugu, Kannada, and Tamil texts, likewise sees it as intended “to foster the increasingly important cult of Hanuman as a folk hero” (1987:xxxix). As I have noted, the story is absent from Tulsidas’s epic, which seems to be in keeping with the comparatively subdued role that Hanuman assumes in that work. Yet there, too, the poet’s brief *Sundar kāṇḍ*, in which Hanuman takes the spotlight, quickly assumed a textual life of its own, becoming the most copied and evidently most recited of his seven subbooks.

The nascent “Hanuman literature” discerned by Smith and Zvelebil emerges in Hindi during the late twentieth century in a collection of texts devoted almost entirely to a vastly expanded life story of the monkey hero, presented as a cycle of tales complete in itself. Within this mythobiographical framework, the familiar Rama story is invariably retold, but with significant compression and a change in focus. Typically it comprises no more than half of the total text of these works and begins with Rama’s first encounter with Hanuman. Although a few of the texts situate this meeting according to the standard Ramayana scenario (in the forest near the monkey kingdom of Kishkindha, during Rama’s search for Sita), most place it much earlier, in Ayodhya during Rama’s infancy, when Shiva and Hanuman pay a visit to the royal family in the guise of a wandering street performer and his dancing monkey. The traditional *Sundar kāṇḍ* is of course retold at length in these works, and the subsequent account of the battle in Lanka focuses on Hanuman’s heroic deeds. It almost always includes a long rendition of the Ahiravana story as well as a much-expanded version of Hanuman’s journey to the Himalayas to fetch healing herbs. In contrast, the actual slaying of Ravana

by Rama may be disposed of in a sentence or two and the reunion of Rama and Sita not even mentioned, its place being taken by a long, emotional (and much happier) account of the tearful reunion of “mother” Sita and her “son” and rescuer Hanuman. This reoriented Ramayana is bracketed by elaborate retellings of Hanuman’s birth (generally more than one, to allow for his multiple patrimony), of his childhood adventures, and of his postwar career as courtier and servant to the victorious king of Ayodhya, and then, following Rama’s departure from the earth, as his proxy in succeeding world epochs. Being the biography of an immortal, a *Hanumān caritra* ends with its subject alive and well in the present.

By way of introducing these life narratives (from which are drawn the tales that I retell and analyze in the next two chapters), I will describe and comment on several recently published works in Hindi and (in two cases) English. As will be seen, these texts vary both in the elaboration of their retelling of Hanuman’s life story and in their religious orientation: from those that appear more Shaiva in their slant, to others that attempt to give equal weight to Vaishnava and Shaiva perspectives, to a few that represent Vaishnava sectarian viewpoints.

(1) The paperback *Hanumān upāsna* (“The propitiation of Hanuman”), published in 1978 by the Delhi-based Dehati Pustak Bhandar (“rural book center”), announces its subject as “The son of the wind, the great hero, wearer of the red loincloth and bearer of vermilion, Hanuman—by whose worship not only eight hundred million Indians but the world’s five billion people can have their wishes fulfilled” (Dikshit: title page). A third of its three hundred pages are devoted to Hanuman’s life story, sometimes citing epic and puranic sources for individual episodes, but identifying others as based on “folktales” (*lok kathāem*). The stories stress Hanuman’s identity with Shiva, who in turn is presented as an exemplary devotee of Rama, always meditating on *Rāmanāma*, which he explains to be both the sonic embodiment of unmanifest divinity and the name of Vishnu’s seventh incarnation (ibid:11). The narrative section is followed by two hundred pages of liturgical texts and instructions for ritual worship to obtain various ends.

(2) The mammoth “Hanuman special issue” of the Gita Press journal *Kalyān* was published in January 1975; it runs to 528 double-columned pages and includes 199 individual articles, mainly by pandits and religious leaders (bearing titles like swami, acharya, or *jagat-guru*—“world teacher”) and comprising pious homilies and brief anecdotes about Hanuman, peppered with quotations from revered texts. As is typical in *Kalyān*, Hindu nationalist rhetoric is balanced by more inclusive views—thus an essay on the devotion to Hanuman of M. S. Golwalkar (founder of the militant RSS) sits next to one celebrating the Hanuman-bhakti of Mahatma Gandhi (who once remarked, when speaking at the dedication of a Hanuman temple in a wrestling club, “If our ideal is merely physical strength, then why not consecrate an image of Ravana?”; 85–86). This anthology reputedly became an “instant classic” and has strongly influenced the subsequent development of Hanuman literature (see e.g., M. Joshi 2001:8; J. Mishra 1987:iii; Soni 2000:292).



FIGURE 3.2. The cover of the “Hanuman Special Issue” of *Kalyāṇ* (1975)

The major exception to its short-article format, however, is a 127-page biographical narrative, *Hanumān carit*, by Shivnath Dube, which thus constitutes more than a fifth of the volume and was later separately printed as the 328-page paperback *Hanumān līlāmṛt* (The nectar of Hanuman’s divine sports; Dube 1989). It adheres to the structure outlined above, bracketing a retelling of the Ramayana with numerous tales of the monkey hero’s pre- and post-epic career. Presenting itself as the voice of Sanatana Dharma, *Kalyāṇ* blends social conservatism with (what many consider) an accessible and uplifting Vaishnavized, Sanskritized, and sanitized popular religion. It is much concerned with scriptural authority, and so Pandit Dube identifies the sources on which he bases each story. The majority are drawn from the Valmiki or Tulsidas epics or from the *Adhyātma rāmāyaṇa*, but stories are also retold from the *Śiva*, *Skanda* and *Padma purāṇas*, and from the *Ānanda rāmāyaṇa*; a final section, titled “[Heard] Among Enthusiastic Devotees,” comprises oral tales

that express “Hanuman’s childlike simplicity and extraordinary love” (*Kalyān* 1975:336). The mood throughout is of intense devotion to Rama, and Shiva’s subordination to Rama/Vishnu is gently but repeatedly emphasized. In short, although both shakti and bhakti are portrayed here, the latter, in its Vaishnava mode, appears to have the upper hand.

(3) The attractively printed paperback bearing the title *Pavansut Hanumān kī ātmakathā*—The *autobiography* of Hanuman, son of the wind—piqued my curiosity when I encountered it in a bookstall in Hardwar, where it was published by Randhir Book Sales in 1984. Its author, Sudarshan Singh, has indeed chosen to narrate Hanuman’s life story in the assumed first-person voice of its subject, and he sets it within a charming and plausible narrative framework: during the *pax Rama* that follows the conclusion of the war with Ravana, Hanuman lives in the palace in Ayodhya and serves as a sort of bachelor uncle-cum-babysitter to the little sons of Rama and his brothers. These royal children pester him to tell his own story, and although he begins by protesting that he finds the prospect tiresome, he obliges the little princes by spinning a tale that runs to nearly 300 pages. Such a personalized approach frees the author from the need to cite textual sources, and although he recounts most of the same stories found in other collections, he is able to add distinctive interpretations of his own. Thus the boys’ opening queries: “Why do you have a tail? Why are you covered in fur?” (an allusion to the modern debate over Hanuman’s monkeyhood that I consider in chapter 8) permit Singh to expound a theory of various “races of demigods” (*upadevtāom kī jātiyām*), the males of which take birth in forms associated with animal species (their females appear human, except for naga women, who have human heads and serpent bodies from the neck down). Members of Hanuman’s vanara race adopt the form and behavior of monkeys, although like all demigods they possess the power of assuming other shapes at will. Like a mythobiology instructor, Hanuman discourses on the characteristics of *upadevtās*: they grow to adulthood immediately after birth, are immune to disease, and always appear youthful. He also informs listeners that his vanara birth frees him from human hang-ups over status and propriety: “As far as the Lord’s devotees are concerned, I don’t even notice their personal hygiene or moral behavior and so on. For since monkeys don’t adhere to such things, how can we expect them of others?” (7). The first-person voice also allows for occasional asides that incorporate modern scientific concepts (e.g., describing his childhood leap toward the sun, Hanuman notes that as he flew farther from earth he noticed himself accelerating, adding, “Later I learned that you don’t need as much energy once you leave the earth’s atmosphere and gravitational field”), as well as touches of humanizing introspection (e.g., Hanuman confesses that he is now “terribly embarrassed” when he recalls having once put the majestic solar orb into his mouth; *ibid.* 21). As with all the works under discussion, Singh’s “Autobiography” gives short shrift to portions of the Ramayana that do not feature Hanuman; thus two of the epic’s climactic events—the slaying of Ravana and Sita’s fire ordeal—are merely alluded to,

whereas the emotional dialog between reunited “mother and son” (Sita and Hanuman) goes on for three pages (*ibid.* 207–9).

(4) Another first-person narrative, portions of which show the influence of Singh’s work, is Bhagvatisharan Mishra’s *Pavanputra* (Son of the wind, 1987), which the author subtitles “A unique autobiographical novel” and claims was “written through” him in a flood of inspiration, presumably from its subject, who is even chattier (350 pages) and more opinionated than Singh’s narrator. He is also better read, and his mind ranges freely (and even anachronistically) among the literary yugas—as when he quotes Rabindranath Tagore to describe the beauty of the infant Rama, or when he recites to the guardian demonesess of Lanka a couplet that Tulsidas will eventually write concerning her (she loves it, and responds like a modern Urdu connoisseur, “*Vāh! Vāh!*”; 34, 117). During Rama’s long encampment in the rainy season, Hanuman debates the merits of caste hierarchy (*varṇāśrama dharma*) with his master, pointing out the excesses to which it will lead in the kali yuga and approvingly citing the teachings of Jesus and Mahatma Gandhi; later he quotes the inspirational writings of Norman Vincent Peale (*ibid.* 76–85; 228). Anxious to correct common misunderstandings about himself, he denies possessing musical or literary skill, candidly describes his netherworld meeting with his son Makaradhvaja as “my life’s first and possibly last surprise,” and digresses to muse over Darwin’s theory of evolution (*ibid.* 191, 215, 218–21). He also speaks out against the use of monkeys in modern scientific experiments, and condemns communal violence (*ibid.* 236–37, 272). His rambling narrative of the Rama story ends less than two thirds of the way through the book and is followed by an account of his subsequent career that includes a travelogue in which he surveys (often with a critical eye) some forty-five of his own temples throughout India (*ibid.* 212–54), reserving his harshest words for those in which devotees display “superstition” and “backwardness” by associating him with the treatment of spirit possession (“this weird *bhūt-pret līlā*”; *ibid.* 247). Mishra’s immortal narrator betrays, in short, many of the predilections and rationalist values of an urban, middle-class, English-educated citizen.

(5) An unparalleled (if largely unknown) tour de force of modern Hanuman literature is the epic poem *Śrī Hanumān rāmāyaṇ*—the “Hanuman Ramayana”—by Narendra Sharma, a Ramanandi initiate whose pen name, appropriately, is Hanumananand (*Hanumān-ānand*, “the bliss of Hanuman”). Privately printed in Ayodhya in 1987 and distributed by the author from his small hermitage at Janaki Ghat, this is a work of 858 pages, subdivided into nine cantos and 337 chapters. Its presentation of the Rama narrative appears to have been partially inspired by the rambling and Purana-like *Ānanda rāmāyaṇa*, which likewise runs to nine subbooks, and also by the voluminous *Bhūṣuṇḍī rāmāyaṇa*, with which it shares a preoccupation with the esoteric Rasik tradition. Sylistically, it shows the influence of Tulsidas on nearly every page, borrowing the basic metrical structure of the *Rāmcaritmānas* and sometimes paraphrasing whole verses; since both the author and his audience are presumably familiar with the older epic, such obvious borrowings constitute

homage rather than plagiarism.²⁴ They also, of course, underscore the scriptural pretensions of this work, which as its name implies is nothing less than a “Ramayana” devoted to Hanuman. Moreover, like the *Rāmcaritmānas*, the *Hanumān rāmāyaṇ* is structured as four interwoven dialogs (here, between Shiva and Parvati, Rama and Sita, Guru Ramananda and his twelve disciples, and Sharma and his readers). And like modern popular editions of the Tulsidas text, the Sharma epic is annotated for “nine day recitation” (*navāhna pārāyaṇ pāṭh*)—thus encouraging readers to undertake its ritualized recital (on such performance of the *Rāmcaritmānas*, see Lutgendorf 1991a:55–56, 80–94).

There is grandeur, too, in the work’s narrative sweep, encompassing an elaborate emanationist cosmogony in Canto 1 (“The Book of Birth”), and offering in Canto 9 (“The Book of the Liberator from Distress”) a dizzying tour—reminiscent of the Sanskrit *Yoga vāsiṣṭha*—of alternative universes and time cycles, in each of which Hanuman assumes a different form. Especially dear to the author’s heart is Hanuman’s manifestation as Charushila, the *sakhī* or intimate female friend and maidservant of Sita, a transgendered alter-ego that the divine monkey assumes in certain Rasik texts. Also in keeping with Rasik doctrine, the *Hanumān rāmāyaṇ* deems Sita’s name to be “more majestic” than Rama’s, and her mediation essential for salvation (N. Sharma 1987:93, 887). The compression of the conventional Rama narrative is even more drastic than in most of the other works noted here; thus everything from Rama and Sita’s wedding to the first meeting of Rama and Hanuman in the forest—Kaikeyi’s boons, Rama’s exile from Ayodhya, the kidnapping of Sita, and so on—is crammed into a single ten-line stanza (ibid. 238). But this is more than compensated for by the baroque elaboration of Hanuman’s deeds, including some (to my knowledge) altogether new stories, such as that of his meeting with a gigantic alter-ego in another universe, and a series of birth narratives for his five-, seven-, and eleven-headed manifestations (ibid. 466, 793–800).

It is perhaps too early to tell whether the *Hanumān rāmāyaṇ* will have any influence. If it does not, it will not be for lack of ambition; the preface includes a testimonial in English from Dr. Ramchandra Prasad of Patna University, himself an editor and translator of the *Rāmcaritmānas*, who calls Narendra Sharma “the Supreme poet of the epoch that is now passing away” and compares his work (favorably) to the writings of Homer, Valmiki, Virgil, and Tulsidas (ibid. front matter). The provincial origin and relatively high price (Rs. 101) of this clothbound work no doubt limit its circulation, and its Rasik

24. Thus, at the moment of Hanuman’s birth, Sharma departs from his usual meters to break into the more lyrical *chand*, just as Tulsidas does in describing Rama’s birth, and imitating the style and content of that famous passage, which is often sung as a hymn in Rama temples:

(*Rāmcaritmānas*) *Bhae pragata krpālā dīna dayālā Kausalyā hitakārī /*

The compassionate one became manifest, merciful to the lowly, the benefactor of Kausalya
(1.192.ch.1)

(*Hanumān rāmāyaṇ*) *Pragata bhayau Hanumanta kapi sukhavanta bani Anjanilā /*

Hanuman became manifest, a monkey full of happiness, the darling of Anjani (1.181.ch.1)

theology (unknown and perhaps potentially troubling to many Hanuman worshippers) may also restrict its appeal. Yet the bulk of its contents feature the same stories contained in the other works cited, here retold in rhyming verse of decent if derivative quality, and it may thus be considered indicative of the same trend they exemplify. It simply goes further than any of them in formulating an epic narrative entirely focused on the Ramayana's "other" hero. It also presents an ideological paradox concerning which I will have more to say in my concluding chapter: the product of a Ramanandi initiate, it is imbued with profound devotion to Sita-Rama as the ultimate divinity, yet it implicitly affirms that what the author and his audience *really* want are more stories about Hanuman. As the disciples of Ramananda remark at the beginning of one of the frame-dialogues: "We've already heard the deeds of Rama many times" (*ibid.* 29). Apparently, they are ready to hear something new.

(6) The forty-episode teleserial *Jai Veer Hanuman* was produced by Hyderabad-based Padmalaya Telefilms in 1995–96. After being broadcast on various TV channels as an entry in the steadily popular "mythologicals" niche market (pioneered in the late 1980s by Ramanand Sagar's *Ramayana*), it was subsequently marketed on VHS cassettes. Though cheaply made and poorly acted, it was reported to have done well, and its production company has subsequently prospered. It is chiefly of interest here for its ambitious scale and overall conformity to the emerging "biographical" narrative found in print sources: a Hanuman-centered retelling of the Rama story introduced by a long prelude focusing on the hero's birth and childhood adventures (episodes 1–6). This emphasizes that he is an avatara of Shiva and also gives a more prominent role to his earthly father, the monkey king Kesari (played by former champion wrestler Dara Singh, who portrayed Hanuman in several films and in the Sagar TV *Ramayana*, and is here cast as the stern but loving dad of the frisky young vanara). The adventures of the adult Hanuman (played by Vindu Singh with the usual padded tail and simian mouth-prosthesis favored in "mythological" films) include a version of the Ahiravana saga that runs through five episodes or nearly an eighth of the serial (episodes 31–35). The series finale consists of the likewise extra-Valmikian but very popular tale of Hanuman tearing open his chest to reveal Sita and Rama in his heart (episode 40).²⁵

(7) Two English-language works merit citation. The first is Sri Swami Prem's *The Story of a Lovetrance Being*, published in Harbor City, California (no date is given, but the work seems to have appeared in about 1980). This 378-page book closely adheres to the narrative structure of the Hindi works cited above, even as it attempts to put Hanuman's biography into language that will appeal to both diasporic Indo-Americans and New Age seekers of non-Indic

25. As I was preparing this manuscript for publication, I learned of the release, in October 2005, of "India's first indigenous animation film"—a 100-minute biopic titled simply *Hanuman*. Directed by V. G. Samant, this production largely conforms to the *Hanumayana* narrative as outlined here, emphasizing Hanuman's identity with Shiva, and including his childhood stay with Rama in Ayodhya (Story 8), his slaying of Ahiravana and discovery of his son in the netherworld (Story 21), and his receipt of a priceless necklace that leads him to tear his chest (Story 25).

heritage. Swami Prem sees no reason why the divine monkey should not catch on in the United States, since, as he notes in his introduction, "He comes to us with a message of Liberation, lifting a hand to help us soar above our crowds of desires to their fulfillment, then to their transcendence in Immortal Love. . . . Even the kids who are crazy after movies like Superman, Wonderwoman, Star Wars, Die Hard, Terminator, etc. will find Hanuman-ji very exciting, very fascinating" (cover, 3). Like Narendra Sharma, Swami Prem widens the cosmic canvas on which he paints his tale, but instead of the Rasik devotee's vision of alternative worlds, he offers a post-Luke Skywalker recasting of the Ramayana as an "intergalactic" saga. Thus Ravana is described as "a highly powerful being whose mother came from a subterranean planetary system and settled on earth where her family grew in all kinds of prosperity using atomic and celestial warfare," and Hanuman's mother, Anjana, is said to have "assumed the form of a lady tourist visiting Svah planet, a few million miles beyond the Polestar" (ibid. 7, 25). The sage Narada is called an "intergalactic space traveler," and the demonic forces guarding the sea approach to Lanka are likened to the invisible hazards of the Bermuda Triangle (ibid. 111, 141). The work thus offers an Americanized variant on the kind of "scientific" rationalization of the Ramayana that is common in modern Indian retellings, and in this and other respects it is not without a charm of its own. It conjures up the persona of an eccentric but gifted narrator who relishes both the whimsical and profound aspects of his tale. After unembarrassedly inviting readers to "journey into the timeless Disney Land of Life's highest possibilities and ultimate fulfillment," the Swami indeed delivers a Hanuman-centered saga full of gleaming spacecraft and lovable, furry animals: a sunny California dream that might have been produced by Walt Disney and directed by George Lucas. Yet behind its sci-fi veneer, Swami Prem's tale adheres closely to the standard Hanuman biography.

(8) Yet more audacious and eccentric than Swami Prem's work is another in English, though published in India: Mishr Harivansh Lal Sundd's *Sri Sankat Mochan Hanuman Charit Manas* (1998), a book of 816 oversized pages, printed on heavy magazine stock and filled with color illustrations, plus five fold-out color charts. The author, an eighty-year-old homeopath and former member of the army ordnance corps, claims to have been divinely inspired to write while on a pilgrimage to Banaras following a heart attack. There he was charged with no less a task than the completion of the unfinished lifework of Tulsidas: the uncovering of the sixteenth-century poet's supreme masterpiece, "being hidden in between the glittering hymns, poems and literature of that great personality" (24). This magnum opus turns out to be a rambling epic (albeit mostly in prose) on the supreme greatness of Hanuman. It borrows not only Tulsidas's title, but something of his structure, matching his seven "descents" (*sopāna*) into the mystical lake of Rama's acts with eleven "ascents" (since Hanuman leaps into the air and is the eleventh avatara of Rudra), and adding no less than fifteen appendices. It also offers an elaborate scheme of four ghats or approaches to its own mystical Lake Manasarovar, each having eight steps (for the

eight stanzas of the *Sankat mocan aṣṭak*). Sundd rails at Western scholars, whose diabolical transliteration schemes, “undetected by simple but spiritually asleep populace,” have robbed Vedic mantras of their potency (ibid. xi); his revenge, apart from devising his own erratic system of Romanization, is to write in a bowdlerized Indian English that sometimes inadvertently suggests Rushdian wordplay (e.g., “While Sri Ram was lamenting and gloating over the condition of Lakshman, and thinking that Hanuman had not arrived, Sri Hanuman reached like a heroic strain to the mist of Sri Ram’s pathos” [sic]; ibid. 312).

Noting that “Sri Hanuman is the most popular character of the epic *Ramayana* even today” (ibid. 94), Sundd offers most of the stories found in other collections plus a few unique ones, interwoven in an idiosyncratic monologue that regularly digresses to offer advice on avoiding heart disease, to pen angry letters to the Archaeological Survey of India, to ponder river pollution and the depletion of the ozone layer, and to quote a modern travelogue of a balloon expedition to Mount Kailash (ibid. 101–7, 128, 433–37, 473). Ramraj is described as a “democratic welfare state,” and Samuel Hahnemann, the inventor of homeopathy, is revealed to have been an incarnation of (who else?) the healer who brought the *sañjivani* herb to Lakshmana (ibid. 418, 439). Through all its twists and turns, Sundd’s opus pushes (what may be termed, on analogy with Christology) “Hanumanology” to new heights. I will return to these bold moves in my final chapter.

Although the works cited above range from crudely printed bazaar chapbooks to weighty clothbound volumes, it is striking that the majority of them—judging from such considerations as price, type size, and level of linguistic difficulty (i.e., formal, Sanskritized Hindi rather than more rustic language)—appear to be aimed at an educated and middle-class readership. The chronology of these works also suggests that the older genre of comprehensive handbooks, in which narrative material comprises but one section of a text that also offers a manual for ritual worship, has gradually been supplemented (though not supplanted) by works that are more preoccupied with storytelling—as though the perceived power of the worship of Hanuman had whet readers’ appetites to learn more about his career and personality.

These latter works, viewed overall, present a relatively consistent life story, encompassing incidents from both within and beyond the Rama narrative. The selection and sequence of these tales, especially in the more recent publications, recurs with relatively little variation, although the length and manner of their telling differ and they feature, at times, distinctive interpretations; only rarely does one of the texts include a story that is found in no other. Yet what I find most significant is that, within the structure of these proliferating narratives, the Rama tale itself is implicitly framed as *an episode in Hanuman’s life*. It is, without doubt, the central and formative episode around which that life is arranged, for most of these texts regularly remind their readers of Hanuman’s perfect devotion to Lord Rama/Vishnu. However, they are equally fond of asserting his identity with Rudra/Shiva, and in this respect, as well as in their

selective retelling of the Rama narrative—as a story that is important to the extent that Hanuman figures in it—they effect a striking shift in focus.

These observations suggest to me the emergence of a new epic cycle for which I have—only partially in sport—coined a new name: the “*Hanumāyana*.”²⁶ To my knowledge, no Indian author has yet used this term (although there exist several revisionist narratives bearing the title *Sītāyana*; e.g., Iyengar 1987; Prasad 1998). The authors of the Sanskrit *Māruti caritāmṛtam* (Nectar of the deeds of Maruti)—a 1,000-page work published in Patna in 1996 that anthologizes, with extensive Hindi commentary, all the Valmikian shlokas referring to Hanuman, and the title of which alludes to the celebrated epic biography of Chaitanya by Krishnadas Kaviraj—indicate in their preface that they considered titling their work *Āñjaneyāyana* but decided that readers might not readily understand this (Chaturvedi and Kunal 1996:9). In any case, several authors have devised titles (e.g., Sharma’s *Hanumān Rāmāyaṇ* and Sundd’s *Sri Sankat Mochan Hanuman Charit Manas*) that convey much the same idea: that of a new epic for a new era, featuring a new (and perhaps improved) hero.

I am especially intrigued by the fact that several *Hanumāyana* narratives take the form of “autobiographies” (*ātmakathā*), in which Hanuman, with characteristic panache, embraces an introspective and individualistic literary genre that is relatively new to South Asia. It is interesting, in this context, to note the apparently recent proliferation of works containing the Hindi neologism for “autobiography” in their titles, offering first-person narratives of the lives of figures from Hindu legend; thus *Droṇ kī ātmakathā* and *Gāndhārī kī ātmakathā* by Manu Sharma (2002, 2004), and *Bhīṣma kī ātmakathā* by Lakshmi Priya Acarya (2002)—all devoted to important characters in the *Mahābhārata*. The author of one of the Hanuman “autobiographies,” Bhagvatisharan Mishra, subsequently wrote a series of historical novels based on the lives of premodern spiritual leaders: Mira (*Pitāmbarā*, 1993), Kabir (*Dekh Kabirā royā*, 2001), and Vallabhacharya (*Pāvaka* and *Agni puruṣ*, both 2002). Besides being situated at the beginning of both trends, the Hanuman novels represent the only application of this narrative strategy to the “autobiography” of a deity—a further indication of Hanuman’s special role as simultaneously divine and “one of us.” Indeed, Dipesh Chakrabarty has identified the autobiography, along with the novel, biography, and history as “the four basic genres that help express the modern self,” and again, all are associated with the rise of educated, middle-class society (2000:34). Yet I have not encountered a conventional Ramayana in an Indian language narrated in the first person by its hero, perhaps because Rama, though human, is (both as incarnated high-god and perhaps also in his earthly behavior) too “wholly other” to implicitly invite

26. Ashok Aklujkar has pointed out to me that this neologism ignores Sanskrit *saṃdhi* rules; more properly, the invented title should be *Hanumadāyana* or *Hanumān-āyana*. However, Aklujkar agrees that *Hanumāyana* has a nicer ring, and he notes that such liberties with *saṃdhi* are attested in Sanskrit literature. He also points out the existence of a modern Sanskrit epic devoted to Hanuman, *Śrī Hanumaccaritra* by one Hariharananda, published in West Bengal in 1985.

readers inside his skin, to share his feelings and motivations.²⁷ Hanuman's (fur) coat appears to offer a better fit, and these biographical works encourage devotees to identify with him in a way that they cannot with his master.

Yet in shifting the narrative spotlight from the more distant Rama to the more accessible Hanuman, one side effect of the composition of *Hanumāyana* texts is also to make Rama himself look better, or at least less problematic. For the *Hanumāyana* is, among other things, a Ramayana in which most of the unpleasant or controversial parts are downplayed or deleted. This is a process that was already begun by some premodern devotional poets, as when Tulsidas elided Rama's long and disturbing speech to Sita at the time of their reunion in Lanka with a single half-couplet: "... the Treasury of Compassion spoke some harsh words" (6.108). As I have noted, the authors of the *Māruti caritāmṛtaṃ* have carried this process to its logical conclusion, offering an epic-length Valmiki rescension of 108 *sargas*, consisting *solely of passages devoted to Hanuman*, to which they have appended a *Dvāpara carita* (describing Hanuman's activities in the time of Krishna) and a *Hanumad gītā* (a discourse modeled on the *Mahābhārata*'s most influential subbook). In this respect, *Hanumāyana* narratives appear to contribute to the "sanitization" of the Rama story common in other mass-mediated retellings (such as Amar Chitra Katha comic books or the Sagar TV serial)—a move that may sometimes suit Hindu nationalist ideological agendas. Yet the focus of these Hanuman-centered works is characteristically different: Rama in the *Hanumāyana* is important primarily as *someone to whom Hanuman can manifest his exemplary devotion*, and he appears at times as a distant and somewhat cold authority figure who is ultimately eclipsed by his own name (e.g., in Story 32). In such popular tales, Hanuman instructs, chastens, and gently supersedes his master, giving readers the implicit message that the god who can really help them is not the august but remote Rama, but his feisty and resourceful subordinate—the hero of the adventurous saga to which I now turn.

27. In English, however, there has recently appeared (from Miami, Florida) an historicized and rationalized "autobiography" of Rama (N. Sinha 2005). In addition, Ashok Banker's *Ramayana* fantasy series—a multivolume retelling in a style heavily influenced by Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and the *Star Wars* films—offers a Rama whose thoughts and emotions are described in some detail, though within the framework of a grotesquely violent narrative suggestive of a sci-fi computer game (Banker 2003; for more on this version's innovations, see Lutgendorf 2004).

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4

The *Hanumāyana*

Forty Tales of Hanuman

My research into the lore of Hanuman has yielded too many stories and variants to include all of them in this book. In this chapter, I offer synopses of a representative sample of tales that recur with only minor variation in multiple sources. However, since recent popular literature continues to display diversity, I occasionally include an anomalous story—found in only one or two sources, or an old story that is less well known today—simply because I find it interesting or striking, or because it illuminates themes that surface elsewhere in Hanuman’s cult (additional tales of this sort will be found in chapter 5). Such stories may reflect regional traditions that enjoy local popularity or may simply show the creativity of individual storytellers—indicative of the license that devotees still feel comfortable taking with a beloved and not-yet-too-dignified god. Because my sample is limited and there is hardly a story about Hanuman that does not admit of variations, I apologize in advance to readers who may find that (in their view) there are “errors” in these pages or, perhaps worse, that one of their favorite tales has been left out.

Accounts of Hanuman’s life nearly always include a retelling of the Rama story. Since this lengthy tale is already widely available in English versions, I assume some familiarity with it on the part of my readers, and merely summarize its narrative in italicized passages set in brackets. As in my source collections, the emphasis here is on those parts of the story that directly concern Hanuman or that significantly expand his role beyond what is described in the standard Rama narrative. The whole of my offering is more comprehensive than any of my sources and translates no single



FIGURE 4.1. A late-twentieth-century poster celebrates Hanuman's acts

one of them, although it attempts to convey something of their tone and occasionally features excerpts from their dialog.

Since I offer, in many cases, more than one version of a story, I have ordered the narrative into chronological and thematic sets, which I have numbered sequentially (happily, the total came to the Hanumanically significant forty); within each numbered set, individual tales are assigned letters in alphabetical order (1.a, 1.b, etc.). Chapter 5 is arranged according to the same numbering scheme and comprises a set of extended notes on the tales. To save space in the notes, each Hindi and English primary source is referenced by a code (H1, H2, etc.), the key to which is found at the beginning of the bibliography. I have settled on this two-chapter format because of what I perceive to be the charm of the stories and because I do not want readers who are not academically inclined to have to leap over oceans of analysis or be lost in forests of footnotes just to get to the next tale. To make it easy to move back and forth between the stories and their notes, page numbers referencing the

latter appear in brackets following the titles. I apologize for any inconvenience caused to scholarly readers by my approach, which permits me to preserve, in this chapter, something of the look as well as the feel of a Hindi compendium of Hanuman's *caritra*, which I hope that at least some readers may savor, as I do. And now, to the tales!

[Synopsis 1: *The demonic king Ravana and his brothers terrorize the universe, dethroning gods and persecuting and killing sages. Oppressed by their excesses, Earth appeals to the creator, Brahma, for relief. Pointing out a loophole in the demon's boon of limited immortality, Brahma prophesies the birth of Vishnu as the human prince Rama, who will be Ravana's slayer. He then commands the other gods to descend to the southern mountains and be born to monkey-women, in order to spawn a fantastic cohort of warriors who will assist in Rama's task.*]

I. Prologue: Causes of Hanuman's Birth [see notes on page 177]

(a) Atop Mount Kailash, Lord Shiva emerges from meditation and repeats the mantra *Rāma*. His wife, Sati, asks why he, the supreme Lord, is repeating the name of another god. Shiva replies that "Rama" is both the designation of the ultimate reality as well as the name of an earthly prince and avatara of Vishnu. Declaring the embodied Rama to be his own chosen deity, Shiva announces his intention to incarnate on earth in order to serve him. When Sati protests that she will miss him, Shiva promises to send only a portion of himself and hence to remain with her on Kailash. The two then discuss the problem of what form Shiva should take; if he assumes human shape, it will violate the dharma of service, for the servant should be lower than the master. Shiva finally decides on monkey form because it is humble and has simple needs and lifestyle: no shelter, no cooked food, and no observance of the rules of caste and stage of life. This will allow maximum scope for service.

(b) Although Parvati is initially shocked by Shiva's choice of incarnate vehicle ("Why not take birth as something *nice*?" she asks), Shiva convinces her that the monkey form is ideal for avoiding the allurements of *māyā*, cosmic illusion. Parvati then asks to accompany Shiva to earth and volunteers to become his tail, for "the wife is the ornament of her husband, as the tail is of a monkey." Shiva agrees to this request. This is why Hanuman's tail is so beautiful and so imbued with *shakti*—the power of the goddess.

(c) Parvati asks Shiva how, as Hanuman, he can fight Ravana, since Ravana is known to be his own fervent devotee. Shiva replies that when Ravana propitiated him to obtain boons, he cut off his heads one by one and offered them into a sacrificial fire. However, Shiva has eleven ferocious Rudra manifestations, and since Ravana had only ten heads, the eleventh Rudra remained unsatisfied by his offering. This eleventh Rudra will incarnate as Hanuman and be instrumental in bringing about Ravana's death.

(d) Ravana and his gargantuan brother Kumbhakarna are incarnations of two of Shiva's devoted attendants; hence he is obliged to protect them.

However, once they obtain power through austerities and boons, they become arrogant and oppress even the gods. Eventually they anger Shiva by imprisoning two of his favorite servants: Mahakala, the Lord of Death, and Shani, the planet Saturn. For this reason, Shiva heeds the gods' plea that he incarnate on earth as Hanuman in order to help destroy the arrogant rakshasa brothers.

(e) Nandi, Shiva's bull, is an embodiment of his eleventh Rudra-manifestation. During Ravana's campaign of universal conquest, he attacks even Mount Kailash, where he encounters Nandi. Although himself devoted to Shiva, Ravana cannot resist making fun of Nandi's animal shape and laughingly remarks that his face resembles that of a monkey. In anger at this insult, Nandi curses Ravana to eventually die through the intervention of monkey-faced beings. Later, he requests of Shiva the boon of expressing his devotion through the lowly monkey form, and incarnates on earth as Hanuman, the bull among monkeys.

(f) In the Svayambhuva eon at the beginning of creation, a sage named Shilada does penance to please Shiva and requests the boon of having a son like him. Accordingly, Shiva's eleventh Rudra manifestation is born as Shilada's son, Nandi. Nandi in turn performs penance and obtains the boon of being Shiva's devotee in the lowly form of a monkey.

(g) The wind god, Vayu, assists Shiva in slaying the demon Jalandhara. Shiva offers him a boon, and Vayu requests that Shiva be born on earth as his own son, to which Shiva consents.

(h) Vishnu realizes that he will need the help of his own favorite deity, Shiva, in order to slay Ravana. He propitiates Shiva with hymns of praise and an offering of thousand-petaled red lotuses. Shiva appears and informs him that he has already given the monkey-woman Anjana the boon that he will be born as her son. Now he adds that this son will become Vishnu's helper in the war with Ravana. Shiva adds, "Of course, Ravana is also my devotee, but in the excess of his power he has forgotten right and wrong." Vishnu is delighted and readies himself for his incarnation as Rama.

2. Anjana's Pregnancy [see notes on page 178]

(a) A heavenly nymph named Punjikasthala is capricious and naughty; she makes fun of a sage, who curses her to be born on earth as Anjana, the daughter of the monkey ruler Kunjara. Later he takes pity on her and softens the curse so that, although in ugly and inauspicious monkey form, she will have the ability to change her appearance at will. When she grows up, Anjana is married to another monkey ruler, Kesari, who dwells on Mount Gokarna. She longs for a son. One day, in the prime of her youth, she assumes a lovely human form and, wearing beautiful garments and ornaments, wanders on the summit of a mountain. The wind god sees her and gently blows aside her garments. Beholding her breasts and thighs, he is overcome with desire and

embraces her, remaining invisible to earthly eyes. But Anjana knows that someone has touched her and cries out in alarm, "Who wishes me to break my vow as a faithful wife?" The wind replies that he has no wish to harm her but has united with her inwardly and that she will bear "a wise and mighty son." Anjana is delighted and repairs to a cave, where she gives birth to Hanuman.

(b) A heavenly maiden named Anjana mocks Indra for having a thousand eyes. He curses her to be born on earth with a monkey face. Her girlfriend, Adrika, likewise annoys Indra by meowing like a cat, and is similarly cursed, except that her face resembles that of a cat. Both are born among monkeys, remain friends, and marry the monkey ruler Kesari. In the course of time, they please the sage Agastya with acts of service, and he grants them each the boon of having a son. While playing in the woods one day, scantily clad, the two women are seen by supernatural beings who fall in love with them and enter their bodies. Anjana is raped by the wind, and Adrika by a rakshasa named Nirrti. In due course, Anjana gives birth to Hanuman, and her friend to a being named Adri or Ghora ("terrible"), who is destined to become the king of ghosts. The sons, being divine, grow up quickly, and their supernatural fathers advise them to take their mothers on a pilgrimage to the Godavari River. Hanuman bathes his mother at the place known as *Añjanā tīrtha*, and Adri bathes his mother at *Mārjārī tīrtha* ("cat ford"); both women obtain release from Indra's curse and regain their heavenly forms.

(c) Anjana is the daughter of sage Gautama and his wife, Ahalya. The latter, in her husband's absence, is seduced by Indra, who is enamored of her beauty and who also seeks to reduce the accumulated power of her husband's austerities. Indra takes Gautama's form for this purpose, but the sage returns to discover the amorous couple and angrily curses them both. Ahalya believes that her daughter reported her indiscretion and so curses Anjana to give birth to a monkey. Anjana decides to forswear marriage and to perform austerities to overcome the curse. Standing on one leg, she becomes so absorbed in meditation that an anthill grows around her. Vayu, the wind, takes pity on her and feeds her once a week through a hole in the anthill. Meanwhile, Shiva and Parvati visit the forest for amorous play, taking the form of animals of various species. While they are both in monkey form, Shiva ejaculates, and Parvati cannot bear the intensity of his fiery semen. Vayu picks it up and carries it to Anjana. Three months later, Hanuman emerges from her mouth in the form of a baby monkey.

(d) Kesari is a powerful monkey ruler who lives on a mountain in the South. He slays a demon named Sambasadana, who was tormenting the sages of the coastal forest of Gokarna, and they reward him with a boon. Childless despite his marriage to the beautiful monkey princess Anjana, Kesari requests a powerful son. The sages teach him the Shiva mantra and advise him to repeat it. As a result, Shiva is pleased and enters into him in his Rudra form; the wind god Vayu enters him as well. Kesari then unites with Anjana, and she becomes pregnant.

(e) Troubled by her inability to conceive despite her marriage to Kesari, Anjana asks the sage Matanga for the boon of a son. He advises her to bathe at the pilgrimage place of the "celestial Ganga" and to then perform austerities atop Mount Venkata to please Lord Venkateshvara. Anjana takes a beautiful human form and climbs the mountain; she becomes absorbed in meditation and has a vision of Shiva, who tells her that he will be born as her son. She is lovely, dressed in a yellow sari with a red border, and the wind god, disturbing her garments, becomes enamored of her charms and enters into her. Sensing this, Anjana prepares to curse her unseen violator, but a heavenly voice informs her that the wind will not compromise her devotion to her husband and will give her a powerful son.

(f) One day, Shiva asks Vishnu to show him the form of the "world enchantress," the female disguise that Vishnu assumed to cheat the asuras out of the nectar of immortality at the time of the churning of the cosmic milk-ocean. Vishnu teases Shiva that this vision of beauty will be useless to an ascetic like him, but Shiva persists in his request, and Vishnu ultimately agrees, then vanishes. Later, Shiva and Parvati are wandering in a forest at the height of spring when a maiden of incomparable beauty appears, playing coyly with a ball. Shiva loses his heart to her and, abandoning Parvati, chases her through the forest, mad with desire. Just as he reaches out to touch her hand, a gust of wind blows aside her flimsy garment and he ejaculates. The maiden promptly vanishes, and Shiva, realizing that "she" was actually Vishnu, comes to his senses and mentally bows to the god's illusory power. He too departs, but his semen, gleaming on a leaf, is retrieved by the seven divine sages, who carry it to the spot where the monkey princess Anjana is doing penance to obtain a son. The sages offer to teach her the five-syllable Shiva mantra, and in the course of whispering it to her, sage Vasishtha slips the semen in her ear and she becomes pregnant. Anjana bears the divine embryo for twenty thousand years and then gives birth to an infant in monkey form.

(g) Intent on obtaining an exemplary son, Anjana performs austerity atop a hill for seven thousand years. Via a celestial voice, Shiva indicates his satisfaction with her and tells her that he will be born to her as the eleventh Rudra. He instructs her to remain there a while longer and to raise her cupped palms to heaven. Meanwhile, in Ayodhya, King Dasharatha is performing a Vedic fire sacrifice, likewise to obtain a son. At the climax of the rite, Agni, the fire god, rises from the altar bearing a golden bowl of divine rice-sweet, instructing the king to divide it among his principal queens. Just as the women are about to consume it, however, a she-vulture (who is actually the celestial nymph Suvarcala, cursed by Brahma to assume this form) swoops down, steals the portion given to the juniormost queen Kaikeyi, and flies away with it. The distraught Kaikeyi is comforted by her co-wives, each of whom gives her part of her own portion. All three queens eat the sweet and become pregnant. In the meantime, the vulture, guided by the gods, flies southward until she is just above the peak on which Anjana is standing, hands outstretched. Vayu produces a sudden violent gust that causes the bird to drop

her treat; he then guides it into Anjana's palms, and a divine voice instructs her to eat it. She does so and becomes pregnant.

3. Hanuman's Birthday(s) and Birthmarks [see notes on page 185]

(a) Anjana bears the divine babe in her womb for a long time, but at last the day of his birth arrives. Auspicious omens appear throughout the worlds. The eight directions become clear and free of dust, and a cool, gentle, and fragrant breeze begins to blow. Celestial beings release showers of blossoms while gandharvas play divine music and apsaras dance. The child takes birth, some say, on a Tuesday, but others say Saturday, and there is wide disagreement as to the astrological date, namely:

- the full moon of the month of Chaitra (March/April; *Caitra pūrṇimā*)
- the eleventh of the bright fortnight of Chaitra (*Caitra śukla 11*)
- the full moon of Karttik (October/November; *Kārttik pūrṇimā*)
- the new moon of Karttik (*Kārttik amāvasyā*)
- the eleventh of the bright fortnight of Shravan (July/August; *Śrāvaṇ śukla 11*)
- the full moon of Shravan (*Śrāvaṇ pūrṇimā*)
- the thirteenth of the bright fortnight of Margashirṣa (November/December; *Mārgaśīrṣa śukla 13*)
- the new moon of Ashvin (September/October; *Āśvin amāvasyā*)

(b) Hanuman does not come into the world naked, like an ordinary infant. His tawny-colored, furry body is adorned with supernatural ornaments, which include a tight red loincloth, a sacred thread of twisted *muñja* grass, and a pair of heavy gold earrings such as yogis wear. These earrings are invisible to the eyes of most mortals, and Hanuman's mother later tells him that he will be able to recognize his divine master, Lord Vishnu, in the human being who first perceives these ornaments—as Rama will eventually do.

4. Adventure with the Sun [see notes on page 187]

(a) One morning, Anjana leaves her infant son asleep while she attends to some task; Hanuman's earthly father, Kesari, is also away. The baby awakes and feels very hungry. He looks around but sees nothing to eat, until his eyes fasten on the just-risen sun, which he takes to be a luscious, ripe berry. Leaping into the air, he soars toward it with a speed exceeding even that of the wind, the divine eagle Garuda, or the mind. As Hanuman approaches the fiery god, who rides a chariot pulled by seven white horses, his father, Vayu, becomes concerned that the sun's heat will scorch him, so he blows a frigid blast to protect Hanuman. By coincidence, it is the day of a solar eclipse and the demonic titan Rahu—a disembodied head who periodically swallows the sun

and moon—is also on his way to the sun's chariot.¹ He sees Hanuman, now grown to enormous size, seated on the chariot and preparing to swallow the solar orb. Hanuman sees Rahu, too, and mistaking him for a wild plum, reaches for him as well. Rahu flees to Indra's court, where he complains of cosmic injustice: "I've been assigned the task of swallowing the sun, but now it seems there's another, bigger Rahu around, and he even tried to eat me!" Alarmed, Indra marches out on his divine elephant, Airavata. He sees Hanuman playing with the sun and his horses as a child plays with toys. Hanuman also sees Airavata, mistakes him for another plump fruit, and lunges for him as well. Indra retaliates by hurling his thunderbolt at the furry child, striking him on the left side of his chin. Hanuman, gravely injured and unconscious, begins falling to earth but is caught in the arms of Vayu. The wind god is incensed by Indra's attack on his child and enters a cave, cradling Hanuman in his lap. He withdraws his flowing currents, and the entire universe, deprived of breath, begins to suffocate. Nothing stirs, the recitation of the Vedas ceases, and the gods' stomachs begin to swell. Terrified, they repair to the creator, Brahma, who reveals to them the cause of the crisis, then accompanies them on a mission to placate the offended deity. Arriving at the cave, Brahma passes his hand over the injured infant, reviving him. Each of the celestials then bestows a boon on Hanuman: Indra imbues his limbs with the power of his thunderbolt and, noting the infant's now permanently disfigured chin, gives him the name *Hanumān*—"one having a (distinctive) chin"; Surya, the sun, gives Hanuman a portion of his brightness, as well as wisdom and eloquence; Varuna, lord of the seas, bestows fearlessness of water; Yama, god of death, gives freedom from his snare, which drags souls to the netherworld; the craftsman of the gods, Vishvakarma, gives Hanuman protection from every divine weapon forged by his hand; and Brahma bestows immunity to the supreme weapon that bears his name, as well as physical immortality for the duration of a cosmic eon. Vayu is pleased and promptly revivifies the cosmos; he himself gives his son the boon that "wind-bodied" beings—ghosts and spirits—will flee when he is remembered. The assembled gods shower flower petals on the radiant infant.

(b) As Hanuman approaches the solar chariot, Surya recognizes him as Shiva, the supreme Lord, and worships him. Hanuman places the sun in his mouth, but then spits it out again—not because of its heat, but because its living rays feel like hands, and, being a monkey, he is a vegetarian. Later, when Indra fires his thunderbolt, the infant places it, too, in his mouth. He is not really injured by it, but he pretends to be so that Indra's reputation as a warrior will not suffer.

1. Rahu lost his head when the devas and asuras churned the cosmic ocean for the nectar of immortality. Although an asura, he disguised himself as a deva and had just begun quaffing some of the ambrosia when the sun and moon gods recognized him and signaled to Vishnu, who decapitated the offender with his discus. Since the nectar had already entered Rahu's mouth, his head continued to live and it eternally pursues the sun and moon, seeking revenge, and periodically catches and swallows them. However, since he lacks a body, the celestial orbs soon emerge again from his severed neck.

(c) When Hanuman is wounded, Vayu takes him to Mahakala forest, where he worships Shiva in the form of a lingam. Uttering Shiva mantras and reverently touching the lingam to the infant's limbs, Vayu pleases Shiva, who appears and bestows numerous boons on the child.

(d) Hanuman doesn't release the sun even when struck by Indra's thunderbolt, so the rakshasa king Ravana—the future enemy of Rama—comes and pulls his tail. Hanuman releases the sun and engages Ravana in a fierce wrestling match that continues for a full year. In the end, Hanuman gets Ravana in an unbreakable hold and, filled with the power of Rudra, goes on striking him until the divine sage Vishrava, who is Ravana's father, entreats him to stop.

(e) Hanuman swallows the sun, mistaking it for a fruit. The universe is plunged into darkness, and the gods rush to the scene. They beg Hanuman to release the solar orb, and when he obliges, they each bestow a boon on him.

(f) Hanuman tries to seize the sun but is pulverized by its energy; his remains fall to earth, and his grief-stricken father, Vayu, goes into mourning in the nethermost world, Rasatala. Deprived of air, the gods attempt to reassemble the infant; they ultimately find everything but a small portion of his jaw. Hanuman is revived—though slightly defective, hence his name—and Vayu is placated and resumes his normal flow.

(g) As Hanuman flies through space, he realizes that the sun is receding from him, in its cosmic orbit, and also that he is weightless as a result of leaving earth's gravitational field. Vayu hovers nearby to ensure that the infant is not harmed by a passing asteroid or comet. As Hanuman nears the sun, the moon begins to pass between it and the earth, for it is the day of a solar eclipse. However, Hanuman's gigantic form is even larger than the moon and so the eclipse appears unduly prolonged, causing the earth's inhabitants to panic. They cry out to Indra, who hurls his thunderbolt at Hanuman, briefly knocking him unconscious and disfiguring his jaw. Vayu revives the child by wafting the scent of healing herbs, and the gods, now pleased, each bestow a boon on Hanuman.

5. Cursed by Sages [see notes on page 189]

As a youngster, Hanuman is energetic and fond of pranks. He has the innate playfulness and mischievousness of a monkey child coupled with the awesome power of Rudra; moreover, he has received special boons of invulnerability from each of the gods. Roaming the woods around his parents' home, he begins to annoy sages in their ashrams, stealing their water pots and wooden sandals and hiding them in trees, sneaking up on them while they are meditating and pulling on their beards and loincloths, and even stealing their sacred stones and tossing them into ponds. In time, he becomes bolder and more destructive; he smashes ritual vessels and tears up scriptures, drops huge boulders on the holy men's huts, fills their wells with mud, and pollutes the sacred enclosures of their hermitages. He plays with animals, too, sometimes seizing elephants and tigers and hurling them through the air, although he is careful not to harm

animals of weaker species; rather, he defends them against their natural enemies. Recognizing his divine status, the sages put up with his naughtiness for as long as they can, feeling themselves unable to punish him because of the boons he has received. They scold the wayward youngster and complain to his parents, but neither the sages' nor his parents' admonitions have any effect. Finally, in utter exasperation, the holy men conceive the expedient of placing Hanuman under a curse: let him completely forget his divine powers until someone reminds him of them. The eldest sage, pouring sanctified water on his palm and invoking a powerful mantra, pronounces this, and Hanuman is instantly overcome with forgetfulness and begins to behave like an ordinary young monkey. The sages and his parents are gratified, and peace returns to the forest.

6. Hanuman's Education [see notes on page 190]

(a) As Hanuman grows, his parents become concerned that he get a proper education in the Vedas and their attendant sciences. The sage Agastya advises them to send their son to Surya: "The sun is the source of all light and knowledge, and has already blessed Hanuman. He will surely accept him as a pupil." Although reluctant to send her child so far away, Anjana tells Hanuman to seek instruction from the sun. Hanuman (who has forgotten his powers due to the sages' curse) innocently asks how he can reach the heavens, but when Anjana reminds him that he is the son of the wind, he remembers and soars into the sky. He respectfully approaches the solar chariot, and its driver, Aruna (the dawn), presents him to his master, before whom Hanuman reverently prostrates himself. Surya, recalling Hanuman's earlier visit, nervously asks the reason for his coming, and Hanuman explains his purpose. The sun replies that, although he would be happy to accept such an enthusiastic pupil, circumstances do not permit him to do so: "You see, I have to move across the sky on this chariot day and night, never slackening my pace and always facing forward. How can I possibly give you instruction?" Hanuman replies that this need present no difficulty; in order not to inconvenience his guru, he will run backward in front of the sun's chariot, matching its pace, and constantly facing Surya so as to receive instruction from his lips. The sun god, knowing Hanuman's divine nature, consents to this arrangement. He also realizes that Hanuman already possesses all knowledge and is merely honoring him in order to set an example of respect for the guru-pupil tradition. In this manner, Hanuman, the perfect student, quickly learns the whole of the Vedas and their limbs, flawlessly memorizing each mantra and verse. When he can learn no more, the sun blesses him and gives him permission to return to earth. Hanuman, however, asks permission to give the customary "guru gift" of a departing student. The sun at first demurs, saying he needs nothing, but when Hanuman repeatedly presses him, he requests that Hanuman exercise his vast knowledge in the service of the sun's own son and partial incarnation, the monkey prince Sugriva. Hanuman agrees to do so and returns to earth.

(b) When Hanuman, in his quest for knowledge, reaches Surya's chariot, he discovers that the sun god already has a large number of pupils: the tiny but irascible sages known as *vālakhilyas*. Upon Hanuman's request to join their company, these hot-tempered little Brahmans indignantly inform their guru that they will *not* study the Vedas in the company of a monkey, and Surya, fearing their curse, is compelled to honor their objection. Hanuman then devises the ruse of running backward in front of the sun's chariot so that he can learn everything without troubling the narrow-minded sages. As a result of facing the solar orb for so long, his face becomes dark, and that is why, to this day, langurs have wizened black faces.

(c) Hanuman is so intelligent that he is able to absorb all the verbal wisdom of the Vedic corpus in a mere fortnight. The sun god, however, is flattered by having such a pupil—in reality, Shiva himself—and desires to extend the period of instruction. So he repeatedly causes Hanuman to forget what he has learned so that the lessons may continue for many months. Seeing Hanuman's willing acquiescence in this duplicity and pleased by his perfect devotion, Surya finally releases him, adding the boon that, henceforth, those who invoke Hanuman's name will never forget their lessons.

(d) Asked by his mother to seek instruction from the sun, Hanuman seats himself in meditation, facing east, and begins repeating the Gayatri mantra, which invokes the sun as the spiritual illuminator and source of wisdom. He remains in meditation the whole day, following the course of the sun across the sky, until it sets again in the west. In this way, he becomes, as it were, an "antenna" to absorb all knowledge, which exists in the form of invisible sonic vibrations running through the ether, comparable to (though more subtle than) the television and radio signals we are familiar with nowadays.

7. Hearing Rama's Story [see notes on page 192]

At bedtime in the forest, Mother Anjana tells little Hanuman inspiring stories of gods and heroes of the past. Among these is the story of Rama, the Ramayana. As the days pass, Hanuman becomes absorbed in the story, and when his mother gets to the point at which Rama meets Hanuman, her son asks in surprise who this character might be. His mother then explains to him that time is like a wheel, encompassing a cycle of four ages that recur endlessly. The Rama story she is telling him is from a previous cycle, and the Hanuman of the story was once a monkey-child like himself. Hanuman's absorption in the story deepens. Hearing of Sita's kidnaping by Ravana, he weeps, and when Hanuman encounters Ravana in Lanka, he becomes indignant: "Why didn't he kill him, right there?" When Hanuman returns to Rama with news of Sita and earns his embrace, he sighs and says, "If only I were *that* Hanuman!" During the day, he begins to spend more and more time thinking about Rama's story and repeating Rama's name. At times he becomes lost in meditation and forgets his bodily needs. When his mother admonishes him to take care of himself so that he may serve Rama well, Hanuman asks, "But

where is Rama?" Anjana replies that, as it is again the *treta yuga*, Rama has taken birth in Ayodhya and begun his earthly mission, which will eventually produce another Ramayana. Hanuman wants to go to Ayodhya at once, but Anjana laughs and pats him to sleep. "Rama is only a child now, as are you! And how can a monkey-child live among humans? You will go to Rama when the time is right."

8. Playmate of Rama [see notes on page 192]

(a) Knowing that Lord Vishnu has taken birth as Rama, Shiva longs to have his darshan. Assuming various disguises—a sadhu begging for alms, an astrologer, a singer of tales—he goes to the palace in Ayodhya to get a glimpse of his Lord in child form, but never succeeds in seeing him for long. Finally he takes the guise of a Madari street entertainer, a monkey-man who twirls an hourglass-shaped drum to draw a crowd and beat time while his monkey, comically dressed in human clothing, dances for coins. This monkey is Hanuman. They go to the palace and entertain the little princes. King Dasharatha protectively holds Rama on his lap lest the monkey bite him. Rama claps his hands in delight and gazes wide-eyed at the dance. The Madari and his monkey gaze back, lost in bliss. At the end of the show, Rama asks to keep the monkey, and Shiva consents. Hanuman becomes Rama's pet and remains with him throughout his childhood. When sage Vishvamitra comes to take Rama to the forest, Rama secretly instructs Hanuman to go to Kishkindha, enter Sugriva's service, and await his own coming.

(b) Shiva comes to Anjana's cave in the forest disguised as a Madari. He sounds his drum at the door, and Anjana asks Hanuman to see who it is, but Hanuman is engaged in *Ramlila*—play-acting the Rama story—and refuses to go. Anjana greets the stranger and immediately recognizes him, bowing reverently. Shiva explains to her that he has come on a special mission: he desires admission to the palace in Ayodhya, but it will be difficult for him to get in unless he has Hanuman with him. Anjana summons her son, to whom the Madari seems oddly familiar, "as if he and I were one." The Madari puts a leash around Hanuman's neck, apologizing to him for any discomfort. Arriving in Ayodhya, they attract crowds as they make their way through the streets and markets, and Hanuman holds everyone spellbound with his dancing. People say, "The little princes *must* see this!" But when the pair reach the palace gate, the doorkeeper scornfully refuses to admit them, asking, "How are royal children going to be entertained by the likes of *you*?" The Madari just stands there playing his drum, and inside, Rama, who is four years old, hears it and begins to cry. Dasharatha gives orders to summon the street entertainer, but the guard still refuses to admit the monkey, fearing it may bite the princes. But Rama keeps wailing to see the show, so the doorkeeper finally relents. In the palace courtyard, the Madari and his monkey perform for Rama and his brothers. This is no ordinary monkey show, for the drummer is the Lord who beats out the rhythm of creation and destruction, and he is also Nataraja, Lord of Dancers, now dancing in the form of

a monkey. And Vishnu, who makes the entire universe dance to his tune, is now clapping his hands with delight, oblivious to all but a monkey's dance. No one at court guesses the secret except the royal guru Vasishtha, who inclines his head discreetly out of reverence for Shiva. When the dance is over, the entertainers are given rich gifts and prepare to leave, whereupon Rama again begins to cry. His mothers ask what the matter is, and he demands to keep the monkey. Everyone is embarrassed; how can they ask the poor Madari to give up his source of livelihood? Still, there is the problem of the crown prince, who is wailing obstinately. All at once, the Madari vanishes, and the monkey leaps into Rama's arms. The matter is settled and Hanuman becomes the royal pet. He remains with Rama until sage Vishvamitra comes, whereupon he returns to his parents. His mother tells him that now the Ramayana has begun in earnest and sends him to serve Sugriva on Rishyamuka Hill.

(c) After the Madari leaves Ayodhya, little Rama demands a monkey of his own. Dasharatha sends his agents out to purchase monkeys and they return with thousands of potential pets, but Rama, on one pretext or another, rejects every one. Finally Dasharatha consults his guru, Vasishtha, who recommends sending a letter to the monkey king Sugriva in the southern kingdom of Kishkindha, asking him to send his minister, Hanuman. The king does so, and after some time, Hanuman arrives, accompanied by an ambassador. Rama is finally happy: *this* is the right monkey for him.

(d) Having become the court pet, Hanuman is the constant companion of Rama and his brothers. During the day, he serves the princes in all their activities, fetching stray balls when they play catch, disentangling kite strings, fanning them while they play board games, refereeing polo matches, and rowing their boat and serving as lifeguard when they sport along the river Sarayu. He also retrieves arrows when they practice archery and climbs trees to provide them with fruits. His reward for this is a special intimacy; he sleeps in little Rama's bed, eats the leavings from his meals, and is even privileged to ride on his shoulder.

(e) One day while Rama is flying a kite, it goes so high that it disappears from sight and he is unable to retrieve it. He sends Hanuman after it. Hanuman follows the string all the way to the world of Indra, where he finds that the god's daughter-in-law, Jayant's wife, has seized the kite. She tells Hanuman that, seeing it, she has fallen in love with its owner, and she will not return it until she has seen him. Hanuman returns to Ayodhya and reports the matter to Rama, who sends him back with the message that Jayant's wife must be patient for the moment; she will see him when he goes into exile and lives on the hill of Chitrakut. She accepts this promise and returns the kite.

9. Meeting Rama in the Forest [see notes on page 194]

(a) Young Rama and his brothers go into the forest to hunt. Hanuman, eager to meet his Lord, takes the form of a deer and runs ahead of them, leading them deeper into the woods. They pursue him for a whole day and become exhausted. Then he assumes monkey form and climbs a big fruit tree. Rama rests under the

tree, laying his head on Lakshmana's lap. He looks up and sees a monkey with jeweled earrings sitting on a branch eating fruit. Hanuman descends and reverently offers fruits to Rama, who recognizes him as an avatara of Shiva and embraces him, promising that they will meet again.

(b) When Rama and Lakshmana are in the forest, the latter goes off to gather fruit and finds a beautiful orchard guarded by a ferocious monkey. It is Shiva's own garden, and the monkey is Hanuman, who challenges Lakshmana when the latter picks a fruit. They fight, and Lakshmana is overcome. Wondering what can be delaying his brother, Rama arrives on the scene, and another fight ensues; this time, it is Hanuman who is knocked senseless. Shiva himself then arrives and engages Rama in battle; neither seems to have the advantage and, after terrible mayhem, they reach a stalemate. Finally, an exasperated Parvati comes and upbraids the two fighters, reminding them that they are fundamentally one and the same. Both hang their heads in embarrassment, and Hanuman (now revived) confesses that the whole problem arose due to his "monkey ignorance." Rama asks Shiva to give him the monkey guard, and Shiva readily agrees.

[Synopsis 2: The events of Books 1–4 of the Ramayana transpire. Rama marries Sita and soon after begins fourteen years of forest exile, accompanied by his wife and his brother Lakshmana. While they are living in Panchavati, Sita is carried off by Ravana, and Rama and Lakshmana proceed southward in search of her. A heavenly being tells Rama to form an alliance with the monkey king Sugriva. This is arranged by Sugriva's minister Hanuman, who first comes to Rama disguised as a Brahman student. Rama vows friendship with Sugriva, then slays the latter's elder brother and tormentor, Vali. Rama waits out the ensuing rainy season, until Sugriva dispatches search parties in the four directions to look for Sita. Hanuman is sent with the southbound party, and before his departure Rama entrusts him with his own signet ring to be given as a token to Sita. Lost in a southern wasteland, the monkeys enter a magic cave and meet a beautiful ascetic woman, Svayamprabha, who guides them to the shore of the sea. Here they learn from a giant vulture, Sampati, that Sita is being held prisoner on the island of Lanka, 100 leagues away.² None in the party feels confident of being able to complete a journey of this distance until the elder Jambavan reminds Hanuman of his divine birth. Hanuman grows to enormous size and vows to complete the mission. He leaps into the sky and soars toward Lanka. En route, he overcomes a series of obstacles: a mountain that seeks to offer him rest and which he briefly honors; a female sea serpent (actually a goddess in disguise) who expands her mouth to engulf him but whom he ultimately outwits and likewise honors; and a female marine monster who swallows him by seizing his shadow as it passes over the waters, and whom he slays by piercing her vitals. Arriving in Lanka, he surveys Ravana's mighty fortress from afar and decides to enter it by night, assuming a tiny

2. I use the obsolete English "league" (anywhere from 2.4 to 4.6 miles) to translate the similarly archaic Sanskrit *yojana*, which is variously said to connote a distance of between four and eighteen miles. The point seems to have been that epic Lanka (unlike its modern namesake island nation) was a long way off.

form. As he is about to pass through the gate, he is challenged by a female demon standing guard there. (See notes on page 194.)

10. Encountering Lankini [see notes on page 196]

(a) When the rakshasi guarding the city gate challenges Hanuman, announcing that her job is to devour would-be intruders, he responds by punching her, causing her to faint momentarily and to vomit blood. Recovering her wits, she addresses him respectfully: “When Ravana received his boon from Brahma, I was present, and as the Grandfather departed, he prophesied to me that, when a mere monkey would succeed in reaching Lanka and would overcome me with a single blow, I should know that Ravana’s reign was nearing its end.” She then pronounces a blessing for the success of Hanuman’s mission, and says that she will remain in Lanka merely as an onlooker, giving no protection to the city until Rama’s triumph is complete and he appoints a new king.

(b) Ravana’s devotion to Shiva and Parvati is so great that they have come to live in Lanka, and their presence renders it invulnerable to assault. When the celestial gods complain of Ravana’s tyranny, Brahma goes to Lanka and asks the divine pair to withdraw their protection. Shiva agrees to take birth as a monkey who will oppose Ravana, and Parvati agrees to leave the island when requested by him. In due course, Hanuman enters Lanka in cat-size form. He sees a temple in which is enshrined a lovely three-eyed goddess, holding divine weapons and flanked by eight yoginis. Laughing loudly, she challenges him, identifying herself as Chandika, Kali, and other terrible manifestations of the divine Mother. Hanuman responds by manifesting his cosmic form, containing the energies of all the gods. The goddess is awed and responds, “I recognize you! You are the great Lord, Shiva himself. Tell me what I have to do for the slaying of Ravana.” Hanuman says that Rama will not be able to conquer the island as long as she protects it, and he requests her to leave. Before doing so, the goddess asks the boon that the nine nights of her worship occur in the autumn as well as in the spring, and Hanuman agrees to this.

(c) Ravana, seeking to increase his power, worships Shiva, who instructs him to worship Shyama, the Dark Lady. He does so for ten thousand years and is rewarded with the boon that she will come to live in Lanka, where he propitiates her with daily sacrifices of water buffalo and human beings. However, he falls out of her favor when he kidnaps Sita. Rama, too, worships her during the battle, and when Ravana plots to capture him and offer him to Shyama as a human sacrifice, she becomes enraged and announces that she will leave the island and become vegetarian. Rama instructs Hanuman to escort the goddess to the Himalayas accompanied by ten thousand cobra deities. Carrying Shyama on his back, Hanuman crosses the mountains and descends in the vale of Kashmir, where he locates a marshy area that will be suitable for the snakes. He establishes the goddess on an island, and she

accepts only offerings of milk, sugar, and butter. Hanuman himself remains as doorkeeper of her temple.

[Synopsis 3: Resuming a tiny form, Hanuman enters Lanka and begins searching for Sita. He also examines its layout and defenses, with a mind to Rama's coming campaign. He then searches Ravana's palace and eventually his harem, where he sees thousands of beautiful women sleeping, as well as Ravana himself. He briefly mistakes Ravana's chief queen, Mandodari, for Sita, but quickly realizes his error. In a nearby mansion, he meets Ravana's brother, Vibhishana, a votary of Rama, and gives him encouragement. Vibhishana directs him to the Ashoka Garden, where Sita is held. From the branches of a tree, Hanuman watches as Ravana comes to entreat and threaten Sita, who refuses even to look at him. On the demon's departure, Hanuman reveals himself to Sita, first by reciting Rama's story from his place of concealment, then by coming before her in a tiny form. He gradually convinces her that he is indeed Rama's emissary, gives her Rama's ring, and tells her that she will soon be rescued. When she doubts his strength, he briefly assumes an enormous shape and then receives her permission to eat the fruits of the garden before departing. Deciding to test the strength of Ravana's forces, Hanuman begins wrecking the grove. In an ensuing battle he kills thousands of demon warriors, including several generals and Ravana's young son Akshaya, but is eventually ensnared by the elder prince Indrajit with a divine noose. Brought to court, Hanuman admonishes Ravana to return Sita. Since an emissary cannot be executed, it is decided to mutilate him. The demons wrap oil-soaked rags around his tail, which Hanuman magically extends, then set it alight. Freeing himself from his bonds, he leaps from roof to roof and sets fire to the city, assisted by his father, Vayu. Having burned the whole of Lanka, Hanuman returns to Sita for her blessings, then leaps back to the mainland where he rejoins his companions. The search party returns in triumph, pausing briefly outside Kishkindha to celebrate their success by looting King Sugriva's orchard. (See notes on page 198.)]

II. Two Prisoners Freed [see notes on page 200]

In the course of his survey of Lanka, Hanuman climbs a mountain at the southern edge of the city. There he finds a grotesque black figure chained to the rock. It is Death himself, Kala, who has been placed there at Ravana's command, and the chain-belt that holds him is secured with a Rudra mantra. Thanks to the boon he has received from Yama, Hanuman has no fear of Kala, and when he touches the magic belt, it instantly opens, releasing the prisoner. Kala is overjoyed, and gives his rescuer the boon that anyone who remembers Hanuman need have no fear of him or his emissaries.

While he is still on the mountain, Hanuman hears a pathetic voice crying for help and follows it to a nearby cave. There he discovers Shani—the inauspicious planet Saturn—who has also been imprisoned by Ravana. The king of Lanka is a great astrologer and knows the evil effects of Shani's baleful gaze. The deity is hanging upside down like a bat, his feet chained to the ceiling of the cave and his face turned to the wall so his glance cannot fall on

anyone. Hanuman breaks the chain and frees him, and they then converse. Shani tells Hanuman that the blue sapphire is believed to protect people against Saturn's influence, but since the blue-skinned Lord Vishnu is the "sapphire of sapphires," Rama's devotees are automatically safe. He adds that, in future, those who remember Hanuman will not be troubled by Shani, and he gives his rescuer the title Sankat Mochan, "the liberator from distress."

12. In Ravana's Court [see notes on page 200]

Seemingly bound by Indrajit's Brahma-weapon, though in fact only humoring his would-be captors, Hanuman is brought before Ravana, who is enthroned majestically on a high dais. Since he has come as Rama's emissary, Hanuman requests that he too be given a seat in the court. When Ravana refuses, mocking him and his master, Hanuman causes his tail to expand, then he coils it on the floor of the courtroom until it forms a high tower atop which he seats himself with great dignity. He makes it just high enough that his head is slightly above Ravana's, enraging the latter. However, Hanuman does this not out of arrogance, but out of respect for the one who has sent him.

13. Burning Lanka [see notes on page 201]

As the demons of Lanka gleefully wrap oil-soaked rags around Hanuman's tail, the wily monkey causes it to grow, obliging his captors to come up with more cloth and oil. Eventually the tail becomes so huge that all the fabric in Lanka is used up—the citizens are forced to surrender their clothing, and even the royal ladies hand over their saris—and the kitchens are emptied of cooking oil and ghee. The nervous guards then try to light this enormous wad but are unable to do so. Hanuman suggests to Ravana that, as the "patron" of this "fire-sacrifice," he should blow on the tail while they attempt to light it, and it will surely catch. Ravana does so, and the tail-torch bursts into flame so violently that all his ten beards and mustaches are singed and his face blackened. He has to slap himself on the face to put out the sparks, provoking general laughter.

Meanwhile, Hanuman has made himself tiny and slipped out of his bonds. He leaps to an adjacent rooftop and again grows to enormous size, filling the sky, his burning tail appearing like another sun. A violent wind begins to blow, fanning the flames. The monkey leaps nimbly from rooftop to rooftop and soon the whole city is ablaze. The gold plating on its palatial buildings melts in the intense heat, and streams of molten gold run into the sea, sending up enormous clouds of steam. To the rakshasas, Hanuman appears like Shiva, intent on destroying the universe at the end of an eon. Ravana uses his power over the forces of nature to summon rain clouds in an attempt to extinguish the flames, but the conflagration is so intense that the water behaves like oil, causing the fire to burn even hotter. The clouds themselves are

awestruck and say they have never seen such a wonder, not even at the time of cosmic dissolution. However, Hanuman spares the mansion of Vibhishana as well as the Ashoka Garden in which Sita is imprisoned. When he is about to burn the palace of Ravana's giant brother Kumbhakarna, who lies unconscious in a six-month sleep, the latter's wife pleads for mercy, invoking Rama's name. Hanuman is pleased and reasons that Kumbhakarna's monstrous appetite is only natural, and he spares his house, too. When the rest of the city has been reduced to ashes, Hanuman extinguishes his tail by dipping it in the sea. He then pays a final visit to Sita before returning to the mainland.

14. Encountering Yama and Shani [see notes on page 202]

Although Hanuman uses his burning tail to set fire to rooftops all over Lanka, the golden city refuses to burn and continues to look beautiful. Hanuman realizes that it is protected by Ravana's magic power, which he acquired through vanquishing the celestials. He goes to Ravana's prison, where he finds the inauspicious Shani in chains. Hanuman releases him, and Shani then turns his evil eye on the city, which is instantly reduced to ashes. Ravana is enraged and sends Yama, the god of death, together with the other World Guardians, to stop Hanuman. Hanuman seizes Yama and puts him in his mouth; he lassoes the other Guardians with his tail and holds them tightly. Due to Yama's absence, disorder breaks out in the cosmos as creatures cease to die. Brahma appears before Hanuman and entreats him to release Yama. Hanuman does so, and Yama gives him the boon that he will never harm Hanuman's devotees. Hanuman then tells Yama to go and perch atop Ravana's ten heads, broadcasting his imminent demise.

15. Hanuman's Pride Is Humbled [see notes on page 202]

The gods are delighted by Hanuman's mighty deeds in Lanka and Brahma gives him a letter to take to Rama, describing them in full. Receiving this commendation from the Grandfather himself, Hanuman feels a trace of self-pride. He then takes leave of Sita, who presents him with her hair ornament as a token of having seen her, and also gives back Rama's ring to return to the Lord. Bearing these three precious objects, Hanuman flies across the sea but becomes thirsty in the process. Reaching the mainland, he spies an ashram with a lake nearby. He descends to find a venerable sage seated in meditation. Hanuman requests permission to drink from the lake, and the sage nods. Hanuman places his three treasures next to the sage and proceeds to the lake. While he is there, an ordinary monkey bounds out of the bushes, picks up Rama's ring and drops it into the sage's water pot; the sage makes no effort to stop him. When Hanuman returns, he finds the ring missing and inquires of the sage, who wordlessly points to his pot. But when Hanuman looks into the vessel, he finds it filled with rings exactly like the one he carried. Hanuman

inquires which ring is Rama's, and the sage finally breaks his silence: "They all are. You see, whenever it is treta yuga, and Rama takes birth, his messenger Hanuman comes this way, puts down the ring, and a monkey drops it into my water pot." Hanuman is stunned and asks the sage how many rings there are. "Why don't you count them?" he replies. Hanuman begins to do so, but loses count; there are thousands. The sage smiles and says, "You see, I don't count the days and years. The monkey puts the rings in the water pot, and so I keep track of the eons, that's all." Hanuman is crestfallen, but the sage blesses him and says, "Don't bother about the ring. No Hanuman ever brings it back to Rama." Much later, when Hanuman is again with Rama, the Lord tells him that he himself took the form of that sage and played a joke in order to relieve Hanuman of the trace of pride he had acquired. Hanuman then sees the ring on Rama's finger and throws himself on the ground, asking to be protected from the sin of self-pride in future. Rama smilingly grants this boon.

[Synopsis 4: Rama receives Hanuman's report with great joy and soon marches south with a vast army of monkeys and bears assembled by Sugriva. They make camp on the shore of the southern sea. Meanwhile, Ravana's younger brother, Vibhishana, having failed to convince the king to return Sita and having been insulted by him, approaches Rama seeking asylum. Sugriva and other warriors warn against trusting the Lankan prince, but Hanuman, knowing Rama's power and compassion, advises accepting him. Rama embraces Vibhishana and then performs a rite proclaiming him King of Lanka. There remains the problem of transporting the army across 100 leagues of ocean. At Vibhishana's suggestion, Rama entreats the god of waters to afford them passage. When Ocean fails to respond, Rama threatens him with a fiery arrow. The god then reveals that two of the monkeys, Nala and Nila, were once granted a boon: stones that they place on the water will float.³ Rama orders a causeway constructed, and his warriors bring huge boulders and mountain peaks.]

16. Building the Causeway [see notes on page 203]

(a) As the monkeys fetch boulders, Nala and Nila place them in the sea, where, as predicted, they float like logs. However, the stones quickly disperse on the choppy waters and fail to form the desired causeway; the monkeys ponder how to join them together. Hanuman proposes writing the consonants "ra" and "ma" on alternating stones, and then placing them side by side on the water, with the crack between them forming the long vowel "ā." Since the Lord's name is the greatest of all mantras, omnipotent and indivisible, the stones will adhere to one another in an unbroken chain of Rāma-nāma.

3. An explanation sometimes offered for this odd boon is that the two monkeys, like Hanuman, were wayward youths given to the prank of throwing the murtis worshiped by sages into a pond. To prevent the loss of their holy images, the sages contrived the "boon."

(b) Hanuman oversees the building of the causeway and also labors more diligently than any other warrior. At the end of the first day's work, a causeway 10 leagues wide has been created, extending 16 leagues into the ocean. Hanuman is unsatisfied, however, and urges his companions to work harder the next day, setting the example himself. By the end of the second day, 20 leagues have been added, but still Hanuman isn't content. Through his urging and his own pains, the monkeys succeed in adding 21 leagues on the third day, 22 on the fourth, and, mounting a supreme effort, 23 on the fifth, thus completing the wonderful causeway in only five days. Rama is pleased.

(c) As the causeway nears completion, Hanuman sees a strange sight: a chipmunk is plunging into the ocean, then coming onto the beach and rolling on its back in the sand. It then climbs onto the causeway and shakes itself, scattering particles of sand over the surface of the rocks, then repeats the whole process. Hanuman fears that the tiny creature will be crushed by the huge monkeys hauling gigantic boulders. He picks him up and, holding him on his palm, admonishes him: "What are you doing here, little one? There's nothing for you to eat on this causeway. Don't come here." Rearing himself up to his full six inches, the chipmunk pluckily replies: "Oh yeah? Is this *your* causeway, or Lord Rama's?" Hanuman, amused, replies that it is Rama's, whereupon the chipmunk informs him that he should mind his own business and let others attend to theirs. As for himself, he explains, he is just doing his part. He has noticed that the surface of the causeway is jagged and Rama's feet are tender, so he is spreading sand to make a soft surface. Hanuman is moved by this tiny act of service, which he feels exceeds his own. He brings the chipmunk to Rama, who lovingly strokes its back and promises it a place in his heavenly realm of Saket. The lines made by the Lord's fingers in the creature's wet, sandy fur become the characteristic marking of all his descendants.

17. Hanuman and Mount Govardhan [see notes on page 203]

The earth-moving monkeys level many mountains to provide building material for the causeway. By the end of the fourth day of construction, they have reduced all of southern India to a level plateau and they leap northward in search of additional peaks. Hanuman flies to the Himalayas where he spies an especially lofty mountain, Dronacala. He decides to transport it to the construction site, but when he attempts to do so, he finds that he cannot. He then realizes that the mountain is made of *sālagrāma*, the sacred black stone of Vishnu. It is in fact a heavenly mountain that has taken earthly avatara at the same time as Rama himself. Hanuman worships it and tells it that he will bring it to the Lord, who will touch it with his feet. At this, the mountain permits itself to be lifted and carried through the skies. However, while Hanuman is en route, Nala and Nila inform Rama that the causeway is complete and no further stones are needed. Rama orders construction halted and tells the monkeys to set down any remaining boulders and return to camp. Many monkeys are en route at the time, bearing mountain peaks, and they drop them on receiving Rama's order, cre-

ating the present-day topography of southern India with its many solitary hills and outcroppings. Hanuman, however, is still far to the north, and when he learns of the completion of the causeway, he sets the Drona mountain down in the Braj region, near the river Yamuna. The holy mountain is, literally, crest-fallen, and reminds Hanuman of his promise to bring it to Rama's feet; Hanuman now faces the dilemma of breaking either his own promise or Rama's order. He quickly flies south and reports to Rama, who tells him to inform the mountain that it is not yet time for them to meet and that it should remain in Braj. In the next age, when Rama takes birth as Krishna, he will roam the mountain with his companions and will even lift it into the air on his finger. The Drona peak will become famous throughout the world as Mount Govardhan and be worshiped as an embodiment of the Lord himself. Hanuman delivers this message, and the resettled mountain is satisfied.

18. Sparing Rama Embarrassment [see notes on page 204]

Watching the marvel of the floating stones and being told by the monkeys that it is due to the power of his own name, Rama becomes intrigued. If his name can make stones float on the water, then shouldn't he too possess this power? He decides to test this, but first retires to a deserted spot along the coast where no one will see him, just in case. Hanuman, however, who is always watching his Lord, sees Rama walk away and follows him unseen, at a respectful distance. Rama picks up a stone and tries placing it on the surface of the water; it immediately sinks. He tries another and then another, but the same thing happens each time. Rama sighs in disappointment and then glances about nervously. His eyes fall on Hanuman standing in a prayerful attitude, watching him. He asks Hanuman whether he has been there the whole time, and when he replies in the affirmative, Rama blushes. Deeply chagrined, he asks Hanuman not to tell anyone what he has seen. Hanuman replies that, on the contrary, he intends to announce this phenomenon to all. Rama is horrified, but then Hanuman quickly explains his understanding of the matter: "Anything you hold is saved; anything you abandon is lost. If a stone has the misfortune to slip from your hand, how can it do otherwise than sink?"

19. Worshipping Shiva [see notes on page 204]

(a) When the causeway is complete, Rama decides to establish a lingam on the beach nearby to invoke Shiva's blessing for the coming war against Ravana. Hanuman brings a group of forest sages to officiate as priests, and they recommend obtaining a lingam from Mount Kailash in the Himalayas. Hanuman flies there and begins propitiating Shiva; after some time, Shiva is pleased and bestows a lingam on him. Meanwhile, the sages warn Rama that the auspicious astrological moment is passing and that he should commence the ceremony without delay. Rama hastily forms a lingam of sand to serve as

a temporary substitute until Hanuman returns. He and the sages consecrate it while the monkey troops look on respectfully. The installation is already over when Hanuman returns with a beautiful stone lingam. He is upset to see that the ceremony has taken place without him and that a mound of sand has been consecrated. Unable to contain himself, he stamps his foot in anger, and it becomes stuck in the earth. Rama tells him to simply brush aside the sand lingam and install the stone one in its place. Hanuman tries to do this but finds the mound immovable. He thinks this may be because of the fivefold oblation poured over it, and so he wraps his tail around it in an effort to uproot it. Still the lingam will not budge, and finally Hanuman pulls so hard that his tail breaks, and he faints in pain. Rama lovingly revives Hanuman by recounting his heroic deeds and passes his hand over the broken tail, healing it. He remarks that a lingam once consecrated by his hand cannot be removed but that Hanuman should place his own nearby and Rama will worship it as well. Rama then gives the boon that all those who visit this place of "Rama's Lord, Shiva" (Rameshwaram) will derive the full benefit of their pilgrimage only if they first worship the lingam "Hanuman's Lord" before proceeding to the one consecrated by him.

(b) Rama wishes to install a Shiva lingam to commemorate the completion of the causeway but there is no priest to officiate. Hanuman flies to Lanka, where he politely requests Ravana, who is a great devotee of Shiva and also a Brahman, to provide this service. Ravana agrees but points out that Sita must also be present, since the sponsor of the ritual should have his wife by his side. She is fetched from the Ashoka Garden, and Ravana, Hanuman, and Sita proceed to the mainland in Ravana's flying chariot. Rama asks Ravana to recommend a source for a lingam, and he proposes that one be brought from Mount Kailash. Hanuman flies northward to obtain it. However, he is delayed, and Ravana insists that the ceremony begin, as the auspicious moment is passing. Sita molds a lingam of sand, and they proceed, Ravana observing all the rites punctiliously and even dutifully intoning Rama's "declaration of intent" in establishing the lingam—"for slaying Ravana in battle." When Hanuman returns, he finds the ceremony over and is disappointed. Rama suggests that he uproot the sand lingam, but he cannot (etc., as in 19.a).

[Synopsis 5: Rama and his army cross the causeway and make camp on Mount Suvela, where they witness the spectacle of the moonrise. Prince Angada undertakes a final diplomatic mission to Ravana's court, but the demon king refuses to yield Sita. The battle begins, and the monkey warriors slay many important demons. However, Ravana's son Indrajit (aka Meghnad) deploys magical powers and even succeeds in binding both Rama and Lakshmana in a venomous serpent snare, from which the divine eagle Garuda frees them. Another devastating attack badly wounds nearly everyone in Rama's army, though the general Jambavan observes that, as long as Hanuman remains alive, they can all be revived. Ravana's gigantic brother Kumbhakarna is awakened and dispatched to the battlefield, where he wreaks havoc but is quickly slain by Lakshmana. Indrajit then succeeds in lodging a deadly shakti weapon in Lakshmana's chest, mortally wounding him. Hanuman fetches the

physician Sushena from the city, and the latter prescribes an herb that can revive Lakshmana, but only if brought before sunrise. Hanuman flies to the Himalayas to fetch the herb. (See notes on page 206.)

20. The Life-Restoring Herb [see notes on page 208]

(a) After examining Lakshmana, the physician Sushena prescribes an herb found near the summit of Mount Drona, located 6 million leagues to the north, but the herb must be administered before daybreak or Lakshmana will perish. As the task seems an impossible one, Rama becomes distraught, but Hanuman comes forward. Growing to enormous size and manifesting fiery Rudra-energy, he promises to turn the universe upside down, if need be, to save Lakshmana. The gods become terrified, fearing that cosmic dissolution may be at hand, and so Rama must calm Hanuman down before dispatching him on his mission.

(b) Ravana's hopes for victory are renewed by the news of Lakshmana's dire condition, but he becomes worried again when his spies inform him that Hanuman has left for the Himalayas. Ravana goes to his minister Kalanemi, a renowned sorcerer, and asks him to intercept and kill Hanuman. Kalanemi constructs an illusory ashram along Hanuman's route, complete with a lake and a temple, and disguises himself as a venerable-looking sage. Hanuman, feeling thirsty from his exertions, sees the hermitage and alights there. Kalanemi blesses him, claiming to be a devotee of Rama who knows, through inner sight, all about recent events in Lanka. He offers Hanuman a drink from his own water pot, in which he has mixed poison, but Hanuman says it will not suffice to quench his thirst and asks permission to drink from the lake. Kalanemi, remarking that the night is young and that Hanuman has plenty of time to complete his mission, tells him to bathe in the lake and then return to him; he will initiate him with a mantra that will allow him to see the herb he seeks, which is invisible to ordinary eyes. Although not much interested in the initiation, Hanuman does not want to displease the sage. He repairs to the lake, wherein Kalanemi has concealed a ravenous female crocodile, and when Hanuman wades in she seizes his leg. He slays her with one blow, and she reappears in the sky as an apsara—who had been transformed into a crocodile by another sage's curse—and warns him that the hermit is really a demon. Hanuman returns quietly to Kalanemi, who has planned an elaborate initiation ceremony that will last all night, but Hanuman grimly announces that, contrary to usual practice, he will give his "guru fee" first and receive the mantra later. Wrapping his tail around the demon, he quickly dispatches him, then soars skyward to resume his quest.

(c) Hanuman reaches the Himalayas and locates the Drona peak, the summit of which glows with the pale light of healing herbs. However, he is uncertain as to which is required by Sushena, and in his impatience—since the precious night is passing—he decides to uproot the whole mountain. Placing it on his palm, he again takes to the sky and heads southward. As he passes over Ayodhya, Rama's brother Bharata, who is sitting in his ashram

outside the city, sees a huge shape pass before the moon and, thinking it may be a demon, fires a blunt arrow at it. Struck by the arrow, Hanuman faints and falls to earth, still holding the mountain. After a few moments, he revives, involuntarily repeating Rama's name. Bharata realizes that the monkey must be a friend of Rama's and is stricken with remorse. Hanuman comforts him and gives him a detailed account of Rama and Sita's adventures since Bharata's last meeting with them on Mount Chitrakuta. Bharata weeps and asks Hanuman to come with him to the court in Ayodhya. Because it is still early in the night, Hanuman agrees. The queen mothers and royal gurus and ministers assemble, and Hanuman repeats his tidings. All are overcome with emotion. Bharata orders the army to march on Lanka to assist Rama, but guru Vasishtha tells him that this will detract from Rama's glory in defeating Ravana with only a force of monkeys and bears. Hearing of Lakshmana's plight, his mother, Sumitra, orders his twin brother, Shatrughna, to return to Lanka with Hanuman to fight in his place. She tells Hanuman to give Rama her message: "Forget about Lakshmana. He has fulfilled his destiny by giving up his life for you." At this, Rama's own mother, Kausalya, excitedly intervenes with the contrary message that Rama should never show his face in Ayodhya again unless he returns with both Sita *and* Lakshmana, alive and well. Hanuman is touched by their devotion but says that he must be on his way. Bharata offers to launch him into the sky astride one of his own arrows, and Hanuman momentarily wonders at the ludicrous idea that an arrow could support the weight of himself and the mountain, then banishes this self-important thought by reminding himself that Bharata is, after all, the Lord's brother. He salutes Bharata humbly but declines his offer. Then he hurtles skyward again and touches down on the battlefield in Lanka well before sunrise. The scent from the miraculous herbs revives Lakshmana and all other wounded warriors, and Rama gratefully embraces Hanuman.

(d) Learning from spies that Kalanemi is dead and that Hanuman is on his way back bearing the mountain of herbs, Ravana orders the sun god—whom he has defeated in battle and made his slave—to rise ahead of schedule. Surya begins to carry out the order, and the eastern sky reddens. Rama's party on the battlefield observes this and falls into despair. Hanuman, speeding toward Lanka, notices with annoyance the glow in the east and extends his arm in that direction. He plucks the sun from behind the horizon and places it under his armpit so that its light is stifled. After he has landed and delivered the healing herbs to Sushena, he salutes Rama with palms pressed together in reverence. Rama notices a red glow coming from Hanuman's armit and asks him what it is. Hanuman remembers the sun and informs Rama, who orders him to release the celestial god. Hanuman does so, and he and Rama both salute the sun with appropriate morning prayers.

[Synopsis 6: After Lakshmana revives the battle resumes. Indrajit attempts an unholy sacrifice to gain further magical powers that will make him invincible, but Rama, warned by Vibhishana, sends Hanuman and the monkeys to disrupt it. Soon after this

Lakshmana slays Indrajit in battle. Ravana is discouraged but continues to fight. He too attempts a sacrificial rite, but the monkeys again disrupt it (See notes on page 211.)

21. The Slaying of Ahiravana [see notes on page 211]

(a) Ahiravana (“snake Ravana”) is born to Ravana’s wife Mandodari, but his serpentine appearance is so terrible that it frightens even his father, who casts him into the ocean. There he is adopted by the snake demoness Simhika and makes his way to the serpent world, in the third nether region. He performs intense asceticism to please the local goddess and so acquires supernatural powers and near-perfect invulnerability, and also the boon that the earthly Ravana, who insulted and abandoned him, will one day call on him for help. Thus fortified, Ahiravana compels the king of Patala to give him his daughter in marriage and in time succeeds him as ruler of the netherworld.

(b) After the slaying of his eldest son, Indrajit, Ravana becomes despondent. Then he remembers his other son, Ahiravana, who reigns over the netherworld and is a great sorcerer and devotee of the goddess in her fearsome form. When Ravana summons him by means of a mantra and explains his predicament, Ahiravana scolds him for having kidnapped Sita but promises to help him anyway. He will use his powers to spirit away Rama and Lakshmana during the night—signaling his success by a streak of light in the sky—and will carry them to his subterranean kingdom, where he will sacrifice them to the goddess. The army of monkeys and bears will awaken leaderless and be easy prey to Ravana’s remaining forces.

As night falls over Rama’s camp, Vibhishana grows suspicious that Ravana may attempt a desperate move and orders special security. Hanuman expands and coils his tail to form a huge fortress within which the entire army settles for the night, placing Rama and Lakshmana at its center. Hanuman himself stands guard at its single doorway, and Vibhishana gives him strict orders to admit no one. During the night, a series of unexpected visitors arrive and request permission to see Rama—Rama’s deceased father, King Dasharatha; his brother Bharata; his mother, Kausalya; his family guru, Vasishtha, and other intimate associates. Hanuman asks each one to wait until he can consult Vibhishana, and each then vanishes. Finally, Vibhishana himself appears, explaining to Hanuman that he was detained at his evening prayers; after some deliberation, Hanuman admits him. Once inside, Ahiravana (for it is actually he) casts a spell of deep sleep over everyone, seizes the two princes, and flies into the sky, giving Ravana the promised signal. He then carries his captives to the netherworld. After some time, Vibhishana awakes and, finding the princes missing, sounds the alarm. He rushes outside and asks Hanuman whether he admitted anyone, and Hanuman describes the series of odd visitors. Dismayed, Vibhishana tells him that he was inside all along, and realizes that his double can only have been his sorcerer-nephew, who alone knows the secret of assuming his form. Hanuman blames himself for their plight, but

Vibhishana tells him that there is no time to lose: Hanuman alone can go to Patala to find and rescue the princes before Ahiravana kills them.

Hanuman plunges into the sea and then, making himself tiny, enters a crack in the ocean floor, emerging after some time in the sky of the subterranean world of Patala. He quickly explores this wondrous realm, sees the palace of the great snake Vasuki, the ashram of sage Kapila, and the nether Ganga, which is known as Bhogavati, the “river of pleasure.” Fatigued by his journey, he rests briefly under a tree and overhears a vulture couple conversing in its branches. They are discussing the excellent meal they will have later that day, when two human princes are sacrificed to Goddess Mahakali in Ahiravana’s city.

Hanuman immediately heads for the city but is challenged at its gate by a huge monkey guard, who resembles him exactly. When Hanuman asks him to identify himself, the guard says that his name is Makaradhvaja (“fish-banner”) and that he is the son of Hanuman. Shocked, Hanuman identifies himself and proclaims that he has been celibate since birth. Makaradhvaja then explains that his mother was a fish who became pregnant through swallowing a drop of Hanuman’s sweat, the result of his exertion during the burning of Lanka. The fish was later caught by Ahiravana’s servants and brought to his kitchen. When the cooks sliced her open, a handsome monkey emerged; Ahiravana gave him his name and appointed him to guard the city. Makaradhvaja touches his bewildered father’s feet and asks how he may serve him. Hanuman quickly explains his mission, and his son confirms that, indeed, Rama and Lakshmana are being held captive in the palace and are to be sacrificed in its main temple that very day. Unfortunately, he himself is under strict orders from Ahiravana to admit no one, and he must obey. Rather than debate the finer points of dharma—does a father take precedence over a patron?—the impatient Hanuman challenges his son to a wrestling bout and, with some difficulty, succeeds in pinning him, then binds him with the youth’s own tail.

Hanuman enters the city and flies straight to the palace, where, reducing himself to the size of a fly, he enters the temple on a flower garland that is then placed around the goddess’s neck. Once there, Hanuman assumes a monstrous form, pressing the murti into the ground and taking her place. Booming kettledrums announce the start of a tantric puja, the first phase of which is the offering to the goddess of an “appetizer” of cooked delicacies. Hanuman, heavily garlanded and now posing as the goddess, opens his jaws wide and the nether-priests begin shoveling the heaped offerings into his maw. As he consumes platter after platter, they call for more. Soon, the palace kitchens and pantries are exhausted, and everyone is amazed; “The Mother is truly present today, giving us her blessing!” Ahiravana arrives, dressed in red, and bows deeply before “her,” overcome with emotion. “You are favoring us greatly! What a marvelous state we will attain through this sacrifice!” Hanuman burps loudly and the priests announce that the Mother is pleased; it is now time to offer her the main course.

Rama and Laksmana are brought into the temple, hands bound and necks garlanded with red flowers. Lakshmana is fuming, but Rama appears calm

and resigned. Ahiravana looks fondly at his victims, knowing that the choicer the victim, the more exalted the powers obtained by the sacrificer. Today he will sacrifice Lord Vishnu himself in human form! He asks Rama if he has any last words—it is customary, at the end, to invoke some benefactor. Rama says, “Well, in the world, people generally take my name. But I think I will remember the Son of the Wind, Hanuman.” Lakshmana grumbles, “Some benefactor! Where is that monkey when we need him?” Rama replies softly, “Where isn’t he? Today I feel that I am having his darshan in the form of the goddess!” Listening to this conversation, Ahiravana laughs wickedly and raises his curved sword. At this, Hanuman lets out a mighty roar, shaking the earth. Extending his arms, he snatches the sacrificial blade from Ahiravana’s hand and lops off the demon’s head; it rolls into the great firepit that had been readied to receive his victims. Panic ensues as Hanuman frees the two captives and mows down thousands of guards. He places Rama and Lakshmana on his shoulders and soars into the air. As they pass the gate of the city, Rama notices a monkey lying there, bound in his own tail, and asks Hanuman who he is, remarking, “He looks just like you.” “He says he is my son,” Hanuman replies. Rama orders a halt, directs Hanuman to free Makaradhvaja, and then anoints him king of Patala, using a splash of Ahiravana’s blood from Hanuman’s limbs. As the new king bows reverently, Hanuman ascends with the two princes on his shoulders. They reach Lanka before daybreak, to the great joy of the monkey army. Learning of their return, Ravana realizes that Ahiravana has been slain and that his own end is near.

(c) Ahiravana and Mahiravana (“earth Ravana”) are twin brothers—in reality, the twin gods known as Ashvins, under a curse. Their terrestrial counterpart, the king of Lanka, summons them from Patala by messenger when the tide of battle turns against him. They agree to slay the Raghu princes by night. Vibhishana, spying in Lanka in the form of a bird, learns of the plot and warns Rama. Hanuman makes a stout rampart of his tail, but the demon brothers manage to put everyone to sleep and spirit away the rock on which the two princes are sleeping; they make ready to offer them to their goddess, Kamaksha Devi. When the sleeping spell lifts, Hanuman sets out for the netherworld. Arriving in Patala, he overhears an elderly demon couple discussing the grand plans for the sacrifice. He rushes to the city and meets the guard Matsyaraja (“fish king”), and tells him he is seeking Rama and Lakshmana. The guard inquires, “My father, Anjani’s son, is well, isn’t he?” Aghast, Hanuman replies that he has no wife or son. Matsyaraja reminds Hanuman that, after burning Lanka, he tried to clear the smoke from his lungs and spit a blob of phlegm into the ocean; a fish swallowed it, and Matsyaraja was born. The two monkeys fight, and Matsyaraja, being the younger, is victorious. However, out of reverence for his father, he admits him to the city.

Hanuman makes himself smaller than the mote of a sunbeam and enters the goddess temple unseen. He then locks the sanctum from inside and, imitating a female voice, orders the demons to send in offerings through the window, as anyone who looks directly at the goddess will go blind. The priests, mightily impressed, bring a rich feast and Hanuman devours it, roaring, “Is

this all?" Eventually the demons ransack their city for all available foodstuffs but still cannot appease their goddess's appetite. Hanuman then orders that the two princes be presented to him alive. They are shoved in through the shrine door, and Hanuman promptly unties them. The three then burst out and begin slaying demons, including Ahiravana and Mahiravana. However, the brothers immediately revive and resume fighting, and this happens time and again. Hanuman races into the city, determined to discover the cause of the demons' apparent immortality. He finds a naga princess who is Ahiravana's mistress, and she tells him that she knows the secret but will reveal it only on condition that Rama agree to marry her. Hanuman consents to this but adds the further condition that Rama will be relieved of this obligation if the bedstead on which she awaits him breaks under his weight. The princess then reveals that seven large bees, kept in a hive 30 leagues away, produce nectar that keeps the two demons alive. Hanuman flies to the spot and kills six of the bees, sparing the seventh on condition that it go to the princess' room and hollow out the leg of her bedstead. He then returns to help Rama and Lakshmana finish off the demons. Hanuman tells Rama of the serpent princess and her demand. Rama goes to the princess' room, but as he sits down on her bed, the frame gives way. He then blesses her to become his wife in the next age, the dvapara yuga, and appoints Matsyaraja king of Patala, telling him to repopulate it by marrying the widows of the slain demons. Hanuman then carries the two princes back to earth.

(d) Mahiravana is a friend of Ravana's. He shuts Rama and Lakshmana in a box and carries them to the netherworld, intending to sacrifice them to his goddess, Chandi. Hanuman descends to the netherworld, disguises himself as a kingfisher bird, and overhears an old demon relate where the princes are being held, and also the prophesy that a monkey will slay Mahiravana. Hanuman takes the form of a fly and enters the palace, where he comforts Rama and Lakshmana. He then goes to the temple, where he threatens to throw the goddess into the sea; she then recognizes him as "a form of my own Lord of Ghosts, Great Shiva," and they converse amiably. She says she has been looking forward to seeing Rama but has lately become annoyed with Mahiravana, because he likes to offer her the blood of exalted men, which makes her feverish. Hanuman asks her advice, and she tells him a ruse whereby the demon can be slain. Hanuman conveys this to Rama and then returns to hide behind the Devi's image.

The goddess is given preliminary offerings by the demons and Hanuman consumes all the food, to the delight of Mahiravana, who exclaims, "What powers I'll attain today!" Hanuman thinks, "That's true. You'll get to die in Rama's presence." When it is time for the sacrifice, Mahiravana asks Rama if he has any last words. Rama says, "Watch out that your Devi doesn't eat you, too!" Mahiravana laughs, then lifts his sword and orders Rama to bow before the goddess. Following Hanuman's instructions, Rama looks puzzled and explains that, being a prince, he has never bowed to anyone and doesn't know how to do it. He asks Mahiravana to demonstrate and the latter lowers his head. In a trice, Hanuman springs forward, seizes the sword from the Devi's

hand, and lops off the demon's head. He then assumes a terrible eleven-headed form and rampages through the city, slaughtering demons. Meanwhile, Mahiravana's queen arrives at the temple in a fury, curses the goddess for failing to protect her husband, and throws her image into a pond. Hanuman returns and slays her, too, but Ahiravana emerges from her stomach, and they fight briefly before Hanuman destroys him. When the mayhem ceases, Rama hands over the city to the Brahmans. Hanuman retrieves the image of Goddess Chandi and carries it, together with Rama and Lakshmana, back to earth. They establish Chandi at Kshirgram in Bengal, where she is worshiped to this day.

22. Substituting a Syllable [see notes on page 216]

On the very eve of his death, the desperate Ravana attempts one final measure to secure victory. He assembles a large number of Brahmans learned in tantric ritual and commands them to invoke the most violent form of the goddess, Chamunda. If she can be made to fight on his side, victory will yet be his. The Brahmans are to perform 1,000 recitations of a long poem in her honor, bracketing each recitation with a fire offering and the chanting of a wish formula that expresses their patron's request:

Jaya tvam devi Cāmuṇḍe jaya bhūtārti hāriṇi

Victory to thee, Goddess Chamunda, remover of the pain of all beings!

Vibhishana learns of this scheme and informs Hanuman, who promptly flies to Ravana's city and, transforming himself into a Brahman, mingles unobtrusively with the priests as they prepare for their all-night ritual. He begins serving them energetically, washing their feet, preparing their seating area, laying out their ritual supplies, and so forth. The Brahmans are impressed because they generally don't get this kind of service from the arrogant inhabitants of Lanka. Pleased, they offer the helpful Brahman a boon. He looks dismayed and protests that he wants nothing; it is his privilege to serve them as they prepare for their important work. But the Brahmans are insistent—their pleasure must find expression in a boon. "Ask! Ask! We need to get started." Shyly, the helpful Brahman says that, since they insist, he will ask one small favor: the alteration of one letter in the final word of the formula they are to recite. "If it isn't too much trouble, would you kindly change the *h* in *hāriṇi* to *k*?" Realizing the implications, the seniormost Brahman throws a glance at his comrades, but they are bound by their promise and all say "So be it!" The thousandfold ritual commences and the formula that echoes with each round is now:

Jaya tvam devi Cāmuṇḍe jaya bhūtārti kāriṇi

Victory to thee, Goddess Chamunda, *cause* of the pain of all beings!

This, of course, is insulting, and the goddess turns a deaf ear to it. Just before dawn, when the thousandth recitation ceases and the goddess is expected to manifest amid blinding flames and murderous supernatural minions . . . nothing happens. The priests look around and the helpful young Brahman has vanished. Abashed, they gather up their things and shuffle out. Naturally they expect the worst from Ravana, but when the whole matter is reported to him, he only sighs and strokes his ten beards thoughtfully, remarking: "That monkey is so awfully clever!"

23. Stealing a Magic Arrow [see notes on page 217]

During the final battle, Rama's arrows repeatedly deal Ravana what ought to be fatal wounds, yet the king of Lanka fights on. The worried Rama is then informed by Vibhishana that Ravana received yet another boon: he can only be slain with one special "Brahma-arrow" that the Grandfather himself gave to him. It is hidden in Queen Mandodari's private apartments, and unless it can be obtained, the battle will go on forever. In a trice, Hanuman leaps to Lanka and assumes the form of an aged Brahman, hobbling on a cane. He presents himself to Mandodari, who is worshiping Parvati together with ten thousand co-wives, praying for Ravana's well-being. She is delighted to see the frail and venerable Brahman and offers him lavish hospitality, which he willingly accepts. To win her confidence, Hanuman tells her that she is fortunate to possess a treasure that will prevent Rama and his monkeys from harming her husband and warns her never to reveal it to anyone. Mandodari is impressed by his knowledge and eagerly seeks his blessing. The Brahman then expresses a new concern: "That traitor Vibhishana is sure to reveal the arrow's hiding place, because he knows where everything is in Lanka. You had better move it!" Mandodari panics and begins to remove the arrow from its hiding place—inside a crystal column—which she thus inadvertently reveals. Hanuman reverts to his true form, grabs the arrow, and leaps back to Rama's camp, leaving Mandodari in tears. Ravana is doomed.

[Synopsis 7: Ravana makes a final sally onto the battlefield amid many inauspicious omens, and Rama, standing on a celestial chariot lent by Indra, slays him. The gods rejoice over Rama's victory. Rama comforts Ravana's widowed queens, sends Lakshmana into Lanka to enthrone Vibhishana, and dispatches Hanuman to the Ashoka Garden to inform Sita of Ravana's death. In an emotional reunion, Sita expresses her debt to Hanuman and blesses him to always possess all virtues. Hanuman offers to punish the female demons who have been tormenting her, but the compassionate Sita pardons them. Sita is brought to Rama's camp and receives a cold welcome from her husband, who seems to suspect her chastity. After a painful verbal exchange, she decides to undergo a fire ordeal and emerges vindicated. The gods praise her virtue, and Rama again accepts her, saying he tested her only to avoid public scandal. Together with Vibhishana and their monkey allies, Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita mount Ravana's flying chariot and begin the return journey to

Ayodhya, stopping at several places en route. Shortly before reaching Ayodhya, Rama sends Hanuman in disguise to meet Bharata and determine whether he truly wants Rama to return. Hanuman finds Bharata to be faithful to his elder brother and regales him with the tale of Rama's adventures. The brothers are reunited and enter Ayodhya, where Rama soon ascends the throne to general rejoicing. His long reign, known as "Ramraj," is a time of perfect order, happiness, and abundance. Though most of Rama's allies return to their homes, Hanuman receives permission to remain at court and continues to serve Rama and Sita. (See notes on page 217.)]

24. Anjana's Milk [see notes on page 218]

En route to Ayodhya, Rama directs the Pushpaka vehicle to land in Kishkindha, the monkey capital. Sita is introduced to Sugriva's wife and the other royal women, and she invites them to join their party and attend the enthronement festivities in Ayodhya. As they are preparing to depart, Hanuman asks Rama's permission to visit his mother, Anjana, who is living nearby. Rama smilingly asks, "And what about us? Shall we be denied the opportunity to offer our salutations to this noble lady?" The entire party then sets out for the hilltop where Anjana is living an ascetic life, absorbed in meditation and prayer. When Hanuman spies her sitting outside her cave, he is overcome with emotion, cries out "Mom!," and falls at her feet. Anjana blesses him and takes him on her lap, shedding tears of joy. Hanuman introduces her to Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, and the others. Anjana is deeply moved and says, "My son, you have made my life truly blessed today!" Then, in response to her questions, Hanuman narrates the tale of Rama's adventures and his own role in them. However, when he describes his journey to Lanka and the subsequent events of the war, Anjana's mood changes. Her brows become knitted, her face darkens, and at last she pushes her son away with a gesture of disgust, declaring, "You are not worthy of being my son. You have disgraced your mother's milk!" Hanuman turns pale, and no one understands the reason for her anger. She thunders, "What good was your valor if, while you were still alive, the Lord was obliged to go to so much trouble, building a bridge and fighting a battle? Why didn't you yourself slay Ravana and his whole army and hurl Lanka into the sea? It seems I nursed you in vain. Fie on your heroism!" After she has vented her anger, Hanuman stammers that, through drinking her milk, he had indeed acquired the strength to perform such deeds, but he was strictly bound by the limits of the charge given him by Jambavan. The latter confirms this and declares that, if Hanuman had done all the things of which he was capable, it would have lessened Rama's glory. When Rama, too, joins in Hanuman's defense, Anjana's anger subsides, and she once more embraces her son. But she notices that Lakshmana is looking skeptical, so she remarks, "Perhaps you think this old monkey lady is making rather too much of a fuss about her milk, eh? After all, what is so special about it? Well, see for yourself." She squeezes her breast and a thin stream of milk arches through the air and falls on the summit of a nearby hilltop. There is a deafening crash

as of thunder, and the summit splits in two. "So you see," Anjana says when everyone has recovered somewhat, "such was the milk that nurtured my son." The whole party cheers for Anjana and Hanuman, and then Rama requests her permission to depart. Anjana asks him to keep her son with him always and tells Hanuman that, henceforth, he should consider Rama and Sita to be his father and mother. All bow to her and depart.

25. The Priceless Necklace [see notes on page 218]

After his installation on the throne of Ayodhya, Rama presents rich gifts to the allies who assisted him in the war. However, he gives nothing to Hanuman, who stands attentively near the throne. To Sita, Rama gives a necklace of large pearls that he had earlier received from Vibhishana, who in turn had obtained it from the ocean god. Recalling her debt to Rama's messenger, Sita places this necklace around Hanuman's neck. He bows respectfully, then returns to his place and begins to examine each bead carefully. After some time, he puts one in his mouth, between his teeth, and then there is a loud cracking sound. As the courtiers look on in dismay, Hanuman proceeds to crack open pearl after precious pearl, peering briefly at the shiny fragments before brushing them away with his paw. There is whispering in the court and grumbles about "an insult to Her Majesty." Vibhishana appears embarrassed; Lakshmana glowers. Someone sighs, "Well, what do you expect? After all, he's a monkey, and they think everything's to eat." Another quotes the old proverb, "What does a monkey know of the taste of ginger?" Finally, one of the courtiers challenges Hanuman to explain why he is destroying this priceless treasure. Hanuman appears surprised. "This is a gift from Mother, so it must have some value. I'm just testing to see what that may be. True, such beads glitter, and people sell them for a lot of money. But does that indicate real worth? According to what I've learned, something has true value if it contains, within it, the Lord. So I'm just searching to see whether or not these stones contain him. But I don't find him, therefore their glitter seems like darkness to me. They are bound to shatter someday, so I'm just throwing them away now." Again, murmurs run through the court. Hanuman's words show devotion but little practicality, and he goes on cracking the pearls. Another courtier speaks up, "Look here, must everything contain God to have value? What about your own body, made of the five elements? Isn't it valuable?" Hanuman looks up in surprise. "Is it, after all?" He rises to his feet, digs his nails into the center of his chest, and begins ripping his own flesh, drawing it back on each side to reveal a ruddy wound. As the courtiers look on aghast, he exposes his beating heart, but their horror turns to amazement when they see Rama and Sita enthroned in Hanuman's heart just as they are on the dais before them. They also perceive the name "Rama" inscribed on Hanuman's bones—it seems to be in every cell of his body. As all acclaim the monkey's supreme devotion, Rama rises from the throne and embraces Hanuman. He passes his hand over Hanuman's chest, and it instantly becomes whole again. Sita merely smiles.

26. Covered with Sindur [see notes on page 220]

In the palace at Ayodhya, Hanuman serves Rama diligently and is almost constantly in his presence. But when the royal pair retire to their inner apartment at night, Hanuman is barred from entering. Hanuman asks Rama why Sita is able to go with him at this time whereas he cannot. Rama smiles with amusement but merely points to the line of sindur on the part of Sita's hair, the auspicious mark of a married woman. The next morning, Hanuman enters Sita's dressing room and finds her applying vermilion. He feels that he must get to the bottom of this mystery, so he asks Sita why she wears the red powder. This time it is Sita's turn to be amused and embarrassed by his simplicity. Smiling, she replies, "So that your Lord's life-span will increase." Hanuman is impressed. "Is that so? Just by putting on that stuff, the Lord will live longer?" Sita blushes again, "That's what people say, yes." Hanuman rushes to the bazaar and finds a shop that sells sindur. While the alarmed proprietor looks on, he grabs several sacks of the fine, red-orange powder, tears them open, and dumps them over himself, then rolls in the heap of vermilion on the floor. In a trice, he rushes back to the palace. Rama is seated in full court, and Hanuman enters and takes his usual place, standing attentively near the foot of the throne. He is bright red from the top of his head to the tip of his long tail. All eyes fix on him, and the assembled courtiers react in various ways; some gasp, others giggle nervously. Sita merely smiles to herself. Rama looks up from his state correspondence and notices Hanuman's condition. "Hanuman, what's happened to you? Did you have an accident?" Hanuman presses his palms together to address Rama. Tears well up in his yellow eyes as he declares, "My Lord, may you live for as many years as there are hairs on your servant's body!" Sita whispers something in Rama's ear, and he descends from the throne dais and embraces Hanuman with great love. Then he announces to the whole court, "Today is Tuesday, and henceforth those who offer oil and vermilion to my beloved servant, the son of the wind, on this day will please me and will have their wishes granted."

27. Service with a Yawn [see notes on page 221]

Day in, day out, Hanuman's greatest delight is in serving Rama. In catering to his Lord's smallest need, his service is so attentive, so complete, that no one else in Rama's entourage has the opportunity to do anything for him. After some time this begins to bother Rama's intimate associates, especially his three brothers and Sita. One day, Bharata, Lakshmana, and Shatrughna come to Sita's chamber to complain about this situation. Sita readily agrees that it is a problem, even for her. "On account of Hanuman, I too am deprived of nearly every opportunity to serve my husband." They fix on a scheme of making up a detailed daily schedule of all the services to be performed for Rama, with a designated assignee—from among themselves—for each. The brothers

say, "We'll write it up, then get the Lord to sign it and affix his royal seal. There'll be nothing left for Hanuman to do." They carry out their plan, and that very night Sita presents the new service schedule to Rama in their bedchamber. Rama is surprised. "What's this?" he asks. "Oh, it's just a new schedule that your brothers made up. I also helped," Sita replies casually. Rama takes the document and reads it carefully. He notices that Hanuman's name appears nowhere on it and becomes suspicious. But he says nothing; he merely takes his pen and signs it. The next day, in full court, the royal seal is affixed, and the schedule becomes official. Copies are made and distributed; everyone is impressed by its detail. The whole day is laid out like clockwork, with a specific person—mainly Sita or one of the brothers—assigned to each little act of service. Hanuman's name is omitted.

Hanuman arrives at court and begins pressing Rama's feet. Someone points out to him that this is not his task; it has been assigned to so-and-so. "Eh?" Hanuman is puzzled, so it is explained to him, "You see, there's now an Official Schedule of Service." Someone brandishes a copy; Hanuman peers at it. "But my name is nowhere on here," he says sadly. Lakshmana says, "Oh, I guess you weren't around when it was drawn up. Too bad." Then he adds brightly, "Of course, anything that's *not* on here, you can still do." Hanuman looks at the schedule again. Everything—from getting Rama a sip of water to rinse his mouth on arising, to removing his sandals before he retires for the night—has been assigned. They've thought of everything. Hanuman scratches his head and ponders for a moment. "I don't see yawning service," he says.

"Yawning service?" Lakshmana asks.

"Yes, you know, when the Lord yawns, I snap my fingers to ward off evil."

"Oh, yes, right. There's an idea. Why don't you do that? Yawning service, quite right," says Lakshmana, thinking how ridiculous it seems.

"Only, I want it in writing too, my yawning-service assignment, and stamped with the royal seal," Hanuman insists.

"Of course, of course," says Lakshmana. "Why not?"

And so it is done, signed and sealed. Hanuman's yawning service begins, and it is an all-consuming assignment. A yawn might come at any moment—who can tell? Therefore Hanuman must always be with Rama, must sit in front of him, walk in front of him, keep his eyes always on his face, keep his right hand ever ready to snap his fingers should a yawn come. Even at meal-times, Hanuman doesn't look at his food but only at Rama, and he even eats with his left hand—imagine!—so the right will be free to snap its fingers in the event of a yawn.

Night falls, and Rama prepares to retire to his bedroom. Hanuman, gazing intently at his face, starts to follow him, but Sita stops him at the door. "You can't come in. You'll have to stay outside." Now what? What if a yawn should come to Rama in the middle of the night? The yawning service has been signed and sealed, it's Hanuman's special duty. And after all, people are sleepy at night; they yawn a lot. Hanuman climbs to a balcony not far from the royal bedchamber, but out of sight. Because he cannot see when the Lord may

be yawning, he resolves to snap his fingers constantly, all night long. To keep awake, he will chant Rama's name—the best pastime. So he begins, "Rama, Rama, Rama," snapping all the time.

Inside the bedchamber, Rama and Sita are preparing to retire when Rama begins to yawn. One yawn, then another, then another—great big jaw-straining ones, the kind that bring tears to the eyes. They become continuous; Rama can't stop. Soon he can't close his mouth at all, it's locked wide open in a monster yawn. Tears begin to stream down his face. Sita, at first amused, soon becomes worried, then panics. She summons Kausalya, Rama's mother, who shrieks in dismay. Family members come running. Royal ministers are awakened, physicians are summoned, medicines are prescribed and administered, but without effect. Rama has collapsed into a chair, pale with exhaustion, his face seemingly locked in a continuous silent scream, breathing in short gasps. The royal guru Vasishtha arrives; Rama makes a pathetic attempt to rise and salute him. The sage grimly surveys the scene—the terrified family members and courtiers, the helpless physicians. Then he notices something odd: someone is missing. "Where's Hanuman?" he asks. Sita remembers. She blurts out tearfully, "We treated him badly. We wouldn't let him serve the Lord, for whose sake he gladly went without food or even rest. He must be off somewhere crying now."

Vasishtha hurries out of the room. He guesses that Hanuman is not far off. Soon he spies him sitting alone on a high balcony, eyes closed in meditation. He is repeating Rama's name and rhythmically snapping the fingers of his right hand. Vasishtha shakes and rouses him, "Hanuman! Come with me!" Hanuman obeys, still repeating his mantra, still snapping his fingers. Vasishtha leads Hanuman into the royal bedchamber, and he sees Rama's pitiable state. With a cry of distress, Hanuman falls at Rama's feet, forgetting his act of service—and at that moment, Rama's mouth closes, and his facial muscles relax. There is a general sigh of relief, combined with bewilderment; only Sita grasps the truth. She too bows before Rama. "Lord, a great injustice was done to your servant. Henceforth none of us will interfere with his loving acts of service to you. He may perform whatever service he pleases." Though exhausted from his ordeal, Rama smiles and nods his assent.

28. Fed by Sita [see notes on page 222]

Throughout her long residence in Ayodhya following Rama's return, Sita has no children of her own, hence she showers her maternal affection on her "son" Hanuman. Seeing him devotedly eating the leftovers from Rama's meals, she decides one day to prepare food for him with her own hands. She plans a great feast of the choicest savory dishes and lovingly prepares them. Then she summons Hanuman. He is thrilled, and as he takes his seat he feels immense hunger. Sita begins serving him; she has prepared food of many varieties and in abundance, for in truth she is Goddess Annapurna, who nourishes the whole world. Yet the more Hanuman eats, the more his hunger grows. Sita

keeps filling his plate and he keeps emptying it again, till in time even she becomes alarmed. When all the food is nearly finished—even additional food that she has hastily prepared—and Hanuman still appears as ravenous as ever, Sita inwardly realizes that her “son” is none other than the Great Lord who will consume the entire universe at the time of cosmic dissolution. She quietly moves behind him and with her right index finger traces a five-syllable mantra on the back of Hanuman’s head—*om namaḥ śivāya*—saluting his true identity. At that moment, Hanuman stops eating, takes a sip of water to rinse his mouth, and belches. He is sated at last.

29. Amusing Tales of Hanuman [see notes on page 223]

(a) “Lanka Burns in Ayodhya.” One day, Hanuman is strolling through the bazaar of Ayodhya when a foolish cloth merchant calls out to him, “Hey, Son of the Wind! How did it look when you burned Lanka?” Hanuman replies that he cannot describe it, he can only show it. He has the merchant wrap some cloth around his tail, pour oil on it, then light it. Hanuman then sets fire to the merchant’s shop. When the merchant becomes upset, Hanuman notes that this is just how the demons of Lanka reacted. The shop burns to the ground and Hanuman repairs to a nearby pond to extinguish his tail. The next day the merchant appears in court and complains to Rama: “Your monkey destroyed my business!” Rama asks Hanuman for an explanation, and Hanuman forthrightly tells the story. When Rama asks the merchant whether it is correct, he replies, “Yes, but I never expected him to burn *my* shop!” Rama then asks, “Oh, did you want to see someone *else’s* place burn?” and the merchant hangs his head in shame. Rama instructs him to avoid selfishness and idle curiosity in future, then orders full recompense for his loss from the royal treasury. Hanuman and the merchant both bow at Rama’s feet.

(b) “Hanuman Caught in a Trap.” Sometimes Hanuman likes to take the form of an ordinary monkey and raid gardens in Ayodhya. No one can do anything, because the mischievous monkey may be Rama’s favorite. One day he attacks a grove of fruit trees that some boys have been guarding for a long time. Exasperated, they decide to trap him in a net and bring him to Rama. If the monkey turns out to be Hanuman, they’ll complain to the king, but if not they’ll be free to suitably punish him for his depredations. They set a trap, placing some especially nice fruit in it, and before long the monkey is snared. They take him to court, where Rama immediately recognizes him, but pretends not to. He instructs the boys to take the wayward monkey home and teach it a good lesson. On the way back, Hanuman uses his powers to escape from the net. He then causes welts to appear all over his body, as if he’d been severely beaten. In this pitiable condition he hobbles into court and appears before Rama, who greatly repents his hasty action. Then Hanuman reveals the truth, adding, “You played a joke on me, so I played one on you.”

(c) “Hanuman’s Marriage.” One day in court, Rama decides to tease Hanuman. He says, “Son of the Wind, now that the war is over, haven’t you

had enough of this celibate lifestyle? Why not get married and settle down happily?” Hanuman assumes that Rama is joking and decides to humor him. “Lord, how will I get married in my old age? And besides, what pretty young girl would marry a monkey like me?” Rama appears serious, “If I find a girl, are you prepared to obey me and get married?” This puts Hanuman in a dilemma. He thinks for a moment, then replies carefully that he is willing to fulfill Rama’s order but that the girl must willingly consent to the match. When Rama agrees, his younger brother Shatrughna chimes in, “The bride and groom should be suitably matched. Since the boy is ill-formed, the girl can be a hunchback. I propose Manthara!” There is general laughter, and Hanuman winces. “Lord, that villainess sent you to the forest for fourteen years. If I should ever look at her the wrong way, who knows what she’d do to me!” Rama replies that Manthara is now reformed and will not give him trouble. He will summon her to court tomorrow and ask if she will assent to the wedding.

Late that night, Hanuman knocks on Manthara’s door. Queen Kaikeyi has just gone to bed, and her cantankerous maid is sitting down to have her own meal, so she refuses to answer. Hanuman breaks down the door and storms in. He informs Manthara of the discussion in court. She appears pleased and says that she’d like to get married. Hanuman tries to talk her out of this but she is adamant; given her looks and temperament, a monkey will be better than no husband at all. Hanuman becomes furious, grows to enormous size, and begins choking her with his tail. Terrified, she begs for mercy and promises to drop the idea. The next day she is summoned to court, where Rama puts the proposal to her. There is a hushed silence, but Hanuman gives her a stern look, which has the desired effect. She turns down the offer, and Hanuman breathes a sigh of relief. He is spared having to get married and is free to go on serving Sita and Rama.

30. Whose Servant is Hanuman? [see notes on page 224]

One day, Rama and Sita get into an argument over which of them receives greater devotion from Hanuman. To resolve it, they decide to test him. First they ask him outright, but Hanuman manages to avoid a direct answer that would favor one over the other by insisting on his devotion to their joint name, “Sita-Rama.” Sita then feigns thirst and asks Hanuman to bring her a pitcher of water; Rama counters that he is fainting with heat and wants Hanuman to fan him. Which task will Hanuman attend to first? The clever form-changing monkey expands his arms, fetching water with one and a fan with the other, thus placating both divine masters.

31. Narada and Hanuman [see notes on page 224]

The divine sage Narada is a great devotee of Vishnu. He roams the universes chanting one of Vishnu’s thousand names: “Narayana! Narayana!” He is also

known to be something of a busybody and mischief-maker. One day he visits Ayodhya and converses with Hanuman. He asks whether Rama keeps a ledger listing the names of his greatest devotees. Hanuman says that he doesn't know, so Narada asks Rama himself about this. The Lord shows him a big ledger and Narada is pleased to see that his own name appears at the top of the first page. He reads on and notes that Hanuman's name does not appear. Later, he mentions this to Hanuman, who replies, "Ah, but did he show you the small diary?" Narada goes back to Rama and asks to see this, and Rama again complies. In this little book, Narada finds Hanuman listed first and himself not at all. When the puzzled sage asks the difference between the two books, the Lord replies that the big ledger lists all those worthy souls who remember him, whereas the small diary records the names of those whom *he* remembers.

32. Saved by the Name [see notes on page 224]

One day, Hanuman asks Rama's permission to visit his mother and departs for the South. That very day, the king of Kashi happens to be journeying to Ayodhya to pay his respects to Rama. En route, he meets the sage Narada, who requests a favor of him. When the king agrees, Narada tells him to show respect to everyone in Rama's court, but to ignore sage Vishvamitra. Though mystified and worried by this request, the king is bound by his word and carries it out. The ever-volatile Vishvamitra is enraged by the slight and informs Rama of it, calling it a stain on the honor of his court. Rama's brow darkens; he removes three arrows from his quiver and vows that he will take the life of the king of Kashi before the sun sets. Word of this oath quickly spreads through the city and reaches the intended victim, who becomes terrified. At this moment Narada happens by again, and, when told of the situation, cheerfully remarks that, after all, there is no better way to die. The king is trembling like a leaf, however, so Narada offers a suggestion for how he might yet save himself: "Go to Lady Anjana and ask for her protection. Make her promise three times to help you. It just might work."

The king hurries to Anjana's hermitage and finds her in meditation. Weeping, he throws himself at her feet, and when she inquires as to what is the matter, tells her that he seeks her protection because a "powerful person" has vowed to kill him before sunset. "Why? What powerful person?" Anjana asks. But the king, weeping, asks her to first promise three times that she will help him, and the compassionate lady complies. When he then reveals that his would-be executioner is none other than Rama, Anjana is troubled, "This will be difficult," she says, then adds, "still, I'll try." At this moment Hanuman arrives and bows at his mother's feet. She says she was just thinking of him because she has a small problem. Hanuman immediately offers to take care of it, whatever it is, but his mother cautions him that it is an awkward affair; she makes him, in turn, promise three times to assist her. When he does so, she explains the king's plight. Now it is Hanuman's turn to be

distressed. His mother reminds him of the great dharma of sheltering the weak and of the fact that she has given her word. Hanuman says he will try to find a way out.

Hanuman flies back to Ayodhya with the king and brings him to the bank of the Sarayu. He tells him to wade waist-deep into the water and to remain there, repeating Rama's name. Meanwhile, Hanuman presents himself at court, bows to Rama, and says that he would like to ask a favor. Rama is delighted, because Hanuman never requests anything for himself. Hanuman now asks that, henceforth, he be permitted to guard those who repeat Rama's name, and further, that as long as he does so, no power in the universe—"not even God himself"—should be able to cause them harm. Rama readily agrees, whereupon Hanuman bows to him and then rushes back to the riverbank where, club in hand, he takes up his position in front of the pale and frightened king. As afternoon shadows lengthen, crowds gather on the riverbank, anticipating the curious spectacle of a showdown between the Lord and his greatest devotee. Rama is soon informed of this and becomes furious. He takes one of his arrows, charges it with mantras for the destruction of the king of Kashi, and fires it right from the palace. But the arrow halts in midair just in front of the king, waiting for him to pause in his repetition of "Rama, Rama, Rama." Finding the chant unbroken, the arrow returns to Rama and reports its failure. Rama grows still angrier and discharges a second arrow. Meanwhile Hanuman has charged the king to repeat "Sita-Rama, Sita-Rama" continuously; this too halts the arrow in midair and sends it back. Rama is now beside himself, and loudly swearing that he will kill both the king and Hanuman, takes up his third arrow and heads for the riverbank. There Hanuman, reasoning that devotees are as dear to the Lord as his own being, adds a third name to the formula that the king continually repeats, making it a chant, "*Jay Sītā-Rāma, jay jay Hanumān!*" His eyes bloodshot with rage, Rama arrives on the scene. The sun is about to set and thousands are watching as the Lord and his servant face each other. As Rama places the third arrow on his bow, the king of Kashi becomes so terrified that his voice begins to fail. Discerning this, Hanuman uses his own energy to inwardly fortify him, making his chant loud and clear.

The royal guru Vasishtha becomes frightened and approaches Hanuman, asking him to withdraw his protection. After all, the king of Kashi, dying at Rama's hands, will achieve liberation from rebirth, and the Lord's promise to Vishvamitra will be upheld. Hanuman replies that he will not step aside but rather will be happy to surrender his own life for the glory of the Lord's name and for the protection of those who repeat it. Meanwhile, Vishvamitra too arrives on the scene, brooding over the curious crisis he has precipitated. As Rama prepares to fire his arrow, Vasishtha decides to try one last ploy, and tells the offending king to throw himself at Vishvamitra's feet. The king does so, still repeating his mantra, and Vishvamitra is pleased and declares his act of repentance to be sufficient. The sage then orders Rama to put his third arrow back in its quiver and to relinquish his anger. Rama complies with his guru's request, and the sun passes below the horizon. The news of Hanuman's

triumph spreads rapidly through the kingdom and brings a smile to the lips of Anjana.

33. Initiation from Sita-Rama [see notes on page 225]

One day Rama tells Sita that Hanuman is now a perfect spiritual aspirant, worthy to learn the truth about their real nature. Accordingly, Sita delivers a discourse to Hanuman in which she reveals that Rama is the transcendent absolute and she his manifest power and the material principle that performs all apparent acts of creation, preservation, and destruction of the worlds—only ignorant beings mistakenly superimpose these functions on Rama himself. She further reveals that all the events of the Ramayana are divine sport—*līlā*—performed by herself; they too should not be confused with Rama's absolute state, which lies beyond all transformation. Rama then adds his own instruction concerning the nature of the self and of consciousness in relation to the absolute, concluding that consciousness is ultimately one and indivisible, as reflected in the great Upanishadic dictum “thou art that” (*tat tvam asi*). Hanuman listens attentively to all this.

The next day, when Hanuman presents himself in court Rama abruptly asks him, “Who are you?” Hanuman realizes that this is not a conventional question and replies in a couplet:

From the bodily perspective, I am your servant,
from that of the soul, a portion of you,
from that of essential reality, I am but yourself;
this is my firm conviction.

He then expounds this to reveal his full grasp of the mysteries that were imparted to him. Rama and Sita are pleased and give him their blessing.

[Synopsis 8: Rama is informed that some of his subjects are slandering Sita, claiming that she was unchaste while in Ravana's power. To prevent public scandal, Rama reluctantly resolves to banish his wife to the forest and asks Lakshmana to carry out the task. Lakshmana delivers Sita to Valmiki's hermitage, where the sage, discerning that she is pregnant and blameless, offers her shelter. After some time, Sita gives birth to twin sons, Lava and Kusha. They grow up in the ashram and are educated by the sage, who teaches them the epic poem that he has composed. King Rama never takes another wife and reigns assisted by his three brothers. After many years, the sage Agastya advises him to perform a horse sacrifice. The consecrated stallion is set free to wander for a year, followed by Rama's youngest brother, Shatrughna, at the head of a large army; then it is brought back to the capital for sacrifice. Rama has a golden image of Sita made to sit beside him throughout the ceremony. During intervals in the rites, Lava and Kusha, who have come to Ayodhya as bards, perform the Rāmāyaṇa, eventually singing it before Rama himself. Rama is deeply moved and gradually recognizes them as his sons. Sage Valmiki arrives with Sita and publicly attests to her

unbroken fidelity to Rama. Rama agrees to let his wife rejoin him provided she submits to another truth-test, but instead she calls on her mother, Earth, to take her back. Sita descends into the earth on a divine throne, leaving Rama's sons in his care. Rama raises the boys, provides them with kingdoms, and eventually relinquishes his body by walking into the waters of the Sarayu followed by the entire population of Ayodhya. Only Hanuman remains behind, having received a boon from Rama to live on earth for as long as Rama's story is told. (See notes on page 225.)]

34. Composing a Ramayana [see notes on page 226]

After the banishment of Sita, Rama becomes withdrawn and disconsolate and, when not engaged in official business, spends much time alone. Hanuman finds himself with a lot of leisure and yet has no pleasure in being in Ayodhya, which seems empty and sad to him. To relieve his sorrow, he begins to frequent a distant mountain. Its summit is composed of sparkling crystalline slabs, and with his diamondlike nails, Hanuman begins to inscribe Rama's story on these rocks, composing verses in the divine tongue of Sanskrit. The work continues for a long time, and Hanuman, lost in the story, becomes oblivious to the passage of years. Meanwhile, in the forest outside Ayodhya, sage Valmiki completes his own epic version of Rama's story, and his disciples (including Rama's twin sons, Lava and Kusha, who have not yet been revealed to their father) begin to sing it wherever people gather; its beautiful poetry earns great renown. One day, someone tells Valmiki that Hanuman has written his own account of Rama's life. The sage's curiosity is piqued—the monkey warrior was an eyewitness to much of the saga, but is he a *poet*?—and one day he asks Hanuman if the rumor is true. Hanuman carries Valmiki through the air to the mountaintop and sets him down on a ledge from which he can read the inscribed poem. Valmiki reads and reads, scanning the cliffs from top to bottom, sometimes climbing or descending a bit in order to see better. Sometimes he laughs loudly, often his eyes brim with tears; Hanuman simply stands by attentively. After a very long time, Valmiki stops reading and gazes off into the distance; he looks frail and downcast. Hanuman inquires politely: “Best of Sages, is something wrong? Does the poetry have many faults?” Valmiki turns to him and brushes away a tear. “It is wonderful, marvelous!” he says. “Every word, every image is as if alive. There is not and can never be anything to equal it.” Then he adds hesitantly, “So of course I know that . . . once people hear this, well, they will never want to listen to my *Rāmāyana*.”

For a moment Hanuman is dumbstruck, then he smiles broadly. “Is such a small thing troubling you? Come!” Without another word, he wrenches out all the inscribed slabs from the summit and heaps them on his left shoulder, sets the aged poet on his right shoulder, and soars out over the ocean. When they reach the dark blue water of the deep sea, Hanuman calls out loudly, “May it be an offering to Lord Rama!” and drops the glistening boulders into the water, where they raise huge waves before disappearing forever into the depths. Valmiki watches speechless, overcome with shame and guilt. “It

would have been better," he thinks grimly, "if he had thrown *me* into the ocean, but spared that wonderful Story!" But Hanuman seems careless and cheerful. In a trice, he returns to land and delivers the poet to his own hermitage. "Any other service?" he asks with a bow. Valmiki's face is wet with tears. He struggles to speak, "What you have relinquished, for my sake. . . ." But Hanuman appears unconcerned. "It was just something I did to pass the time; I had no other purpose for it. Please do not trouble yourself over this." He bows before Valmiki, who blesses him distractedly. Suddenly a realization comes to the sage and he speaks prophetically: "Son of the Wind, in an age to come, I will take birth again and devote myself to your service. I will sing your praises and teach others to do so, and I will retell the story you have written, using the language of common people, so that everyone may understand it." Hanuman smiles and says, "Victory to Lord Rama!"

35. The Sacrificial Horse [see notes on page 227]

(a) Following the banishment of Sita, King Rama immerses himself in the affairs of state, and Hanuman passes the time listening to the wisdom of sages and storytellers. One day, the great sage Agastya visits the palace. Rama tells him that he is troubled by all the killing required for the liberation of Sita, especially the slaying of the Brahman Ravana and most of his kinsmen. Agastya advises, as an act of expiation, the performance of a horse sacrifice. The court guru Vasishtha consecrates an auspiciously marked stallion and fastens to its brow a golden crown bearing a royal proclamation: that any ruler who supposes himself mightier than the owner of the horse may attempt to halt its progress, but that to let the horse pass is to bow to its owner's authority. Since Bharata suffered so much during Rama's absence from Ayodhya, and Lakshmana accompanied Rama through exile and war, Rama orders his youngest brother, Shatrughna, to follow the horse with an army of four divisions, including many of the monkey champions who fought against Ravana, and Shatrughna's son Pushkala. He asks Hanuman to go as well. Following inaugural rites, the army sets out in high spirits.

The horse progresses through many countries where it is honored by kings. The army in turn pauses to honor sages in their hermitages and arrives one day at the ashram of sage Chyavana. In response to Shatrughna's request that he bless their journey, the sage praises Rama as Vishnu in human form. He then announces his own intention of going to Ayodhya for Rama's darshan. Seeing the sage and his family departing on foot, Hanuman asks Shatrughna's permission to transport them. He expands his body, places the party on his back, and flies them to Ayodhya in an instant, bringing them directly into Rama's presence. The sage, in ecstasy, blesses Hanuman.

(b) The horse and army approach the city of Chakranka, ruled by King Subahu, a devotee of Vishnu. His son Damana goes hunting and sees the horse, which he seizes. When its defenders attack him, he puts up a fight that astounds them. Finally, he engages in single combat with Prince Pushkala,

who knocks him unconscious. King Subahu then emerges from his city at the head of a large army, accompanied by his brother Suketu and the latter's son Chitranga. A terrible battle ensues with heavy losses on both sides. After a prolonged combat, Pushkala slays Chitranga. The latter's kinsmen fight even more ferociously, and King Subahu rains arrows on Hanuman, covering him with wounds. The monkey responds by seizing the king in his tail and hurling him to the ground. When even this does not deter the king, Hanuman lands with both feet on Subahu's chest, causing him to lose consciousness. But while outwardly lying senseless on the battlefield, Subahu sees a wondrous vision: Lord Rama seated in a sacrificial pavilion in the heavenly city of Saket, surrounded by a celestial court. When he comes to, he calls off his forces and praises Hanuman. He then recalls that he was once cursed by a sage for doubting that Vishnu could live on earth as a man; the sage predicted that his ignorance would be removed when the Lord's servant would strike him with his foot. Subahu and his family pay homage to Shatrughna and shower him with tribute, but the king offers the greatest reverence to Hanuman for freeing him from ignorance and blessing him with darshan of the Lord.

(c) Next, the horse nears the magnificent city of Devapura, whose king, Viramani, once propitiated Shiva and received the boon of his protection. Viramani's son Rukmangada captures the horse and, when fighting ensues, is joined by his father and a vast army. In order to protect Shatrughna and Pushkala, Hanuman challenges the king and his brothers. He wraps many warriors in his tail, chariots and all, and slams them to the ground. When the Ayodhya army gets the upper hand and most of the Devapura champions have been rendered unconscious, Lord Shiva enters the battle, riding a magnificent chariot and accompanied by his ravenous familiars. In the mayhem that ensues, Shiva's servant Virabhadra seizes Pushkala by the feet and hurls him to the ground so forcefully that he dies. Roaring maniacally, he then uses his sharp trident to sever the prince's head. Anguished by his son's death, Shatrughna challenges Shiva to a duel and fights bravely, but he is soon felled by an arrow to the heart. Hanuman then attacks Shiva, hurling abuse at him for opposing the brother and son of Vishnu-Rama. Shiva praises Hanuman's bravery and declares his devotion to Rama, but adds that he must uphold the honor of bhakti by defending his own votaries. Each then fights with redoubled force, Hanuman raining mountain peaks and tree limbs on Shiva, who hurls fiery darts at the monkey's breast. At last Hanuman, roaring with rage, ensnares Shiva in his tail and begins pummeling him on the earth. Seeing this, even Shiva's bull, Nandi, is terrified. Shiva, however, declares himself "satisfied" with Hanuman's valor and offers him a boon. Hanuman smiles and says that he has already obtained all by Rama's grace, but asks Shiva to watch over the corpse of Prince Pushkala and the unconscious Shatrughna while he himself goes to the Drona mountain to fetch healing herbs. Shiva agrees to do this.

Hanuman reaches Drona peak on the shore of the milky ocean. He is about to uproot the summit, which is covered with divine herbs, when the yakshas appeal to him to have mercy on them—they need these herbs to

preserve their immortality. In response to their plea, Hanuman graciously agrees to take only a portion of the herbs. He returns to the battlefield, places herbs on the slain and wounded warriors' chests, and reconnects Pushkala's head to his body. He then swears that, if his own devotion to Rama is unwavering, Pushkala should live. The prince immediately sits up. Hanuman then revives Pushkala's father, this time swearing on his unbroken celibacy. Shatrughna and his son resume fighting with Shiva and Virabhadra. Yet the god who destroys the whole universe again proves more than a match, and when Hanuman sees Shatrughna weakening, he advises him to invoke Rama, who alone can secure their victory. Shatrughna meditates on Rama, who instantly appears on the battlefield, dressed as one consecrated for sacrifice and holding an antelope horn in his hand. Both Hanuman and Shiva bow reverently at his feet, praising him as the Supreme Being. Rama replies that there is no difference between Shiva and himself, "You are in my heart and I am in yours. Only a fool of tainted intelligence sees a distinction between us." Shiva passes his hand over the slain and wounded warriors and revives them, and all join in worshiping Rama. King Viramani reverently returns the sacrificial horse to Shatrughna, and the Ayodhya party resumes its journey.

(d) The royal army, following the horse, reaches a meadow on Mount Hemakuta, the Golden Peak, when the horse suddenly becomes paralyzed. It appears rooted to the spot and every effort to coax it to move fails. Shatrughna seeks the advice of a sage in a nearby ashram, who declares that the horse is possessed by a rakshasa who was once a Brahman, but who came to his present state after being cursed by a group of sages. When he begged for mercy, they added the merciful qualification that he would be freed from the curse by hearing Rama's story, and that this would come about when he took possession of Rama's sacrificial horse. Hanuman begins lovingly singing the Rama-katha to the possessed horse. When he finishes, he loudly calls on the long-suffering spirit to depart to its proper world. A divine being appears, bows in gratitude to Hanuman, and then mounts a heavenly chariot and departs. At once, the horse begins to graze contentedly in the high meadow.

(e) The horse approaches the city of Kundalapura, ruled by King Suratha, a great devotee of Rama who has received a boon from Yama that he will not leave his body until he has had Rama's darshan. When the king learns the identity of the horse grazing outside his city, he decides to capture it in order to obtain an audience with Rama. Learning that the horse has been seized, Shatrughna sends Angada to demand its release. King Suratha is frank about his intentions, but Angada replies that although they are all Rama's servants and have great respect for the king's devotion, they must fulfill their Kshatriya duty of protecting the horse. Suratha replies that, in that case, he will take them all prisoner and will never surrender the horse until Rama himself graces him with a visit. Angada returns to camp with this message and preparations for battle begin. King Suratha rides out accompanied by his ten sons and a huge army. In single combat, Prince Pushkala is taken captive by one of Suratha's sons, Champaka. Hanuman challenges the latter and, with great difficulty, wounds him and renders him senseless. He then faces the

king, whose devotion to Rama he recognizes. The king vows to take Hanuman prisoner, and Hanuman smilingly urges him to fulfill his pledge, declaring that, if he is captured, Rama himself will liberate him. However, Hanuman vigorously resists the king, laughing off his supernatural weapons. When even the Brahma weapon has no effect on Hanuman, King Suratha deploys a special "Rama weapon." Since it bears Rama's name, Hanuman allows himself to be bound by it. The other warriors continue to fight but the exultant Suratha soon overcomes them all. The principal champions, including Hanuman, are brought to his throne room as prisoners. The king then asks Hanuman to invoke his master, and Hanuman recites a long praise-poem describing Rama's glory and mercy and pleading for their release from bondage. Rama hears this in distant Ayodhya, promptly mounts his flying Pushpaka chariot, and proceeds to Kundalapura. Overcome with joy, King Suratha falls at Rama's feet. The Lord displays his four-armed form and clutches the king to his breast. Then he glances at Hanuman and the other prisoners and their bonds fall away. King Suratha, his family, and all the citizens of his capital worship Rama and Hanuman, obtaining their hearts' desire.

(f) The horse roams into an ashram on the banks of the Narmada. There in a leaf hut resides the aged ascetic Aranyaka, who constantly meditates on Rama. When the members of the Ayodhya party pay their respects to him, he is overjoyed, and delivers a sermon on Rama's glories, including teachings he has learned from the sage Lomasha: "There is but one God: Rama; one discipline: his worship; one mantra: his name; one scripture: his praise." All are delighted by these words, but Hanuman feels special bliss. The sage recognizes this and embraces him, shedding tears of joy. Both become lost in ecstasy.

(g) The horse makes its way to the ashram of sage Valmiki, in which Sita resides with her twin sons, Lava and Kusha. One morning, Lava goes into the forest with some other children and sees the horse. He reads the proclamation on its brow, then seizes it and ties it to a tree. Soldiers appear and order him to release the animal, but he replies, "I have captured this fine horse, and anyone who tries to free it can say farewell to his life. So get lost!" The soldiers think, "Poor lad!" and start to advance, but Lava grabs his bow and cuts off their arms with sharp arrows. Shatrughna is informed that a boy "who resembles Rama" has mutilated his soldiers and captured the horse. He becomes angry and sends his general Kalajit with a large army to punish the lad. The general first tries to reason with the boy, who tells him that, actually, he doesn't want the horse, but that he takes the message written on its crown to be a challenge. A battle ensues, and Lava quickly slays Kalajit and most of his troops. Reinforcements arrive, including the senior princes and Hanuman. Pushkala is quickly overcome by Lava's arrows and falls in a faint. Hanuman hurls trees and boulders, but the boy shatters them into pieces the size of sesame seeds. Then Hanuman wraps his tail around Lava and whips him into the air, but the boy, remembering his mother, manages to free himself and strikes Hanuman so forcefully that the monkey falls to earth stunned. Shatrughna then

fights the boy, and with great difficulty succeeds in wounding and binding him and placing him on his chariot.

When the ashram children rush home with the news that Lava has been wounded and abducted by an intruder, Sita becomes distraught. However, Lava's elder twin, Kusha, promises her that he will free Lava and leaves with her blessing. By the time he reaches the battlefield, Lava has revived. Seeing his brother, he frees himself from his bonds, and the two take up positions in the east and west and begin ravaging the Ayodhya army. When the troops identify themselves as soldiers of King Rama, the brothers merely laugh and insult Rama, calling him "a hypocrite who has nothing to do with dharma." Shatrughna and his companions become enraged and fight with renewed force, but they succumb one by one to the superior energy of the twins. Pierced by many arrows, each meets a warrior's death on the field of battle. Though he resists furiously, even Hanuman is finally overcome, though he is not slain. The brothers tie him up and gleefully announce that they'll "take the monkey home and make it dance" for their mother. Sita is overjoyed to see them returning safely to the ashram but becomes horrified when she sees their prisoner, whom she recognizes at once. She orders the little princes to release him. They then tell her about the horse and the "arrogant challenge" inscribed on its crown "from some Rama fellow, the son of Dasharatha." They go on to narrate how they have slain great warriors with names like Shatrughna and Pushkala. Sita begins to weep, saying they have done a terrible wrong. "That horse belongs to your own father. Go release it at once!" The twins shrug nonchalantly—after all, how were they to know?—and leave to carry out her order. Meanwhile, Sita prays that, if she has been true to her husband, may all the dead warriors revive. This miracle promptly ensues. Sita and Hanuman then converse, and she asks how it was possible for a warrior like him to be defeated by a mere lad. Hanuman replies, "O Mother, a son is the very soul of his father. These two boys are my own Lord, who has compassionately performed this sport in order to relieve us of our self-pride."

36. Rama's Boon to Hanuman [see notes on page 229]

After his long reign on earth, Rama prepares to depart for his celestial realm of Saket, taking along all who are devoted to him. Before setting out on this final journey, he summons Hanuman and gives him special instructions. Hanuman is not to accompany him, but is to remain on earth for the remainder of a cosmic eon and is to be present wherever Rama's name is uttered and his story told. "But," Rama adds with a smile, "you need never be concerned that you will not get enough to eat, because in the coming kali yuga you will be worshiped as the principal deity and will receive abundant offerings of sweetmeats!" Hanuman bows to Rama and departs for the Himalayas to practice austerities. He resides there to this day, though he often moves about in the world, assuming various forms, in order to hear Rama's story.

37. A Favor for Krishna [see notes on page 230]

It is the close of the dvapara yuga and the beginning of the kali. Vishnu is again incarnate on earth. In the form of Lord Krishna, he reigns as king of the city of Dwarka on the western coast, surrounded by sixteen thousand beautiful queens, among whom Satyabhama is a special favorite, and assisted by his discus, Sudarshan, and his eagle, Garuda. Yet in time, all three—the queen, the discus, and the bird—begin to betray self-pride. Garuda is proud of his grand exploits (such as stealing *soma* from the celestials) and of the fact that his image adorns Krishna's banner. The razor-sharp Sudarshan has slain such enemies of Krishna as Shishupala and considers himself deadlier than Indra's thunderbolt. Krishna dotes on Satyabhama and has even brought a fragrant creeper from heaven for her garden, and so one day the queen, viewing herself in a mirror, asks Krishna pointedly if she isn't more beautiful than "that Sita, for whom you once roamed from forest to forest." Krishna makes no reply. Instead, he mentally summons Hanuman, who resides in an enchanted grove in the Himalayas. Hanuman comes to Dwarka in the form of a large monkey with fiery yellow eyes and enters the royal orchard, terrifying the guards. Sampling choice fruits and breaking branches, he wreaks havoc throughout the grove. Krishna is informed and orders Garuda to go with an army to catch the monkey. Garuda is surprised, "An army . . . for a monkey? I'll get him myself!" "Whatever . . .," says Krishna with a faint smile.

Garuda enters the garden and sees Hanuman sitting with his back to him, munching fruit. "Vile one!" the eagle screeches, "Who are you and why have you destroyed the garden?" Without even giving him a glance, Hanuman casually replies, "As you may have noticed, I'm a monkey, and I'm doing the usual thing monkeys do." Garuda then announces that he is going to bring him to the king, and when the monkey ignores this, informs him that he is none other than Garuda. Hanuman glances at him, then reaches for another fruit, "Oh, go away! I've seen plenty of birdies like you. If you've got some strength, show it." Enraged, Garuda attacks, but Hanuman quickly wraps him in his tail and begins to choke him. Garuda gasps that Lord Krishna has sent him. "I only know Lord Rama," Hanuman replies, loosening his grip slightly. "They're the same, you fool!" Garuda says. Hanuman tightens the tail again, "No doubt, but I only answer Rama's call, no one else's." Not wanting to hurt Lord Vishnu's vehicle, Hanuman gently tosses Garuda head first into the sea, then bounds off toward the southern mountains. Garuda faints and swallows seawater, then revives and makes his way back to court, where, downcast and with dripping plumage, he presents himself before Krishna.

"Been sea-bathing?" Krishna inquires innocently. Garuda falls at his feet, "That's no ordinary monkey! He threw me into the ocean with his tail." Krishna informs him that, in fact, the monkey is Hanuman, and orders him to go to the Malaya Mountain and summon him again, only this time he should say, "Lord Rama calls you." Still proud of his speed, Garuda streaks

southward. Meanwhile Krishna summons Satyabhama and tells her, "I have a small lila to perform. Hanuman is coming, and I must appear to him as Rama. Kindly array yourself as Sita." Then he calls his favorite weapon, the discus Sudarshan. "I'm busy," Krishna says. "Remain outside the throne room and don't let anyone in." Glinting with importance, Sudarshan stations himself before the door.

Garuda is a little afraid as he approaches Hanuman, and he delivers Krishna's message respectfully this time. Hanuman is now delighted and tells him to go back, he will come presently. Garuda thinks to himself, "This branch-beast may be strong, but he can't match my speed. God knows when he'll reach Dwarka!" But he says nothing and turns northward, flying at full tilt. Hanuman reaches Dwarka in a trice and is about to enter the throne room when Sudarshan challenges him. Eager for his Lord's darshan, Hanuman considers conversation pointless and simply grabs the discus and pops it into his mouth. Entering, he sees Krishna as Rama, with bow and arrows, and prostrates at his feet. Rising, he glances at the woman seated to Krishna's left, and then addresses him, "Lord, where is my revered Mother? It seems you are honoring some slave-girl today." Satyabhama is properly mortified. At that moment Garuda flies in, huffing and puffing. Seeing Hanuman before the throne, he, too, becomes downcast. Krishna smiles broadly and asks Hanuman, "By the way, did anyone stop you on your way in?" Hanuman looks thoughtful, "Well, there was a sort of metal toy, but I was in a hurry to see you." He reaches into his mouth and removes Sudarshan, who is understandably chagrined. All three of Krishna's companions hang their heads in shame. The Lord blesses Hanuman, who bounds off cheerfully to the mountains.

38. Humbling Arjuna's Pride [see notes on page 230]

Arjuna, one of the five Pandava brothers, is acclaimed as the world's greatest archer. He is also a friend and devotee of Krishna, but because of his martial skill he is overly proud. During the Pandavas's exile, he journeys to the Himalayas where, on the shore of a lake, he encounters Hanuman in the form of an ordinary monkey, seated in meditation. When Arjuna asks the monkey who he is, he identifies himself as "one of that race who built the great causeway for Lord Rama." "One thing I have never understood about Rama," Arjuna remarks carelessly, "is why he put those monkeys and bears to so much trouble, hauling rocks for a causeway. If he was as great an archer as people say, he could have just made a bridge of arrows." At this insult to Rama, Hanuman grows in size and identifies himself to Arjuna, who salutes him. Hanuman then explains that a bridge made of arrows would never have been able to sustain the weight of the monkeys who assisted Rama. "It would not even be able to support the weight of my big toe," he adds. Now Arjuna bristles. "If you like, I will build such a bridge right now, and you can jump on it to your heart's content." "And if it doesn't hold?" Hanuman asks. Arjuna

draws himself up, “In that case, I will relinquish my life, right here, by entering a fire. But what will *you* do if it holds?” Now it is Hanuman’s turn to make a vow. “If your bridge holds me, I will sit on the standard of your chariot and assist you in battle.”

Arjuna lifts his legendary bow, Gandiva, and reaches into his inexhaustible quiver. Firing arrows with lightning speed, he links them so as to create, within moments, a marvelous span across the lake. Pleased with himself, he steps aside. But when Hanuman gingerly places his big toe on the edge of the bridge, the whole structure shudders, cracks, and disintegrates. Arjuna hangs his head in shame. Hanuman looks regretfully at him, “Now, about your vow . . . much too severe. . . .” But Arjuna is already gathering wood. In moments he has built a pyre, set it ablaze, and stands before it, grimly determined to enter it. At this moment a young Brahman appears and asks what is going on. When Arjuna explains the situation, the Brahman replies: “A vow must of course be fulfilled. But for such a deadly wager to be valid, there should have been a witness. How do you know that this monkey didn’t cheat you? Repeat the test, and I will serve as witness.” Hanuman and Arjuna agree to this. Arjuna again takes up his bow, but this time he makes a silent prayer to Krishna before he begins shooting. Hanuman notes this with satisfaction, as also the fact that Arjuna constructs the bridge exactly as he did the previous time. Hanuman again approaches it and gently presses his toe onto it. Nothing happens. Hanuman applies his whole foot, then both feet. The structure is firm. Hanuman is astounded. He begins to jump on the bridge, but it doesn’t even tremble. Bewildered and frustrated, he expands to mountainous size and brings down his full weight with a crash. The bridge remains solid. Hanuman leans over and looks under the bridge. He notices a thin red line in the water, a stream of blood issuing from the mouth of a large tortoise that has positioned itself beneath one of the pylons. Now the tortoise slides out and the whole structure collapses. Turning around, Hanuman sees that the little Brahman’s nose is also bleeding. He falls at his feet, crying “My Lord!” It is in fact Krishna, who has taken the form of both the Brahman and the tortoise, to save Arjuna’s life even as his servant Hanuman humbles the Pandava archer’s inordinate pride. Chastened, Arjuna worships him as well. Hanuman then promises to honor his own vow, and so Arjuna becomes known as “monkey-bannered.”

39. Encountering Bhima [see notes on page 232]

Each of the five Pandavas was fathered by a celestial, and the strongman Bhima’s father was Vayu, the wind. One day during the brothers’ forest exile, their common wife Draupadi finds a thousand-petaled golden lotus that has been carried by the north wind. Entranced, Draupadi asks Bhima to bring her more of these flowers. Bhima sets out northward and soon begins to climb into the high Himalayas. In time, he reaches a forest of banana trees, where he impatiently plunges through the lush foliage like a maddened elephant, shattering and uprooting trees and terrifying animals and birds. In a clearing

in the middle of the grove reclines a huge, golden-colored monkey with yellow eyes, languidly feeding on bananas. He hears the commotion wrought by Bhima's passage, yawns, and slaps his great tail on the ground, producing a sound like thunder. Bhima hears this and considers it a challenge. He charges forward and soon comes face to face with the monkey, who is lying right across his path. The monkey chides Bhima for his lack of compassion for the creatures of the forest, but the arrogant Bhima merely orders him to get out of the way or be the next to suffer his wrath. The monkey protests that he is too old and tired to move. He suggests that Bhima jump over him. Bhima replies with annoyance that since he holds God to be present in all beings—even a feeble, prostrate monkey—he will refrain from such an act. "Otherwise I'd leap over you as Hanuman once leapt over the sea." The old monkey's eyes gleam momentarily: "Hanuman . . . now, who might that be?" Bhima scornfully explains that, as everyone knows, Hanuman was the great general of Lord Rama and, being son of the wind, his own half-brother. The monkey appears unimpressed and slowly peels a banana, remarking, "Why don't you just move my tail off the path? If you don't feel up to it, have a banana; it'll give you strength." Bhima becomes enraged and strides over to the monkey's tail, intending to toss it—and him—high into the air. But when he touches the tail, he is surprised by its ironlike hardness, and when he tries to lift it, he discovers that it won't budge. He strains until sweat pours down his face and veins bulge out on his forehead, then at last assumes a prayerful posture and addresses the beast respectfully: "Surely you are no ordinary monkey, but some god in monkey form. Kindly deign to tell me your name." The monkey now reveals that he is Hanuman, and warns the overconfident hero against proceeding further, for Bhima has reached the very limits to which human beings can go. The golden lotuses bloom on the nearby lake of Kubera, god of wealth, which is guarded by powerful yakshas.

Bhima is thrilled to meet Hanuman and tells him, "You've been my ideal since childhood!" But he is disappointed to find him in an infirm condition and asks him to display the form he assumed long ago, when he leapt the sea to Lanka. "Ah, but that form belonged to the treta yuga, an age that is no more," Hanuman explains. He goes on to detail the characteristics and durations of the four ages and says that, though immortal, he must always conform to the current age. If he were to assume his ancient form, he adds, Bhima would not be able to endure it. But Bhima continues to plead for a vision and finally Hanuman reveals himself, swelling to fill the sky, as radiant as another sun. Indeed, Bhima closes his eyes and prays that Hanuman return to his former shape. Hanuman does so, then blesses Bhima, warns him against wanton acts of violence, and tells him the secrets of Kubera's lake. Then he offers him a boon: he is even willing to destroy the Kauravas, who have stolen the kingdom of Bhima and his brothers. Bhima replies that merely meeting Hanuman is sure to bring them success. After promising to be present on Arjuna's standard and in Bhima's battle roar, Hanuman disappears.

40. The Defeat of Shani [see notes on page 233]

(a) Hanuman is performing his evening worship when Shani, son of the sun god and ruler of the planet Saturn, approaches him. Hanuman recognizes him, since he once released Shani from prison in Lanka. Shani is black, ill-figured, and has a crooked neck that keeps his head bent downward; if he ever raises it, woe betide the person on whom his ominous glance falls! Shani informs Hanuman that the dvapara age is over and that Lord Krishna has left the earth; so have other celestial beings and demigods, who have repaired to subtler and less troubled realms. Shani himself has been granted enhanced powers to torment earthly beings in the dismal kali yuga. He does this especially through invading their zodiacal signs for a ruinous seven-and-a-half-year cycle, and he particularly likes to prey on the elderly through lingering and painful bodily afflictions. Exulting in his new powers, Shani announces that, since Hanuman is now old and his strength greatly reduced, Shani is going to afflict his body straightaway.

Hanuman does not fear Shani any more than he fears Shani's elder brother, the death-dealing Yama. He tells him to get lost, because there is no room in his body for anyone or anything but Rama. Shani laughs, "We'll see about that." He outlines his favored program: he starts with two and a half years on the head ("to weaken the mind"), moves to the stomach for an equal period, ruining digestion and health, then finishes off with two and a half years of crippling the legs and feet; when he's done, the victim is generally ready for Shani's big brother. "Well, better get started," says Hanuman with a sigh, pointing to his head. "We can see about the stomach and legs later." Shani climbs onto Hanuman's head, and soon the monkey's scalp begins to itch. Hanuman is annoyed and, seizing a large boulder, claps it onto his head. "What are you doing!" Shani yells from under the boulder. "This is generally how I deal with headaches and such," Hanuman says. The itching persists, so he selects a second, larger boulder and balances it atop the first. Shani writhes in agony and manages to gasp out, "Look, we could negotiate. Maybe only seven and a half weeks, or even days." "Oh, that's all right," says Hanuman. "You have to carry out your work according to your nature, and I'm just behaving according to my nature." He picks up a third, even larger boulder and adds it to the pile. Shani shrieks and vomits blood. When he comes to, he begs, "I'll leave you now, let me get down. I'll go away." "Oh, you'll just bother someone else then," says Hanuman, delicately positioning a fourth boulder. "You know, five of these generally do the trick, and I don't mind sitting under them for a millennium or two." Now Shani screams for mercy: "Save me, Son of the Wind! Save me, Messenger of Rama! I promise henceforth never to afflict anyone who remembers you!" Hanuman is pleased, especially by the invocation of his Lord, and removes the boulders. Shani descends, pressing his bruised limbs. He swears to keep his word, then asks Hanuman for some mustard oil to massage his aching body. Hanuman is already settling down for meditation: "Sorry, fresh out. Better ask someone else."

(b) One evening, Hanuman is meditating at the seaside in one of his favorite haunts: the mainland terminus of the causeway known as “Rama’s bridge.” The ugly and inauspicious Shani Deva comes strolling down the beach and notices him. Shani is feeling awfully good; his powers have never been stronger and people everywhere are in terror of him. He is familiar with the reputation of Rama’s most favored servant, and it occurs to him that to conquer the Son of the Wind will positively cement his reputation as a deity to be reckoned with. So he saunters up to Hanuman, whose eyes are closed, and says in his shrill voice, “Monkey, I am the all-powerful Shani and I want to fight you. Quit your bogus piety and stand up!” Hanuman opens his eyes and greets Shani respectfully, adding that he has become very old and tired and is devoting himself to the prayerful remembrance of Rama. He suggests that Shani look elsewhere to find a worthy adversary. Shani replies sharply that once he selects a victim he never lets go until his full cycle of devastation is complete. “And now I’m coming into *your* horoscope!” Hanuman continues to demur, but Shani boldly steps forward and seizes his paw. Hanuman rolls his eyes and thinks, “He just doesn’t get it.” Then he stands up, expands his tail, and quickly binds Shani in it from head to foot. Shani sputters and chokes but lacks the power even to move, much less to free himself. “Eh, what’s the time?” Hanuman remarks, glancing at the sinking sun. “I’d better perform my daily circumambulation of the Lord’s bridge.” He springs onto the rough-hewn causeway and sets out at a brisk jog—200 leagues, to Lanka and back—periodically punctuating his strides by slapping his tail down on the jagged rocks. The tail is like adamant and suffers not the least injury, but the same cannot be said for its unwilling passenger. By the time the journey is complete, Shani is beaten almost to a pulp and is babbling for mercy. The monkey takes a leisurely stretch and remarks that, if Shani will promise to stay out of the horoscopes of Hanuman’s worshipers, he can go free. Shani agrees and is released. His body, bathed in blood, looks uglier than ever, and he hobbles away to beg for oil to rub on his wounds. He is still doing this today.

5

A Reader's Guide to the *Hanumāyana*

I. Prologue: Causes of Hanuman's Birth

The first set of tales reveal a characteristic concern of Hindu storytellers to identify the cause of a significant event, typically through past occurrences involving the effectuating force of curses and boons. Events in this narrative universe (as in the material world) can have more than a single cause, so it is not uncommon for a teller to include more than one of these tales; any apparent contradiction between them can be attributed to “difference-of-eons” (*kalpa-bheda*, a term further explained in the discussion of birth stories below). A more specific concern of these stories, however, is to position Hanuman vis-à-vis the two principal male deities, Vishnu and Shiva, a concern that is already apparent in one of the strangest and seemingly oldest of them, Story 1.e, a version of which appears in the final book of Valmiki's *Rāmāyana* (7.6.11–16), and in the 219th chapter of the *Viṣṇudharmottara purāṇa* (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:116). Hanuman's association with Vishnu/Rama is of course guaranteed by the plot of the Ramayana, but the Nandi story suggests that the early Sanskrit poet already saw a special link between the powerful monkey and Shiva, which is here expressed through another servant of that god who is incongruously given a “monkey face.”¹ Nandi's curse serves the further purpose of relieving Shiva of the obligation of protecting a devotee (i.e., Ravana), thus solving a dilemma that was perhaps already troubling audiences in Valmiki's time, as Shiva's

1. The tale may also suggest a link, in the poet's mind, between Hanuman and the “bullish monkey” of *Rgveda* 10.86.

stature grew along with Vishnu's. According to one commentator, in the *Campū rāmāyaṇa* attributed to Bhoja, when Ravana sees Hanuman for the first time, he feels frightened and, recalling Nandi's curse, guesses that the messenger is in fact Shiva's vehicle in monkey form (H15:21).

Stories 1.c and 1.d, common in modern collections, likewise ponder how Shiva could turn against his own worshippers or even familiars. Here the ancient set of eleven Rudras provides a convenient out, with Hanuman as the eleventh. In the Sanskrit drama *Hanuman-nāṭaka*, Ravana, witnessing the burning of Lanka, realizes that Hanuman is Rudra and wonders how this can be, since he has already appeased that god. He then recalls having offered only ten heads, leaving the eleventh Rudra unsated (Govindchandra 1976:123). Story 1.d introduces two other ominous henchmen of Shiva, Great Lord Death (*Mahākāla*) and Shani/Saturn (*Śani*), who will reappear in Hanuman's narrative cycle as well as in his worship, for the monkey's relationship to both gives him power over them that devotees like to invoke.

Whereas most of these popular stories are concerned with clarifying the relationship between Shiva, Hanuman, and Ravana—making it possible for the former two to destroy the latter—two of the stories reveal a more evident sectarian slant. Several versions of the very common Story 1.a (e.g., H2:5; H3:11; H12:2) have Shiva rhapsodizing over the divine primacy of Vishnu; these also address the old problem of the relationship of the “formless” divine mantra *rāma* to the embodied prince of Ayodhya, an issue that evidently troubled some sixteenth-century North Indian devotees (see Lutgendorf 1991a:355–56). On the other hand, the rarer Story 1.h (H17:13) shows an apparent Shaiva perspective, since Vishnu/Rama's victory over Ravana depends on Shiva's help, which is obtained through worship with the flower especially associated with the goddess and with Shiva's more sanguinary manifestations. A special connection of Hanuman with Shiva's wife is asserted in Story 1.c, likewise found in only a single recent collection (H15:6–12). This charming tale alludes to the fact that the Hindi word for “tail” (*pūñc*) is feminine in gender and makes the richly endowed monkey the combined manifestation of Shiva and his consort.

Although Hanuman's most common epithets identify him as “Son of the Wind,” the Vedic Vayu has been so eclipsed by Shiva and Vishnu that he figures directly only in the briefest of these accounts (Story 1.g; H16:15), in which he himself becomes a humble servant of Shiva. As we shall see, a peripheral role and a Shaiva association will remain characteristic of his subsequent involvement with his nominal “son.”

2. Anjana's Pregnancy

The profusion of Hanuman's birth stories is remarkable, and although the full range of tales given here is not found in any single source, modern works devoted to Hanuman typically offer several. One reason may be because many of Hanuman's epithets identify him as the “son” of someone, and although



FIGURE 5.1. Baby Hanuman; poster, mid-twentieth century

they name but a single mother—Anjana (aka Anjani), as in *Añjanī-nandan*, *Añjanī-lāla*, “Anjani’s delight, Anjani’s darling”—his popular titles name three different fathers: Kesari (e.g., *Kesari-nandan*), Shiva (e.g., *Śaṅkar-suvan*, “the son of Shiva”),² and Vayu (e.g., *Vāyuputra*, *Māruti*, etc.). The examples cited here are only the presently best known among a baroque array of birth stories, traceable to the medieval Puranas and regional Ramayanas. One modern scholar cites ten different accounts (Nagar 1995:16); an ordinary bazaar book of Hanuman’s *caritra* may offer as many as six (e.g., H3:11–24). The obvious questions—why so many stories, and can all of them be equally true?—have not failed to occur to audiences and are also posed in some texts (e.g., *Kalyāṇ* 1975:245).

2. This epithet, which occurs in the sixth verse of the *Hanumān cālīsā*, is rephrased by some devotees as *Śaṅkar svayaṃ* (“Shiva himself”), to underscore Hanuman’s identity with Mahadeva (e.g., H18:30).

The standard answer is that the multitude of stories are ascribable to difference-of-eons, alluding to the cosmic chronology, codified in the Puranas, of time cycles of four “ages” (*yuga*) that recur in endless succession, with a series of such cycles forming larger units such as the “eon” (*kalpa*) or the “great eon” (*mahākalpa*). In this worldview, significant cosmic events such as the advent of the Rama incarnation of Vishnu are also recurring, Rama being born at the close of the treta yuga of each successive *kalpa*. Though Rama’s story is assumed to always follow the same basic pattern, it is also accepted that minor variations in events may occur in successive eons—perhaps to preclude divine boredom? In any case, invoking this mind-numbing time scheme serves, in *Hanumāyana* texts, a clear purpose concerning which I will say more shortly. Significantly, the few authors who attempt to collapse the four principal stories into one do so by synthesis rather than elimination, thus preserving the key motif of multiple patrimony.

The characterization of Hanuman’s mother in my sources suggests an historical evolution in her role. In the oldest ones, she is a minor figure who disappears from the narrative soon after Hanuman’s birth, and the authors portray her as guilty of a transgression in consequence of which she comes under a curse, as in stories 2.a–c. Her sin reflects capriciousness, licentiousness, or disrespect for authority figures, and the curse involves assuming the form of a monkey, an animal understood to embody these qualities. Implicit here is the authors’ understanding of the baseness and impurity of simian form; hence Anjana (and by extension, her son), must “fall” into it. The curse in turn often leads to a physical violation, though this is tempered by a divine boon of a heroic son who will annul the curse.

Story 2.a is essentially that found in the fourth book of Valmiki’s epic (4.65.8–18), where it is recounted to Hanuman by the bear Jambavan; it is standard in modern Hindi collections. Jambavan does not explain the cause of the curse on the apsara who will become Hanuman’s mother, though some modern versions supply a reason, stating that she is “restless” (*cañcal*, e.g., H4:11). But like many epic curses, it is modified by a compassionate escape clause permitting Anjana to change her appearance, and she evidently prefers to look human—at least for taking solitary strolls on breezy mountaintops. It is thus in the form of a human maiden that she infatuates Vayu, who violates her invisibly, arousing her anger.³ Yet she is quickly placated by his promise of a son.

Stories 2.b and 2.c are rare in modern collections. The former was recorded in the *Brahma purāna* in an account of the greatness of the Godavari River and its pilgrimage places, and was later alluded to in the (ca. fourteenth–fifteenth-century) Sanskrit *Ānanda rāmāyana* and in the (ca. fifteenth-century) Bengali *Rāmāyana* of Krittibasa (Govindchandra 1976:160, 195). It figures in only two of my sources (H14:14; H18:25–26), yet it points to an association

3. Surya and Indra, on the other hand, lust after an actual she-monkey, ejaculating on her fur to produce the heroes Sugriva and Vali in a story found in some Valmiki manuscripts.

that remains important in Hanuman's popular worship. By making him the half-brother of a being identified as the ruler of a group of disembodied and malevolent spirits (*piśāca*, a term sometimes translated "goblin," though it is more properly a type of ghost), it suggests both Hanuman's literal "kinship" with these beings and his potential power over them (see chapter 6). Story 2.c may come from eastern India, for a version of it appeared in the Oriya *Mahābhārata* of Sarladasa, and it is also found in the Thai *Rāmakien* (Govindchandra 1976:238, 265). Two versions of it appear in the *Hanumān rāmāyaṇ* (H11:171–76, 816–19), which appears to be influenced by eastern and southern sources. A version of the story is also said to be found among the Nath yogis (H13:7; M. Joshi 2001:59). In these tales, Anjana's misfortune is woven into the well-known story of Ahalya's seduction by Indra, as a result of which Ahalya is cursed to remain invisible or in stone form for thousands of years, until released by the touch of Rama, "purifier of the fallen." There are several variants: sometimes, it is Ahalya who curses her daughter for ostensibly reporting her to her husband; sometimes Gautama curses Anjana for *not* reporting her mother. In one version, it is Anjana herself who is seduced by Indra and then cursed by her father (H11:171–76). The motif of the penitent ascetic encased in an anthill, found in some of these tales, recalls the popular story of Valmiki himself (Leslie 2003:12–17), and also of the sage Chyavana, found in the *Mahābhārata* (3.122.1–25, 1975:458–59).

This emphasis on maternal transgression or on mother-as-victim seems to have been a preoccupation with premodern narrators; thus it survived even in Jain versions of the Rama tale, wherein monkeyness itself has been effaced. Thus in the *Paumacariya*, a pregnant vidyadhara princess named Anjana is suspected of infidelity and banished to the forest, where she gives birth to her son in a cave (Kulkarni 1990:23). Incidentally, even this "heretical" story finds its way into one modern anthology, wherein it is described as a "folk tale" (*lok kathānak*); the compiler casts doubt on its veracity, but tells it at length anyway, perhaps because the theme of Hanuman's mother as an unjustly exiled woman giving birth in the forest prefigures Sita's later fate (H3:22–24). However, the theme of transgression and punishment as an explanation for the assumption of bestial form is downplayed in modern Hindi collections, as is the motif of rape. Instead, as subsequent tales will reveal, recent works emphasize Anjana's positive maternal qualities and Hanuman's close and enduring bond with her. Their relationship thus becomes exemplary of the emotional mother-son bond idealized by modern patriarchal and nationalist ideology and a prototype for Hanuman's later devotion to Sita as a mother surrogate.

Hanuman's mundane father, the monkey ruler Kesari, plays a minimal role in most birth stories, although he occasionally (as in 2.d) serves as a vehicle for possession by Shiva/Rudra and/or Vayu. An early source for this tradition is the *Bhaviṣya purāṇa*, wherein Rudra and Vayu both possess Kesari prior to his uniting with his wife in a bout of loveplay that lasts twelve years (Narula 1991:15). For the most part, Kesari's contribution to his son appears limited to a reinforcement of his monkeyhood and to the common epithet

“son of Kesari.” Storytellers sometimes explain their relationship in the language of the paternity statutes of Sanskrit legal texts; in Valmiki, Jambavan explains that Hanuman is the *kṣetrajā-putra* of Kesari (the son “born in one’s field”—i.e., to one’s wife, but through the intervention of another), whereas he is the *aurasa-putra* (“legitimate son,” that is, born through one’s own semen) of Vayu (5.65.27–28).

Story 2.e is a variation on the Valmiki account, incorporating some southern lore, such as the figure of sage Matanga, who is associated with northern Karnataka and who figures elsewhere in the Ramayana as the deceased master of the ascetic woman Shabari. It also invokes the hill of Venkatachal (*Venkaṭācala*, aka *Venkaṭādri*) at Tirupati in northern Andhra Pradesh, which in medieval times became the site of a celebrated temple to Vishnu as Shri Venkateshvara.

Story 2.f, concerning Shiva’s encounter with Vishnu in the form of the “world enchantress” (*viśvamohinī*), was already alluded to in the ca. eighth-century *Śiva purāna* (*Śatarudrasaṃhitā*, *adhyaḥya* 20). Despite its sexually explicit imagery, it remains popular and is found in most modern collections. It connects Hanuman’s birth with one of the best known epic and Puranic myths: the tale of the churning of the cosmic milk-ocean by the devas and their elder cousins, the asuras or “antigods,” to obtain the nectar of immortality (*amṛta*) lost in the cosmic flood following the close of a prior eon. When the nectar finally emerges, the asuras claim it, but Vishnu assumes a beguiling female form and dances before them, distracting them so the devas can spirit away the goods. More to the point, the story reveals Shiva as Hanuman’s direct father, while (in some versions) making him subsidiary to Vishnu, since he too falls victim to the mysterious illusory power (*māyā*) of the blue-skinned Lord. Further, by making Vishnu the cause of Shiva’s arousal, it also makes him, in a sense, a “parent” of the monkey child, a point that will be underscored in Story 2.g. In one charming variant, the seven sages do not intervene; instead, following Shiva’s orgasm, the maiden changes back into Vishnu, much to Shiva’s chagrin. Vishnu is amused, however, and quickly puts Shiva at ease. The two then debate what to do with the “infallible” (*amogha*) divine semen, which must produce a son. They take the form of sages and wander the earth until they encounter Anjana engaged in penance on a mountaintop. Vishnu playfully tells her that she will not achieve her end until she is initiated with a mantra by a sage. Anjana asks, “Why not by you, right now?” Vishnu then slips the semen into her ear while whispering the mantra (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:124; H15:15–16). Here the motif of impregnation-by-ear may also represent a puritanical revision of Anjana’s more blatant violation by Vayu suggested by Valmiki.⁴ As the deity associated with the flow of sound through the ether, Vayu is also closely associated with hearing and the ears.

4. An exception is H15:16, wherein the seven sages put Shiva’s semen into a river; Anjana then accidentally ingests it while bathing.

One study notes that the ear is the purest of bodily organs because it may hear the divine word/sound (*śabda*) of the Veda, hence Anjana is “immaculately” impregnated in this way (Aryan and Aryan 1975:73). Of course, impregnation by ear and subsequent birth through that organ also spares the chaste Hanuman any contact with female genitalia.

Although rejected by some scholarly devotees because it lacks an ancient pedigree, the story of the vulture and the stolen rice-sweet (Story 2.g) is nevertheless popular and widely retold. It may be traced back at least to the Sanskrit *Ānanda rāmāyaṇa*, recurs in the Marathi *Bhāvārtha rāmāyaṇa* of Eknath (1533–99), and is found in most modern collections. Although it may appear to be a “Vaishnavizing” innovation—since it directly links the circumstances of Hanuman’s birth with those of Rama and even, as one modern commentator notes, makes him a half-brother to Rama, and hence a partial avatara of Vishnu (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:111)⁵—the story retains a Shaiva flavor as well, since in most retellings it is Shiva who instructs Anjana in her penance and promises to take birth as her son, which even suggests that the sacred rice pudding back in Ayodhya is Shiva’s seed rather than Vishnu’s! Vayu, of course, remains a player, if only to blow the heavenly morsel in Anjana’s direction. The motif of an accursed celestial woman is also repeated here in the she-vulture who is yet another errant nymph, and who will be freed from her vile avian form after dropping the sweet in Anjana’s hands (HI3:8). The story—which avoids messy themes of rape, ejaculation, possession, or insemination via the ears—probably represents a devotional attempt to, so to say, rationalize Hanuman’s multiple paternity and eat it, too. It retains the involvement of all three key deities, thus alluding (for those who know) to earlier tales, while substituting an innocuous sweetmeat for their more lurid and explicit images.

There exist several Southeast Asian variants in which Hanuman is more literally Rama’s kin. In the Thai *Rāmajātaka*, Rama, while searching for Sita, consumes a magic fruit that turns him into a monkey for three years. During this period he mates with Anjana to produce Hanuman; a similar story occurs in Laotian, Malaysian, and Javanese versions (Govindchandra 1976:239–49). In the Malay *Hikāyat Mahārāj*, Rama and Sita bathe in an enchanted pond that turns them into monkeys. They then mate, and Sita conceives; Lakshmana catches them, however, and bathes them in another pond that undoes the simian transformation. Rama then extracts the unborn fetus from Sita’s womb, and it is carried by the wind to Anjana’s mouth. In another Malay variant suggestive of the tale of Shiva and Vishvamohini, Rama, alone in the forest, ejaculates on seeing the beautiful Anjana, and the wind carries his semen into her mouth (*ibid.* 258). Needless to say, these stories would be

5. This is also made explicit in an eighteenth-century dance drama from Karnataka in the *Yakṣagānā* style. In the play *Hanumadvilāsa* (The sport of Hanuman) of Tippanarya, Rama calls Hanuman the “fifth son of Dasharatha” and considers him his brother (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:414). One modern commentator similarly labels Hanuman “a partial avatara” of Vishnu because of this story (M. Joshi 2001:62).

unacceptable to most modern Hindus, yet their source texts contain enough details that recur in Indian versions (e.g., the motif of Rama recognizing Hanuman by his large earrings; see Story 9) to suggest that they may have had a common origin, perhaps in less puritanical folk tales that have gradually been sanitized. Note that the theme of a divine couple taking the form of monkeys to enjoy amorous play survives in an Indian variant in which it is not Rama and Sita, but Shiva and Parvati (whose wild behavior is more acceptable to Hindu audiences) who take simian form.

The common argument that all of Hanuman's birth stories are equally true because of *kalpa-bheda* coexists with a tendency to try to rationally merge them into a single account, as in Story 1.e, in which Vishnu, Shiva, and Vayu all figure briefly in Anjana's conception. A more determined effort to combine all the variants occurs in Sudarshan Singh's "autobiography," resulting in a serial impregnation: here, Kesari kills a demon who is harassing sages and is rewarded with the Shiva mantra. He repeats it, Shiva possesses him, and he makes love to Anjana. She then goes to a mountaintop and is violated by Vayu, who instructs her to remain standing there; she subsequently receives the palmful of rice-sweet dropped by the she-vulture (H14:16–17; see also M. Joshi 2001:56, 63).

What conclusions may be drawn from this embarrassment of mytho-obstetric riches? I believe that their multiplicity itself is most telling—a multiplicity that time has not served to iron out (as Western readers might expect), with a single story coming to be accepted as authoritative and the rest rejected as “apocryphal.” On the contrary, one modern bazaar text, offering four tales, simply calls them “various causes of the Hanuman avatara” with no further explanation (H3:11). A similar plenitude is found in the epic and Puranic birth narratives of two other deities: Ganesha and Skanda. The biographies of these “second-generation” gods inform us that their conceptions and births were defining moments in their mythic personalities. Like human beings, and unlike the exalted deities who are praised as “beginningless” and “birthless” (*anādi* and *aja*), they are *born* and have genetic histories that explain things about their character. Moreover, these histories are too rich to be encompassed by a single story or indeed by a single parent or set of parents. Ganesha is the son of Siva alone, of Parvati alone, or of the two together, and he receives his distinctive elephant head in a variety of ways (Courtright 1985:31–62). Skanda has six (or seven) mothers, and his conception, celebrated in multiple accounts, involves (like Hanuman's) the intervention of several deities and much long-distance transport of divine seed (O'Flaherty 1975:104–16, 161–68). Hanuman is already linked, through the main Ramayana narrative, with Vishnu-Rama and with the protean realm of the forest, but his later birth stories confirm his equally close connection with Shaiva and Shakta deities and with the powers of the tempest, of ghosts, and of the netherworld. Despite occasional rationalizations, modern narrators seem little troubled by the conflicting nature of these accounts and, via the convenient concept of difference-of-eons, embrace them all as affirming the multiple traits that devotees have come to understand and value about Hanuman.

Finally, I have omitted from the tales but cannot overlook an additional anecdote, found in two recent collections, that underscores the desire of *Hanumāyana* authors to give their hero a more fleshed-out and humanized biography. It falls into the category of what might be called “Hanuman trivia,” intended for devotees who want to know *everything* about their favorite deity. In a five hundred-page opus titled *Kāljayī Hanumān* (Hanuman, Conqueror of Death), Raghunath Prasad Sharma announces that “readers of Hanuman literature will be happily surprised to know that Lord Hanuman was one of six brothers”; he then proceeds to give their names and the order of their births (H13:215; see also H15:17). This meticulous detail is a further step toward providing little Hanuman with a proper family and childhood, as further tales will demonstrate.

3. Hanuman's Birthday(s) and Birthmarks

Given the abundance of birth stories, it is not surprising to find Hanuman honored with more than one birthday, and the dates offered by various texts probably reflect regional traditions. The subject is not a casual one to devotees who are intent on celebrating the deity's birth on the correct day, and so a number of authors offer lengthy discussion of the competing claims of several dates. Of the eight given, two have come to enjoy wide acceptance in recent times: the most popular is the full moon of the spring month of Chaitra, which thus sets Hanuman's birthday five days after that of Rama (*Rāma navamī*, the ninth of the bright fortnight of Chaitra), and also places it during the “day” of the solar year, when the sun is moving northward, toward the Himalayas and the world of the gods, and hence “waxing.” However, some North Indian devotees, including the sadhus of the Hanuman Garhi temple in Ayodhya, celebrate Hanuman's birth a full half year later, on the new moon of the autumn month of Karttik. Significantly, this is an astrological date known as *yakṣa amāvasyā* (the new-moon night of the yakshas, with whom Hanuman may have ancient associations) and also as “hell fourteenth” and “black fourteenth” (*narak caturdaśī*, *kāl caturdaśī*), suggesting links with the netherworld and with the souls of the dead. As John Cort notes, this is “a day of dangerous inauspiciousness,” called *Mahārātri* or “the great night” by certain tantrics, who observe it by worshiping Bhairava and Hanuman in cremation grounds. Modern Jains mark it with the worship of their own “bell-eared” hero deity, a recent Jain substitute for Hanuman (2001:164). This date is appropriately set in the “night” of the solar year, when the sun is headed south, toward the realm of the dead, and hence is considered to be “waning.” Taken together, these two popular birthdays give Hanuman a foothold in both halves of the ritual year, one associated with the bright celestials and the other with subterranean and chthonic forces. The other dates given also have their advocates, who sometimes use a date to assert sectarian eminence; thus the members of the Vaikhanasa sect, who celebrate Hanuman's birthday on the full moon of Shravan, claim that their birthdate differs from everyone else's because they are the *original* Vaishnava sect and worship a Hanuman (and

a Rama) who lived in a previous eon (*Kalyāṇ* 1975: 389). Ultimately, *kalpa-bheda* is of course the convenient explanation for all these dates (e.g., in H13:6, which offers four dates, and in H15:36–37, which gives six).

The claim that Hanuman's birth occurred on either a Tuesday or a Saturday is often cited as one reason why these are special days for his worship. But they are also, according to Indian astrology, the most dangerous weekdays, governed by the riskiest planets. Thus *Maṅgala* or Mars, who presides over Tuesday, is considered a "sinful planet" (*pāpa graha*), and *Śani* or Saturn is a "cruel planet" (*krūra graha*; van der Veer 1988:232). Hanuman's ability to handle dangerous forces is being invoked here, and his interactions with the truly nasty Shani will be the subject of several later stories.

The passage that follows offers an auspicious darshan of newborn Hanuman, who bears supernatural adornments indicative of his status. The description parallels his popular iconography, and recent posters depict just such a fur-covered, bejeweled infant, sometimes with the caption "Anjani's darling." The cataloging of the visual ornamentation of a deity—his or her *śrṅgāra* or "beautification"—is as common in mythological texts as is the actual adornment of murtis in temples, and some accounts of Hanuman's birth list even more elaborate accoutrements, such as a crown, wristlets, and a girdle. Large earrings or *kunḍal* are an almost unvarying feature of his iconography, however, and suggest a link with the Nath yogi tradition, whose practitioners acquire these on initiation. The notion that they will remain invisible to everyone but Rama may have originated in southeastern India (e.g., it is found in the ca. thirteenth-century *Raṅganātha rāmāyaṇa*, and in the ca. fourteenth-century *Bhāskara rāmāyaṇa*, both in Telugu; *Kalyāṇ* 1975:410), and is also common in Southeast Asia, where the earrings often figure in a dramatic recognition scene in the forest between monkey and master (e.g., the ca. seventeenth-century Cambodian *Rāmakertti*; Govindchandra 1976:239). Hanuman's sacred thread (*janeū*) makes a visual claim of "twice-born" status (reflecting Vedic initiation, theoretically accessible to males of the three upper *varṇas*) yet his thread, unlike those of cotton worn by human males, is said to be of a coarse, wild grass (*muñja*, resembling hemp twine), suggesting his "wild" (*jaṅglī*) nature as well as his humility.

The inherent loincloth is widely attested, though it appears to be of somewhat later provenance (e.g., it is found in the ca. sixteenth-century *Jagamohana rāmāyaṇa* of Balaramadasa, in Oriya and in the still later Gujarati *Rāmāyaṇa* of Giridhar; *Kalyāṇ* 1975:213; Govindchandra 1976:229). This garment carries ascetic connotations, for the word used is *kaupīn* (as opposed to the everyday male G-string, *laṅgot*), which connotes both "genitals" and the secure covering that male ascetics place over these as a mark of strict continence. In Eknath's *Bhāvārtha rāmāyaṇa* in Marathi, and in Sarladasa's Oriya version of the *Mahābhārata*, Hanuman is said to be born wearing a *kaupīn* of "diamond" or "adamant" (*vajra*); in the latter text, he refuses to emerge from his mother's womb until he is given one, and Shiva obligingly provides it (Govindchandra 1976:230). Since the term *vajra* may also refer, in tantric texts, to an erect phallus, it connotes the sexual power that, for yogis, is associated with

unbroken celibacy. Like Hanuman's earrings, this may become a token of recognition; thus in Giridhar's account, Hanuman's loincloth (here, made of gold) is invisible to mortal eyes; Anjana predicts that the one who can see it will be his master (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:213). A more playful variant on the origin of Hanuman's loincloth is found in a modern Punjabi folktale, in which the wayward monkey child steals all the clothing of sage, leaving him with nothing but a *laṅgoṭ*. As a result, the sage curses him: "Henceforth you will not be able to wear any other garment" (Bulcke 1999:544).

In iconography, Hanuman's loincloth is nearly always red, even in images in which his body is not smeared with vermilion, and it is worth noting that the Hindi expression "one with a red loincloth" (*lāl laṅgoṭ vālā*) can also refer to a rhesus macaque with its ruddy hindquarters. Since male monkeys are popularly associated with sexual activity, not continence, Hanuman's brightly wrapped loins suggest a visual paradox that underscores his supernatural status.

4. Adventure with the Sun

This is one of the *ur* as well as indispensable tales of Hanuman, already twice told by Valmiki and then retold by virtually every subsequent narrator of his *caritra*. Like his array of birth stories, this too is vital in defining the range of his powers, and its most ancient form already establishes traits for which he will be worshiped in later times. Most modern anthologies offer only one version of it, yet collectively they display significant variants. In Story 4.a, I offer a fairly representative composite version, and then give some alternative scenarios. All have in common the overreaching infant whose immense energy inadvertently throws the cosmos into disarray, incurring first the wrath and later the rewards of its divine protectors. The first version parallels Valmiki's account, although storytellers often expand on its details e.g., through dramatic or humorous speeches. Thus, in one version, when Vayu flees to earth with his injured child, Indra is initially unconcerned about possible revenge, thinking to himself, "After all, he's only a directional-guardian" (*loka-pāla*, one of the deities of the quadrants of space). Withdrawing into a cave, Vayu responds, "All right, let's see how the gods manage without breath!" He arrests his flow in the heavens and netherworlds, but takes pity on the earth, since humans possess so little vital breath to begin with (H14:23–24). Because all natural processes, right down to the flow of urine and feces, depend on the "five breaths" (*pañca-prāṇa*), Vayu's self-restraint quickly becomes unbearable (H8:5). There exist local variants as well; thus in eastern Madhya Pradesh and western Orissa, a Munda tribal story relates that, when Hanuman seizes the sun, he begins to gleefully frolic with it, thus giving rise to the *Chau* dance popular in that region (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:479). Another version claims that it is the gods who dance in an effort to distract Hanuman so he won't get burned by the sun, but when the playful monkey infant imitates them his infectious enthusiasm causes all the world's creatures to join in (M. Joshi 2001:74).



FIGURE 5.2. The infant Hanuman leaps toward the rising sun; poster, late twentieth century

Other variants display concern that, as an embodiment of Shiva or a perfect devotee of Vishnu, Hanuman's stature not be diminished even briefly by his encounter with more senior cosmic authorities. Thus Story 4.b stresses Hanuman's identity with Shiva (an identity that may already be read in his ravenous hunger, which mirrors Shiva's periodic manifestation as *Mahākāla*, the "eater" of the worlds); however, it also makes him a fastidious vegetarian, a fact that will please diet-conscious Vaishnavas (H14:23; H16:10–13; H18:33). Story 4.c alludes to the same theme; though absent from modern sources, it occurred in the Sanskrit *Skanda purāna* (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:206, Govindchandra 1976:263). Story 4.d anticipates the main Ramayana narrative by pitting Hanuman against Ravana and revealing that the monkey, even as an infant, could defeat the rakshasa king (Govindchandra 1976:263–64). The recent *Hanumān rāmāyaṇ* goes furthest in asserting his near omnipotence (Story 4.e), eliminating any special role for either Vayu or Indra and permitting

baby Hanuman to negotiate directly with the chastened World Guardians (H11:181).

At the other extreme stand a group of apparently older tales (represented by 4.f) in which Hanuman's encounter with the sun proves fatal to him, and the gods must reassemble his body from ashes or fragments; this tale occurs as early as the ca. eighth-century Sanskrit *Dhūrtākhyāna* by Haribhadra Suri (Govindchandra 1976:118). Being of Jain provenance, it need offer no special reverence to Vishnu or Shiva, and it does not appear in modern Hindi collections. Yet it circulated widely enough to get into the Malay *Hikāyat Serirām*, wherein Hanuman's charred bones fall into the sea and are gathered by fishes; Anjana's grandfather then propitiates the sun, who restores the child to life (ibid. 257). In such variants, it is the rescue team's inability to find one fragment, rather than the deadly blow of Indra's thunderbolt, that accounts for the deformity that gives Hanuman his odd name (though, as noted earlier, other Jain authors derive this from a childhood passed on an island called "Hanuruha").

Story 4.g, drawn from the two recent "autobiographical" novels, shows the attempt to render Hanuman's life story more acceptable to modern readers by scientifically rationalizing its details (H7:14–18; H14:20–21). Similarly, in Swami Prem's sci-fi-like English rendering, Indra's elephant is transformed into a "white aircraft" (H18:33). Notably, no recasting of the story, however drastic, can avoid the basic motifs of Hanuman's challenge to cosmic authorities and his subsequent wounding and restoration—a dramatization of his insistent "upward mobility," at first suppressed but ultimately triumphant, that appears central to this key episode.

In chapter 1, I noted various interpretations of the monkey hero's best-known name, which is bestowed in this tale. The distinctive prominence of the simian jaw here becomes (as is common in Indian epic) overdetermined, making Hanuman, as it were, doubly "disfigured" (by his monkey birth and by his punishment for challenging the gods). Yet despite the wide acceptance of the *hanu* etymology, Hanuman's iconography never depicts his lower face as "broken" or "disfigured," but merely as simian, although storytellers do note the paradox that, being a monkey, Hanuman is as inherently "ugly" (*kurūp*) as, being a deity, he is beautiful (*sundar*). And as noted, others take recourse to alternative etymologies, ranging from the Jains' fanciful geographical designation to various combinations of tantric "seed mantras"—for instance, one analysis "proves" that the letters of Hanuman's name contain all deities and add up to the sacred syllable *om* (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:61; cf. H13:14–16).

5. Cursed by Sages

This story is part of the original Valmikian legacy and continues to be retold, generally in colorful detail, though with little significant variation, in most modern collections. The descriptions of Hanuman's "pranks"—some fairly violent (e.g., boulders dropped on huts)—are generally offered with

unembarrassed admiration, suggestive of the license that Indians typically extend to small children, especially males. Only a few accounts in my collection—among them, Swami Prem's American contribution, composed in a country that is less tolerant of unruly kids—display a concern that readers might feel that this divine juvenile delinquency betokens truly bad character (e.g., "He really never had any bad intention toward anyone; it was only his nature to be impetuous as he had so much energy"; H18:39). At the same time, the story offers exaggerated examples of the simian depredations with which Indians are familiar: the pilfering of food and laundry and dirtying of living spaces.

Like the previous story, this tale presents its young hero as a "problem child" who threatens authority figures and must be chastened, this time not through mortal wounding and a dramatic fall to earth, but through an enforced memory loss that renders him harmless and (more or less) domesticated. Even as it reflects a familiar feature of the natural environment and mirrors the process by which male children are socialized, it echoes the mythological theme of the necessity of trimming back excessive and disorderly divine energy. Similarly, in a well-known Chinese tale cycle, the heroic Monkey King flies to heaven and ravages the peach orchard of the Jade Emperor; he too is punished, though his irrepressible exuberance will lead to further adventures.⁶ In one Thai variant, the Indian and Chinese narratives seem to be conflated: Hanuman wrecks Indra's heavenly garden and is cursed by the gods to forget half his strength, though he will recover it when Pra Narai (Vishnu incarnate as Rama) pets his back when they meet in the forest (Nagar 1995:163).

The motif of forgetting and remembering, itself suggestive of the soul's journey to self-knowledge, has further significance both to the Ramayana narrative and to Hanuman's later cult. Within the epic story, the sages' curse serves to explain Hanuman's relatively subdued role in the beginning of *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, just as its removal at the end of this book—through a panegyric narration that "reminds" him of the powers with which he is endowed—makes possible his epiphany in the opening of *Sundarakāṇḍa*. This already hints at the cultic notion of Hanuman as a deity whose dormant shakti can be quickly activated through praise-hymns (M. Joshi 2001:72).

6. Hanuman's Education

The tale of Hanuman's formal schooling, already alluded to in the *Śiva purāna*, has become standard in modern collections, though it is often accompanied by reminders that, being the avatara of Shiva, guru of the world, Hanuman has no need to seek knowledge from anyone (e.g., H2:14; H3:32; H4:33–34). Most versions of the tale also link it to the Ramayana through the fact that Sugriva, the monkey prince destined to employ Hanuman as his

6. The parallels between Hanuman and the Monkey King are examined in chapter 8.

minister, is Surya's son; hence Hanuman's service to Sugriva may be understood as his payment of the traditional "teacher-gift" (*guru dakṣiṇā*). That Hanuman receives his education in an unusual manner, running backward in front of his ceaselessly moving teacher, was a tradition already familiar to Tulsidas, who devoted the fourth stanza of his *Hanumān bāhuk* to it, but one modern version (Story 6.b) makes it the result of the prejudice of a group of ill-tempered sages who object to the presence of a monkey (*Hanumat vibhuti* 1987:172; cf. M. Joshi 2001:79, who compares the prejudice against Hanuman by Surya's Brahman students to that of the Pandava princes toward the outcaste boy Ekalavya). As usual, Hanuman paradoxically overcomes such restriction even while humbly accepting it. A few storytellers mention the blackening of his face, a folkish touch that provides a mythical explanation for the physiognomy of langurs (Govindchandra 1976:226). Story 6.c links Hanuman's exemplary performance as a pupil and remarkable memory with the aspirations of mundane scholars, which may help to explain why he is so fervently worshiped by students at examination times (H14:38). Finally, Story 6.d, from Mishra's "autobiographical novel," reflects another effort at "scientific" rationalization. Here there is no leap into space and no embarrassing backward run; there isn't even a personified Surya. Hanuman simply sits in meditation, repeating the well-known *gāyatrī* mantra (a Vedic text that is today often presented as a kind of universal panacea, possessing wondrous "vibrational" powers), while tracking the sun's course across the sky like a living radio-telescope (H7:24).

Although these are the best-known stories concerning Hanuman's education, they coexist with less common ones that explain how he acquired certain specialized bodies of knowledge. Thus Hanuman is said to have received, from his father Shiva, esoteric instruction in the *praṇava* mantra (*om*), which is still preserved in a certain sectarian lineage (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:59). Shiva is also supposed to have trained him in hatha yoga (H11:215). According to the *Adbhūta rāmāyaṇa*, however, this is taught to him by Vishnu, along with the philosophical wisdom of *sāṃkhyā* and *bhakti* (Govindchandra 1976:287). Another source claims that Hanuman learned the secrets of breath control from his mother Anjana, who had in turn acquired them from her paramour, Vayu (Nagar 1995:26). A Bengali variant reported in one modern collection makes Hanuman's guru the irascible and violent Parashurama ("Rama with the axe"), who teaches him both the Veda and wrestling in a mere four days. Repeating a motif from Story 5 (and from the *Mahābhārata* tale of Karna), this story has Hanuman anger his guru through disrespectful behavior and be cursed to forget his knowledge and strength until someone reminds him of them (H15:43).

Finally, I must mention an anomalous yet intriguing story that portrays the child Hanuman not as pupil but guru. Here, the young Hanuman is equipped with wings, with which he flies very fast, harassing the children of the gods. The latter complain to Indra, who devises a stratagem whereby Hanuman's flight is constantly checked, as a result of which the impetuous child angrily tears off his wings. Seeing him earthbound, the gods' children

launch a retaliatory attack, but Hanuman expands his tail and lassoes them. When they again complain to Indra, he refuses to intervene further, but instead admonishes them to seek instruction from Hanuman in the art of wrestling. The young gods respectfully entreat Hanuman to be their teacher (the text uses the Urdu word *ustād*, common in some wrestling clubs), and he proceeds to teach them all the holds and feints (H12:41–42). This unusual tale repeats Story 4's motif of a plucky Hanuman challenging more exalted powers, here presented as a crowd of spoiled divine brats. Indra at first obliges them, causing Hanuman to wound and limit himself, but even in this reduced condition he uses his distinctive monkey appendage to best his cosmic betters, who are then compelled to seek his forgiveness, as well as his instruction in the great social-leveling sport of premodern and rural India, practiced by males of many castes. The young gods' dutiful adoption of *pahlvānī* (wrestling) suggests a subaltern victory even as it reaffirms Hanuman's status as presiding deity of the *akhārā* or wrestling club (see chapter 6).

7. Hearing Rama's Story

This story about storytelling occurs in seven of my source texts, most of which are saturated with a Vaishnava devotional flavor. Like the child Hanuman, the reader is gently cued in to the mind-boggling time scheme of *yugas* and *kalpas*, which in some tellings Anjana explains in detail. The notion that, in every cycle, the child Hanuman hears his own life story before it happens, because it has already happened in a previous eon, affirms the eternity of the Ramayana even as it ushers the reader into a narrative *regressus ad infinitum*. Not everyone is charmed, however; some pandits have assailed this story—which seems to lack a premodern textual source—as “imaginary,” pointing out that, from their reading of the chronology of the Valmiki epic, the “real” Hanuman was already an adult at the time of Rama's birth (then again, a storyteller might respond that this was only the case in *that* particular eon).

8. Playmate of Rama

This, too, in the view of some pandits, is an “imaginary” story, since it lacks an epic or Puranic pedigree, but it is a wonderfully charming one. It reflects popular fascination with the theme of *bāla-līlā*—the play of deities in child form, as exemplified in the cycle of tales concerning Krishna's infancy and boyhood. The Madari tale may be an effort to similarly flesh out Rama's early youth, which in many literary Ramayanas is passed over in a handful of verses. Yet the success of the story, recounted in ten of my sources, also depends on familiarity with the wandering entertainers known as *madārī*, low-class street performers who play the double-headed *ḍamarū* drum associated with Shiva and indeed are sometimes Shaiva sadhus or yogis. Madaris may be snake charmers or jugglers, but another act they often present is the “monkey

dance" (*bandar kā nāc*) in which a comically dressed monkey (usually a rhesus macaque, who seem better adapted to this sort of thing than the more dignified langurs) frolics about to the beat of the drum, mimicking human behavior. Sometimes a pair of monkeys, dressed as man and woman, stage a mock "wedding." Ironically, given that so many commentators are intent on reminding readers that Hanuman is *not* an ordinary monkey, this story requires him to behave like one, albeit to achieve a devotional end.

Of the three versions I offer, 8.a is fairly generic and representative of shorter retellings. Story 8.b offers more details and borrows especially from the long retelling in Mishra's "autobiographical novel" (e.g., Hanuman, engrossed in Ramayana role-playing games, keeps Shiva waiting at the door). The story delights in the incongruity of a plebian street entertainer with a dirty and potentially dangerous animal being permitted to enter the royal apartments, while reveling in the theological ironies that underlie this mundane scenario.⁷ The final version (found only in H12:8–9) permits Shiva to go to Ayodhya as a Madari while simultaneously solving a chronological problem pointed out by some Ramayanis: that Hanuman is already a minister in the employ of Sugriva at the time of Rama's childhood.

Once Hanuman is established in the palace in Ayodhya, what does he do there? Most collections simply fast-forward to the coming of Vishvamitra, when Rama reluctantly informs his longtime pet that now their childhood sports must cease, for there is work to be done. But a few storytellers expand on this blissful interlude, as in stories 8.d and 8.e. The first, from the *Śrī Hanumān rāmāyaṇ*, offers an idyllic vision that parallels the meditations of Rama devotees of the Rasik tradition, who assume a personal relationship to Rama by identifying with a character in his story and visualize themselves interacting with the incarnate Lord (H11:230–33). An intimate male friend (*sakhā*) is one such role, and here Hanuman assumes it through a range of domestic activities that would be incongruous in the later books in which he appears (though some sources will again cast him as a kind of playmate/friend/servant during the postwar period of Ramraj).

Story 8.e occurs in two collections (H11:233–34; H12:9–10), and in each case alludes to another story—of a later encounter between Rama and Jayant's wife—that they do not tell. The *Śrī Hanumān rāmāyaṇ*, however, provides enough details to permit a guess at the nature of that meeting. Jayant himself is the wayward son of Indra, and in a story already found in Valmiki (5.36.12–33), he takes the form of a lustful crow and attacks Sita while she and Rama are resting on the hill of Chitrakut, pecking at her breasts; Rama punishes him for this transgression by blinding him in one eye. In Narendra Sharma's account, Jayant's wife is similarly an "amorous woman" (*kāminī*), who asks go-between Hanuman to set up an assignation for her with Rama. But here, Valmikian morality has been superseded by the Rasik devotees' delight in

7. Such irony is, indeed, a characteristic feature of Hindu narratives about omnipotent God in the seemingly helpless and dependent form of a child (cf. Bryant 1978:21–42, 105–12).

meditating on their Lord's erotic sports, and so Rama, unperturbed, sends back the message that her wish will be granted soon, when he performs the "great circle dance" (*mahārāsa*) in the forests of Chitrakut. In Rasik retellings of the Ramayana, this corresponds to Krishna's comparable dance in the forests of Vrindaban and couples Rama with thousands of women. In the other, less detailed version (H:12), the delayed meeting is planned for the forest of Panchavati—possibly a hint that the lustful celestial woman will incarnate as the rakshasi Shurpanakha.

9. Meeting Rama in the Forest

These stories offer a different take on an early meeting between Hanuman and his future Lord. Story 9.a was included in the *Padma purāna* (Govindchandra 1976:270) and is retold in a single modern source, which purports to offer "secret" stories (H17:22–23). It appears to be an eastern variant, related to Story 9.b, and also similar to one found in a number of Southeast Asian narratives, such as the Thai *Rāmakien* (Govindchandra 1976:270). It incorporates the motif of recognition-by-earrings included in some of Hanuman's birth tales. Story 9.b is found in none of my Hindi collections but appeared in Krittibasa's Bengali *Rāmāyana* as well as in the later *Biṣṇupurī rāmāyana*, also in Bengali; Smith notes that it "may well be a purely Bengali contribution to Rama lore" (W. Smith 1994:128–30; cf. Sen 1987:47). It asserts Hanuman's primal association with Shiva and places him in the not uncommon role of "doorkeeper," here of the god's magic orchard. It then tests the relative power of Shiva versus Vishnu by actually pitting them against one another. The male gods fight to an exhausted stalemate, whereupon the goddess sets them straight. Both tales give Shiva a more autonomous divine status and lack the saccharine devotional mood of the more recent Madari stories. It is possible that the latter, set in orderly Ayodhya rather than the protean forest, but still involving Shiva ultimately "giving" Hanuman to young Rama, present a Vaishnavized rewrite of an earlier set of tales about an agonistic first meeting between Rama and Rudra/Hanuman.

[Synopsis 2: Whereas most collections of Hanuman's adventures gloss over the first three books of the traditional Ramayana, sometimes summarizing them in a few lines, they resume a detailed retelling from the beginning of Book 4, when Hanuman enters the story. This tends to closely follow the versions of Valmiki and Tulsidas, and since these are available in English translation, I will not devote much space to them. However, these modern prose retellings often reveal distinctive or unexpected interpretations of familiar episodes, and I will give examples of a few of these before proceeding to stories that depart more significantly from the classic narrative.

The fateful first meeting of Rama and Hanuman (albeit readers will now understand that, according to most Hanumāyana authors, it was actually a reunion) naturally merits much attention. Storytellers generally hold that Hanuman, who is disguised as a Brahman student, initially fails to recognize his Lord (having last

seen him as a child), but once Rama identifies himself, the monkey falls at his feet, so overcome with love that he fails to maintain his disguise. Weeping profusely, he proceeds to upbraid himself for his deficiency of vision. This Vaishnavized version may be contrasted with several less common Shaiva-flavored ones of substantial historical pedigree. Thus in Kamban's Tamil epic, Hanuman displays his awesome mountainlike form to Rama in their first encounter, and manifests it again in the magic subterranean kingdom of Svayamprabha, which he then uproots with his tail and hurls into the ocean, freeing the ascetic woman from Indra's curse and allowing her to ascend to heaven (Govindchandra 1976:183–84). All modern versions, however, highlight Hanuman's dramatic manifestation on the shore of the ocean, and several call it a "cosmic form" (*virāt rūpa*) and associate it with Shiva (H2:28–29; H6:59; H17:31–32). They also stress that Hanuman's power must be awakened through verbal invocation, and one modern handbook reminds ritual reciters of Tulsidas's *Sundar kāṇḍ* that they should never chant only this book, but should begin their recitation with Jambavan's inspiring speech at the end of the preceding book (4.30.3–6), in order to "remind" Hanuman of his strength (H3:23).

The obstacles and trials that Hanuman encounters on his transoceanic journey spawn numerous elaborations. The three females over whom he triumphs often figure in allegorical interpretations, wherein they are said to represent, for example, the primary elements of sky (Goddess Surasa), water (*Simhika*, a sea serpent), and earth (the guardian of Lanka, often called *Lankini*; Ludvik 1994:81). Another interpretation identifies them with three kinds of *māyā* or illusory entanglement, characterized by the fundamental qualities known as *guṇas*. Thus the heaven-born Surasa is *sāttvika māyā*, the purest and most refined sort of illusion, which the aspirant should overcome but still honor, as Hanuman does once he has outsmarted her by quickly entering and exiting her mouth. The truly demonic *Simhika*, inhabiting the netherworld below the sea, is the crude and lethargic *tāmasika māyā*, which should be destroyed by any means. And the earthy *Lankini*, who stands guard over a royal city, represents the intermediary quality of *rājasika māyā*, imbued with passionate energy, whose power should be blunted but not destroyed on the aspirant's spiritual journey (Jayramdas 1942:308; Morari Babu n.d.:649–51; see also Jarow 2004:85–88 for a Jungian-influenced interpretation of Hanuman's "shamanic" trials). Since the third demon is also widely understood to be Lanka's patron goddess, Hanuman's encounter with her has generated the widest range of interpretations, to which I turn in the next section.

Needless to say, popular sources offer none of the psychoanalytic-flavored interpretations of these encounters proposed by some modern scholars (see, e.g., Goldman and Goldman 1996:52, esp. n. 176; Sattar 1990:152–74), wherein the three females represent sexually voracious "bad mothers" who seek to engulf or "eat" the hero, who phallically responds to them by alternately swelling and shrinking in size. Whereas the former response challenges them to similarly expand, the latter has the effect of disarming their power; it turns snaky Surasa into a "good mother" (since, having emerged from her mouth, Hanuman is now her surrogate "son") who benignly blesses him. One modern Hindi commentary obliquely points to sexual imagery in these encounters by observing that the reason the gods test Hanuman with women is because they know that when he visits Ravana's harem in Lanka he

will be confronted with voluptuous naked women, including nubile “serpent maidens” (nāga kanyā). Yet because serpents are ornaments of Shiva, Rudra-Hanuman is untroubled by such temptations, and is able to address Surasa as “Mother” and so defuse the threat she poses (H15:115). Hanuman’s complex relationship with various “mothers,” and with women in general, will be considered in chapter 7.]

10. Encountering Lankini

The story of Hanuman’s encounter with a third threatening female figure who personifies and also protects the island city of Lanka is an ancient one. Although omitted from the modern critical edition of the Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇa*, it occurs in numerous manuscripts as “a very well-known passage of seventy-three lines” (Goldman and Goldman 1996:336) that makes explicit the identification of the gatekeeper with the city itself. The story, which recurs in many vernacular Ramayanas, thus invokes the concept of the *bhū devī* or local “goddess of the earth,” as well as that of the feminine personification of power and prosperity (shakti and *śrī*) whose presence blesses and protects a king and his city. Story 10.a offers a brief synopsis of this tale based on Valmiki and Tulsidas, such as is found in most Hindi collections, adding a final promise from the goddess drawn from a single one of them (H14:109).

The regional popularity of various devis occasioned some significant expansions of this story, and 10.b reflects several such variants from eastern India. It occurs in the eighteenth chapter of the ca. thirteenth-century *Bṛhaddharma purāṇa*, which was probably composed in Bengal, and also in the later Bengali *Rāmāyaṇa* of Krittibasā; the goddess sometimes identifies herself as the ferocious tantric deity Chanda or Chamunda, and appears with garlands of severed heads and skull-bowls filled with blood (Govindchandra 1976:74–75, 196; W. Smith 1994:132). Yet the audience understands that she is simultaneously the auspicious Parvati, wife of Shiva, and when Hanuman reveals himself as that god, she promptly becomes benign and submissive. Her withdrawal of support makes Ravana’s downfall inevitable, and is thus more instrumental to it than in the Valmiki and Tulsidas versions. The boon she requests, of being worshiped “out of season” (*akāla*, i.e., during the ritually less auspicious “night” of the year, when the sun is moving south), mirroring her nine-day worship during the spring month of Chaitra, alludes to Bengal’s most important festival, Durga Puja, which is celebrated in the bright fortnight of Ashvin (October/November). This has a further tie-in with the Rama story in that the death of Ravana is generally held to have occurred on the tenth of Ashvin (“victorious tenth” or *vijaya daśamī*), immediately after the “departure” of the goddess at the close of this festival. This may reflect both her withdrawal of protection from Ravana, as well as (according to some narrators) the success of Rama’s own worship of her on the battlefield during the nine preceding nights.

But if the goddess departs Lanka at Hanuman’s request, where does she go? Several local myths provide answers to this question. Story 10.c offers a single

example, from the Kashmiri cult of Khir Bhavani (*khīr bhavānī*, “Goddess who eats *khīr*,” or rice pudding), whose temple stands on an island outside Shrinagar. According to Madhu Wangu, both the cult and legend of this deity developed through the superimposition of the Vaishnava ideology of a nineteenth-century dynasty on the older Shaiva/Shakta practices of the valley. The goddess’s compound incorporates a sacred spring and numerous shrines to snake deities, yet she abjures the older practice of blood sacrifice and in fact consumes only milk sweets, and her story now links her to that of Rama. Like the kings of Kashmir, she has changed her allegiance, and her worshipers understand Ravana as a tantric adept who failed in his spiritual practices and incurred his patron goddess’s wrath (Wangu 1988:52–59, 92, 128–37). Hanuman becomes her doorkeeper—a role he plays for other local Mothers—and this is explained by the story of his having carried her from Lanka at Rama’s orders, together with her



FIGURE 5.3. Hanuman and Bhairava accompanying the Goddess; poster, late twentieth century

frightening but auspicious naga attendants (with whom, as we shall see, he has other connections). According to Govindchandra, the modern bazaar poster in which a diminutive Hanuman, banner in hand, accompanied by a child form of Bhairava, marches ahead of a lion-mounted goddess who resembles Durga, represents Hanuman leading Lankini from Ravana's island capital (1976:348). In North India, this poster is often said to represent Vaishno Devi, another vegetarian Himalayan goddess, whose site-myth bears similarities to that of Khir Bhavani (Erndl 1993:4, 40–42; see chapter 7).

One final, ancient variant on this story deserves mention, from the Jain *Paumacariya* of Vimalasuri. Here the gatekeeper, named Vajramukha or "thunderbolt-mouth," is male, and Hanuman fights and kills him; he then proceeds to bed the gatekeeper's beautiful daughter (Kulkarni 1990:35). Like several other Jain innovations, this episode also appears in retellings from Southeast Asia, wherein Hanuman's playboy qualities are similarly prized (see chapter 7).

[Synopsis 3: In their accounts of Hanuman's nocturnal tour of Lanka, storytellers delight in his ability to change form according to need. What in a demon would constitute a frightening power to deceive becomes, in Hanuman, a magical versatility that is purely enjoyable. Tulsidas describes him as being tiny "like a mosquito" (Rāmcāritmānas 5.4.1); in one tribal narrative from eastern India, he transforms himself into a parrot, while a Punjabi folk song makes him a crow, and a Bengali version has him enter Lanka in the guise of a Brahman astrologer (Kalyāṇ 1975:479; Govindchandra 1976:275, 287). In one modern account, he first shows himself to Sita as "a little tawny monkey the size of a bird, with a crooked face and eyes that gleam like molten gold" (H4:103). This resourcefulness remains coupled with simian mischievousness, and some folk narratives of the city tour include a series of pranks executed by Hanuman. To create jealousy between the demon brothers, he steals Ravana's clothes and puts them on Vibhishana's bed (so the latter will believe that his elder brother has taken liberties with his wife), ties the sleeping Mandodari's hair to a bedpost and steals her jewelry, or ties Ravana's and Mandodari's braids together so they will knock heads when they awaken (Govindchandra 1976:276). Such tales are absent from the more august literary Ramayanas as well as from my modern Hindi sources.

The signet ring that Hanuman carries assumes great importance in many retellings. Inscribed with Rama's name, it is sometimes said to demonstrate Hanuman's status as the original adept of the Rama mantra. One commentator offers an elaborate genealogy of the ring: originally given to sage Vasishtha by the divine serpent Shesha, it was presented in turn to King Dasharatha and then to Queen Kausalya, who gave it to Sita as a wedding gift. Sita offered it to Rama to pay the boatman who ferried them into exile, but the latter refused to accept payment, so it remained in Rama's possession (H15:142). The circumstances under which Hanuman gives it to Sita are variously interpreted; Valmiki's Hanuman simply hands it over (occasioning a verse, 5.34.3, that some commentators celebrate as the very "seed" of the epic; Goldman and Goldman 1996:5). In Tulsidas's version (followed by most modern Hindi sources), Hanuman drops the ring onto the ground from his

hiding place in an ashoka tree, in response to Sita's anguished prayer to the tree (whose buds have a reddish tinge and resemble embers) to give her a spark with which to immolate herself (Rāmcaritmānas 5.12). In a tribal variant from eastern India, Hanuman drops the ring into a pot of water destined for Sita's bath, and she later finds it and has him summoned (Kalyāṇ 1975:479).⁸

Concerning Hanuman's interaction with Sita, Sundd, author of the Sri Sankat Mochan Hanuman Charit Manas, poses an intriguing question: Was the Sita whom Hanuman saw in the Ashoka Garden real or illusory? According to Tulsidas, the woman kidnapped by Ravana was only a "shadow" (chāyā) of Rama's real consort, who had concealed herself in the sacred fire to avoid the contamination of Ravana's touch (Rāmcaritmānas 4.24.1–5). Although this story is widely known, it is seldom mentioned in the context of ensuing narrative events, wherein the "shadow Sita" behaves exactly as the real one would. Yet it is inconceivable to Sundd that the woman to whom Hanuman responds with so much devotion could be unreal in any way; hence he argues that Sita, out of respect for Hanuman's love, substitutes herself for the shadow at the moment when he drops the ring from the ashoka branch (H19:80, 275).

Another notable episode is Hanuman's display (in response to Sita's question as to whether all his cohorts are as tiny as he) of an enormous form, a passage whose treatment suggests his growing theological stature. Whereas in the Valmiki and Tulsidas versions he expands to mountainous size, and Sita feels encouraged (Rāmāyaṇa 5.35–41; Rāmcaritmānas 5.16.7–8), in the Telugu Raṅganātha rāmāyaṇa he grows to fill the heavens, and the stars become his necklace and waistband; Sita is terrified and requests that he resume his diminutive appearance (Kalyāṇ 1975:211)—a motif that (like Bhima's similar request to Hanuman in Story 39) recalls Arjuna's awed response to Krishna's cosmic form in the Bhagavad-gītā (11:23–25, 45–46).

Hanuman's defiance of Ravana leads to an order for his execution, but whereas most accounts follow Valmiki and Tulsidas in having Vibhishana intercede on the emissary's behalf, some storytellers have the demons actually attack Hanuman, only to find that their swords cannot penetrate his diamondlike limbs (W. Smith 1994:186). In the Ānanda rāmāyaṇa, Ravana orders Hanuman's tail cut off, but then the monkey himself proposes burning it instead (1.9.184; 1986:91). Clearly, the wily Hanuman is already planning his next exploit, and its anticipation allows the audience to savor the ensuing scenes of his apparent "humiliation," in which he is led through the streets of Lanka in chains, mocked, and spat upon by a mob—a sort of *ecce hominid*.⁹ Although Hanuman submits to this treatment, he sometimes talks back saucily, as in a Bengali variant in which the demons smear his body with mud and hang the rims of broken pots around his neck; when their king laughs at

8. This suggests a Sita who is living with a degree of comfort that would be unacceptable to most Indian audiences today (Valmiki's Sita forswears bathing in captivity), but its occurrence in a Javanese drama indicates again the close affinity between Southeast Asian Ramayanas and some folk and tribal versions of eastern India (Govindchandra 1976:252).

9. *Ecce homo* ("Behold the man!"), the purported utterance of Pontius Pilate as he turned Jesus over to the mob, became the name of a genre of medieval and Renaissance paintings showing Christ's humiliation.

this, Hanuman tells him that he is being dressed as a bridegroom to marry one of Ravana's daughters (W. Smith 1994:186). His most common response, however, is to expand his tail (see Story 13).

Hanuman's triumphant return to his companions occasions some amusing portrayals of simian behavior. In one account, the monkeys are so happy to see him that they begin kissing his tail (H8:102), while another portrays them as dancing, waving their erect tails. Sugriva, too, "joyfully lifts his tail" when Hanuman and the search party return to court (H4:140, 143).]

II. Two Prisoners Freed

Found in four Hindi sources, these stories celebrate Hanuman's power over two of the most ominous deities of the celestial pantheon. Most Rama narratives recount Ravana's campaigns of cosmic conquest, in the course of which he defeats the Vedic gods and puts them to work as his servants (e.g., Varuna, god of the seas, carries water for him, Vayu fans him, etc.). But according to these tales, he deals differently with the two most dangerous deities, imprisoning them at the southern edge of Lanka (the south being the most inauspicious cardinal direction), lest their influence wreak havoc in his golden capital. Hanuman, who has no fear of either, frees both. His power over the Rudra mantra that is securing Kala naturally stems from his being Rudra incarnate and results in a boon that will protect his future devotees from (presumably untimely) death. For despite the obvious fact that everyone eventually dies, Hindu lore abounds in stories in which death's emissaries are held at bay by the intervention of a god. The story of Hanuman's release of Shani also occurs in a more common variant set during the burning of Lanka (see Story 14). Either way, it makes the malevolent planet beholden to Hanuman, a circumstance still reflected in the monkey god's ardent worship on Saturdays. This act of kindness does not conclude Hanuman's relationship with this deity, however; later tales will show the spiteful Shani attacking even his benefactor, who will then be obliged to deal with him more firmly (see Story 40).

12. In Ravana's Court

This story is one of many that celebrate the resourceful uses to which a monkey's tail, especially when magically expanded, can potentially be put. Though already found in the Marathi *Rāmāyaṇa* of Eknath (Govindchandra 1976:230), it occurs in only one of my modern collections (H18:174). Yet the coiled-tail throne is common in contemporary visual art, occurring in comic books, posters, and in the teleserial *Jai Veer Hanuman* (Padmalaya Telefilms 1995: episode 13; see also J. Williams 1996:100 for images from Orissa). Some storytellers prefer to attribute this feat to Prince Angada during his later embassy to Ravana; others deploy it on both occasions. The motif of Hanuman

coiling his extended tail to form a formidable structure will recur in the tale of Ahiravana (see Story 21).

13. Burning Lanka

Few modern accounts include the Valmikian motif of Sita, learning of Hanuman's prescribed punishment, praying to the god of fire to make his flames cool for Rama's emissary, resulting in a miracle that surprises Hanuman himself (*Rāmāyaṇa* 5.51.20–33); similarly, only a few have Hanuman worry, post-conflagration, that he may have accidentally burned Sita, too (5.53.1–16; cf. H15:165). Instead, most stress the monkey's autonomous divine stature in this, one of his most Rudra-like acts of destruction. The trick of the expanding tail is a favorite of storytellers, resulting in the hyperbolic image of a Lankan population denuded of its clothing and drained of its oil reserves. In the *Torabe rāmāyaṇa* in Kannada, Brahma must finally intervene and order Hanuman to stop expanding his tail; there is reportedly even a tribe, the Uraom, who claim descent from Ravana and say that their lack of clothing is a result of its having been taken from them to pad Hanuman's tail (Govindchandra 1976:229, 371).



FIGURE 5.4. Hanuman burns Lanka; poster, late twentieth century

The amusing episode of Ravana's singed beards occurs in several old Marathi sources (Ghurye 1979:162, Govindchandra 1976:230), the *Ānanda rāmāyaṇa* (1.9.198; 1986:91), and the modern *Hanumān rāmāyaṇa* (H11:302). The awesome account of the ensuing destruction of the city given by Tulsidas in his *Kavitāvalī* (5.3–25) includes the motif of rain clouds that merely fuel the flames, which is repeated by a number of modern narrators. The story of the sparing of Kumbhakarna's life (because of his appetite, a trait with which Hanuman can evidently sympathize) occurs in two Hindi sources (H8:93, H17:36). In the most elaborate account of the fire episode, Ravana attacks Hanuman with an army of a hundred million warriors, but Hanuman ensnares them with his burning tail and kills them; Ravana escapes but is badly burned, and Indrajit cowers in a cave. According to the author, the incident confirms that Hanuman could easily have defeated the Lankan forces by himself (H15:161).

The usual motif of Hanuman extinguishing his burning tail by dipping it in the ocean admits of an interesting eastern variant, though one that has all but vanished from Hindi sources. The story (already noted in chapter 2) of Hanuman, at Sita's advice, placing the burning tail-end in his mouth, resulting in the permanent blackening of his (and every langur's) face, occurs in Krittibasa's Bengali epic and also in a Santal tribal version. A variant told by the Virhor tribe has Hanuman wipe his face with his sooty hands, thus blackening it for himself and all his descendants (Elwin 1949:201–2; *Kalyān* 1975:479; cf. H14:295). Apart from their humor and their tie-in with earthly monkeys, these stories suggest the supernatural nature of the fire, which emanates from Rudra-Hanuman and can only be quenched by being turned back into himself.

14. Encountering Yama and Shani

This popular tale, found in six sources, offers a variant on Hanuman's earlier encounter with these two inauspicious deities (Story 11). In modern versions, the release of Shani from prison is sometimes deliberate but sometimes only an accidental result of the general mayhem caused by the fire, and the god of death is sometimes called Kala or Mahakala ("great death"), and sometimes by his Vedic name, Yama. As in Story 11, the episode highlights Hanuman's power to protect his devotees from threatening cosmic forces.

15. Hanuman's Pride Is Humbled

The motif of Hanuman being given a tangible report of his achievements in Lanka to carry back to Rama (suggesting the new importance of written documents) occurs in Eknath's *Bhāvārtha rāmāyaṇa*, but the full tale may first appear in the *Ānanda rāmāyaṇa* (1.9.280–97; 1986:97–98). It has inspired several colorful retellings, some of which, noting that it does not occur in

Valmiki and accepting the worldview of the story itself, attribute it to “a certain eon.” Sometimes it is the silent sage who drops the ring into the vessel, but most versions introduce the mischievous monkey, a feral double of Hanuman himself. In the ca. 1700 *Biṣṇupurī rāmāyaṇa* in Bengali, Hanuman drops the ring while crossing the ocean and dives in after it. The encounter with the sage occurs in a hermitage in the netherworld (W. Smith 1994:11). A Kannada multiform of this tale occurs near the end of Rama’s reign, when his ring slips from his hand and rolls into a crack in the floor. Hanuman pursues it to the netherworld, whose king astounds him by displaying a tray of identical rings and sends him back with the message that Rama’s incarnation is nearly over (Ramanujan 1991:22–24). Besides dramatizing the implications of mind-numbing *kalpa* theory, the story plays with the notion that even Hanuman can acquire a bit of self-pride that requires removal for his own good. The sage’s (or Rama’s) little joke serves this purpose, and perhaps it is this lesson that will make Hanuman, in later stories, such an effective agent for humbling the pride of others (see Stories 37–40).

16. Building the Causeway

These three anecdotes appear in several collections. The first, found in six sources, is often alluded to in poster representations of the causeway’s construction (*setu bandh*), wherein monkeys are shown writing the syllables *rā* and *ma* on stones (or, as here, just the consonants, allowing the crack to serve as the vowel *ā*, which is represented by a vertical line in Devanagari script), or carrying stones so inscribed. The second story is a simple matter of epic arithmetic, fastidiously detailing how the marvel of a causeway some 40 miles wide by 400 long was completed in a mere five days. The third is a devotional “just-so” story—“how the chipmunk got his stripes”—which I like to imagine in a Disneyesque sendup; it is not modern, however, but dates back to the Telugu *Raṅganātha rāmāyaṇa* (W. Smith 1994:121). It suggests Hanuman’s compassion for smaller and weaker animals and also shows him receiving another lesson in humility. Some versions of the story allude to Saket, the eternal Ayodhya, to which Rama carries his adherents after death; popular tradition maintains that he makes a place there for every kind of creature, including chipmunks.

17. Hanuman and Mount Govardhan

This story stresses the oneness of Rama and Krishna and links Hanuman with one of the most important sites of present-day Krishna pilgrimage, the hill of Govardhan in Braj (see Haberman 1994:110–14). Some storytellers also use it to emphasize the *difference* between Vishnu’s two best-loved avatars, as when Rama, hearing that Hanuman is bringing the Drona peak, becomes anxious: since this mountain originated in Krishna’s heaven, Goloka, he will

have to appear to it as “the beguiling flute player,” forsaking his Rama role as exemplar of order and decorum. It is to avoid this theological anachronism that he orders causeway construction halted (H4:164–66; H8:121–23). One account adds that Hanuman himself promises to return in the next age as a companion (*sakhā*) of Krishna, and the narrator adds that, as a boy in Braj, “Lord Krishna was always surrounded by monkeys.” He then draws a further connection between this promise and ten miraculous Hanuman images that lie along the present-day circumambulatory path around the sacred hill (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:438).

It should be noted, however, that this sweet devotional tale stands in contrast to several older and more agonistic ones that have disappeared from most of my collections (cf. H13:147–48; H15:177). The medieval Telugu and Bengali Rama epics describe a heated argument between Hanuman and the monkey architect Nala, occasioned by the latter’s taking, with his impure left hand, the boulders Hanuman brings, before placing them in the water with his right hand. Hanuman feels insulted and becomes so agitated that he has to be calmed down by Rama; this monkey spat is a favorite subject of Javanese shadow plays (Govindchandra 1976:191, 198). Another story popular in Southeast Asia involves an attack on the causeway by an army of fish, led by their queen. The monkeys battle the fish but are unable to triumph until Hanuman agrees to marry the queen, on whom he sires a son. The story is found in the Thai *Rāmakiēn* and in the *Wayang kulit* tradition (wherein the monkeys, like good Javanese, eat as many fish as they can in the course of the battle, and Hanuman uses his tail to troll for giant crabs; *ibid.* 229, 253). Despite the general Hindu preference for a celibate Hanuman, the motif of a fish-born son surfaces in India through the ubiquitous tale of Ahiravana (see Story 21 and chapter 7).

18. Springing Rama Embarrassment

This folksy anecdote, in which Rama displays refreshingly human qualities and Hanuman proves to be more spiritually discerning than his Lord, is evidently a favorite with modern storytellers; it appears in nine print sources as well as the teleserial *Jai Veer Hanuman*. It also underscores the popular belief that the divine name, as mantra, is greater and more efficacious than its bearer.

19. Worshipping Shiva

This old and popular tale occurs in many variants. Version 19.a is based on the *Ānanda rāmāyaṇa* and appears in three of my sources (H4:207–215; H7:159–61; H8:162). The most common variant, found in the *Skanda purāṇa* in the context of a passage extolling the glory of the pilgrimage site of Rameshwaram (*Rāmeśvara* or “Rama’s Lord,” i.e., Shiva) in present-day Tamil Nadu, the traditional mainland end of the causeway to Lanka, places the incident after the war, when Rama and his party pause on the seashore so that



FIGURE 5.5. Hanuman attempts to uproot the sand lingam; poster, late twentieth century

Sita may marvel at the monkey-built bridge. Rama then asks a group of sages (or the sage Agastya) how he may atone for the sin of Brahman-slaying (*brahma-hatyā*) incurred in killing Ravana and his kin, and they recommend the establishment of a lingam; the rest of the story proceeds as in 19.a (H19:342–43; *Kalyāṇ* 1975:76; Govindchandra 1976:64–65, 157, 278). Likewise, the Telugu *Raṅganātha rāmāyaṇa* has Rama's victorious party halted at the seashore by a monstrous apparition of Ravana; Vibhishana explains that this is attributable to the sin of *brahma-hatyā*. Rama then worships Brahma (the archetypal Brahman), who appears and prescribes consecrating a lingam; Hanuman is sent to get one, and when he is delayed, Rama fashions one of sand while Sita molds an image of Shiva's bull, and so on (H13:188–89; Govindchandra 1976:193). In some versions, Hanuman is sent to Kashi (Banaras) instead of Kailash, and in another variant—no doubt to spare him embarrassment—he doesn't become upset when he discovers that the ceremony transpired without him, but simply places the lingam he has brought nearby, and Rama worships it as well. But other accounts have Hanuman succumb to a fit of pique, even (in one case) exploding at Rama, "You sent me

all the way to Kashi for *nothing?!*" (H15:180–81). All these tales relate to specific lingams now in worship in the Rameshwaram area, including the principal one in the inner sanctum of the great temple there. The lingam known as *Hanumadīśvara* ("Hanuman's Lord," also known as *Viśvanātha*—"Lord of the World"—a name especially associated with Shiva's main temple in Banaras) stands some distance away.¹⁰ The reference to Hanuman stamping his foot in anger and becoming stuck in the sand also refers to a partially buried Hanuman image at the site; in one variant, Rama tells Hanuman that he must remain there, with broken tail and feet lodged in the sand, to atone for his self-pride (H8:162). The invocation of multiple sites in these tales may reflect the expansion of pilgrimage to Rameshwaram, with new shrines laying claim to the sanctity of older sites.¹¹

Story 19.b is a less common variant (e.g., H2:26), and Sita's presence is an optional detail that I have heard in oral versions. Like the previous story, this one is partly concerned with the status of Brahmans, who are particularly associated with the worship of Shiva and who must be respected by Kshatriyas. Like some of the variants noted above, it also reveals more than a little sympathy for the "villain" of the Ramayana, who in many retellings from southern and eastern India is less a demon than a pious and heroic (if fatally flawed) Shaiva monarch. In some versions of this story, however, Ravana's duplicity is shown by his "impossible" demand that Hanuman bring a lingam from Mount Kailash within the span of a few hours. Here, Hanuman is not delayed but rather, to everyone's amazement, succeeds, and the lingam he delivers is consecrated.

[Synopsis 5: *The march to Lanka and the early stages of the battle with Ravana have occasioned a number of minor tales that reflect on Hanuman's personality. The tradition that he carries Rama on his shoulders as the army crosses the causeway—to spare the Lord's feet from the sharp boulders mentioned in the chipmunk story—is sometimes represented in visual art and is an act of intimate service on which devotional storytellers like to dwell. Another beloved episode occurs in Rama's camp atop Mount Suvēla and forms a peaceful interlude before the battle. In Tulsidas's version, retold by many modern Hindi narrators, Rama rests his head on Sugriva's lap while Angada and Hanuman press his feet and Lakshmana sits protectively behind him. Rama sees the full moon rising and exclaims over its beauty, then asks each of his companions to explain the dark spots on its surface. Various explanations are offered, including one by Rama himself, but Hanuman has the last word, pronouncing them to be Rama's own dark image, enshrined in the moon's heart (Rāmcāritmānas 6.12a; cf. H2:57; H7:161).*

10. A multiform of this tale concerns a lingam called *Hanumateśvara* in the central Indian city of Ujjain. This is said to have been given to Rama by Vibhishana, and installed here during his return journey in expiation for the sin of killing a Brahman (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:76).

11. Compare, in a different context, the belief that pilgrims to Ayodhya will not obtain the full merit of their journey unless they first worship Shiva's ancient shrine of *Nāgeśvaranātha* ("lord of serpents") on the bank of the Sarayu, a site generally assumed to predate most of the present-day temples in the city (van der Veer 1988:17).

Once the battle begins, a number of dramatic episodes highlight Hanuman's heroism and devotion. One is the wounding of Lakshmana by Ravana's son Indrajit. The demon then tries to lift the wounded prince's body, presumably to carry him off as a prisoner, but is unable to do so; this is generally explained as the result of Lakshmana's being an incarnation of Shesha, the serpent who bears the weight of the earth. Hanuman arrives at the scene and, because of his great devotion and/or his Rudra power, easily lifts Lakshmana (Rāmcaritmānas 6.54). Valmiki's accounts of Hanuman's two journeys to the Himalayas in search of healing herbs (6.61 and 6.89) are sometimes collapsed into one by modern narrators, but storytellers still like to recount the revealing dialogue between Vibhishana and Jambavan that occurs prior to the first of these journeys. Indrajit deploys a terrible "Brahma weapon" that badly wounds most of the principal champions of Rama's army and even renders the Raghu princes insensible. In the ensuing night, Vibhishana and Hanuman make their way across the battlefield to where Jambavan lies, nearly blind and pierced by countless arrows. When Vibhishana identifies himself, Jambavan asks whether Hanuman is still alive. Vibhishana expresses surprise that his first inquiry was not concerning the welfare of Rama and Lakshmana or Sugriva and Angada. Jambavan replies that, if only Hanuman is alive, "our forces, though slaughtered, will yet live. But if Hanuman is gone, we, who are still alive, are as good as dead."¹² When Hanuman reveals himself, Jambavan feels (as Sita did earlier in the Ashoka Garden) that his life has already been restored (H8:129–30).

The episode of Garuda's intervention to counteract the effect of magical snake venom (Garuda being the traditional enemy and devourer of snakes; Rāmāyaṇa 6.50) was given an interesting reinterpretation in medieval Bengal, where the divine eagle was particularly associated with the cult of Krishna. In Krittibasa's account, when Garuda reaches the battlefield, he doubts whether the wounded Raghu hero is really Vishnu/Krishna and insists that he reveal himself in Krishna form. Rama agrees to do so, but makes Garuda enfold him in his outspread wings lest the monkeys witness this anachronism. Only Hanuman sees it, and he tells Garuda that he'll get back at him one day for this cheeky request—an allusion to Story 37, in which Krishna uses Hanuman to crush Garuda's pride (Govindchandra 1976: 199).

Hanuman's role in healing Lakshmana, the subject of the next set of tales, is expanded in some texts to include his protection of the prince prior to the fateful assault. According to the Sanskrit Hanuman-nāṭaka, Ravana seeks to kill Lakshmana with the terrible "weapon of Brahma" but Hanuman is able to neutralize it. As a result, Ravana becomes furious and threatens to kill Brahma himself. The grandfather of the gods responds by dispatching Narada to the battlefield to distract Hanuman, and Ravana is then able to drive home his weapon (Hanuman-nāṭaka 13.2; Govindchandra 1976:199). A version of this story survives in Sharma's modern epic, wherein Narada distracts Hanuman by singing Rama's name, permitting Lakshmana's wounding (H11:346).]

12. Rāmāyaṇa 6.74.22–23 (vulgate edition); I cite Raghunathan's translation (1981: 3.216).

20. The Life-Restoring Herb

Hanuman's quest for the rare Himalayan herb that heals all wounds (generally called *sañjivani*) is, like the *Sundarakāṇḍa* story and the tale of Ahiravana, a kind of mini-epic that has received significant elaboration by storytellers. Already in Valmiki's rendering, the drama and emotion of the frame situation highlights the mutual love of the Raghu brothers and shows Rama at perhaps his most vulnerable moment—even ready to abandon his task and relinquish Sita if his brother's life cannot be saved (*Rāmāyaṇa* 6.89). Hanuman, of course, rises to the occasion, and in Story 20.a responds to the Lord's distress with an epiphany of Rudra power that, to onlooking celestials, threatens cosmic dissolution (*pralaya*). This theme, found in the *Hanuman-nātaka* (13.16) and the subject of a poem in Tulsidas's song cycle *Gītāvalī* (6.8; 1974:331), recurs in some modern prose retellings (e.g., H4:181; H8:131–33). Hanuman's prodigious feats of transport may begin early in the story: sent into Lanka to fetch the rakshasa physician Sushena, Hanuman reasons that the required medicine may be in the doctor's house and so brings it as well. His power is also revealed by the phenomenal distance he traverses on his Himalayan quest, a round-trip journey (according to one storyteller) of 6,640,400 leagues (H13:158).

A version of the Kalanemi story (20.b) appears in the western and Bengali recensions of Valmiki and becomes standard in most medieval Rama narratives, e.g., occurring in the Telugu *Raṅganātha rāmāyaṇa*, Krittibasa's Bengali epic, and in the *Adhyātma rāmāyaṇa* (Govindchandra 1976:149, 193, 200; Ludvik 1994:132). Modern Hindi retellings largely adhere to Tulsidas's account (*Rāmcaritmānas* 6.56.2–6.58.6), with some elaborations, particularly in the set-up to Hanuman's proposed "initiation" by the demon-guru; for instance, Hanuman indeed receives the promised mantra, for the demon dies shouting "Rama!" Another teller has Kalanemi stall for time by narrating Rama's story. This, of course, is the one thing that Hanuman can never resist, and so the ruse nearly works. Kalanemi drags out the tale as much as he can, but fortunately he lacks knowledge of key episodes (since he never, in any *kalpa*, outlasts his own role in it), and when he runs out of material, Hanuman snaps out of his reverie and slays him (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:176). In one version, the wily demon shape-shifts during their final combat, becoming a bird, a lion, a false Sugriva, and a hundred-horned monster (H13:162). The horned and fanged male figure crushed beneath Hanuman's foot in murtis and posters is sometimes identified as Kalanemi (Govindchandra 1976:312), though he is equally often said to be Ahiravana (see Story 21).

Another common expansion of the tale involves battles on the outward or return legs of the journey; thus Hanuman must defeat an army of 130 million gandharvas guarding the herbs (H13:163; cf. H15:198), and he is also attacked en route by seven warriors sent by Ravana, who are skilled at aerial combat (H15:204). Once he reaches Lanka, he is further delayed by an army of a hundred million rakshasas led by Ravana's uncle Malyavan (H13:165), and



FIGURE 5.6. Hanuman brings the mountain of herbs; poster, late twentieth century

Rama's later order to return the mountain to its Himalayan home occasions another pitched combat (H13:168); needless to say, Hanuman emerges triumphant from all these encounters.

Some Cambodian and Malay versions add an interesting variant absent from the Indian retellings known to me: to prepare the medicine, the physician Sushena demands a special rolling pin from Mandodari's kitchen or a small table kept beneath Ravana's bed. Hanuman enters the palace to steal the required object, and while there, ties the sleeping Ravana's and Mandodari's braids together. He magically charges the knot with a mantra and then writes on the wall that no one can untie it until Mandodari strikes Ravana on the forehead with her left hand. He then returns to Rama's camp, having ingeniously achieved two ends: Lakshmana will be healed, and Ravana—forced to undergo an inauspicious humiliation—can no longer

boast of being “undefeated” (*ajeya*; Govindchandra 1976:240, 256–57; see also Story 23).

Some storytellers are troubled by the inability of Hanuman—whom they consider Shiva incarnate and (in Tulsidas’s words) “foremost among the wise” (*jñāninām agragaṇyam*)—to recognize the desired herb. Valmiki already introduces the idea that the herbs “hide” themselves from Hanuman (the reason is not given), prompting him to lift the entire mountain. But one modern narrator has Ravana himself cause all the herbs to glow in order to confuse Hanuman (this occasions a digression on “bioluminescence”; H17:37). In another version, Hanuman becomes furious at the mountain for hiding the herbs, and declares “You think I’m an ordinary wild monkey (*jaṅglī vānar*) and are making fun of me!” His Rudra rage again threatens the cosmos, so the mountain deity appears and calms him by pointing out the herbs (H15:184–85). According to an oral account I recorded, Hanuman knows very well which herb is required, but desires to glorify Rama with his mountain-lifting feat. Moreover, he has an additional compassionate purpose: he leaves a portion of the peak near the southern tip of India, where, as “Maruti’s Hill” (*mārutvāmalai*) near Kanyakumari, it still provides herbs to ayurvedic physicians (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:450).

Like the Kalanemi story, the tale of Hanuman’s “flying visit” to Ayodhya (20.c) may be of eastern origin, as it appears in the Bengali recension of Valmiki and is told at length by Krittibasa (Govindchandra 1976:200–201; Ludvik 1994:132; W. Smith 1994:182). Tulsidas evidently considered it authentic, since he too included it (*Rāmcaritmānas* 6.58.8–6.60b). The *Hanuman-nāṭaka* version has Queen Sumitra awaken from a nightmare in which she sees Lakshmana lying near death. She reports this to Bharata, who decides to perform a Vedic ritual to avert evil; it is while he is engaged in this rite that he sees Hanuman’s huge shape passing overhead and mistakes it for a disruptive rakshasa (Govindchandra 1976:125–26). The story provides a neat symmetry to the tale of Kalanemi by having Hanuman detained by a bad guy en route to the Himalayas and by a good one while returning; he offers the requisite response to each, and in Ayodhya additionally displays his skill as a narrator of Rama’s story. This much of the tale figures in many modern collections; less common, however, is its further expansion to include Hanuman’s appearance at court and the dialog between the two queens. The latter is of course less about Hanuman than about the selfless virtue of Rama’s mothers (Kaikēyī excluded).

The sun story (20.d) seems to be another Bengali innovation, found in Krittibasa’s epic (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:221; Govindchandra 1976:200). Hanuman’s casual handling of the sun gives a striking demonstration of his awesome power, and in one modern retelling he absentmindedly slips it into his mouth rather than his armpit; later Rama notices a bit of redness around Hanuman’s lips and thus gets the celestial orb released (H11:357). As I have noted, Hanuman has persistent associations with both the sun and fire, and in one account his own brilliance as he flies through the sky causes the distraught Rama to worry that sunrise is at hand (H13:167).

[Synopsis 6: A few storytellers include unique tales of Hanuman's heroic feats during the battle; thus the Hanuman-nāṭaka has him grab Kumbhakarna's severed head and hurl it to the Himalayas (Govindchandra 1976:124), and modern epic poet Sharma, painting on an even bigger canvas, has him seize with his tail a legion of eighty thousand red, immortal rakshasas and hurl them into "outer space," whence they never return (H11:362). A significant expansion that has vanished from modern Hindi collections, however, comprises a series of anecdotes, again primarily from eastern sources, concerning the disruption of the rituals of Ravana and his son. These tales make Hanuman and his companions behave more like ordinary monkeys, and have presumably been expunged for reasons of devotional decorum; they may, of course, still pop up in oral tellings. According to Krittibasa, when Hanuman breaks into the enclosure at Nikhumbhila in which Indrajit is worshiping, he abruptly terminates the rite by urinating into the prince's fire altar. During Ravana's later sacrifice, Hanuman grabs the ritual ladle from the king's hand and beats him with it, then bites him on the face while Nila climbs on Ravana's head and urinates profusely; their companions drag the weeping Mandodari by the hair and tear off her clothing (Govindchandra 1976:201; Nagar 1995:37; W. Smith 1994:185). A text called the Bicitra rāmāyaṇa ("Colorful" or "Wondrous" Ramayana) has Hanuman himself pull Mandodari's hair, while his cohorts urinate and defecate into Ravana's firepit; in the eighteenth-century Assamese poem Śatruñjaya, Hanuman indulges in similarly unchivalrous behavior on the battlefield, binding a demon named Bimarddana with his tail and then defecating into his mouth and urinating in his nose and ears. William Smith, reporting all this, understatedly notes that the eastern Hanuman can be "a trickster and somewhat of a clown" (1994:74, 185). As usual, Southeast Asian variants go further still; in the Rāmakien the symbolic rape of Mandodari becomes actual, with Hanuman assuming Ravana's form to sleep with her, thus robbing her husband of the power derived from her chastity (Govindchandra 1976:235). The merest shadow of these simian indiscretions appears in Mishra's "autobiography," wherein Hanuman (narrating the tale of the disrupted rite) admits to having made an uproar that drew Mandodari and other royal women, but then insists that (contrary to what some people say) he did not touch or abuse them (H17:201).]

21. The Slaying of Ahiravana

By virtue of age, geographical diffusion, and literary elaboration, this story occupies a special place in the *Hanumāyana*. Lacking a Valmikian prototype and having as its principal setting the weird netherworld of *Pātāla*, it provides a striking example both of the development of an autonomous mythical role for Hanuman and of the continued growth of the greater Ramayana through variations on older themes.

The basic story appears to be at least a thousand years old. It is alluded to in the *Śiva purāṇa*, which suggests that the audience was assumed to be familiar with it (*Śiva purāṇa* 3.20.34, 1970:3.1156), and in subsequent centuries it spawned retellings in most of the literary languages of South Asia.

Among these are substantial independent works, such as the Sanskrit drama *Mahirāvaṇa nāṭaka*, composed in Nepal in ca. 1337, the ca. seventeenth-century *Pātāla-rāmāyaṇam* (Ramayana of the netherworld) in Malayalam, and the eighteenth-century Tamil *Mayilirāvaṇan katalai* (Nagar 1995:215; W. Smith 1994:146; Zvelebil 1987:xxxviii, xlv–xlvi). It has also been a favorite subject for visual artists and is celebrated in temple icons, palm-leaf drawings, miniature paintings, and modern poster images; it was the subject of one of the first films made in South India (1918), and the 1995 teleserial *Jai Veer Hanuman* devoted most of five episodes to it (Nagar 1996; Zvelebil 1987:xlvi; Padmalaya Telefilms 1995: episodes 31–35). A much-copied contemporary poster depicting Hanuman soaring upward with Rama and Lakshmana perched on his shoulders while his left foot presses down a fanged demon represents the climax of this tale, as is further confirmed by the appearance of a small goddess temple in the background. Today, several popular temples in India mark sites connected with the story (see chapter 6).

The tale occurs in too many variants to offer them all, and as in the case of Hanuman's birth stories, authors sometimes include more than one account (e.g., H15:211–14). Each of my versions is an assemblage based on several sources. The villain is called Ahiravana (“snake Ravana”) in most Hindi collections, but also sometimes Mahiravana (“earth Ravana”); these names are occasionally elided to Airavana and Mairavana. Sometimes both names appear and there are two demons, who are twins or father and son. Zvelebil cites the Tamil variant Mayiliravana or “peacock Ravana,” and points to the peacock's association, in Tamil lore, with the ocean, gateway to the netherworld; he speculates that this may have been the demon's original name and that the story had its origin in the South (Zvelebil 1987:xliv). Whatever the merits of this hypothesis, both Sanskrit/Hindi names have chthonic resonances, since snakes and serpent deities are believed to dwell in the earth or waters. Their realm is most often called *Pātāla loka*, the world of Patala—not an infernal place, but a magical and sybaritic otherworld that figures in many tales, most of which assume some sort of downward journey to get there; in variants of the Ahiravana story, for example, Hanuman plunges into the sea, dives into a fissure in the earth, or descends through the stalk of a huge lotus growing in the middle of the ocean. However, the spatial location of this realm is sufficiently vague to encourage some modern authors to set Patala in an exotic region of the earth that they consider pleasurable but faintly immoral. One of my texts locates it in Central America (noting that the Mayan ruins there were “built by a danava”); another places it “somewhere between South America and Australia”; and two others simply identify it as “America” (H7:191; H17:43; H18:230; *Kalyān* 1975:82).

The goddess who figures in the story bears many names, among them Chandi, Durga, Nikumbhila, Kamaksha, and Bhadrakali. All are associated with tantric shakta worship, which to many mainstream Hindus is both faintly sinister and mildly alluring, since it generally involves offerings of meat and liquor (consumed by worshipers afterward as the Devi's prasada) and is rumored to favor human sacrifice and ritual sexual intercourse. Vaishnava



FIGURE 5.7. Hanuman rescues Rama and Lakshmana from Ahiravana; poster, late twentieth century

disapproval of such rites is suggested in versions of the story in which Hanuman shows no respect for the goddess (e.g., crushing her down or slamming her to the floor with his tail; H11:363; H12:30; W. Smith 1994:148–49), and tantric worship is sometimes parodied in an almost Orientalist fashion, with booming kettledrums and masses of black-robed priests holding gleaming scimitars in a spectacle that might be dubbed “Indiana Hanuman in the Temple of Doom” (e.g., Jvalaprasad Mishra 1982:1044–47). Yet Hanuman’s triumph involves a manifestation of his own raw shakti, which serves to link him with the Shakta worldview, and in some versions the goddess recognizes him as Shiva and assists him in his task.

Story 21.a offers a prelude explaining the birth and subsequent rise to power of the villain; it is based on a lengthy verse retelling in the style of Tulsidas, composed by Pandit Jvalaprasad Mishra in the late nineteenth century as an (acknowledged) interpolation into a much-reprinted edition of the *Rāmcaritmānas* (ibid. 1032–50). Story 21.b is based on that found in thirteen of my sources, and hence may be regarded as the most widely accepted version of the tale, at least in Hindi-language regions. The details of the fort

made of Hanuman's coiled tail (a favorite with artists) and of Ahiravana assuming multiple disguises as Rama's intimates date back at least to Kritibasa (Govindchandra 1976:201–3; Sen 1987:252–78). Version 21.c is loosely based on the *Ānanda rāmāyaṇa* story, which contains some distinctive features (e.g., the demon brothers as incarnations of the divine Ashvins, the serpent maiden who wants to wed Rama and whom Hanuman tricks) that also turn up occasionally in modern retellings (*Ananda rāmāyaṇa* 1.11.71–130; H10: episodes 34–35). Story 21.d incorporates more premodern material from Bengal and Assam, where accounts often lack an encounter with a fish-born son of Hanuman and feature the villain being dispatched via the “show-me” motif common to folktales in many parts of the world (W. Smith 1994:148–51; Sen 1987:118, 252–78; J. Williams 1996:30, fig. 239). The final detail in this story links it to a contemporary shrine in Bengal (Sen 1987:50–51).

The Ahiravana tale features an heroic quest involving the overcoming of fantastic obstacles. This has its prototype within the classical *Rāmāyaṇa* in the *Sundarakāṇḍa* as well as in the episode of Hanuman's journey to fetch the *sañjivani* herb. Both these stories cast Rama in a passive role—pining for Sita atop Mount Prasravana or weeping over the mortally wounded Lakshmana—and give the spotlight to Hanuman. But whereas these adventures transpire within the mythical geography of the subcontinent (*Bhāratavarṣa*), the Ahiravana story adds the element of an “otherworld” journey, involving a shamanlike descent to recover demon-captured souls. Apart from its elemental appeal, this scenario has generic precursors in the other great epic of ancient India, the *Mahābhārata*, in which the more “energetic” members of a heroic brotherhood—Arjuna and Bhima—depart on personal quests that carry them to fabulous landscapes wherein they overcome trials while their senior brother and leader waits passively at home. These scenarios have themselves become loci for significant “crystalline growth” in the *Mahābhārata* tradition, and the Arjuna cycle has been embellished with a long episode, popular in Tamil regions, involving a descent to Patala and marriage with a serpent princess there (Hiltebeitel 1988:217, 225). The theme of an otherworld journey, coupled with the magical and illusory elements in the Ahiravana story, suggest other popular South Asian oral tale cycles that assumed literary form in the nineteenth century, such as the Urdu *Dāstān-e amīr Ḥamzah* (which, under the sponsorship of the Naval Kishore Press of Lucknow, eventually grew into a *Mahābhārata*-dwarfing opus of forty-six volumes of some nine hundred pages each; Pritchett 1991:25), and the likewise expanding folk epic *Ālhākhaṇḍ*, both of which abound in episodes featuring sorcerers who inhabit magical fortresses (*tilasmī garh*) and specialize in abductions. The Ahiravana tale has provided an opportunity to introduce this kind of staple action-adventure material into the Ramayana framework, but its theme of netherworld descent and rescue also resonates with Hanuman's cultic role as an exorcist-healer.

Notable, too, are the snake motifs in the story, particularly in the Hindi verse version by Pandit Mishra. In telling the tale of “serpent Ravana,” whose appearance frightens even his demon father and who is adopted by the

serpentine sea monster Simhika (whom Hanuman will later slay), this narrator has artfully introduced an array of snaky images that suggest the ambivalent status of these semidivine beings: Hanuman standing guard over the fortress formed by his tail is compared to “the king of snakes who had formed a coil” (Jvalaprasad Mishra 1982:1037), the sleeping Rama’s hand resting on Lakshmana’s chest is likened to “a serpent on a lotus” (ibid. 1038), and throughout the episode Lakshmana is referred to by epithets (as he is not generally in the *Rāmcaritmānas*) meaning “serpent king” (*phaṇināhu*, *phaṇipati*) that allude to his being the incarnation of the cosmic snake Shesha. Hanuman, like Garuda (with whom he is sometimes paired as Vishnu’s servant and to whom Valmiki often metaphorically likens him) can be an adversary of serpents, but as a shape-shifting illusionist (*kāmarūpin*) and avatara of the “lord of snakes” (Shiva), he has naga-like qualities of his own, and he is the patron deity of wrestlers, who worship snakes as emblems of male power and whose principal holiday is *nāga-pañcamī*, a monsoon festival in which bowls of milk are offered to cobras (Alter 1992:136–66, 198–213). In Orissan paintings, Hanuman’s tail sometimes ends in the head of a snake, and a local *stuti* likewise hails him as “You who have Nāgarājā (the king of serpents) in your tail” (J. Williams 1996:103). “Crookedness” (*terhāpan*)—a quality of wiliness and moral ambiguity as well as a physical attribute of snakes and of langur’s tails—is not one of Rama’s strong suits, for he is the avatara of the “straight path” of dharma, and in the classical Ramayana, he runs into trouble with Indrajit’s “snake noose” (*nāgapāśa*), becoming helplessly bound until Garuda arrives to free him. Small wonder that he is equally helpless in the clutches of “snake Ravana” and must await rescue by a more “crooked” hero who can beat the demon sorcerer at his own devious game.

The story abounds in doubling and disguise. Ahiravana himself is Ravana’s darker double, who spreads impenetrable darkness over Rama’s army and begins an elaborate series of impersonations. Hanuman matches the demon’s moves; in the Assamese tale *Mahirāvāṇa vadha* (“the slaying of Mahiravana”) by Chandra Bharati, he successively transforms himself into a crow, a kingfisher, a fly, an aged Brahman, a crow again, a second fly, and the vampiric goddess Vetlacandi in the course of his mission (W. Smith 1994:149–50). This is not the end of the doubling, however, for at the gates of the demon city Hanuman encounters his own double in Makaradhvaja, a “son” who dramatizes both Hanuman’s sexual potency (the procreative power of even his perspiration, saliva, or phlegm) and his strict celibacy. But despite this bit of male bonding (and bondage), the Ahiravana story has little to say about dharma, family values, kingship, or the importance of keeping one’s word—themes that figure prominently in the classical Rama story. Instead it has everything to do with deception, resourcefulness, and power. In the world of Patala we expect the unexpected and are not disappointed: forms change with bewildering swiftness, divine champions prove helpless, and a lifelong bachelor turns out to have a child.

As an episode in Hanuman's biography, the Ahiravana cycle thus displays a dark symmetry with the equally popular *Sundarakāṇḍa* narrative. It spotlights Hanuman as a plucky superhero with talents as devious as his trademark appendage; one who is as adept in the shadowy realms below ground as he is soaring through the sky—indeed, more adept, since here he triumphs over forces that baffle even the celestials.¹³ It also foregrounds his comical and aggressive traits that, although implicit in classical Rama narratives, are there more restrained by the somber themes of renunciation and lovers' separation and by Hanuman's devotion to Rama; Valmiki's messenger monkey does *not* pause, en route to delivering Rama's ring to Sita, to pack away a multicourse meal in Ravana's palace! Hanuman's triumph in this story cycle confirms him once again as intermediary par excellence, capable of traversing all realms of being because he is not above displaying some of the qualities of each.

22. Substituting a Syllable

This story of another failed sacrifice in Lanka—spoiled not by brute violence and desecration but by genteel behavior and linguistic ingenuity—is found in several modern collections, sometimes as a tale told by Rama to Sita after they are safely home in Ayodhya. When Rama remarks that, if it hadn't been for Hanuman, Sita would still be pining away in Lanka, she questions this assertion, adding, "You are always praising that monkey!" Rama replies with this tale. Apart from giving Hanuman an opportunity to be more subtly disruptive while concealed in one of his favorite disguises (in Valmiki's poem, he twice takes the form of a young Brahman student), the story invokes a motif that dates back to the *Śatapatha brāhmaṇa*, in one passage of which a demonic fire sacrifice intended to yield a son who will be "the slayer of Indra" instead produces one "whose slayer is Indra" because of the substitution of a few syllables (*Śatapatha brāhmaṇa* 1.6.3.10). The low-key ending of the present story suggests near-sympathy for Ravana, who seems to have finally realized who his *real* adversary is, and that he cannot hope to win.

In one variant, the officiating priest is Brihaspati—the planet Jupiter and family priest (*purohita*) of the devas, whom Ravana has compelled to serve him. Here Hanuman takes the form of a bee and lands on the manuscript from which Brihaspati is chanting while the latter has his eyes closed in meditation. The bee alters two letters to reverse the meaning, but Brihaspati knows the chant by heart and ignores the change, obliging Hanuman to assume a form so monstrous that the god-priest flees in terror. The goddess, annoyed by the interruption of her rite, abandons Ravana to his fate (H15:216–17).

13. In his "autobiographical novel," Mishra suggests this symmetry by having Hanuman remark, before setting out for Patala: "In searching for the Mother of the world, I once had to take to the skies. Now I am presented with the opportunity of journeying to the netherworld for the sake of my Lord and his younger brother" (H7:191).

23. Stealing a Magic Arrow

Though relatively uncommon in Hindi collections, this tale of another last-minute intervention by Hanuman is suggestive of a number of older Rama stories from northeastern India that feature what folklorists term the “life-index” motif: the existence of a magical object on which an enemy’s life depends, and its theft by a hero bent on slaying him. The story also relates to the theme, common in vernacular Ramayanas, of Vibhishana’s final betrayal of his elder brother (which, though deemed necessary, is often harshly judged by popular opinion). Thus in the *Rāmcaritmānas*, when Ravana sprouts a new head each time Rama decapitates him, Vibhishana reveals the existence of a “pool of nectar” in his brother’s navel, which Rama then dries up with a fiery arrow (6.102.1–103.1).

In a Virhor tribal story, Ravana’s soul is kept in a box, and Hanuman and Lakshmana break into Lanka and steal it (Govindchandra 1976:281). More commonly, Hanuman’s mission is to obtain a magic arrow or sword that Vibhishana has revealed to be the only means of killing the demon. Often it is hidden in Mandodari’s bedchamber or even under her bed. Hanuman takes the guise of a Brahman astrologer and, after winning Mandodari’s confidence, tricks her into revealing the arrow’s hiding place (H11:805–7; H15:219–21; Sen 1987:51; W. Smith 1994:187). In a variant attributed to the great Bengali mystic Ramakrishna, when Hanuman grabs the arrow and reverts to his monkey form, Mandodari tries to tempt him to give it back by offering a plate of fruits. Hanuman replies disdainfully that he already has the “supreme fruit” (*parama phala*; i.e., Rama) in his heart and doesn’t need hers (*Kalyān* 1975:419).

[Synopsis 7: Hindi-language retellings of Hanuman’s caritra stress his intimate relationship with Sita as a surrogate son, and storytellers paint a highly emotional picture of their reunion after the war when Hanuman brings the news of Rama’s victory. Sometimes whole chapters are devoted to this tearful scene, with the title “At Mother’s Feet” occurring in two collections (H4:201–7; H8:152–56), and one narrator claims that, since Hanuman brought the joyous tidings on a Tuesday, Sita blessed him to always be worshiped on that day (H19:176–77). Anyone familiar with the Rama story, however, cannot fail to be aware that Sita’s blissful reunion with her furry “son” stands in sharp contrast to her more problematic one with her husband. A few of the Hanuman collections, following the lead of Tulsidas, allude to the latter incident in a single sentence, as a sort of unpleasant formality (e.g., “This painful incident lasted but a little while”: H8:156; H14:210; “Mother’s fire-test took place and then everyone boarded the Pushpaka”: H7:205), but others skip it altogether, passing directly to the scene of the triumphant party returning to Ayodhya. Of course, the anguish of Sita’s public humiliation by Rama has resisted all efforts to efface it from the story. But the handling of the postbattle scenes in the Hanumāyana collections, at least, suggest that Sita’s erstwhile emotional link to Rama has now effectively been transferred to his emissary, a theme that I explore further in chapter 7.]

I must mention one other set of postwar stories that likewise link Hanuman and Sita but are mainly absent from modern Hindi collections, though they are found in premodern texts from Bengal and Assam: these are stories of a hundred- or thousand-headed Ravana who (like Ahiravana) proves to be too much for Rama. Instead, this demon must be slain by Sita, who assumes a ferocious shakti form for the purpose and is assisted by Hanuman (Coburn 1995; W. Smith 1994:141). A single text in my collection offers a version of this tale, in which Agastya informs Rama that he has not yet entirely lifted earth's burden; a hundred-headed Ravana—ten times stronger, naturally, than the one in Lanka—still lives across the sea. Hanuman grows to enormous size and flies Rama and his army to this king's realm, where they enjoy initial success against his troops. But when the demon learns of this, he merely laughs: "I don't fear even the gods, much less some fellow riding on a monkey!" Arriving on the battlefield, he knocks Rama and his brothers unconscious and hurls them into the sea. Hanuman extends his tail and fishes them out, then stuns the demon with a blow of his fist, provoking Hundred-Head's praise. No one can destroy the demon, however, until Sita (who has accompanied the party) assumes an awesome form and finishes him off. Hanuman then flies everyone back to Ayodhya (H12:32–33). That this northeastern tale should surface in a single collection published in Mathura is indicative of the unpredictable nature of Hanuman's still-growing saga.]

24. Anjana's Milk

This story begins as a conventionally emotional mother-son reunion, but then takes an unexpected turn. Anjana is portrayed not merely as a pious and tenderhearted old woman, but as the iron-willed mother of a warrior, who expects total self-sacrifice from her son. Storytellers like to dwell on her abrupt shift from maternal tenderness to angry, taunting criticism for Hanuman's supposed "failure" to properly serve his master and surrogate father. Her disapproval causes even the mighty Hanuman to tremble in fear, and the miracle of her milk reveals why: this old lady is full of raw shakti—not altogether surprising, since she has borne Shiva's seed. The mingling of power with maternal love suggests Hanuman's own trademark combination of shakti and bhakti, as well as the patriarchal and nationalist ideology that glorifies the role of such women in nurturing heroic sons; small wonder that this apparently recently minted tale is now found in eight of my sources.

25. The Priceless Necklace

A number of the most popular stories in this collection correspond to images that have been widely disseminated in the last century through popular art. The present one is associated with one of Hanuman's most eye-catching icons: the great monkey rending his chest to reveal the secret of his heart. That secret takes a number of visual forms—Rama alone, Rama and Lakshmana,

Rama and Sita, or simply the name *Rāma*—and this variety is reflected in written accounts as well. Similarly, the priceless necklace—consisting of pearls, diamonds, or unspecified “jewels”—may be presented to Hanuman by Rama or by Sita, and the protesting courtier may be Lakshmana (Rama’s frequent “straight man”), Vibhishana, guru Vasishtha, or someone else. Hanuman’s explanation may be brief or long, but the denouement is always the same: a dramatic act of self-mutilation culminating in a bloody epiphany that shames the scoffers and earns Hanuman an affirmation of the Lord’s favor. The chest-rending image has lately become as popular in sculpture as in poster art, and the main entrance of the famous Tulsi Manas temple in Banaras sometimes displays a life-size animatronic version, constantly opening its cupboard-chest to reveal illuminated figurines, while a tape-recorded voice booms “*Jay Śrī Rām!*”

The story has its roots in Valmiki’s account of the presentation of gifts to Rama’s allies, which includes Sita’s gift of a priceless necklace to Hanuman (6.128.82). That is as far as the old tale goes, however, and the earliest literary expansion seems to be in the Bengali epic of Krittibasa, wherein Lakshmana is the querying skeptic and the assembled courtiers behold hundreds of thousands of impressions of *Rāma-nāma* on Hanuman’s exposed bones (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:222; Govindchandra 1976:203). Tulsidas follows Valmiki and omits the story, but few modern narrators can resist its visceral effect; displaying, indeed, shakti and bhakti in a single riveting image, it appears in twelve collections. It also presents a good example of the adaptation of simian traits to a religious agenda; as the courtiers note, monkeys are fond of putting things in their mouths and of breaking hard objects in search of food. They conclude that even great Hanuman is “a monkey, after all!” (*bandar to hai*). In one version, Vibhishana remarks, “He may be celibate and foremost among the wise, but the monkey nature (*saṃskāra*) won’t go away” (H13:197), and in another Lakshmana blurts out, “Do you see, Lord? This monkey, due to his animal nature, doesn’t know the value of a jewel necklace!” (H15:229). All such scoffers, of course, are quickly and emphatically proved wrong.

To those devoted to chanting the Rama mantra, the story graphically illustrates their faith in the sonic impregnation of the physical body with the vibration of the Name, with a resulting transformation of the self. Hence it celebrates Hanuman’s role as an adept and preceptor of this practice, one in which he figures in many of the guru lineages of the Ramanandi order. In one such sectarian account, Lakshmana asks Hanuman how he came to have the Name inscribed throughout his body, and Hanuman replies that Sita wrote it on his forehead with her finger when she blessed him in the Ashoka Garden (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:407). In another version, Rama asks Hanuman what he is looking for in the jewels, to which Hanuman replies “Your name.” Rama then asks whether his name is dearer to Hanuman than Rama himself, and the monkey’s affirmative answer is accompanied by a discourse on the spiritual supremacy of the Name over its bearer (M. Joshi 2001:135). The cult of Rama’s name has grown far beyond sectarian perimeters, however; in many parts of India, *Rāma* has become a generic designation for the Supreme Being, and

some people repeat it a fixed number of times daily or write it out in notebooks as a devotional discipline (Lutgendorf 1994a). Mahatma Gandhi once retold the necklace story and remarked that, if people were to cut him open, they would find *Rāma-nāma* in him as well—a claim allegedly borne out by his utterance of it when the assassin's bullet tore into his chest (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:85).

Hanuman's self-inflicted wound is quickly healed, usually by the touch of Rama's hand, and this is often followed by the boon of physical immortality that will last as long as Rama's deeds are told in the world. In a variant account, however, Sita takes some vermilion from the part of her hair and applies it to Hanuman's chest; the blood-red powder closes and heals the gaping wound (e.g., H12:31). Sindur is said to have antiseptic and healing properties and to have been applied to battle wounds (Aryan and Aryan 1975:20), yet it is also clear that Sita's application of it has further significance, which the next story will make clear.

26. Covered with Sindur

Though this story seems to lack a premodern textual source, some version of it now appears in nearly every collection devoted to Hanuman. A scholarly storyteller such as Pandit Dube may offer it with a mild disclaimer, noting that it lacks a Sanskrit pedigree, yet proceeding to narrate it with gusto (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:336). Sometimes the story bears a title such as "The mystery (*rahasya*) of Shri Hanuman and sindur," suggesting that, to some modern readers, the archaic and widespread practice of applying oil and vermilion to certain sacred images now appears puzzling and in need of a narrative explanation, which the tale neatly supplies. Like the necklace story, this one dramatically displays Hanuman's excitable shakti and heartfelt bhakti, and then links both to a familiar ritual practice, for which it also supplies a *phalaśruti* declaring the "fruit" it will yield. It again highlights Hanuman's simian simplicity by showing his puzzlement over one of the most common diurnal practices of Indian women, as well as his clumsy effort to mimic this himself, resulting in a comic situation that is swiftly turned into a devotional lesson. The prelude to the story—Hanuman being denied entrance to Rama and Sita's bedchamber—though not found in all versions, hints at the association of vermilion with eroticism. In one version, Hanuman asks Rama why he loves Sita more than he loves him; Rama is embarrassed and evasively talks about liking Sita's practice of applying vermilion after bathing. Hanuman is puzzled, but he concludes that Rama is somehow crazy for the red powder and decides to cover himself with it (H19:133). Hanuman's childlike desire to be with Rama *everywhere* leads him to seek an inappropriate degree of intimacy, though from a certain devotional perspective there is of course no such thing. As I have noted, among devotees of the Rasik tradition, Hanuman has a feminine alter-ego as one of Sita's intimate friends, and in this persona he indeed participates in the passionate pastimes of the royal boudoir—in reality,

the divine play that sustains life and that is signaled by the life-affirming color of fire, blood, the sari of a bride, and sindur (HI1:237, 440–47; van der Veer 1988:162–64). Yet another, and not unrelated, explanation for the vermilion coating was given to me in 1989 by Pandit Gopinath Pannat of Banaras, who said that it resulted from Hanuman's having impersonated Devi (who is likewise covered with it) in order to slay Ahiravana (see Story 21).

Scholars have proposed other theories for the religious application of sindur. When combined with an aromatic oil (generally sandal, jasmine, or mustard), vermilion is thought to be “cooling” and so is applied to energetic deities who are understood to be characteristically “hot” and hence potentially dangerous. It may also be linked to the ancient anointing of yaksha stones and trees with animal blood; as this practice fell out of favor, especially with upper-class people, vermilion paste became a vegetarian substitute. In Indian alchemy, sindur is red mercuric oxide or cinnabar, a potent and life-extending substance associated with the union of sulphur and mercury—understood to be the menstrual blood of the goddess and the semen of Shiva (White 1996:194–95; see also note 7 in chapter 2).¹⁴ Whatever their historical merit, such explanations are remote from the understanding of contemporary worshippers, who simply regard sindur as auspicious and as pleasing to Hanuman. If they need further explanation, there's the story.

Several anthologies link the sindur episode with Tuesday and advocate reapplying the holy paste to Hanuman murtis on that weekday. As I have noted, repeated applications of sindur to stone images gradually efface their surface details. Devotees seem to instinctively understand that such visual modification—like the smoothing of metal icons through years of devoted handling—is a sign of the belovedness and power of these murtis. There are also stories of Hanumans that suddenly “shed” their sindur coat, built up through centuries, emerging from a massive shell that cracks and falls away. Such an occasion is considered especially powerful, and the news of a murti thus “manifesting” will quickly attract crowds of worshippers.

27. Service with a Yawn

The folksy detail and dialog in my retelling of this popular story, found in eight collections, is typical of the elaborate versions offered by modern Hindi authors, and suggests the storyteller's license to “domesticate” the august characters of sacred narrative (Ramanujan 1986:64–67). Most tellers seem to have no problem with depicting Rama's three brothers and even his beloved queen as self-interested schemers, and they appear to take real delight in

14. One commentator notes that, when Sita sees Hanuman covered with vermilion, she blesses him by uttering a half-verse now found in the *Hanumān cālīsā*: “[May] You possess the alchemy of Rama” (*Rāma rasāyana tumhare pāsā*). Here, he notes, the word “alchemy” (*rasāyana*) refers to Hanuman's sindur coating, which is associated with his physical immortality (HI3:199; see chapter 6 for additional discussion of Hanuman's link to the alchemical tradition).

Rama's amusing predicament and the minor crisis it precipitates. It is evidently a recent tale; no old sources are cited, and the bureaucratic "service timetable" seems a distinctly modern touch.

Several pieces of cultural information are relevant to this story. The first is the widespread Indian belief that the act of yawning—an involuntary opening wide of one of the body's "nine gates"—potentially exposes a person to the assault of malevolent forces that may be lurking in the environs, but that this can be offset by snapping the fingers of the auspicious right hand (a gesture called *cutkī* in Hindi; perhaps a reaffirmation of conscious control, and not unlike the Western custom of pronouncing a "blessing" after a sneeze). Another is the concept of "service" (*sevā*) itself—a term applied to activities ranging from humanitarian public works to the intricate rituals of temple worship that focus on the daily care and feeding of divine embodiments. According to some theologians, God (who is all-sufficient) really does not "need" such service, yet graciously accepts it out of compassion for devotees. But emotional bhakti may overturn the usual hierarchy of server and served and (as here) audaciously propose that for a wholehearted bhakta like Hanuman to render service is to make Rama an offer(ing) that he literally *cannot* refuse. Hence Hanuman's finger snapping, an act intended to "serve" Rama whenever he yawns, itself compels Rama to perform the act for which it is a response; to not do so would be to "refuse" Hanuman's *sevā*. Rama's apparent helplessness in the story—he seems almost a puppet whose strings Hanuman pulls from his hidden perch on the balcony—has a certain narrative charm, but also effectively conveys the bhakti concept that, paradoxically, the Lord of the universe is the slave of the love of his devotees. The appeal of this message explains, I think, why this story is included so consistently in the various collections, despite the fact that it casts their adored Lord Rama in an uncharacteristically discomfited role. Only a few texts attempt to sanitize it (by sparing Rama the continual yawning, H2:73–75; or by omitting the plot to deprive Hanuman of service, H13:222). The only other notable modification in my sources is an expansion of Hanuman's role: in Mishra's "autobiography," Hanuman invents the finger-snapping *sevā* fully knowing the mischief it will cause, as his way of "teasing" back those who have teased him (H7:293–301).

28. Fed by Sita

Traceable to the Bengali Ramayana of Krittibasa (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:119), this little story occurs in seven of my sources. Contemporary narrators delight in its sentimental depiction of an idealized domestic love feast, in which maternal affection takes the form of an abundant supply of delectable treats. Yet the real point of the story is to emphasize Hanuman's identity with Rudra/Shiva, the god who is ultimately all-consuming. A few storytellers seek to deflect the exclusive focus on Sita and Hanuman by having her, when all the food is gone, appeal to Rama for help; he then inspires her with the solution, or

himself comes and writes the mantra on Hanuman's back. A rarer Vaishnavized variant has Sita feed Hanuman, as a last course, a tulsi leaf (sacred to Vishnu) on which she has written Rama's name—which likewise fills him completely (H15:231–32).

29. Amusing Tales of Hanuman

These three stories come from a booklet titled *Hanumad vinod* (Chandrashekhar 1954), “The entertainment of Hanuman,” which suggests both that it contains droll stories *about* Hanuman, and stories that might serve to divert him from his more serious tasks. My collection includes one other work of this sort: *Hanumān kā byāh*, “Hanuman's marriage” (n.d.), with many of the same stories; its title page bears the notice, “For the amusement of children . . . hilarious, side-splitting stories of Bajrangbali Hanuman.” Although one still encounters such booklets now and then, it is my impression that they are being replaced by the more reverential narratives I described in chapter 3. Yet the chapbooks are not altogether lacking in devotion. “Hanuman's marriage” includes the sindur story (Story 26), and *Hanumad vinod* contains the finger-snapping story (Story 27), both of which are common in recent anthologies. Moreover, the publisher of “Hanuman's marriage” is the same Hardwar firm that issues three of the longer collections (H2, H4, H14), and its title story (29.c) also appears at length in Mishra's “autobiography” (H7:265–71). In addition, Story 29.a and that titled “The Crushing of Hanuman's Pride” (briefly retold below) also appear in H12. All of this suggests that comedy—Hanuman torching a foolish merchant's shop, or getting caught red-handed stealing fruit from boys—continues to have its place in the lore of the divine monkey, although it seems to be taking a backseat to more pious themes.

The attention-getting title of Story 29.c plays to the audience's knowledge that Hanuman is a lifelong bachelor and celibate. His proposed marriage begins as a little royal joke but then turns into a serious test of obedience. Mishra begins his version with Rama asking, in court, who his most devoted servant is. All present raise their hands, but Hanuman raises *three* (the third being his tail, which serves as an additional “hand” for a monkey), so he “wins.” Rama's jealous companions then propose that Hanuman's devotion be tested, and the marriage-scheme is devised for this purpose (H7:265–67). As the author of *Hanumad vinod* observes, Hanuman now faces an “ethical crisis” (*dharm sankat*): his vow of celibacy versus obedience to his Lord. Normal bhakti etiquette would favor the latter, but the wily monkey manages to insert an escape clause. In Chandrashekhar's retelling, he beats Manthara, presumably to give her an idea of what married life with him would be like. In Mishra's version, Hanuman uses no violence but grows to immense size, terrifying Manthara into abandoning her enthusiasm for the match (the author seems unaware of any sexual overtones). Neither version, of course, shows the least concern for the deformed old servant woman, who is the villainess par excellence of many Ramayanas.

30. Whose Servant Is Hanuman? and 31. Narada and Hanuman

Stories 30 and 31 are further examples of modern tales occasionally encountered among devotees. The former occurs in two Hindi collections (H1:37–39; H11:460–64) and indicates storytellers' concern to position Hanuman in relation to his *two* masters, who are also understood as a divine dyad (represented by the name *Sītā-Rāma*, which some devotees favor as a mantra over *Rāma*), yet who, within the narrative, necessarily retain individual personalities. The second is in none of my printed collections but was recorded by me in Ayodhya during a storytelling session in April 1990 by the distinguished *Rāmcaritmānas* expounder, Shrinath Mishra. Here it is Narada who succumbs to a modicum of pride, and as in Story 27, written record keeping suggests modern bureaucracy. Such touches help keep Hanuman stories fresh while conveying a familiar message: here, that Hanuman's special intimacy with Rama transcends the "frequent-worshiper incentive program" of conventional, transactional religion. This, of course, is precisely what makes him such a valuable intercessor for drudges like us.

32. Saved by the Name

This is another story concerning which Pandit Dube observed that, although absent from authoritative Sanskrit texts, it was "current among enthusiastic devotees and oral storytellers (*kathāvācak*)" (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:339). Apparently it has remained so, for it is retold in eight Hindi collections. Some introduce minor modifications; one storyteller omits Hanuman's mother and has Narada advise the king of Kashi to seek shelter with Hanuman himself (H17:47–48); another has the showdown occur outside Anjana's retreat and involve a real battle between Rama and Hanuman, broken up by the arrival of Narada and Vishvamitra, who arbitrate (H12:33–34). In Swami Prem's version, the offender is the gandharva Chitrasena, who accidentally spits betel juice on the testy sage Durvasas, who complains to Rama; the rest of the story follows the version I have given, except that Rama provides Hanuman with a magic club to be used to defend those who repeat Rama's name (H18:276–84). In a more significant variant, the king is omitted and Hanuman himself is tricked by Narada into insulting Vishvamitra, the sage's motive being to prove the superiority of the Name over its bearer (*nāma* vs. *nāmī*; H13:216–17). Finally, one elaborate version posits the ill will of Shani (Saturn), as the cause of the crisis. Here, Rama and Lakshmana both pursue the hapless king, and Hanuman is supposed to assist them. But when the king seeks Anjana's protection, Hanuman is faced with another *dharm saṅkaṭ*: to obey his master (and surrogate father) Rama or his mother. Viewers of Hindi films will not be surprised to learn that he chooses the latter course. As in the Ahiravana story, Hanuman then coils his tail into a fortress in which he places the king and before which he seats himself in meditation, chanting the Name. Rama's and Lakshmana's

weapons prove useless, and ultimately Shiva intervenes to pacify them (H15:245–47). The storytellers' usual choice of Vishvamitra as the offended character is significant, since he was once an arrogant Kshatriya who, by superhuman effort, transformed himself into a Brahman, hence he remains hypersensitive about receiving all the requisite prerogatives.

In all versions, the story celebrates the power of the Rama mantra (being careful to include its three most common variants) and Hanuman's special relationship to it. Dube notes that the king has been "initiated" (*dikṣit*) by Hanuman in the mantra and its use (*Kalyān* 1975:342), and this recalls the Ramanandi doctrine that Hanuman is one of the great preceptors of the spiritual discipline of "remembrance of the Name" (*nāma smaraṇa*). Indeed, in one recent version, when the king's voice falters in his repetition, Hanuman enters his throat and takes up the chant (H19:351–54). For his part, Rama—who relentlessly pursues a status-based notion of "dharma" regardless of the cost—here seems to be fading into the cosmic clockwork, to become just another of the adverse forces we humans are likely to find aligned against us. Yet a remedy is at hand, in the form of an intercessor who has managed to wrangle the boon of defending us against adverse fate and even "God himself."

33. Initiation from Sita-Rama

Though less a story than a discourse, this episode recurs in six collections and is evidently considered to impart not simply a standard Vedantic message on the unity of the self and the absolute, but evidence of Hanuman's authority as a preceptor of such teachings. All the texts draw on (and most cite) the "esoteric" *Adhyātma rāmāyaṇa*, in which Shiva reveals to Parvati an instruction given by Sita to Hanuman (I.I.25–56), which in turn leads to a revelation from Rama himself, a passage known as "the heart of Lord Rama" (*śrī Rāma hṛdayam*, I.I.44–52; 1985:5–9). Three sources add an epilogue in which Rama, on a subsequent day, "tests" his pupil's understanding; Hanuman passes with flying colors, delivering a terse Sanskrit shloka, the basic meaning of which I have conveyed but the deeper implications of which each storyteller expounds at greater length (e.g., H8:198–99; H14:244–45; H18:290–92).

[Synopsis 8: Many Ramāyanas end their narrative with Rama and Sita's installation on the throne of Ayodhya and their long and happy reign. The Hanumāyana, however, presupposes the darker events described in Valmiki's controversial seventh book, Uttarakāṇḍa, which includes the tragic story of Rama's banishment of his queen to the forest, where she gives birth to twin sons in Valmiki's ashram. In view of the special relationship between Sita and Hanuman, these events may be expected to have a great effect on the latter, and indeed we find Hanuman in many stories torn between his loyalty to Rama and his adoration of the wrongly accused Sita. Several tales depict him (and Rama) as profoundly depressed following Sita's departure; Sudarshan Singh's narrator remarks, "In Mother's absence, I felt as if I were only half alive," and goes on to observe that Rama covered his own pain through fastidious

activity, a strategy that Hanuman found “unbearable” (H14:246). How Hanuman passes the time without Sita is the subject of the next tale, and his reunion with her becomes the dramatic climax of Story 35.^{15]}

34. Composing a Ramayana

Although Sanskrit literary history celebrates Valmiki as “primordial poet” (*ādi kavi*), popular tradition has long maintained that it was not he, but Hanuman, who composed the original Rama narrative—or that they worked contemporaneously, but Hanuman’s version was better. The roots of this tradition, as of so many, may lie in Valmiki’s own account, for his Hanuman is a master storyteller who recites Rama’s geste on numerous occasions and with spell-binding effect (e.g., to Svayamprabha, Sampati, Sita, Bharata, etc.), and whose very being becomes so entwined with the tale that his physical life is to last as long as it remains current in the world (Sattar 1990:210–41). It might appear that one way to ensure such immortality would be to inscribe the tale—on crystal rocks, no less—but although this story depicts Hanuman whiling away the ages in this manner (note that Rama reigned for 11,000 years), it also reminds us that we are in a land where written texts have often been considered more ephemeral than speech. Ultimately, this story is about renunciation (*tyāga*), not writing, and this is evidently an aspect of Hanuman’s persona that is considered more important than his rhetorical skills. Selfless and compassionate, his loyalty is to the tale and not to any particular telling, and he willingly drowns his own masterpiece to spare a poet’s wounded pride. Thus the first and greatest Ramayana—like the original, unitary Veda—is lost, preserved only in fragments in these fragmented times.¹⁶

Sattar cites a variant story in which Hanuman composes his tale on paper rather than on stone. When he finishes, he becomes so exuberant that he runs to the top of a mountain and throws the work into the air, and the wind disperses the leaves to the four directions. Hanuman is unconcerned, but Valmiki rushes about gathering up as many sheets as he can find, which become the basis for his own *Rāmāyaṇa* (ibid. 212–13). Like the Ramayana-on-the-rocks story, this one obviously reflects a chirographic milieu (in most versions, Valmiki scans the sort of text-covered wall now common in temples),

15. Kirin Narayan has shared with me an oral tale she recorded in Kutch, after inquiring concerning a murti in which Hanuman appears with a woman on his shoulder. She was told that the female figure was “Mother Fate,” whom Hanuman accosted and brought to Rama’s court in order to question her as to why she had “written” such injustice for Sita. Not content with her replies, Hanuman began beating her and pulling her hair, whereupon Fate challenged him with a conundrum: “Who wrote that I should be mistreated by you in this way?” Hanuman’s anger cooled and he asked the goddess’s forgiveness, but he continued to weep over Sita’s destiny.

16. The eleventh-century Sanskrit play *Hanuman-nāṭaka* claims, in its final verses, to be fragments of the lost poem, recovered from the sea by King Bhoja and edited by his courtier Damodara Mishra (*Hanuman-nāṭaka* 14.96; 1978:255–56).

yet it highlights the true artist's concern for the *process* of storytelling rather than its reified *product*—an attitude shared by many oral narrators, who show little interest in having their tales “reduced to writing.”

Several authors note a similar tale concerning the Bengali mystic Chaitanya, who is said to have thrown a brilliant treatise into the Ganga because it made a friend's work look shabby; possibly this story inspired the present one (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:367). Five versions of the story conclude with Valmiki vowing to be reborn in the kali yuga as Tulsidas in order to serve Hanuman and retell his *Rāmāyaṇa*, this time in the language of ordinary people. They thus serve to enhance the link between Hanuman and the putative preceptor of his devotion in North India. Bulcke reports two more variants in which Rama himself gets involved; in one, he orders Hanuman to destroy the poem after Valmiki complains that, as the work of an eyewitness, it will eclipse his own account. In the other, Rama settles an argument between Hanuman and Valmiki over a narrative detail in the latter's favor, and a frustrated Hanuman then opts out of the writing business (Bulcke 1999:540). One storyteller has Hanuman destroy his narrative before it is complete, hence he is always wandering around trying to hear the rest of it (H14:250).

35. The Sacrificial Horse

This is not a single story but a cycle of tales set during a year of wandering in the wake of a stallion destined for the great *āsvamedha* ritual, the royal horse sacrifice of Vedic civilization. The narrative, which appears with little variation in ten collections, constitutes yet another mini-epic, sometimes comprising as much as a tenth of a Hanuman biography. It, too, has ancient roots. Valmiki's rambling final book includes an *āsvamedha* for which Lakshmana accompanies the horse on its wanderings; little is said about the journey, however, and Hanuman plays no role in it (7.85, 92). There is also an episode devoted to Shatrughna, whom Rama dispatches to slay a demon-king named Lavana and whose adventures are described in greater detail. On his journey, Rama's youngest brother twice visits Valmiki's hermitage; he is present when Rama's twin sons are born and then returns twelve years later to hear the singing of Rama's story; again, Hanuman plays no role in any of this (7.61–71). A more elaborate horse-sacrifice story appears in Bhavabhuti's (ca. eighth-century) Sanskrit play *Uttararāmacarita* (“the later deeds of Rama”) but likewise without Hanuman's involvement (Govindchandra 1976:166). Somadeva's copious story anthology *Kathāsaritasāgara* (ca. eleventh century) includes a tale in which the twins Lava and Kusha challenge Rama's army (Bulcke 1999:174). An expansion of Hanuman's role occurs in the Sanskrit *Āsvamedha parva* (“episode of the horse sacrifice”) of the *Jaiminibhārata* (ca. twelfth century), a work that presents itself as a supplement to the *Mahābhārata* and that seems to incorporate lore from northeastern India. Here Lava and Kusha capture Rama's horse and slay Shatrughna and Lakshmana; Rama then sends Bharata

accompanied by Hanuman and other champions; Hanuman is captured, and the others slain. Valmiki eventually revives the dead and unites the boys with their father (W. Smith 1994:64–65). The whole tale cycle, more or less as it is retold today in Hindi and with Hanuman playing a central role, appears in the *Pātāla khaṇḍa* (“netherworld book”) of the voluminous *Padma purāṇa*, a work cited by several modern storytellers.

The elements of the cycle’s enduring appeal are obvious: a martial quest punctuated by marvelous feats and furious battles (and, this being India, esoteric sermons and beatific visions), all culminating in a dramatic episode of mistaken identity that climaxes with the recognition of long-lost sons—in short, most of the requisite ingredients (apart from romance) of a Bombay film. The individual tales (which are usually presented as such in Hindi anthologies, with headings like “Hanuman’s Combat with Shiva” and “Liberation from a Curse”) reiterate several of Hanuman’s standard roles: he facilitates devotees’ access to Rama (sage Chyavana in Story 35.a, King Subahu in 35.b, and King Suratha in 35.e), mediates in the apparent rivalry between Shiva and Vishnu (Story 35.c), and narrates the Rama story while displaying his power over psychically invasive spirits (Story 35.d).

He plays another role as well, for in most Hindi collections there occurs, after the final battle, no reconciliation of Sita’s sons with their father. Although Lava and Kusha, in stealing the horse and fighting the army, are ostensibly just behaving like plucky Kshatriya lads, they have good reason to have a chip on their shoulders, at least where a stallion from Ayodhya is concerned: their mother has been horribly wronged. The audience knows this and senses that the boys—despite their rote training in Rama’s virtues—know it, too. They are after revenge, as they make clear in some retellings by ridiculing Rama and his vaunted allegiance to “propriety”; Mishra’s Lava calls Rama “a hypocrite who has nothing to do with *maryādā*” (H7:347). Some eastern Indian storytellers take the challenge further and, following the deaths of Shatrughna and Pushkala (and sometimes Lakshmana and Bharata as well), have Rama himself appear on the battlefield, where he is likewise defeated—even killed—before being identified and, of course, miraculously revived (W. Smith 1994:64). Even the less radical Hindi versions of the *aśvamedha* story give us reason to doubt whether Lava and Kusha’s eventual return to Rama—like their mother’s reunion with him after the war—will actually be very happy. But if Rama and the boys cannot display the emotional effects of their long separation and sudden reunion, Hanuman and Sita rise to the occasion. As in the *Sundarakāṇḍa*, it is again Rama’s emissary who becomes his emotional stand-in, savoring the full poignancy of the situation and displaying the requisite feelings, especially toward his long-lost “mother.” In discussing Story 34, I noted the theme of Hanuman’s depression caused by his separation from Sita; one version of the Lava-Kusha story from the Kathakali dance theater of Kerala eliminates the horse sacrifice and has Hanuman come to Valmiki’s ashram alone, simply in order to be near Sita and protect her. He takes the form of an ordinary monkey and follows her,

jumping from tree to tree; eventually, her sons capture him, and it is then that she recognizes him (*Hanumat vibhuti* 1987:63).

A further set of northeastern tales linking Hanuman with Lava, Kusha, and Sita warrant mention here. Though absent from modern Hindi anthologies, they are represented by two substantial works in Assamese, the *Pātāli kāṇḍa* (Book of the netherworld) of Dvija Panchanana and the *Adbhūta rāmāyaṇa* (Astonishing Ramayana) of Raghunatha Mahanta, both probably dating to the eighteenth century.¹⁷ These works take up the Ramayana story where others end it—with Sita's descent into the earth—and explore her subsequent life in the netherworld. Sita misses her sons and asks local serpent deities to kidnap them from Ayodhya. When the boys disappear, Hanuman is commissioned to bring them back. As in the Ahiravana cycle, he descends to the netherworld and assumes a variety of shapes (including that of his own corpse, in an effort to convince Sita that he is up to no mischief), before eventually triumphing and returning not only the boys but also their mother to Rama, with whom Sita is at last reconciled. Mahanta's Sita makes one final effort to outwit Hanuman by multiplying herself into an array of doubles; when Hanuman cannot recognize the real Sita, he threatens self-immolation. Unable to bear this, Sita reveals herself (W. Smith 1994:29, 157–60).

36. Rama's Boon to Hanuman

Hanuman receives boons of immortality several times in the Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa*, and in one of its final passages, Rama, who is about to relinquish his body in the waters of the Sarayu, alludes to the monkey's prior "resolve" to remain on earth and charges Hanuman to delight in hearing his story and obeying his wish (7.108). Hanuman's life is evidently to continue as long as the story endures, but some later narrators set more precise time limits. The *Adhyātma rāmāyaṇa* gives Hanuman's lifespan as a *kalpa*, after which he is to obtain the state of "communion" (*sāyujya*) with Rama (6.16.14–17). In this text, Sita is still with Rama and adds her own boon: that Hanuman will always find "pleasure" (*bhoga*) wherever he goes, a term generally assumed, in this context, to refer to edibles; some later storytellers link it to the abundant sweets offered to Hanuman in contemporary temples. In a premodern work known as the *Tattva samgraha rāmāyaṇa* (Ramayana of collected secrets) Rama gives the boon that, in the next eon, Hanuman will be reborn as Brahma and create the world; this promise is echoed in the modern *Hanumān rāmāyaṇa* (Govindchandra 1976:298; H11:709). Whatever Hanuman's ultimate fate, his condition, from the human point of view, is essentially one of corporeal "immortality" (*amaratva*); I consider the implications of this in chapter 6.

17. The latter work should not be confused with a late Sanskrit text of the same title, although both contain a good deal of Hanuman-centered material.

37. A Favor for Krishna

This is the first of a series of tales in which Hanuman humbles the pride of key figures associated with Krishna. The stories thus effect a link between many people's favorite Ramayana character and Vishnu's arguably most popular avatara, the beguiling blue-skinned flute player. The story is at least as old as the Marathi chronicler Mahipati's late eighteenth-century *Santavijaya*, in which it appears as a tale told to Swami Ramdas by Maruti himself (Mahipati 1932:134–39). It occurs with much consistency in eight of the longer anthologies, and is often told with humorous, colloquial dialog, some of which I have translated. In addition, my texts offer two variants on the story. One features Vishnu lying on his serpent bed on the ocean of milk, rather than Krishna. Garuda and Sudarshan play the usual roles, and Lakshmi is the proud queen who proves to be no substitute for Sita (H17:49–52). This last detail may seem odd to readers who assume that the Ramayana's heroine is actually an incarnation of Lakshmi, just as Rama is of Vishnu. But to many Ramanandi devotees, this is not so. For them, Sita-Rama (a divine dyad) is the primordial godhead, of which all other deities are emanations. Lakshmi is a separate and subsidiary goddess, never to be compared to Rama's inseparable shakti.

The beginning of another version resembles that of Story 39 (below); Krishna's proud beloved (here, Rukmini, another of his favorite queens) demands flowers from "Rama's forest," a sacred Himalayan grove guarded by Hanuman. Krishna sends Garuda to get them, but Hanuman challenges him, saying that the flowers are only for Rama. Garuda says, "Try stopping me." They fight, and Hanuman puts Garuda in his armpit and flies to Dwarka with such velocity that he creates a tempest that terrifies the city's inhabitants. Seeing Hanuman in the sky, they think him a demon and ask Krishna to protect them. Krishna responds by hurling his discus. Hanuman puts it in his other armpit and lands on the roof of the palace, frightening Rukmini. Krishna explains that this is Rama's great devotee, Hanuman, and that if he isn't pacified, he'll destroy all of Dwarka. Rukmini should take the form of Sita, and Krishna will take that of Rama. They do so, and Hanuman bows and places flowers at their feet. Krishna asks Hanuman what he has in his armpits, and Hanuman replies, "A half-dead bird, and some sort of metal wheel, which tried to stop me." Thus the pride of Garuda and Sudarshan is crushed, and Hanuman departs (H12:42–43). That Rukmini gets away with her masquerade in this version may reflect the fact that the text comes from Mathura, where Krishna and his consorts enjoy special veneration.

38. Humbling Arjuna's Pride

This story appears in virtually every collection, though with a range of variants. It is traceable to the *Ānanda rāmāyaṇa* (9.18.1–45) in which it appears essentially as in my retelling, except that it is Krishna's discus (*cakra*), rather

than a tortoise, that supports the bridge. The tortoise—itsself recalling Vishnu's *kūrma* avatara, which supported the cosmic mountain during the churning of the milk-ocean—appears in the *Tatva samgraha rāmāyaṇa* and subsequently seems to have become the more popular motif (Govindchandra 1976:290–91). One storyteller, for good measure, includes both, and two others do not specify how Krishna holds up the bridge, though they note that he sheds blood in the process. The location of the incident also varies; some accounts place it in the Himalayas, where one has Krishna send Arjuna to “Rama’s grove” to bring flowers for Queen Satyabhama (a motif that also occurs in Story 39); Hanuman guards the grove and challenges him (H12). In Hardwar, where the Ganga emerges from the Himalayan foothills, I was shown a spot along the river where, according to local people, Arjuna erected his arrow-span. But others locate the tale in the far South, at Rameshwaram, which marks the mainland terminus of the causeway and provides an obvious incentive to Arjuna to critique Rama’s earlier feat. Arjuna’s contempt for Rama is common to all versions, and in some he expresses this to Krishna himself, saying “Why did you go to all that fuss of bridge-building in your Rama incarnation? Bridges can be made of arrows!” Krishna then challenges Arjuna to fabricate such a bridge and mentally summons Hanuman to test it (H2:93; H19:388–89).

Apart from depicting Hanuman in the now-familiar role of chastener-of-pride, the story accounts for his presence on Arjuna’s battle standard. The great hero of the *Mahābhārata* is regularly referred to as “monkey-bannered” (*kapi-dhvaja*), and most audiences assume that the *kapi* is Hanuman, particularly in view of the latter’s promise to Bhima to indirectly assist the Pandava brothers in battle (see the next story). For this reason, several narrators append to the bridge story brief anecdotes that expand on Hanuman’s role in the war: e.g., Krishna instructs Arjuna to repeat the “Hanuman mantra” one hundred thousand times to ensure victory; according to this author, Arjuna thus becomes “the first person to worship Hanuman as God,” and Krishna then instructs Hanuman to accept such worship in the ensuing kali yuga (H19:178, 389). From his perch on Arjuna’s flag, Hanuman enjoys the privilege of hearing the *Bhagavad-gītā* and witnesses the revelation of Krishna’s cosmic form (H7:353). At the start of battle, Krishna admonishes Hanuman not to roar, noting, “This is not the treta yuga, but the dvapara. If you bellow, these warriors’ hearts will burst” (H14:277). During a particularly fierce encounter with Arjuna’s rival Karna, the chariot backs up a few inches, and Krishna applauds Karna’s skill. Arjuna gets annoyed, because Krishna has never applauded him even though he has caused countless chariots to retreat. Krishna then humbles him with the reminder that Hanuman himself is sitting on their chariot, and yet Karna has managed to move it slightly; were Hanuman not there, Krishna adds, Arjuna’s vehicle would have been burned to ashes. Indeed, after the battle, Hanuman descends from his perch, and the chariot bursts into flame (H2:94; H8:232; H19:392). One of the more tantric-flavored collections adds the interesting claim that Hanuman takes the form of his half-brother Bhima to carry out the most gruesome of the killings that

occur during the battle: the ripping open of the chest of Duhshasana, whose blood Bhima/Hanuman greedily drinks (H17:55). Clearly, this is not the vegetarian monkey of most of the bhakti-oriented anthologies.

39. Encountering Bhima

This is one of the earliest extra-Ramayana Hanuman stories, since it occurs in the *Mahābhārata*; as such it may be considered the archetype for the later tales in which Hanuman chastens the pride of various figures. It is a stock feature of the Hindi collections, though told at greater length in the *Mahābhārata* (3.146.6–150.27); my own synopsis mainly follows the epic but adds a few details from modern sources (e.g., Hanuman offering Bhima a banana, H17:58). The ancient narrator seems to have fully savored the irony of the situation and

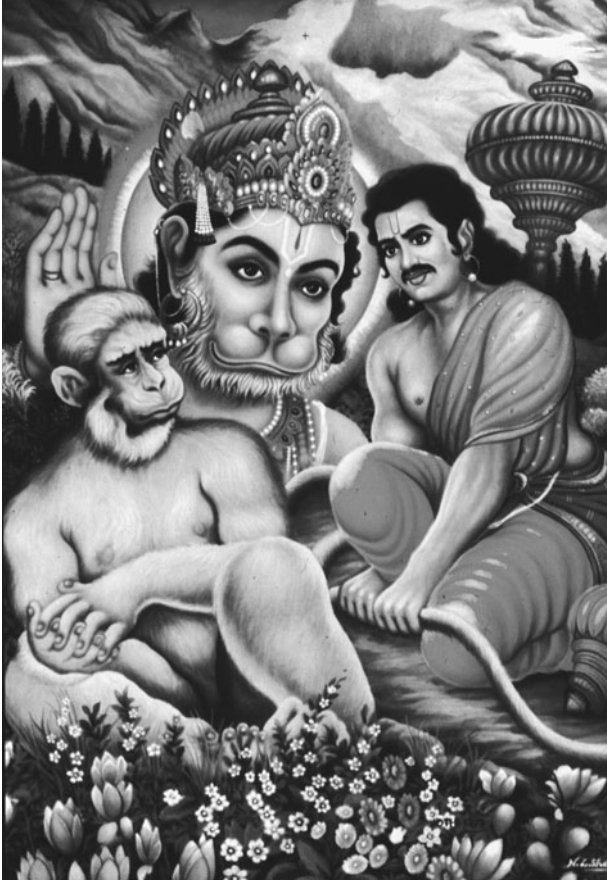


FIGURE 5.8. Bhima attempts to lift Hanuman's tail; poster, late twentieth century

also the opportunity to muse on the implications of physical immortality, though the monkey obviously protests too much about his age and infirmity. We find him apparently “retired” to a magical forest where both his favorite food and preferred entertainment are plentifully at hand, and we witness an ironic reversal of roles: Bhima, plowing through the orchard, behaves like Hanuman in Ravana’s garden, whereas Hanuman is now the guardian and preceptor who passively defeats the brash young warrior and then reveals to him the mystery of the inexorability of time (itself one of the grand themes of the *Mahābhārata*). After a little coaxing, Hanuman offers a dazzling epiphany, prefiguring Krishna’s self-revelation in *Bhagavad-gītā* 11. Finally, he agrees to lend his support to the Pandavas, albeit indirectly, by becoming a heraldic emblem on Arjuna’s banner and a terrifying amplification of Bhima’s roar.¹⁸

40. The Defeat of Shani

The black-faced deity Shani is the *bête noire* of Indian astrology, the nastiest of the planetary forces that impinge on earthly lives. As the story indicates, his *sārhe sāti* or seven-and-a-half-year progressions through zodiacal signs bring both physical and mental ills and are thought to be especially hard on older people. In the poetry of his later years, Tulsidas refers to the afflictions of such a cycle of Shani and it is believed that this deity caused the rheumatic pain that prompted him to compose the *Hanumān bāhuk*. Astrologers still do a great business selling sapphire rings, which are thought to give some protection from Shani’s sinister gaze. His influence extends to the day of the week named for him—in Hindi as in English—Saturday (*Śanivār*), and when it rolls around it is customary to take protective measures. Protracted worship of Shani is rare; poster images show the god in his chariot drawn by a crow, and here and there small Shani shrines draw a Saturday clientele. In North India it is common to see, on Saturday mornings, metal basins on city streets, containing a puddle of mustard oil in which passersby toss small coins. Sometimes the pans are decorated with a crudely cut out figure of black sheet iron, garlanded with marigolds. All these are signs of Shani, to whom the base metal iron is pleasing. So is mustard oil, and the Hanuman stories provide one explanation of why. They also explain why Hanuman temples are usually packed on Saturdays.

Both versions offered here occur in multiple sources, generally enhanced with juicy colloquial dialog. For Story 40.a, I have closely followed Sudarshan Singh (H14:283–85) and for 40.b, Jayram Mishra (H8:233–35). Dube states that the story is taken from a Marathi source (H4:310), and it is notable that many Maruti temples in Maharashtra contain a small icon of Shani who is worshiped with oil offerings on Saturday. These stories are also about the kali yuga, which is likewise associated with the color black and with iron—the

18. Sattar offers an insightful reading of this episode as part of her analysis of Hanuman’s “family” connection with Vayu and Bhima (1990:183–96). I discuss this story further in chapter 6.

“dark” or “iron age.” It is also, given its interminable duration, something of a metaphor for the human condition; we have always lived in it and always will, though stories help us to “remember” brighter days. In chronicling the discord that ushers in this grim era, the *Mahābhārata* offers a Hindu narrative of the “fall” of humanity into its present debased condition. The Hanuman-and-Shani stories present a similar scenario: Vishnu incarnate packs up and leaves the earth, initiating a general exodus of auspicious supernaturals who head for more salubrious worlds. Poor humans are left to fend for themselves and at the mercy of cosmic bullies like Shani. Fortunately, they have a champion who, like them, stays on earth, but unlike them, has no fear of Shani or his club-wielding brother, Yama. Even more than in the tales of Bhima, Arjuna, and the rest, readers can relish the well-deserved chastening of Shani’s pride, however it is administered—through crushing beneath boulders or pummeling by the ever-resourceful tail—even as they can hope that the ill-omened god will keep his promise. The stories thus provide another charter for the worship, in the present age, of a “subordinate” deity who, paradoxically, is most able to render divine assistance under humanity’s straitened circumstances. The great variety of manifestations that Hanuman assumes in response to his kali yuga worshipers forms the subject of the next chapter.

Concluding Note

One way of understanding the appeal of Hanuman’s biography—whether presented as an epic poem, a prose story cycle, or a first-person narrative—is to see it as, at many points, mirroring an idealized Hindu male life pattern. After being ardently anticipated, an adorable and adored infant is showered with gifts by doting relatives. He is vigorous, possessed of a hearty appetite, and fond of putting things in his mouth—a trait he will retain. He is much loved by his mother (a role shared by two women) and throughout his life will maintain a close relationship with her, ever eager to please her but also fearing her high standards and occasional rebukes. His physical father is a distant figure of no emotional importance to him, and his place is taken by a succession of spiritual fathers to whom he devotes himself. As a young child, he is given great license to do as he pleases and becomes unruly but is then reigned in by male authority figures. His socialization transforms him from hyperactive child to docile, submissive student. Packed off to boarding school, he easily excels in all subjects. His adulthood includes a career of heroic quests and conquests as the energetic deputy to an idealized boss. Although he never marries, he fathers a son and eventually becomes the avuncular preceptor to numerous young charges. Late in life, he writes a book of memoirs and, following his master’s departure from earth, begins a prolonged retirement that he devotes to meditation and storytelling. He ages and even displays the weakness and infirmity of the elderly—although he can still recall and manifest the vigor of his youth—but, of course, he never dies. His biography is unfinished, a life-in-progress; like a second self, he remains with us.

However, this synopsis, which underscores Hanuman's kinship with (at least some) human beings, is only intended to supplement my broader interpretation of his complex mythic persona and not to reduce it to a simple psychological caricature. Valmiki's Hanuman has already been subjected to a reductive Freudian analysis as an "imaginary companion" expressive of infantile longings (Masson 1981), a condescending interpretation that, in my view, ignores many dimensions of his personality and appeal. The recent translators of the *Sundarakāṇḍa* have given a more balanced assessment that is closer to what I intend here, suggesting that Hanuman presents simultaneously a "resource of empowerment" and a model of self-restraint and deference to authority, a paradoxical combination that is nevertheless highly valued, and thus offers "a kind of normative ego-ideal for South Asian society that is perhaps more compelling than even that of his omnipotent master" (Goldman and Goldman 1996:84, 86). Indeed, I will have more to say, in chapters 7 and 8, about the ways in which Hanuman may come to supersede Rama.

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6

Sitings and Sightings

Hanuman in the Cultural Landscape

Then Sita spoke, greatly pleased: “Son of the Wind, wherever
you reside,
by my decree you will always receive abundant offerings.
In villages, fields, cities, and cowsheds, by roadsides, in hamlets and
homes,
forests and forts, on hilltops and in all temples,
by rivers and pilgrim places, by tanks and in towns,
in gardens and groves, under fig and banyan trees, and in [sacred
sites like] Vrindavana,
men will worship your image to assuage their afflictions, and
when you are remembered, ghosts, goblins, and ghouls will flee.”
—*Ānanda rāmāyaṇa* 1.12.146–48

Sita’s blessing to Hanuman, contained in a ca. fifteenth-century Sanskrit epic that incorporates much lore absent from older versions of the Rama story, seems intended as an ex post facto prophecy of a proliferating cult already evident to its author. Developments during succeeding centuries have made it appear all the more prescient, and it is sometimes quoted today in explanation of Hanuman’s great visibility. The present chapter documents this visibility through the evidence of temple surveys and recently published guides to Hanuman shrines, and then offers more detailed descriptions of a small number of sites, each suggestive of aspects of Hanuman’s character. It also considers the implications of Hanuman’s bodily immortality: the lore and experience of his embodied presence as well as his occasional manifestation in human exemplars.



FIGURE 6.1. Murtis outside a sculptor's studio; Assi, Varanasi, 2006

In many rural areas, Hanuman has long been worshiped as a protective deity who polices the boundaries of human habitation against the incursions of malevolent spiritual forces—a role he sometimes shares with other gods, notably Bhairava (aka Bheru, Bhairon), his fellow club-wielding avatara of Rudra/Shiva. Both deities are often found on the outskirts of villages in Rajasthan, and may also stand as paired doorkeepers of goddess temples in the Punjab hills (Erndl 1993:4). The Kannada saying, “There is no village without a cock and a Hanuman temple” (from the Bellary District Gazetteer of 1916, cited in Ghurye 1979:152) probably alludes to this guardian role; a more emphatic Maharashtrian variant omits the cock and substitutes Maruti, Hanuman’s local name (Feldhaus 2003:148). Similarly, Govindchandra reports that when a new village is settled in West Bengal, it is customary to first establish a Hanuman image to protect the inhabitants’ wealth, fields, and livestock (Govindchandra 1976:305). A talismanic function may also explain the placement of Hanuman at the gates of medieval forts, as in Salem district of Tamil Nadu, a region not otherwise associated with his extensive worship (Ghurye 1979:153).

In certain urban centers as well, Hanuman appears as guardian of a settled or sacred area. The planned city of Jaipur, established in 1728, featured Hanuman temples at its southern and western gates, each facing a

traditionally inauspicious direction. The pilgrimage town of Nathdwara in southern Rajasthan, dedicated to Krishna as Shri Nathji, boasts four such shrines at its cardinal portals, as does, on the opposite side of India, the great temple of Jagannath in Puri (D. Gupta 1980:268; Soni 2000:302, 306). Similarly, Vrindaban, the heartland of north Indian Krishna devotion, is said to be ringed by protective Hanuman shrines on its circumambulatory track. Such placement of shrines—like the siting of Ganeshas above doorways or of directional guardians on the outer walls of temples—suggests an important but limited role for the deity, though this may at times be belied by the attention that an individual, off-center image occasionally receives. I noted in chapter 2 that the mere presence of Hanuman on temple columns and friezes does not constitute proof of his independent worship, and I agree with Ghurye's contention that freestanding images or shrines, however modest, are more compelling evidence "of the deity being considered to be a fairly important god, with a set of more or less complex beliefs and practices centered on it" (1979:148). In both Jaipur and Vrindaban, residents told me that although Hanuman was once regarded mainly as a boundary guardian, he had in recent times become the principal deity of temples erected in all parts of the city, a shift that they considered significant.

Historical evidence for the proliferation of Hanuman shrines is, as I have noted, available for areas of present-day Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh. Records of the Maratha Empire at the close of the eighteenth century indicate that of a total of 250 temples endowed by the Peshwa's treasury, the largest number (fifty-two) were dedicated to Maruti (Hanuman)—compared to forty to Shiva, thirty-six to Ganesha, thirty-four to Vithoba (a local form of Vishnu/Krishna), and eighteen to Rama (Deming 1928:10). Similarly, a temple survey of Pune under Bajirao II in ca. 1810 records (out of a total of 395 shrines) eighty-nine dedicated to Maruti (again, the largest number), sixty-four to Shiva, sixty-one to Vithoba, sixty to Ganesha, and twenty-one to Rama (Ghurye 1979:147, 162). A survey of the same city conducted in 1954–57 showed Maruti continuing to lead with ninety-two shrines, and a contemporaneous study of 114 villages in the Pune region yielded similar results.¹

When I was researching *Rāmcaritmānas* performance in Banaras in 1982–84, I was told that Hanuman had begun to rival Shiva (from whom, of course, Banarsis do not always distinguish him) as the most popular god in town. When I returned to the city to study Hanuman's cult in 1989–90, I undertook a walking survey of three of the city's 434 neighborhoods

1. The survey recorded 139 Maruti shrines (again, the largest number to a single deity), compared to 118 to Shiva and 175 divided between some thirty-four local goddesses (Ghurye 1979:164–65). Pune remains dotted with small Maruti temples, many of which bear colorful names indicative of the local communities that established and first patronized them. Among those I visited on a brief tour in 2001 were "Potato Maruti" in a former vegetable market adjacent to the Peshwas' palace, a sindur-covered mound with eyes known as the "Cannabis-sellers' Maruti" (*bhāṅgyā Māruti*), and a beautiful black image on a street corner in the Budhwar Peth "red-light" district, formally called Vijay ("victorious") Maruti, but more commonly the "Whores' Maruti" (using *chināī*, a Marathi slang word for prostitute).

(*muhallās*), chosen randomly, recording the Hanuman shrines they contained. I extrapolated on this basis a conservative estimate of two thousand to three thousand such sites for the city as a whole. Yet my more interesting findings concerned the specifics of local sites, such as the twelve shrines I counted in the market area of Visheshvar Ganj, frequented by wholesale merchants, truck drivers, and pushcart vendors, and bearing names (typical of those in the wider city) suggesting Hanuman's role in relieving the troubles of his devotees: *Ādi cintā haraṇ* Hanuman ("Hanuman, remover of worries," the word *ādi* or "original" distinguishing it from supposedly less-ancient shrines bearing the same name), *Kaṣṭ haraṇ* Hanuman ("remover of afflictions"), *Mankāmnā pūrṇ* Hanuman ("fulfiller of the heart's desire"). There were also shrines identified by the size of their images—one *Bare* or "big" Hanuman and two *Choṭe* or "little" ones—and others whose names might mislead someone unfamiliar with Hanuman's association with other deities, such as the *Guṛeśvar mahādev* temple, located in the wholesale sugar market and dedicated, apparently, to Shiva as "lord of *gur*" (raw sugar)—except that its interior contained only a small lingam, but a huge murti and several wall paintings of Hanuman. Sometimes a modest temple at the base of a peepul tree would elicit a story of local personalities and politics, such as *Pragāsbīr* Hanuman in the neighborhood known as Dara Nagar. This temple was built in the early 1970s by one Ramshankar Singh, aka Lallu Singh Pahalvan, who for about a decade prior to his death in 1976 reigned as Banaras's most famous "goonda" (*gūndā*, a hoodlum or ruffian); his career suggests the ambivalent meanings that this term connotes in the city. A poor boy who became a famous wrestler, Lallu Singh allegedly moved from petty theft to profitable protection rackets, building a fortune with which, it is said, he gave dowries to poor girls from the neighborhood. Long in the service of a Brahman family of powerful politicians, Singh later had a falling out with his patrons and was killed in a controversial police "encounter." It is said that one hundred thousand people marched in his funeral procession. The tidy Hanuman temple in the heart of the neighborhood, another demonstration of his piety and largesse, is now his principal legacy.

In several neighborhoods, small but famous temples housed murtis said to be "ancient" (*prācīn*), "self-manifest" (*svayāmbhū*), or among those established by Tulsidas, yet there was general agreement that they had come to prominence only in recent times. Thus it was said (in 1990) of the Hanumans of Nichi Bagh and Kabir Chaura, known for the paralyzing traffic jams created around their roadside shrines on Tuesdays and Saturdays, that only a few decades before they had received little notice. Several miles to the south, *Senāpati* Hanuman ("Hanuman the General"), also known as *Bankatī* Hanuman ("Hanuman of the cleared forest"), is located on a narrow lane behind Assi Ghat in a settlement of tiny houses inhabited mainly by Dalits. Many stories circulate about this "self-manifest" image, said to have been found centuries ago when the forest was cut down in the southward expansion of the city. Yet there is general agreement that it was little visited until the early twentieth century, when (local people say), nationalist leader Madan Mohan

Malaviya began stopping here for prayers after his morning bath in the Ganga, and then kept a forty-day vigil to obtain Hanuman's blessing for the establishment of Banaras Hindu University in 1916. A small temple was erected in 1939 and a grander superstructure incorporating a temple to Shiva was added in 1970. The site now enjoys citywide fame and, because of its cramped location, is almost impossible to approach on peak attendance days (Katz 1993:171–73).

Similar narratives of rapid development can be offered for other Hanuman temples in Banaras, and indeed for hundreds throughout India. They reflect cultural ideas concerning the sudden “awakening” (*jāgrti*) of sacred images, often through the efforts of a human exemplar, but also point to the fact that temples to the god who is easy to please are likewise easy to found: the ritual installation (*sthāpnā*) of a Hanuman murti, like the daily worship of one, is a simple procedure that need not require priestly mediation. That such convenience may lend itself to motives other than devotion was suggested by several of my interviewees, who claimed that Rama's plucky assistant is now the favorite deity of “land grabbers” and “encroachers,” both on crowded urban thoroughfares and in village-owned (*gāmv-sabhā*) fields. A common scenario described to me was of an image appearing overnight—“they will say that it was *svayambhū* or that somebody was instructed in a dream to establish it”—and then of people beginning to worship it. The founder might quickly attach a small shop selling garlands, incense, and *pān*, or even a house, and though some people would grumble, “no one would be able to oppose it, for fear of angering Hanuman-ji.” In urban areas, such opportunistic shrines not only block pedestrian walkways and obstruct traffic but sometimes take on a volatile communal dimension, as when an image “manifests” provocatively close to a mosque (as has occurred in the Banaras weavers' area of Sonarpura) and soon acquires worshipers, a pujari, and even a sign declaring it to be “ancient.” Any “insult” to such sites may be viewed, by self-proclaimed “defenders of dharma,” as an act that justifies violent retaliation. Hanuman's facility at broad jumping into new locales thus provides incentive to both subaltern entrepreneurs and communalist agents provocateurs.

A Monkey's Guide to India

With a Hanuman on every corner, why would one need to travel anywhere to see him? Yet the concept of “pilgrimage to holy places” (*tīrtha-yātrā*) as an efficacious and accessible religious activity is very old in Hinduism, and texts that catalog such sites and the beneficial “fruits” (*phala*) they yield form an important subgenre of scriptural literature, beginning with the lengthy *Tīrthayātrā parvan* of the *Mahābhārata* (3.80–153) and continuing (and expanding) in the *māhātmyas* (encomiums of sacred sites) and *tīrtha-yātrā khaṇḍas* (“pilgrimage books”) of many Puranas. These texts seem intended less as guidebooks for would-be pilgrims than as public pronouncements, set in the divine language, of the sacrality of various sites and indeed of whole

regions, and also perhaps as vicarious verbal pilgrimages for the homebound, the mere reading or hearing of which confer merit. Given the chronology of the rise of Hanuman worship, it is not surprising that his shrines are absent from older texts of the *tīrtha-yātrā* genre. Even premodern devotional writings in Hindi make little mention of temples, despite the fact that older bhakti literature includes many paeans to murtis residing at specific sites. However, recent *Hanumāyana* literature includes several works containing substantial sections devoted to temples, which constitute an emerging *tīrtha-yātrā khaṇḍa* of the Son of the Wind. In this section I briefly survey this literature, offer my own abbreviated catalog of some of the sites it celebrates, and reflect on several themes implicit in it.

I possess no examples predating 1975, the year in which *Kalyān* devoted its special issue to Hanuman. In addition to the lengthy biography cited earlier, the anthology featured a thirty-seven-page guide to “principal pilgrimage places” (*pramukh tīrthsthal*) connected with the deity (431–68). In keeping with the upper-caste piety of *Kalyān*, the section opens with a “request to readers” enjoining them to remember that the supreme focus of their devotion ought to be Rama and not his servant. The editor then concedes that many devotees do venerate independent images of Hanuman and concludes that this is all right because Sita and Rama are “present in Hanuman’s heart” (ibid. 431)—this serves to introduce accounts by forty-two regional contributors who lovingly catalog a total of 181 temples, mainly grouped by state (Assam, Maharashtra, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, etc.), or by cultural regions, both small (“Braj”) and large (“the South”).

Daudayal Gupta’s 1980 book *Hanumān mahimā* (The greatness of Hanuman) includes a section titled *Tīrth khaṇḍ* that runs to seventy-nine pages, describing 161 sites (201–80). Bhagvatisharan Mishra’s 1987 “autobiographical novel” incorporates a tour of fifty temples in its opinionated, first-person narrative, wherein a rationalist Hanuman laments the superabundance of shrines: “a Hanuman-ji of the fort, the station, the market”—even “Hanuman-ji of the jail” (212). He also complains (echoing the Gita Press editor) that worshipers elevate him above his master—but here Rama himself interjects: “Go ahead and eat all those *laddus*! In the treta yuga, you had to fill your stomach with fruit. Now in the kali yuga, enjoy sweetmeats, even if they are made with Dalda instead of ghee!”² (ibid. 212). Although Raghunath Prasad Sharma’s impressive *Kāljayī Hanumān* (Hanuman, conqueror of death; undated, but from the 1990s) features only fifty-two shrines in its *Citra khaṇḍ* or “picture section,” it offers a color image of the murti in each, so that readers “seated at home may obtain the bliss” of a pilgrimage (v). The selection reflects the author’s own peregrinations, and each photograph is accompanied by anecdotal information as well as travel directions suitable for pilgrims of modest means (e.g., “take a *tempo* [a three-wheeled country taxi]

2. “Dalda” is an Indian brand name for a hydrogenated vegetable shortening similar to American “Crisco.” It is considered a vastly inferior substitute for traditionally valued but expensive ghee (clarified butter).

from the railway station”). Finally, Ramdev Prasad Soni’s glossy hardback *Māruti mahimā* (The greatness of Maruti, 2000) presents a condensed temple tour that encompasses an impressive 177 sites. The author draws on *Kalyān* and his own experiences, supplemented by simple lists for a few regions (292–306; cf. Nagar 1995:287–91).

The authors of these works invariably include certain famous temples and thus further contribute to their visibility. Yet most also include lesser-known sites of special significance to the author. Thus Sharma’s first photo and description is of “Patna Junction Mahavir,” located outside a railway station in Bihar and the deity to whom the author, a resident of Patna, has dedicated his volume. This shrine came to prominence in the early 1930s through its association with a charismatic sadhu, and its present structure was erected in 1983 under the patronage of an officer in the Indian Security Force. It contains two murtis placed side by side, and a third Hanuman in the form of an aniconic cone (*piṅḍ-rūp*) that is taken out in processions. Notes Sharma, “This Mahavir temple is a seat of power (*siddh pīṭh*), for here devotees invariably obtain their hearts’ desires” (n.d.:377).³ Sundd, author of the eccentric *Sri Sankat Mochan Hanuman Charit Manas*, devotes seven pages and a color plate to a temple in his hometown of Nurmahal, Punjab. Mentioned in no other collection, this site reveals veneration of Hanuman within the *nirguna* devotional tradition associated with the eighteenth-century poet-saint Gharib Das (1998:453–60). And although Soni, a resident of Allahabad, includes a description of that city’s famous “recumbent Hanuman,” he gives lengthier treatment (and dedicates his book) to a suburban temple described by no other author: the “Miraculous Hanuman-ji of Kailash Mandapam,” located “in an alley thirty feet from the road in Rajruppur.” Recently carved out of a dark-green boulder, this image “awoke” by itself when only half finished and began showing a reddish color on its face, chest, thighs, and feet, a miracle of “self-manifest sindur” that attracted huge crowds (2000:295).

All textual Hanuman pilgrimages include the sacred city of Banaras, where they first visit the Sankat Mochan temple (to be separately discussed below). But most also note “Great Hanuman” (*Barē Hanumān*) in the monastery of the Juna Akhara at Hanuman Ghat (*Kalyān* 1975:435; R. P. Sharma n.d.:384). Some say he manifested from a charcoal image drawn by Swami Ramdas, but local sadhus maintain that the murti dates to the time of Rama’s pilgrimage to nearby Kedar Ghat, to establish a lingam in atonement for slaying a Brahman, Ravana. “Great Hanuman” appears in tall relief, his tail rising into a massive silver-sheathed spiral that suggests a mysterious rune. His face is turned southward (*dakṣiṇāmūrti*), a pose said to manifest particular shakti because he is looking toward Lanka and also because it was in the

3. A Bihari acquaintance told me in 2002 that the patron, Kishore Kunal, created a trust that built a large temple and introduced a “Brahmanical structure” to Hanuman’s worship, so that now “we cannot see Hanuman-ji from the road and do *namaste* without going inside the temple.” Kunal became prominently involved with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the right-wing Bharatiya Janta Party (see chapter 8) during the Ayodhya controversy.

South that he was “awakened” by Jambavan’s speech. Guidebooks also mention several small “childlike” images at Tulsī Ghat, located in and around the house in which Tulsīdas spent the latter part of his life. A chamber on its lower level is said to be where the poet composed some of his most famous works, reciting them to *Gufā ke Hanumān* or “Hanuman of the cave,” and where he passed away in 1623 at the age of eighty (*Kalyān* 1975:434–35).

Accounts of Ayodhya often begin by noting that Hanuman is the reigning deity in this “city of Rama”: “On reaching Ayodhya, some pilgrims may pass up having darshan of Sita-Rama, but they will definitely seek that of Hanuman-ji” (Soni 2000:293; cf. R. P. Sharma n.d.:379). Explanations of this are variously “Vaishnava” or “Shaiva” in flavor. It is said that Rama turned the city over to Hanuman when he left the earth; hence a modern guidebook begins with the matter-of-fact observation, “Lord Hanuman is the present-day king of Ayodhya” (Bhagirathram 1978:17), and the Banaras Ramayani who guided me on my first visit in 1982 remarked pragmatically that I should guard my belongings against the king’s ubiquitous “troops,” who exercise “monkey sovereignty” (*bandar rāj*). Noting that Ayodhya’s most important temples are Hanuman Garhi and Nageshvarnath (a riverbank shrine to Shiva as *Nāgeśvara*, “lord of serpents”), a 1963 pamphlet adds that, since Hanuman is an avatara of Rudra, both sites honor him. “Common pilgrims bathe in the Sarayu, pour a jug of water over Nageshvar, then take darshan in Hanuman Garhi, and their pilgrimage is complete. Only the educated know of places like Kanak Bhavan, the Janambhumi, and so on” (R. Pandey 1963:2–4).⁴ The author calls Hanuman the “principal deity” of Ayodhya, and by highlighting his Shaiva genesis underscores the conclusions of some academic historians that present-day Ayodhya was in ancient times a Buddhist, Jain, and later Shaiva and Nath yogi center that gradually became “Vaishnavized” and associated with the Rama story (Bakker 1986:1–59; van der Veer 1988:14–18, 92–95, 142–51).

Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh, is invariably cited for two temples in the Aliganj area that date to the period of nawabi rule of the kingdom of Oudh (Avadh). Most authors agree that the Shri Hanuman temple, though the newer of the two, is the city’s most renowned, and its great festival, the *Mahāvīr melā*, held each year in the month of Jyeshth (May/June), is said to rival the Shi’a Muharram festival and, like it, to attract the participation of all religious communities. A special feature of this festival is the vow (*sankalp*)

4. In recounting the history of Hanuman Garhi, the author emphasizes the protracted and violent contest over the site between Shaiva sannyasis (depicted as tyrannical and arrogant) and righteous Ramanandis; Muslims figure primarily as later patrons of the temple (Ramgopal Pandey 1963:4–8). It is indicative of the time line of rising Hindu nationalism that the author of this now-rare 1963 pamphlet (which I read in 1990 in the private library of Ramkumar Das at Mani Parvat) two decades later would contradict his account of the relative status of the city’s well-known sites in a much-reprinted chapbook on the “blood-soaked history” of the Rama birthplace, in which he alleged that it had been Ayodhya’s chief object of devotion (and of fierce contest with Muslims) for hundreds of years (Pandey 1987, 1989). On the fame of Hanuman Garhi, see also *Kalyān* 1975:432; B. Mishra 1987:225; R. P. Sharma n.d.:379; its administration by Ramanandi Nagas has been described by van der Veer (1988:151–59).

taken by many male worshipers to circumambulate the temple with full-body prostrations, or by rolling in the dust, while clad only in red loincloths. This vow may be performed in gratitude for the fulfillment of a request (*manauṭī*), or to petition for one. The temple is also said to provide, free of charge, outfitting for Hanumans being established elsewhere: red loincloths, crowns, bells, silver parasols, and other items “blessed” by having been briefly used by the murti here (*Kalyāṇ* 1975: 435–36; Gupta 1980:219–221). The older Aliganj murti is claimed to be “self-manifest,” and its legend links it to both the Ramayana and the nawabs. Buried in a hillock in a garden known as Islambari, it was revealed to Begum Rabia, the wife of Nawab Muhammad Ali Shah in ca. 1800, after Hanuman gave her darshan in a dream and blessed her with a son. Subsequently, the murti was excavated, and plans were made to move it to a grand temple on the opposite bank of the Gomati. However, when the elephant bearing it stopped near the river and refused to go forward, a sadhu told the Begum that Hanuman wished to remain on that spot. Later it was revealed that Islambari had in ancient times been called Hanumanbari (“Hanuman’s orchard”), and marked the site where Hanuman stood guard over the pregnant Sita while she rested overnight during her journey into exile at Rama’s order. Lakshmana, who was overseeing this mournful march, had gone across the river to rest in his own palace (for the name Lucknow is said to derive from *Lakṣhaṇāvātī* or “Lakshman’s city”), but Sita and Hanuman had refused these comforts; now the murti was continuing to show unwillingness to enter the city of the man who had helped exile his beloved “mother” (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:436; D. Gupta 1980:221–22).

Some of the many Hanumans in the Braj region, heartland of Krishna devotion, may predate the establishment of sectarian Vaishnava bhakti there in the sixteenth century, for they suggest the deity’s longtime association with fecundity, Shiva, snakes, and ghosts. The author of the *Kalyāṇ* article “Famous Hanuman Images of Braj,” calls Hanuman the “patron deity” (*iṣṭadev*) of Braj, who protects mothers and children from evil spirits and whose local form of Languriya (a complex persona discussed in the next chapter) is venerated as a cow-dung image at the time of the festival honoring Mount Govardhan. Even the temples now integrated into the Krishna cult retain a raw and folksy edge, such as Hathilo Hanuman, which celebrates a “tenacious” (*hathilā*) little monkey who grabbed morsels when Yashoda was feeding infant Krishna, or “Looter” (*luṭeriyā*) Hanuman, on the Mathura-Vrindaban road, who assisted Krishna in pilfering the butter pots of the market-bound gopis (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:438–39; the present-day macaques of the town are infamous for similar depredations).⁵

The famous “recumbent Hanuman” (*leṭe* or *bhū-sāyī Hanumān*), also known as “Hanuman of the fort” (*bandhvā ke Hanumān*) stands, or rather lies,

5. As noted previously, “Hathile” is also the name of one of the “five saints” (*pañc pīr*) of popular Sufism, who was once worshiped on the hill where Hanuman Garhi now stands (van der Veer 1988:149–51). I say more about the likely substitution of the worship of Hanuman for that of Sufi masters later in this chapter.

near the “triple confluence” (*triveṇī saṅgam*) of the visible rivers Ganga and Yamuna and the invisible Sarasvati, at the ancient site known as Prayag, outside modern Allahabad. The huge murti, buried in the sandy riverbank, is approached by descending a flight of steps, and “they say that only after having his darshan does a bath in the *saṅgam* prove fruitful” (D. Gupta 1980:219). According to one account, it was being transported down the Ganga by a wealthy merchant some 200 years ago, when the boat ran aground and tipped over, hurling the image onto the sand. All attempts to dislodge it failed, and Hanuman revealed in a dream that he wished to remain at the confluence (R. P. Sharma n.d.:380). But another story maintains that the image washed ashore in a mighty flood, and when Muslims later attempted to remove it, “no matter how deep they dug, the image kept sinking into the earth” (Soni 2000:294). The motif of a murti that “grounds” itself by sinking or by proving to be rooted so deeply that its base can never be excavated is common to a number of prominent Hanumans. That the riverbank at Prayag is a point of transit between worlds is suggested by the presence of a “Patalapuri” (“city of the netherworld”) temple inside the fort (D. Gupta 1980:219). When I visited Recumbent Hanuman in 1990, a sadhu identified two oblong shapes on the murti’s shoulders as Rama and Lakshmana, a smaller simian figure at Hanuman’s feet as his son Makaradhvaja, and a fourth figure as the goddess of Patala. The murti, he explained, shows Hanuman at the moment of his victory over Ahiravana. The fact that several other prominent temples are linked with this narrative—including Gervi Hanuman in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh, said to mark the spot where Hanuman took the form of a bee (*gerṇī*) while searching for the entrance to Patalapuri (R. P. Sharma n.d.:399); and the rare eleven-headed Hanuman of Porbandar, Gujarat, believed to embody the form Hanuman took to slay Ahiravana (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:461)—is another indication of this story’s popularity.⁶

Some seventy miles south of Allahabad, near the pilgrim site of Chitrakut, stands another temple that figures in virtually every Hanuman tourbook. Perched near the summit of a wooded hill and approached by 350 stone steps, “Hanuman’s Stream” (*dhārā*) commands a sweeping view of the region where Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana are supposed to have resided for a dozen years. The shrine’s back wall is a cliff into which its chunky, larger-than-human-size murti is carved and from which a stream of water emerges to flow over Hanuman, cooling him, it is said, after his exertions in burning Lanka (ibid. 435).

Although most travelers associate the coastal city of Puri in Orissa with the ancient Jagannath Temple to Vishnu, the city’s Hanuman shrines are also famous enough to figure in most of my sources. In addition to the four “gatekeeper” shrines at the cardinal portals—one of which, an 18-foot image at the south door, is called “ear-protecting” (*kānpātā*) Hanuman, because he

6. Note also the recumbent *Pātālī Hanumān* (“Hanuman of the netherworld”) in the Omkareshvar (Shiva) Temple in Khandwa, Madhya Pradesh (R. P. Sharma n.d.:402). In Maharashtra, several famous shrines adjoin snake holes in which Hanuman is said to reside in naga form (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:453–54).

keeps the roar of the sea from disturbing the tranquility of the sanctum—popular sites include Makaradhvaja Hanuman (who carries a sword in one hand and a crocodile banner in the other), and *Uṛantā* (“leaping”) Hanuman, who stands on the spot where, in the sixteenth century, an enormous monkey vanished after straightening the finial of the Jagannath Temple, which had been bent in a typhoon. *Beṛī* or “chain” Hanuman (also known as *Dariyā* Hanuman or “Hanuman of the sea”) was installed to protect the city from inundation by storm tides. This arrangement worked well (the story goes) until Hanuman abandoned his post to go for darshan of Jagannath. When residents complained about this, the Lord advised them to chain Hanuman to his post, but since ordinary bonds could never hold him, he was secured with gold links inscribed with Rama’s name. According to the guidebooks, however, the most venerated Hanuman in Orissa is in the village of Siruli on the Puri-Bhubaneshwar road and known simply as Mahavir. A 10-foot,



FIGURE 6.2. A Hanuman poster from Gujarat; late twentieth century

black stone murti believed to have emerged from the earth, its left eye gazes through a small window toward Puri, some 13 miles away, while its southward-looking right eye “paralyses the demonic powers of Lanka” (R. P. Sharma n.d.:422).

On the opposite coast in Gujarat, Hanuman sometimes appears as a stout figure with a handlebar mustache, as in the Sarangpur temple to the “crusher of sorrows” (*kaṣṭ-bhañjan*) at the headquarters of the Swaminarayan sect. Baring his teeth as he subdues a female demon below his left foot, he stands amid sculpted foliage full of fruit-bearing monkey attendants (ibid. 406–7). The netherworld resurfaces at Bet Dwarka on the Arabian Sea: “Patalapuri lies beyond here,” a guidebook notes, and so Hanuman is known as *Dāṇḍīyā* (“club wielding”) for the enormous cudgel that lies at his left hand, to keep the demons submerged; his son Makaradhvaja stands alongside (ibid. 409; cf. *Kalyāṇ* 1975:462). In the Saurashtra region, several Hanuman shrines adjoin the 1,500 steps of the sacred Girnar Mountain, and darshan of another at its summit, nearly concealed in a rock cleft, is said to instantly dispel the fatigue of the climb (R. P. Sharma n.d.:411–14).

Some older Rajasthani images are also thickly mustachioed, evoking a martial ethos; they are often known as *Bālā-jī*, an epithet usually understood to mean “child” or “beloved” but possibly also related to Sanskrit *vāla*, the “hairy tail” of an animal. Two of the most famous are at Salasar and Menhdipur, and both now attract pilgrims from distant places (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:463, 465–67; Soni 2000:305). The Salasar Balaji, who also sports a beard, is located in a village in Churu District and is known chiefly for his largesse and curative powers. According to legend, he appeared in ca. 1750 in the form of a sadhu, befriending a pious farmer named Mohan Das and assisting the local raja in a battle. Meanwhile, a peasant in another village found a buried murti while plowing his field; it spoke and asked to be taken to Salasar, where the grateful raja provided a temple. Today the image rests on a golden throne, and huge dharamshalas accommodate the thousands who come to hang coconuts, representing their requests, on a tree in the courtyard (the equally popular Balaji of Menhdipur has a different specialization and will be discussed in the next section). At Khole, a place on the Jaipur-Delhi highway that was once thickly forested, an eighteenth-century sadhu named Narvar Das had Hanuman’s darshan in the form of a rock outcropping. Now covered with sindur and supplied with eyes, the recumbent image retains an organic shape. According to Sharma, “this is the spiritual heart of Jaipur,” and on Tuesdays and Saturdays it hosts a “huge fair” (R. P. Sharma n.d.:404).⁷

Maharashtra abounds in Maruti temples, many of which (such as the *akarā* or “eleven” Marutis in Satara, Sangli, and Kolhapur Districts, associated with the forms of Rudra) are said to have been established by Swami Ramdas (Feldhaus 2003:148–56). Many also contain unique murtis, such as the

7. For additional famous Jaipur-area murtis associated with the Ramanandi lineage of Galta, see Horstmann 2002:155–56, 177, 184.

Maruti of Khed village, which was once tiny but began to grow. When it reached 5 feet in height, a local carpenter who was worried that the temple roof would soon be too low to contain it pounded a nail directly above its head, halting Maruti's growth but, alas, also that of the carpenter's lineage, which soon became extinct (the apparent moral: "Don't fence Maruti in"). The "very ancient" Maruti of Rampayli village, district Bhandara, marks a site where Rama is supposed to have halted on his wanderings in search of Sita (hence the village name, meaning "Rama's feet"; similar claims are made for many Deccani settlements), but the special prodigy of its Langra Maruti is that whereas one of his legs is "lame" (*laṅgrā*), the other extends so far into the earth that villagers have never been able to find its end. At Belgaum, a black Maruti flanked by two small Shiva shrines is said to have been endowed by the sultans of Bijapur. The many Hanumans of Mumbai and Pune draw a similarly diverse clientele; that of the South Indian neighborhood of Matunga in Mumbai is reputed to attract Parsi, Christian, and Muslim devotees (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:454–55; D. Gupta 1980:246).

No Hanuman tour of South India will overlook the Hospet region of Karnataka, site of the medieval city of Vijayanagara and reputedly of the treta yuga monkey kingdom of Kishkindha. Near the Tungabhadra River, a hill known as *Añjanādri* (Anjana's hill) is topped by a small, whitewashed temple said to mark Hanuman's birthplace—a claim shared with at least two other sites (one in Nasik district, Maharashtra, and one in Ranchi district, Bihar; see Aryan and Aryan 1975:25–26; *Kalyāṇ* 1975:446, 478). Inside, a 6-foot relief image is carved, like many of the hundreds of Hanumans in the Vijayanagara ruins, directly onto the side of a boulder. The profusion of murtis in this region is also attributed to the influence of the Madhva sect, and at its headquarters in the coastal town of Udipi, worshipers first take darshan at a small Anjaneya shrine before proceeding to the main temple to Krishna. At Yalguru, Hanuman is adored as prana, the cosmic demiurge and intercessor of Madhva theology (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:448; D. Gupta 1980:258).

Though numerous, South Indian Hanumans generally receive less detailed treatment in my Hindi-language accounts, but most authors mention the 20-foot murti in prayerful pose at Suchindram, Tamil Nadu (said to represent the colossal form Hanuman took to reassure Sita in the Ashoka Garden), or the numerous shrines at Rameshwaram, associated with the crossing of the sea. There is also a famous Hanuman at Kanyakumari, the southern tip of India, and another at nearby *Marutvāmalai*, a 1,600-foot hill said to be a fragment of the herb-covered peak brought by Hanuman to heal Lakshmana. Every year during the month of Karttik, an all-night bonfire is lit on its summit to evoke the luminosity of the *sañjīvanī* herb (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:450; D. Gupta 1980:262–65, 266–67).

The examples offered above are but a small sample of the rich lore assembled in the Hanuman *tīrtha-yātrā* texts, which feature miraculous speaking and shaking Hanumans, subterranean and submerged Hanumans, and Hanumans emerging from boulders or (like Sita) from farm furrows. But from these catalogs of wonders also emerge some recurring themes that I would

now like to consider. A first observation concerns the geographical distribution of Hanuman shrines and, by extension, of Hanuman worship. Certain regions of the subcontinent receive little mention even in the most comprehensive catalogs, and although (as I have noted) the northern orientation of my sources must be taken into account, the presence of large gaps in otherwise ambitious “all-India” compendia is at least suggestive. Thus no guidebook mentions a single Hanuman temple in West Bengal outside Calcutta, where several famous shrines (such as the “self-manifest” image in Hanuman Lane, near Howrah Bridge) appear to represent the patronage of immigrants from Bihar and Rajasthan. A mere handful of sites are listed for the other northeastern states, for Orissa beyond Puri, and for Andhra Pradesh, and no guidebook even mentions Kerala. Based on this evidence, the stronghold of contemporary Hanuman devotion appears to be in the Indo-Gangetic basin and in a region extending south and southwest through Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Karnataka. Interestingly (and as chapter 5 has shown), several of the areas little represented in the temple guides nevertheless preserve, in local Ramayana retellings as well as folk tales, abundant lore foregrounding trickster-like aspects of Hanuman’s personality that have been downplayed in regions where his worship has become more established or more subsumed within a framework of Vaishnava bhakti (e.g., on the magnified yet “burlesque” Hanuman of northeastern India, see W. Smith 1994:183–89).

A second observation relates to the chronology of the rise of Hanuman’s worship proposed in chapter 2, which is underscored by these guides. Although there are occasional references to images said to be “seven hundred” or “more than a thousand” years old, the great majority of sites for which historical data (however unverifiable) is presented are no more than 300 or 400 years old, and most are more recent. A pattern in the accounts is of a charismatic holy man (a *bābā* or sadhu, often a Ramanandi) finding, installing, or taking up residence near a murti, often in a sparsely inhabited or forested area, during the nineteenth or early twentieth century. The sadhu’s austerities and daily worship are said to make the image siddha (in this context, “charged”), and it attracts other worshipers, and then eventually (but usually not until the second half of the twentieth century) acquires a permanent superstructure and receives more elaborate forms of worship (*sevā*), sometimes by Brahman priests. By showing the greatest proliferation of Hanuman bhakti to have occurred during the colonial and post-Independence periods, such accounts belie the claims (often made by the same authors) that this god’s popularity arose as a Hindu response to the “atrocities” of Muslim rule.

In addition, the very appearance of pilgrimage catalogs as a subgenre of Hanuman literature during the post-Independence period reflects not only the proliferation of sites but also the increasing literacy and mobility of rural and lower-middle-class people. Hindus on the move often seek out, in new places, popular shrines to their favorite deities, and these accounts combine local traditions with Ramayana lore to envision a subcontinent in which Hanuman is decidedly “on the map” for pilgrims. The socioeconomic background of imagined readers is suggested not only by the instructions, already noted, for

reaching destinations by inexpensive public transport, but also by the modest opening refrain, found in many accounts, “Although the temple is quite small. . . .” Indeed, Hanuman shrines (excepting the recent spate of monumental murtis described in chapter 1) generally *are* small and unpretentious, and larger ones often display a pattern of piecemeal growth—with side shrines opportunistically sprouting from the principal site like the aerial roots of banyan trees—rather than the preplanned architectural visions of wealthier patrons. But the “although” clause concerning modest size invariably precedes a confident claim about efficacy: “Here there is an extremely powerful, wish-fulfilling murti,” or “This is a totally charged place, and no devotee returns without receiving Hanuman-ji’s grace.” Such claims abound even in the pages of *Kalyāṇ*, mocking the editor’s plea that worship ought to be “desireless” (*niṣkāma*); clearly, most Hanuman pilgrims bring desires and expect results.

Finally, I detect hints of a grander vision at work here than the mere cataloging of local shrines. In the Sanskrit shastras, recurring numerological patterns impose meaningful design on the chaotic world of everyday experience, and in the realm of *tīrtha-yātrā* literature, such patterns sanctify the landscape by linking diverse sites in a geometric mandala (as in the concept of the “four *dhāmas*” or divine “abodes” located at the cardinal “gates” of the subcontinent) or in an anthropomorphic configuration (as in the scheme of fifty-two “seats” of the goddess, where fragments of her dismembered body fell to earth). For Hanuman’s pilgrims, the “master narrative” remains the Ramayana, itself a saga that (in the usual understanding) spans much of the subcontinent. Yet this Rama narrative must be understood as now including the *Hanumāyana*, for many of the sites in the guidebooks allude to the popular stories presented in the previous two chapters, most notably to the mini-epic of Ahiravana.

Occasionally my sources present evidence that Hanuman sites are beginning to be linked together in meaningful networks of their own, both local and translocal. Thus it is said that, in Jaipur, Hanuman—known for having a prodigious appetite—takes his breakfast at the Khede temple near Phagi, lunches at Purana Ghat on the Agra road, and has dinner at Chandpol, the city’s western gate. Another story presents a tired Hanuman, after the conclusion of the war in Lanka, asking Rama where he can get a good meal, a bath, and a sound night’s sleep. Rama replies that he will obtain all three at temples that will be built for him in the kali yuga: he will gorge on rich sweets at Hanuman Garhi, bathe in a cooling spring at Hanuman Dhara, and sleep comfortably on the sand at Allahabad (Soni 2000:299–300).⁸ Marathi-language guidebooks to the “eleven Marutis” encourage a comprehensive pilgrimage, modeled on that of the “eight Ganeshas” (*aṣṭa vināyaka*) of the Pune region, or the well-known circuit of the tomb shrines of poet-saints of the Varkari tradition (Feldhaus

8. In a variant on this scheme, Hanuman takes his bath and rest at Chitrakut and Prayag, as above, but his daily meal in Puri, where the Jagannath temple is especially known for its lavish prasad (R. P. Sharma n.d.:387).

2003:140–48), and R. P. Sharma's fifty-two temples reflect a sacred number often associated with the goddess. The “networking” of up-and-coming temples is also reflected in the tendency of shrines to reproduce in new locations: thus the Aliganj temple in Lucknow seeds other sites through the provision of sacred accessories, and there are now numerous “Sankat Mochans,” reflecting the fame of the Banaras temple of that name. Such sacred “cloning” has a long history (e.g., the multiplicity of springs known as Gaumukh—“cow’s mouth”—invoking the source of the Ganga), and its recurrence among temples to Hanuman offers further evidence of his acceptance as a deity to whom pilgrimage is now appropriate.

Five Faces of Hanuman

In titling this section, I use the word “face” to suggest an aspect of personality or a localized “mood”—the latter term now common in Hindi (*mūd*)—and not a physical “face” (*mukha*). Hence I am not alluding here to icons of Hanuman, associated with his tantric worship, that are literally “five-faced” (*pañcamukhī*), though these have interesting implications that I consider in chapter 8. Rather, I intend to supplement the brief descriptions of shrines offered in the previous section by escorting readers on a more focused tour of five contemporary sites that each expresses a different role assumed by Hanuman: as presiding deity in two urban temples that cater to distinct clientele, as master of athletic gymnasia, as healer and exorcist, and as transnational and transcultural ambassador.

French researcher Mathieu Claveyrolas, who has conducted extensive research at the Sankat Mochan temple in Banaras—perhaps the most renowned Hanuman temple in India today—stresses the importance of the “atmosphere” of a religious site, invoking a term that has been used rather casually by previous researchers, including me (e.g., Katz 1993:163; Lutgen-dorf 1991a:163, 1997b:312). By “atmosphere,” Claveyrolas refers to no single indigenous term, but to a constellation of desirable features often cited by worshipers, such as the “feeling” (*bhāv*) induced by darshan of the presiding deity, the physical environment (sometimes including perceptions of “orderliness” as well as the proximity of trees or water), the presence of crowds (as evidence of the power of the place, and often cited as conducive to a feeling of *śānti* or “peace”). The sum of these components constitutes what Claveyrolas described to me in 1998 as “a culturally constructed *mise-en-scène* of devotion.” His published research also stresses the mundane, quotidian quality of the atmosphere of Hindu sites, which challenges Western perceptions of the divide between “sacred” and “secular” realms of activity (2003:13–18, 353–78). I note, too, that “atmosphere” (derived from the Greek *atmos* or vapor and also said to be related to *aēnai*, “to blow,” which in turn is linked to both Sanskrit *vāta* and English “wind”) is particularly relevant to Hanuman, whose life-breath is felt to energize the unique “atmosphere” (in Sanskritized Hindi, *vātāvaraṇ*, “encompassing wind”) of each of the sites to which I now turn.

A Tale of Two Temples

Downtown New Delhi is not best known for religious sites. Its commercial hub is the British-built mandala of Connaught Circus, whose white-columned porticos shelter rows of posh shops, bank and airline offices, and air-conditioned restaurants. The radial avenues that enter it are lined with more recently built high-rises containing government and corporate offices. Yet less than a block from the rim of Connaught, and just opposite the row of state handicraft emporia that are visited by virtually every tourist to Delhi, stands one of the city's most vibrant Hindu complexes. Set back from the busy street, the white marble temple of Shri Hanumanji Maharaj ("Great Lord Hanuman") bustles with activity every morning and evening and is mobbed on Tuesday and Saturday, when a temporary bazaar springs up on its plaza. According to its householder mahant, the temple dates from hoary antiquity, being one of five shrines established by the Pandava brothers when they built their capital of Indraprastha, and it also has a special connection with Tulsidas.⁹ During the Mughal period, it enjoyed the patronage of Raja Man Singh and his descendants, who built a dome over the sanctum and embellished it with now-vanished murals.

Whatever its history, the shrine acquired its present form through a grandiose renovation during the 1980s. Now one approaches via a broad flight of white marble steps that lead up from street level to heavy silver-sheathed doors bearing panels of Ramayana scenes. These open into a hall lit by clerestory windows, decorated with paintings of Hanuman in four aspects facing the cardinal directions, with marble panels below inscribed with the complete text of Tulsidas's *Sundar kāṇḍ*. The sanctum lies to the right, and contains images of Radha and Krishna, a central trinity of Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita, and farthest to the right, the temple's main object of veneration: a small bas-relief Hanuman. When I first saw him in 1989, his features were hard to distinguish under a coating of sindur and silver foil, but in 2004 the murti "miraculously" shed his overcoat to reveal his original form: a simian profile with head facing south, teeth bared. One raised fist brandishes a tiny club, the other rests on his heart. He wears a tapering crown, a sacred thread over his right shoulder, a stylized loincloth hanging between short legs, and

9. It is widely believed that Delhi contains five temples dating to *Mahābhārata* days, although devotees disagree on precisely which sites qualify for this status. Nearly everyone cites Kalkaji, a goddess temple in south Delhi containing a "self-manifest" rock image; other popular sites are the Yogmaya temple near Qutub Minar, the Bhairava temple near the Purana Qila, and the Neel Chattri Mahadev (Shiva) temple at Nigambodh Ghat, outside the walls of Old Delhi. Both the Shri Hanumanji Maharaj temple at Connaught Place and Marghat Baba Hanuman at Yamuna Bazaar are claimed, by their devotees, to be among the five. According to Mahant Jagannath Das, Tulsidas came to Delhi to have darshan of the Connaught Place temple's murti, then far outside the city walls. It was from here that he was summoned by the "king of Delhi" and ordered to perform a miracle, as reported in the *Bhaktirasbodhini* of Priyadas. The mahant claims that, following Hanuman's miraculous intervention on behalf of the poet, the Mughal ruler embellished the shrine's spire, in place of the usual ornamental water pot (*kalaśa*), with an Islamic crescent-moon finial that he describes as unique among Hindu temples.



FIGURE 6.3. The temple of “Great Hanuman,” Connaught Place, New Delhi, 1990

the U-shaped Vaishnava tilak on his forehead. A railing separates the image from worshipers, who press forward eagerly with small trays purchased from stalls outside the entrance, bearing garlands, sweets, clay butter-lamps, and lumps of white camphor that they light and place on the railing as they bow in brief prayer. The priests who staff the sanctum clear the trays efficiently, waving garlands and packets of sweets in Hanuman’s direction before returning them to worshipers as his *prasād*. As in most busy temples, there is noise and jostling as people press forward, their eyes intently fixed on the small *murti*, their lips murmuring prayers and petitions, yet a certain decorum prevails. Indeed, “orderliness” is sometimes cited as one of the attractions here, along with the absence of votive plaques recording the donations of benefactors. The mahant, Jagannath Das, told me in 1989 that this policy of not advertising gifts contributes to a devotional atmosphere. “Here there is only one name: Shri Hanuman.”

The sanctum is surrounded by a circumambulatory corridor (*parikramā*) that is usually filled with worshipers completing some individually chosen number of clockwise circuits, often while reciting the *Hanumān cālīsā*. This being downtown New Delhi, there seems to be an especially businesslike, even calisthenic, flavor to the efforts of many circumambulators, who appear to be mostly white-collar workers from nearby offices or middle-class shoppers taking a break from Connaught Place. Parliament, too, is nearby, and politicians are said to flock here, especially at election times, promising (as they are

wont to do) generous gifts in return for support. One man from a distant part of Delhi jokingly refers to the shrine as “Hanuman of the government bureaucrats” (*sarkārī bābū Hanumān*).

But Hanuman and his Lord are not the sole focus of devotion here, for the recent renovation has made provision for other objects and styles of worship. Most prominently, a large shrine to Shiva, Parvati, and their children adjoins the sanctum, more than equaling it in size. Another portico contains shrines to Durga, Lakshmi-Narayan, and Ganesha, and, to the south, an expansive wing enshrines a murti of Santoshi Ma, the wish-granting goddess whose Friday worship, popularized by a 1975 feature film, has spread among women in recent times (Erndl 1993:141–52; Lutgendorf 2002). These large interiors with cool marble floors and whirring ceiling fans, above and away from the din of the street, are often the site of individual and group activities such as the recitation of sacred texts, seasonal or life-cycle rituals, or just relaxation and quiet conversation. For the temple administration, it makes pragmatic sense to offer varied amenities. Das explained that whereas temples used to be dedicated to single deities, “nowadays people think differently; some feel special devotion to one god, some to another; some worship on one day, some on another.” Moreover, he added, they are too busy to visit numerous temples. So, not unlike the bustling marketplace that surrounds it, Hanumanji Maharaj has become a “full-service” religious center, offering the convenience of “one-stop” worship.¹⁰

But a Delhiite asked about popular sites for Hanuman worship is almost certain to mention a second one as well, located some 5 kilometers north of the Connaught Place temple, and in contrast to it in many respects. This monkey’s Delhi is Old, not New—the maze-like Mughal city of Shajahanabad, full of winding lanes and crowded tenements housing a greater proportion of the city’s poorer residents. Hanuman abides between its seventeenth-century walls and its ancient riverfront, in a locality known both as Yamuna Bazaar and Nigambodh Ghat. This is a Delhi that few foreign visitors see: a narrow quarter that resembles pilgrimage towns like Banaras or Hardwar, with the requisite temples, ghats, and cows. Here too is the city’s principal cremation ground—an array of steel-roofed sheds in a riverside park, each sheltering brick platforms for funeral pyres. The Hanuman temple is just across busy Ring Road from this place and derives its popular name from it: *Marghaṭ bābā Hanumān-jī*—“old Hanuman of the mortuary ghat.” The small complex, set among huge peepul trees, is barely noticeable from the street, except on Tuesdays and Saturdays when crowds of darshan seekers line Ring Road in

10. This inclusive approach is not altogether new, and these general observations should not be taken as definitive of the great variety of Hindu religious sites throughout India. Although associated with a principal deity, medieval urban temples (such as those still found in South India) were often multipurpose complexes incorporating shrines to many gods, as well as schools, workshops, and markets. The hierarchical incorporation of various “lesser” deities in such sites at times reflected dynastic or sectarian ideology, as well as the convenience of worshipers and the multiplicity of styles of Hindu devotion. In the North (perhaps for political reasons, in the climate of Islamic rule) the tendency during the past millennium has been toward smaller and less obtrusive temples focused on a single deity.

a blocks-long queue. Once inside the gate, one approaches a tiny shrine with a low doorway, beyond which a narrow flight of steps descends to a cryptlike sanctum in which the small murti stands, its eyes gazing straight ahead. There is no space here for offerings, but back upstairs there is the usual circumambulatory corridor, lined with large bells that devotees sound and niches in which they place their clay lamps and burning camphor. The overhanging trees, the clamorous, smoky atmosphere filled with flickering lights, and the descent to the subterranean sanctuary create a unique atmosphere. During the monsoon season, it is said, Yamuna water seeps in from the saturated earth, and at times Hanuman stands neck deep in it, but the temple never closes, and devotees never cease to come, because, they say, this is a "seat of power" where petitions are swiftly granted. Here, too, people say that the temple was founded thousands of years ago by the Pandava strongman Bhima, Hanuman's half-brother, and they are apt to laugh at the claims of the Connaught Place complex which (one man tells me) is "new and just for show." Although the circumambulatory passage is studded with marble plaques recording the (mostly modest) gifts of donors, a worshiper tells me proudly that, in this temple, "there is no pressure to give anything. You get prasad regardless of whether you offer anything or not." Facing the sanctum is a small portico for *Cālīsā* recitations, but the beaten path leads to an adjacent compound containing a peepul tree, at the base of which is a tiny goddess shrine with a smoke-blackened window. The trunk of the tree is encrusted with sticky sweets, offered not to Hanuman but to Pretraj, the "king of ghosts," who is under Hanuman's jurisdiction. The enshrined Devi is Anjana, who is approached for intercession with her mighty son.

Associations with death and with unquiet spirits are underscored by literature sold in stalls just outside the gate. Much of this concerns the shrine of Balaji in the village of Menhdipur, which has lately become so popular that special buses ply there from Delhi's Interstate Bus Terminus, just up Ring Road from the temple. Chthonic themes are evoked again in a conversation I have with an old man who is reciting the Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇa* on the temple portico. He tells me that Hanuman is physically present and capable of being seen (*pratyakṣa*), and he knows this because he has seen him. He then recounts a tale of a boyhood vow to obtain a vision of Hanuman through a twenty-one-day tantric puja, at the culmination of which he picked up his seating mat and found a small snake coiled beneath it. The snake crawled away and entered a wrestling club where it disappeared into tall grass. As the boy followed, the grass began waving as if stirred by a tempest, and then there arose from it a towering hooded serpent with a golden mustache and a three-line Shaiva tilak on his forehead. As the boy gazed in awe, the figure sank back into the grass and disappeared. An aged sadhu to whom he confided the vision confirmed that it had been Hanuman in naga form, and he associated the two snakes with the ninth verse of the *Cālīsā*:

Taking tiny form you showed yourself to Sita,
assuming awesome form you burned Lanka.

The “atmospheres” of Shri Hanumanji Maharaj and Marghat Baba Hanuman appear as different, one might say, as day and night. In his gleaming white perch above Connaught Place, Hanuman appears as exemplary subordinate to the righteous hero of the solar dynasty and is worshiped in the eclectic style of devotion common to upper-middle-class urbanites. In his cramped grotto near the cremation ground, he reigns as a master of serpents and ghosts, and is the special patron of the city’s poorer and less-educated inhabitants. The contrast suggests distinctions of class and education, and between “elite” and “folk” and “Vaishnava” and “Shaiva” orientations (although these categories, as I have noted, are problematic and often overlapping), as well as between bhakti and shakti—the two qualities that Hanuman is said to especially embody.

God’s Gym and Poet’s Pilgrimage

It’s 6 o’clock on a March morning atop Tulsi Ghat, one of the southernmost riverfront landings of Banaras. Just across a narrow lane from the imposing white house belonging to the mahant of the Sankat Mochan temple, a gated flight of steps leads to a raised enclosure: the Swami Nath Akhara—a “gymnasium” and wrestling club. When I first lived in Banaras in the early 1980s, I passed this gate many times without suspecting the akhara’s existence, for like most of the scores of such clubs in the city, it is nearly invisible from the street. But once inside, there is a wonderful sense of open space—always surprising in this unbelievably crowded city—as one enters an earthen-floored compound containing several old neem and peepul trees, a deep stone well, and an open-sided shed containing the wrestling pit: a stone foundation that has been filled with clay chosen for its softness and then mixed with quantities of turmeric powder. The shed’s tin roof is held up by columns bearing carvings of cobras, and its back meets the wall of the enclosure. A red-painted niche in this wall contains a tiny Shiva lingam above which is written “Shri Hanuman-ji”—the only representation, here, of the patron deity of wrestling. At this hour, only a few members of the club, called “disciples” (*celā*), are present, and they are busily preparing the pit for the morning workout. Each day its clay is turned over with large spades to a depth of several feet, after which young men go over the spaded area, breaking up clumps and smoothing out the clay. They then scatter marigold petals and neem leaves over the surface, both as an act of consecration and for their medicinal properties. One of the men places a garland of marigolds in the niche and lights a bunch of incense sticks, then walks backward through the pit while all the members present stand along its sides, palms joined in reverence. The leader shouts “*Bajraṅghalī kī . . .*” and the others complete the cry of victory: “*Jay!*” (“Hail to the iron-limbed hero!”). Each then bends over and takes a pinch of clay with his right hand and places it on his forehead, for the earth of the pit is now imbued with the power of Hanuman. Some rub handfuls of it over their heads and torsos. Those who wrestle will gradually become covered with it, and this is said to be one of the special delights of the sport: the cool

softness and earthy fragrance of the turmeric-laced clay is considered good for both skin and soul. Pairs of men enter the pit and begin sparring; a senior pahalvan (*pahalvān*, “wrestler”), the guru of this akhara, sits on the side and gives pointers from time to time. Elsewhere in the enclosure, newly arrived members strip down to their langots and take a quick bath with buckets drawn from the well. They may then warm up by doing energetic knee bends and push-ups (*baiṭhak*, *dand*), by climbing thick ropes suspended from the trees, or by swinging wooden clubs weighted with stone rings. Besides serving as bodybuilding equipment, the mace or club (*gadā*) is Hanuman’s distinctive weapon, and in many akharas such clubs are stored next to his shrine.

I speak with Kallu Pahalvan, one of the leaders here and a former wrestling champion, a huge man with disfigured “cauliflower” ears. He is pleased to hear that I teach at the University of Iowa, a mecca of American college wrestling. Like many Indian wrestlers, he knows of Iowa’s former coach, Olympic gold medalist Dan Gable, whom Kallu calls “a great guru of wrestling in your country.” There is, he notes, some Western influence on akharas nowadays; some feature metal barbells and have introduced mats instead of the pit. Kallu disapproves because, he says, mats feel hot in the summer and become smelly and unsanitary in the rainy season, whereas clay is always cool, pure, and fragrant. But he is happy to turn the subject to Hanuman, “the greatest hero, the greatest pahalvan.” He attributes this greatness to Hanuman’s lifelong celibacy, noting, “Jambavan, Sugriva, et cetera were actually stronger than Hanuman-ji, yet only he was able to do God’s work, because he had been a brahmachari since birth.” Not just the shrine-niche but the whole akhara and especially the pit, he says, is really a temple to Hanuman, and that is why members apply its clay to their foreheads on entering or leaving. Before grappling, they strike their hands against their upper arms (he demonstrates), producing a loud clapping sound; it is a challenge, signaling readiness to spar, but also a salute to Hanuman. Kallu tells me that a pahalvan is strongest before marriage; afterward he weakens due to semen loss and should no longer compete, though he may continue to come to the akhara to work out and socialize; only unmarried men should wrestle competitively.¹¹ Turning to the subject of wrestling technique, Kallu points to several rhesus macaques romping under a nearby tree. “Look at those monkeys, how they fight. They know how to fall, how to do somersaults. Go to Sankat Mochan and watch them. All the holds and feints (*dāṃv-peñc*) we wrestlers use, we learn from them.”¹²

Later, when the morning workout is over, Kallu and I have a second conversation while he relaxes on the edge of the pit and a grinning boy of about five, wearing only a tiny langot, climbs over him as if he were a human

11. The pahalvans’ ideology of chastity, like other aspects of their lifestyle, has been extensively analyzed by Alter (e.g., 1992:136–66; 1994:571–74; 1997).

12. Alter told me in 2003 that wrestlers sometimes mimic monkeys during practice sessions and refer to one of their exercise routines as a “langur workout” (*laṅgūr daur*).

jungle-gym. The child seems to take the greatest delight in pressing, squeezing, pounding, and scaling the pahalvan's massive body, and all the while Kallu goes on chatting, seeming to take no notice of him. I am reminded of the Ramayana scene in which monkey troops scramble over the giant body of Ravana's brother Kumbhakarna ("pot ears"—looking at Kallu, I gain new insight into the possible origin of this name), while he, ignoring them, fights with Lakshmana. But Kallu, smiling contentedly, speaks not of fighting but of "love" (*prem*) which, he says, is the real essence of akhara culture. "It is only to spread *prem*, that's the main purpose of wrestling." As he says this I look around. Sparring has stopped and groups of men sit in the pit and on the side wall, chatting and taking turns rubbing one another with clay and mustard oil. In one corner, two young men vigorously but solicitously massage an elderly one, a man who no longer wrestles but comes for a workout and rubdown. Others are already bathing or putting on their street clothes, ready to go to day jobs as clerks, shop assistants, or artisans. Morning sunlight filters through the delicate tracery of neem branches to form patterns on the cool, damp earth. The whole atmosphere, in striking contrast to the crowded and dusty streets into which departing pahalvans will descend, exudes peace, comfort, and relaxation.

For many male Banarsis, both Hindu and Muslim and of virtually all castes but typically of relatively lower economic class, akhara culture is a vital component of the good life in Shiva's city: of "Banarsi-ness" (*Banārsīpan*), which is conducive to both spiritual and physical wellbeing (Kumar 1988:8). As Alter has noted, Hanuman's embodiment of shakti and bhakti is central to the ideology of wrestling as articulated by its Hindu spokesmen, and his physical form is considered emblematic of the stout and rounded yet virile and immensely strong "body of one color" sought by pahalvans (Alter 1992:57, 205-7). Hanuman himself, as Kallu noted, is the ultimate pahalvan, and in one storytelling session I recorded at the Sankat Mochan temple in December 1990, the *Rāmcaritmānas* expounder Ramnarayan Shukla described him as a "*pakkā* Banaras wrestler" with red loincloth, bloodshot eyes, and swaggering gait. He held listeners spellbound with a sportscast-like narration of Hanuman's battle with Indrajit, complete with slapping of upper arms and rapid-fire descriptions of feints and holds. Nowadays, the rhetoric of akhara culture may also be invoked by Hindu nationalists, and the role of Hanuman in such communal discourse will be considered further in chapter 8; here I will only note, echoing Alter, that I did not encounter it from wrestlers themselves (Alter 1994). Like yoga and musicianship, wrestling is a somatic skill, and among aficionados technique generally takes precedence over ideology. The communalization of the wrestling akhara appears to be a recent phenomenon, championed (ironically) mostly by those who do not directly participate in this lower-class recreational activity.

Though in many ways typical of wrestling clubs throughout northern and central India, Akhara Swami Nath has a special feature that contributes to its distinctive atmosphere: it is linked both to Tulsidas (who is said to have founded it) and to the half-mile distant Sankat Mochan temple, whose

grounds contain a second wrestling pit belonging to the club.¹³ The akhara is named for an early-twentieth-century mahant of the temple, considered eleventh in succession from Tulsidas. Swami Nath was a famous wrestler, as was his successor Bankeram Mishra (d. 1952), the father of present mahant Veerbhadra Mishra (Sundd 1998:514). Yet despite the temple's association with the acclaimed preceptor of Hanuman bhakti in North India, all accounts confirm that Sankat Mochan was little known prior to recent times. Its rise is sometimes attributed to the spiritual powers of a Maharashtrian priest named Narayan Bhatt who officiated there in the first two decades of the twentieth century and "awakened" its murti. At that time, the shrine was *kaccā* (impermanent, made of adobe), but a small stone temple to Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana was added in 1903; Hanuman himself received a much larger *pakkā* (masonry) abode in about 1940, when the temple also began sponsoring an annual *Rāmcaritmānas* festival.¹⁴ Even so, an elderly neighborhood resident who used to play in the compound as a child recalled that it was not much visited prior to 1950, and that "you could go right up and touch the murti." Guardrails to prevent this, and a cadre of Brahman pujaris on the other side of them, postdate a major overhaul in the early 1970s, funded by the industrialist G. D. Birla, who added a circumambulatory verandah, a guest-house, and a room containing a fire altar for life-cycle rituals. Since then, the temple's fame has increased to the point that it is "arguably one of the two or three most vibrant temples in the whole of the sacred complex of Banaras" (Eck 1991:70), and ranks with the much older Shiva Vishvanath temple as an obligatory pilgrim destination (Claveyrolas 2003, esp. 43–71; Katz 1993:163–65; Lutgendorf 1991a:49–51). Already cited in 1979 as one of the "five principal Hanuman temples of India" (Ghurye 1979:168), it acquired, in 1998, its own "epic" in the form of Sundd's Indian-English *sthala-purāṇa* ("local purana") noted in chapter 3. This work supplies, among many other things, a detailed origin narrative that I have found in no Hindi source (Sundd 1998:60, 163–65, 505–15).

Although I have told it before (Lutgendorf 1991a:49–50), the founding story of Sankat Mochan needs to be included here, as it is one of the great Hanuman legends of North India; moreover, it will serve as a bridge between this temple, the Swami Nath Akhara, and the next stop on my itinerary, and will also set the stage for accounts of Hanuman's physical visitations later in this chapter. Just over the wall of the akhara on Tulsi Ghat, the twisted roots of a peepul tree shelter another of the small Hanumans that Tulsidas is said to have venerated. Some claim this is the very tree on which the poet used to daily pour a small amount of leftover water when he returned from his morning toilet (for which

13. As Claveyrolas has pointed out to me, the temple itself is actually "owned" by the akhara, through the lineage of mahants who control the sacred sites both on Tulsi Ghat and at Sankat Mochan. The recent phenomenal success of the latter shrine has tended to overshadow the greater historical veneration of the riverside sites (house, akhara, and tiny Hanuman temple) believed to date to Tulsidas's time.

14. The recent history of the temple was recounted by Pandit Gopinath Pannat and Mahant Veerbhadra Mishra in interviews they kindly granted me in 1989–90.

he crossed the boundary of the city's sacred area).¹⁵ The tree was the abode of a thirst-tormented ghost (*pret*) who was grateful for the daily oblation and eventually appeared to Tulsidas and offered him a boon. When the saint asked for darshan of Rama, the ghost protested his inability to arrange such a miracle (in one Hindi account, he says sarcastically, "If I could get you Rama, do you think I'd be a *pret*? Ask for some worldly favor!" S. Singh 1984:290). Instead, he told Tulsidas to seek the grace of Hanuman and revealed that the latter came every evening to a certain ghat in the form of an old leper to listen to the narration of Rama's story; he sat at the back of the crowd and was always the last to leave. That night, Tulsidas surreptitiously followed the leper, who led him deep into the forest before the poet finally fell at his feet, hailing him as the Son of the Wind. As the ghost had predicted, the leper "denied a thousand times" that he was anything other than a sick old man, but Tulsidas persisted in his entreaties, and eventually Hanuman manifested his glorious form. Raising one hand over his shoulder to point southwest, he said "Go to Chitrakut," and placing the other hand over his heart added, "I promise you will see Rama."

This epiphany is supposed to have occurred where the Sankat Mochan temple now stands, and the pose of its murti (obscured by garments and garlands, and visible only to priests when they bathe and dress it each morning) is said to preserve the gestures that accompanied Hanuman's message. When I interviewed the mahant and knowledgeable devotees in 1982–84 and 1989–90, I was told either that the murti was made in Tulsidas's time to commemorate his vision, or that it simply *is* that vision rendered tangible through the power of Tulsidas's faith; however, there did not appear to be a definitive line on this (cf. Claveyrolas, who confirms these variants; 2003:73–78). Now there may be, in Sundd's thrice-repeated tale of the temple's founding. In his version, Tulsidas entreated Hanuman to remain on the spot for the benefit of devotees, and the god consented, but then disappeared by leaping into the ground. Tulsidas dug frantically on the spot, continuing through the night (and creating a pit that would later fill with a small pond, which Sundd conflates with the allegorical "lake" of the *Rāmcaritmānas*) and finally, as dawn was breaking, unearthed a svayambhu murti that preserved the pose in which Hanuman had addressed him. Tulsidas then ritually established this murti on the mound of newly excavated earth, thereby creating the "first temple of Sri Hanuman" (Sundd 1998:163; cf. 18, 505). Displaying his concern for exact dating (reflecting a hybridization of Puranic-style astrology and modern academic history), Sundd calculates that the miracle occurred on the eighth of the dark fortnight of Margashirsha (November/December) in 1550 (*ibid.* 60).¹⁶

15. Devotees disagree on the precise location of some sites in this narrative. Some situate the haunted tree on the other bank of the Ganga or within the several acres of "jungle" that still surrounds Sankat Mochan temple (Claveyrolas 2003:73–75).

16. Sundd rejects the scholarship that assumes an eighty-year lifespan for Tulsidas, and he claims that the poet was born in 1497, thus making him 53 years old at the time of his darshan of Hanuman and 126 at his death in 1623 (*ibid.* lviii, 174). He is no less precise about Hanuman's age, asserting that the divine monkey had been on earth for 881,713 years when Tulsidas met him (*ibid.* 60).

Apart from demonstrating the evolution and rationalization of a hagiographic narrative (a process that has been going on, for Tulsidas, for quite some time; see Lutgendorf 1994c), the accounts of the founding of Sankat Mochan are notable for their persistent details. Tulsidas's meeting with Hanuman, the great intermediary who will broker his ultimate meeting with God, is itself mediated by a supernatural entity of a decidedly low rank: an unquiet spirit who—although he is powerless to put the poet into contact with Rama—knows just where to find Hanuman. This curious familiarity has troubled at least one modern narrator, who has added the explanation that, of course, this was not an ordinary pret (who would flee, as the twenty-fourth line of the *Cālisā* promises, at the mention of Hanuman's name) but rather one of Shiva's minions (*gana*) specially deputed for this task (S. Singh 1984:290). Impurity and danger are further suggested by the motif of the aged leper who limps off into the night forest, yet who paradoxically proves to be the poet's "liberator from distress" (*saṅkaṭ mocan*)—here, the spiritual suffering of longing to personally experience God. But *saṅkaṭ* commonly refers to other forms of distress: to leprosy itself and other wasting illnesses, and also to possession by malevolent pretts (Kakar 1982:63; Pakaslahti 1998:139). Such associations periodically resurface, like svayambhu images emerging from the ground, in the shadows of even the most sanitized and Sanatan-ized of Hanuman's shrines, but there is at least one famous temple where they bask in the full light of day.

The Exorcist

Although the Balaji temple in "the valley of Menhdipur" (*ghāṭā Menhdīpur*)¹⁷ has been described elsewhere—in psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar's book on healing traditions (1982), and in the more recent and extensive research of Finnish psychiatrist Antti Pakaslahti (1998, 2005)¹⁸—it must be revisited here, and not simply because of its phenomenal success, attested to by the fact that daily arti ceremonies since 1997 have been shown on video monitors to crowds unable to enter the main shrine (Pakaslahti 1998:135). Menhdipur displays the confluence of several themes that I am tracing in this book: the association of Hanuman with power and devotion, with the control of dangerous forces, and with somatic and psychospiritual healing. Kakar's and Pakaslahti's accounts offer descriptions of the curative regimen and present case histories of patients; however, they have little to say about the presiding

17. The village name (*Menhdīpur*) has been Romanized by Kakar and others as "Mehndipur."

18. Pakaslahti cites the additional ethnographic research of Jens Seeberg, published in Danish as *Sankatfolk* (Moesgaard: Aarhus University, 1992), and of Graham Dwyer, who conducted 700 interviews with patients and family members, as reported in his monograph *The Divine and the Demonic* (London: Routledge and Curzon, 2003). Pakaslahti's own work is unique in calling attention to the important role of a network of *bhagats* or charismatic healers, who bring their clients to Menhdipur and work with them during their stay there. His collaboration with Finnish filmmaker Jouko Aaltonen resulted in the extraordinary documentary *Kusum*, which records the treatment, with the aid of one such *bhagat*, of a young girl from Delhi (Aaltonen 2000).

deity. My concern is especially with Hanuman's role in the process. For although there exist a number of shrines in India where spirits are exorcised, most of them are to local forms of Shiva or Devi or to deceased holy men such as Sufi pirs. How does the healing process so successfully brokered by Balaji reflect this god's identification with Hanuman?

In discussing Hanuman worship in Rajasthan, pioneering folklorist Komal Kothari distinguished between "*dās* and *vīr* Hanuman"—the deity in respectively "servile" and "virile" modes. Whereas the former is most common in shrines built and frequented by the urban middle classes, the latter is typically worshiped in small roofless shrines (*thān*) located on the outskirts of villages. Like Bhairava, who is similarly positioned, Balaji-Mahavir is often represented as an upright stone slab smeared with sindur and set with a pair of eyes. Such minimal icons are, according to Kothari, being supplanted by the homogenized all-India iconography of Hanuman, as when he appears bearing mountain and club. Ann Gold and Bhoju Ram Gujar's brief account of the Balaji of a village in Ajmer District suggests just such a liminal and ambivalent deity as Kothari described. His shrine stands atop the haunted "Owl Dune," a place believed to mark the site of an earlier settlement of robbers that was destroyed by a sage's curse. Here "Balaji of the Thorny Hill" (aka "Balaji of the Pubic Hair") presides over the bandits' buried treasure, which no one attempts to recover because of the occult danger involved (Gold and Gujar 2002:63–64).

According to Kothari, veneration of Hanuman as "the great vir" alludes to the folk and tribal cult of "fifty-two heroes" (*bāvan vīr*), warriors slain before they could sire offspring and whose restless spirits demand propitiation, and of their female counterparts, the sixty-four joginis (*joginī* or *yoginī*), wild ascetic women in the entourage of martial goddesses, who haunt battlefields and feast on the blood and entrails of slain warriors.¹⁹ Both pose a threat to humans, especially to children and adolescents, whom they may jealously attack through illness or possession. Balaji-Mahavir is understood to wield power over them, and his shrines are normally avoided after dark, except by those who seek to invoke his "dark side" (*tamas rūp*). These may include women, who undertake a vow of worshiping him for nine successive weeks, going to his shrine after midnight on Monday, applying a fresh coating of sindur, offering garlands, and removing their clothing to embrace his image (cf. Crooke 1968:1.87, on a similar rite in Maharashtra). The practice is thought to cure barrenness, but it can have more selfish aims: a woman who completes the vow can obtain one of the virs in Balaji's entourage as a personal servant, though she will have to keep it "satisfied" (*tuṣṭ*) by feeding it the livers of children; such a woman thus becomes a dreaded *ḍākin* or "witch."

19. Kothari shared his observations on Hanuman in Rajasthan during a conversation with me in Jodhpur in July 1996. Cf. Crooke, who calls the vir "a very malignant village demon" (1968:1.254); and Harlan, who notes the homologization of dead heroes to Bhairava, and observes that a vir is "not a blessed guardian but a potential, even persistent terrorist" (2003:136–37, 154).

Kothari's observations on Rajasthani folkways (fast disappearing, he said, as urban lifestyles invade the countryside) resonate with themes implicit in Hanuman's wider worship; thus the *Cālisā* notes his power over malevolent spirits, while the well-known taboo against women touching his "chaste" temple icons appears as a kind of diurnal counterpoint to the reported midnight liaisons with the potent vir. As I have noted, in both Rajasthan and Gujarat, Hanuman's heroic aspect may be iconographically signaled by adding a mustache to his images, and the worship of one of these in the Swaminarayan sect is said to be principally for the purpose of expelling ghosts (M. Joshi 2001:148). According to Kothari, the efficaciousness of Balaji in dealing with such beings stems from his kinship with them, an occult variation on the homeopathic medical adage: "like cures like."²⁰ This being so, one might expect that Balaji would also possess people, and indeed I learned in 1990 of several healing circles in the Agra area centered on young men who became regularly possessed by the "wind" (*havā*) of Balaji and were then able to diagnose and prognosticate; in a conversation in 2005, Pakaslahti reported similar activity in Haryana. Tormenting spirits are unassimilable "others" of a supernatural sort, hence it is not surprising to learn that ghosts who torment high-caste Hindus are often revealed to be those of untouchables and Muslims, whereas the *bhūtna* is identified by Muslim healers as a Hindu ghost who preys on their coreligionists. To deal with such beings, a healer must necessarily be a "boundary man," a description that applies both to human healers and to the liminal and boundary-marking Balaji (Kakar 1982:30, 38, 63, 87).

The temple at Menhdipur is situated in a small valley some three miles from the Agra-Jaipur highway. The rear of the shrine abuts an adjacent hill, and its principal murtis are modifications of rock outcroppings, hence "self-manifest." Though guidebooks sold near the temple wax eloquent about the "pure air and water" and lack of "artificialities of urban life" in the little valley (*Camatkārī* 1988:19), the extensive development of recent decades has resulted in a congested sprawl of concrete block dharamshalas and bazaars, with attendant problems of noise, air pollution, and garbage. Yet this does not seem to deter pilgrims, and when I visited the temple in June 1990, at the height of a torrid North Indian summer, the place was mobbed. Although Balaji treats a variety of conditions, including epilepsy, stroke, tuberculosis, and barrenness, his specialty is "affliction by ghosts" (*bhūt-pret kā saṅkaṭ*), and he is often approached as a last resort by people—usually of middle-class status and increasingly from many parts of India—whose afflictions have proved resistant to a variety of therapies, including treatment by the herbal and dietary regimens of ayurvedic and unani physicians, and by biomedical and psychiatric interventions.

20. A similar comment was made by the Madhva scholar S. K. Ramachandra Rao, whom I interviewed in Bangalore in January 1990, with reference to the worship of Anjaneya and Ganesha in rural Karnataka: "All tribal gods both cause and cure diseases."



FIGURE 6.4. A photo-poster of Menhdipur Balaji; late twentieth century

Like a European spa, Menhdipur offers a curative regimen that involves a period of residence and adherence to a daily routine; such a treatment may last for several weeks or months, during which the patient is generally accompanied by family members. Such family groups, interacting in the *dhar-amshalas* and in daily worship sessions at the shrine, create a “healing community” that is one of the notable features of the Balaji experience (Kakar 1982:83–84; Pakaslahti 1998:133).

The pilgrims’ first stop is Balaji’s cliffside murti, covered with sindur and silver foil and sheltered by an impressive silver canopy. Several of the deity’s clubs stand nearby, and there is a huge brazier in front of him in which a smoky fire is always burning, fed by offerings of ghee, rock sugar, coconut, and laddus. A smaller adjacent chamber contains two rock outcroppings that resemble large mushrooms, one of which is set with eyes. These are venerated as Bhairava or Mahakala (“great death”), who is also known here as the “police captain” (*koṭvāl kaptān*), and functions as Balaji’s heavier-handed lieutenant, administering punishments to spirits. He receives offerings of urad dal or black cardamoms, which are likewise burned in a smoldering brazier. A third functionary, also appearing as a sindur-covered rock, dominates a larger

upstairs hall and is known as Pretraj, the “king of ghosts,” a once-malevolent spirit who was defeated and reformed by Balaji. Some pilgrims identify him as Yamraj or Yama, Vedic god of the dead, whose messengers carry human souls to his subterranean world for judgment and subsequent punishment or reward in “hell” (*narak*) or “heaven” (*svarg*)—both normally understood as temporary intervals preceding the soul’s next incarnation (on Hanuman’s ancient association with a half-brother named Pretraj, see chapter 2).

The three main deities preside over a complex bureaucracy of more specialized but lower-ranking functionaries, some of whom have small shrines in antechambers or on the adjoining hillside; thus there are deities specializing in possession by the spirits of untouchables, of infants, and so forth. That the Balaji complex resembles a district courthouse is underscored by the terminology of its curative regimen, which is based on the Persian-derived nomenclature of juridical practice.²¹ This terminology is familiar to pilgrims, for India is a highly litigious society in which suits and countersuits, most often over property, may require multiple visits to courts and the patient cultivation of their officers. The lingo of Balaji thus metaphorically links the “affliction” of spirit possession with stressful but nevertheless mundane “trials.” Such “domestication” of possession is further revealed in the common identification of afflicting spirits as deceased relatives or neighbors, who (like their earthly counterparts) may be unhappy and irritating, but are not inherently evil (Pakaslahti 1998:140). On entering Balaji’s “courtroom” (*adālat*), afflicted pilgrims present a “petition” (*darkhāst* or *arzī*) consisting of appropriate offerings to the supreme magistrate and his two associates. A portion of each offering (in Balaji’s case, two laddus that have been briefly touched to the murti by the priest) is returned as prasad and should be immediately consumed; part of the remainder is burned, and part is offered to dogs, the animal of Bhairava. Consuming prasad causes the power of the deity to enter the sufferer’s body and begin to work on its possessing spirit.

The next ritual may occur upstairs in Pretraj’s hall, where sessions of devotional singing and chanting (*bhajan-kirtan*) are held each afternoon from 2 to 4.²² The texts chanted are in praise of Balaji and other deities and may be taken from anthologies sold outside the temple; the lyrics are sometimes set to film tunes.²³ The aim of these sessions is to induce “an appearance in court” (*peśī*) by the possessing entity, who makes his or her presence known through trance behavior such as violent whirling of the head and torso, writhing, somersaults, and moans and cries. Women typically loosen their long hair, permitting it to fly about their heads. Some pilgrims begin to display such

21. I am grateful to my colleague Frederick Smith for his notes on this terminology, recorded during his visit to Menhdipur in 2001 in the course of his research on deity and spirit possession (see Smith 2006).

22. Pakaslahti reports that similar sessions are now held in dharamshalas all over Menhdipur, presided over by individual bhagats for their client families.

23. In August 2001, Smith reported that Hindi film songs were sometimes played at high volume during these sessions, something I did not witness a decade earlier. A particularly popular song, he noted, came from the film *Nagin*, about a woman possessed by a serpent deity.

behavior immediately on consuming Balaji's prasad, but more commonly it occurs only after one or more sessions in Pretraj's darbar, during which the petitioner has witnessed many examples of such activity.²⁴ As Kakar has noted, the acceptability of possession contributes to a blurring of the line between "sick" pilgrims and their "normal" caregivers; it is not unusual for the latter to become possessed as well, either by ghosts or by the local deities, who may engage in confrontations with spirits (Kakar 1982:83–84). Sometimes a possessed person speaks in several voices: that of Bhairava or Balaji threatening the ghost ("Out with you! Why are you tormenting her?"), and of the latter screaming in defiance ("Let go of me! I won't leave her!"). The foulest language is routinely heard, and the struggle may become physical, with the god "beating" the ghost (e.g., as afflicted patients strike themselves repeatedly on their heads with shoes—one of the most culturally demeaning of punishments). To further inconvenience the afflicting spirit, fixed periods of corporal punishment (*sazā*) may also be prescribed during *peṣī* by "police chief" Bhairava or one of his "army" of messenger-assistants (*dūt-fauj*). These may include weighing down the chest with slabs of rock, the inhalation of acrid smoke from burning offerings, or suspension upside down from a tree limb. These punishments are sometimes administered on the hillside behind the temple, producing scenes that, although they may strike an outsider as grotesque, are casually accepted by pilgrims as routine and palliative.

Healing can occur in several ways. Sometimes the possessing spirit is induced to flee or is even "killed" by the deities, but this is an extreme measure against beings who are regarded as pitiable and themselves in need of treatment (Pakaslahti 1998:140). More commonly, the ghost is provoked to give a "deposition" (*bayān*) in which it reveals its identity and grievance. Often it proves to be the "unsatisfied" (*atrpt*) spirit of a relative who died an untimely death, or a ghost deployed through black magic by an enemy. Once the spirit identifies itself and declares what it wants, it can be placated and induced to leave its victim. It may be given a "home" (*ghar*) in the form of a tiny shrine of stones on Balaji's hillside; this can receive puja on subsequent pilgrimages, to ensure that the spirit is happy and at rest. Such pacified ghosts may be revered as ancestral spirits (*pitān*), but they can also become "messengers" (*dūt*) of Balaji or one of his associates, and be reassigned to their erstwhile victims as spiritual guardians.

Hanuman's role at Menhdipur is clarified by the origin legends of the shrine, of which several are in circulation. The one offered by Kakar, based on a book he purchased outside the temple, begins with the standard tale of Hanuman's birth, his attempt to seize the sun and retaliatory wounding by Indra, and his subsequent revival and receipt of divine boons. Menhdipur is identified as the place where the revived child-god (*bāla*) was returned to the lap of his mother. Eons passed, and Balaji was petitioned by a prince who had died an untimely death and become a pret; in response, the god decided to

24. Pakaslahti stresses the "learned" nature of trance and disagrees with Kakar's assessment that it presents evidence of "hysterical personality disorders" (1998:159; cf. Kakar 1982:75).

open his “court” to all who suffer from the *sankat* of spirit possession, an affliction that especially plagues humanity in the kali yuga (Kakar 1982:58).

A second version of the story was told to me in 1989 by Jagannath Das, the mahant of the Connaught Place Hanuman temple in Delhi. Ages ago, a powerful pret used to inhabit the Menhdipur valley; one day he began to torment a Brahman, who took refuge with Hanuman. Hanuman released the spirit from his “thirsty” condition and turned him into Pretraj, establishing him on the site as his own servant, to assist others in the future. Pakaslahti reports a variant on this story in which nearby villagers, seeking to appease the angry pret who would afflict anyone passing between the two hills, built him a temple. Balaji came and challenged the spirit. After a combat, the defeated pret begged forgiveness and was made into Balaji’s own *dūt* (1998:138).

Yet a third version is found in two anthologies I purchased in 1990, one published in Menhdipur and another in Hardwar; both consist mainly of hymns for use by pilgrims. Since both also contain fulsome praise of the then-mahant and of his father (who is said to have ushered in “the golden age” of the shrine), these books may represent an emerging “official” version of the story, and indeed both claim to reveal “the mysterious secret (*rahasya*) of Lord Balaji.” Unlike the previous two stories, this open “secret” contains no paradigmatic possession or healing, but it displays other concerns. It begins with Rama promising Hanuman that “in the kali yuga you will be worshiped as the foremost deity.” The author adds, “In truth, the manifestation of Lord Mahavir-Bajrangbali in the vale of Menhdipur is the great boon of this age.” The founding legend follows:

An ancestor of the mahant had a dream in which he went to a place where he saw a murti of Balaji. Then he beheld an extraordinary spectacle: from one direction came thousands of flickering lamps. As they approached, he saw a huge army containing horses and elephants. They came and circumambulated Balaji, and the commander got down and prostrated before him; then they all departed as they had come. The Brahman was amazed and frightened. Then he saw three murtis in their shrines and heard a voice saying, “Get up, assume the burden of my service. I intend to perform miraculous deeds.” (*Camatkārī* 1988:20)²⁵

The Brahman located the site he had seen in his dream, discovered three svayambhu murtis there, and began performing their worship. Miracles occurred, but then came the rule of “enemies of dharma” (a reference, presumably, to Muslims and/or the British), and the power of the place became obscured. One disbelieving king even tried to uproot the Balaji murti, but however deep his men dug, they could not find its base, because “the whole mountain is its body” (*ibid.* 21). More time passed, and the shrine rose to its present fame.

25. The identical account appears in *Śrī Hanumān-bālā jī* n.d.:10–11.

Like Hanuman's multiple birth stories, these three accounts each reveal something different about Balaji. The first presents him as a rambunctious child who is traumatized but then healed and restored, on this spot, to the shelter of his mother's love, and who remains here to help others. This paradigmatic healing is commemorated in posters of infant Hanuman seated in Anjana's lap, sold in stalls adjacent to the temple. The second tale also features healing, this time of a possessing spirit who is chastened and then established as an additional functionary at the site. It thus dramatizes a process central to the therapeutic regime at Menhdipur, which is expressed through a rhyming play on words: the malevolent spirit (*bhūta*, the past participle of the Sanskrit verb "to be," hence a literal "has been") is transformed into a messenger-servant (*dūta*). The third story, which aims to glorify the site and its hereditary lineage of priest-proprietors, makes no direct reference to possession or healing, though it promises "miracles" (*camatkār*); however, the founder's vision of the mysterious nocturnal army of "lights" (the Persian word *cirāg* is used) suggests a legion of spirits, and may allude to similar imagery in folktales concerning the Sufi Ghazi Mian and the five pirs—wonderworkers who are also invoked, in North India, for the control of unruly ghosts (Crooke 1968:1.201–3, 2.198). Here the spirits pay homage to Balaji and indicate their subservience to him. There may be an element of communal cooptation in the story, for the disciplining of ghosts and jinn has long been one of the specialties of Muslim holy men, who perform exorcism rituals and place Quranic verses in amulets (*tābīz*) to be worn on the body. Beginning in the last decades of the nineteenth century, some Hindu leaders began urging their coreligionists to keep away from such healers and to seek help at Hindu shrines instead; a major concern of their discourse was the protection of Hindu women from the alleged lust of Muslim men (C. Gupta 2001:282–83). At Menhdipur, the list of forty-one "rules" to be followed by pilgrims, posted in the temple and printed in handbooks sold nearby, includes (along with rules against public defecation and smoking near the temple) a warning that pilgrims "should not waste their time and wealth by falling into the clutches of any other *sayān*, *pīr*, *auliyā*, etc."—all terms used for Muslim healers. Another rule advertises the temple's own service of preparing *tābīz* amulets (*Camatkārī* 1988:17).

Hanuman himself is known as "Rama's messenger" (*Rāma-dūta*), and a ubiquitous poster showing "Lord Rama's court" (*Śrī Rām darbār*), depicts him crouched with bowed head at his master's feet. Yet Rama and his story are not much in evidence at Menhdipur. This is not surprising, since it is difficult to imagine the "exemplar of propriety" (*maryādā puruṣottam*) presiding comfortably over the shrieking, writhing bodies of a *peṣī* session. At Menhdipur an alternative court has developed, in which a proliferation of eccentric spiritual functionaries specializing in the darker dimensions of the human psyche fills a *darbār* presided over not by Rama but by Hanuman-Balaji, the wounded child who survived his trauma to take on the powers of all the gods and to acquire "messengers" of his own. As case studies reveal, it is in this "true court" (*sacce darbār*) that those who are often in the weakest and most

vulnerable positions in society—adolescent girls, newly married women, and insecure young men preparing to assume the duties of a householder—are empowered to speak and even to hurl abuse at elders and spouses (Kakar 1982:59–60, 65, 67, 76, 79; Pakaslahti 1998:160–61). Among the reversals that can occur here, I will cite one that seems emblematic of Balaji's role in converting negative fears into positive assets. The general inauspiciousness of monkeys is a matter of ancient record in India, and it is said that to see one in a dream is an ill omen (e.g., *Rāmāyaṇa* 5.30.4). To an aged Muslim healer also visited by Kakar, a patient's dream about a monkey was an indicator of probable possession by a vampiric female ghost (*balā*), who would slowly consume her victim from within (Kakar 1982:47). Yet in the ideology of Balaji, for a *saṅkat*-afflicted person to dream of a monkey is interpreted as a good omen: a summons to Menhdipur and to the potential transformation of malevolent *bhūt* into protective *dūt*, a being who, like Balaji himself, can move between worlds on benevolent missions (ibid. 82–83).

A Further Leap

In front of the temple, a sacred fire—called *dhūnī* or “smoky” and associated with yogic ascetics—smolders in a pit of whitewashed cow dung, before which is planted the trident emblem of Shiva. Just beyond, in the main shrine, an egg-shaped stone lingam, attended by small murtis of Ganesha and Nandi, receives a continuous oblation of cooling water dripping from a perforated copper vessel. There are other deities in the room as well—Durga, the divine trio of Rama-Sita-Lakshmana, and the eternal lovers Radha and Krishna—but the principal items of veneration are a wooden bedstead covered with a coarse blanket, and a large murti of a flying and beatifically smiling Hanuman, rendered in highly polished white marble, which appears to float above the main altar. On this special day, both Hanuman and the bedstead are canopied with chains of brilliant orange and yellow marigolds. Lamps flicker on the altars amid clouds of incense smoke, and the air seems electric with excitement. The small room is crammed with worshipers, and many others who cannot fit in stand at the low windows that open on three sides. It is mid-morning, and the assembled devotees are halfway through a marathon 108 recitations of the *Hanumān cālīsā*, which they began at 4 AM and will continue until about 1 in the afternoon. Led by a succession of singers and accompanied by harmonium, drums, and finger cymbals, the unison chanting uses a variety of melodies and is sometimes rapid, sometimes slow, but always fervent, and more so as the morning proceeds.

Meanwhile, in a nearby kitchen, devotees assemble huge platters of sweets to be offered to Hanuman and distributed to worshipers at the end of the chanting. Outside, cooks working over wood fires stir enormous cauldrons of spiced chickpeas and potatoes, while others fry thousands of puris, for a feast to be served in midafternoon to some eight hundred pilgrims, seated on the ground in neat rows under a canopy. The feast will be followed by a local production of the Ramlila, with homemade sets and costumes, enacted by

a handful of adults and numerous children, the latter especially in the roles of monkey and demon “extras.” This production is already in rehearsal, and actors in glittering crowns and face paint join devotees lining up for chai, which is continually dispensed from a huge pot in the temple garden. Everywhere there is bustling activity, yet without apparent central direction. The morning air is crisp, for it is late September, and the temple stands on a high plateau bordered by rugged mountains, visible in the distance in the golden light.

The scene just described might be unfolding in the Himalayan foothills, but for a few visual details that I have neglected to mention: the fact that Hanuman’s flat-roofed temple is built of adobe and rounded beams, is down the street from a shrine to the Virgin of Guadalupe, and is entered through a parking area full of American and Japanese cars and pickups. It is, in fact, in Taos, New Mexico, only a five-minute walk from the historic plaza with its boutiques full of Navajo jewelry and cowboy apparel. Moreover, although the devoted participants include a small number of U.S.-resident South Asians, the majority, even among the fervent chanters of the *Cālīsā*, are Americans of Anglo-European ancestry. How they, and Hanuman, have come to be here is a story worth telling, for it reveals a further facet of the ongoing—and outgoing—appeal of this god.

Though sometimes dubbed the “monkey temple” by nondevotees, the Taos shrine, consisting of several buildings set in a tract of fields and gardens, is formally named the “Neem Karoli Baba Ashram,” for it commemorates a quixotic and highly charismatic sadhu or “baba,” Neem Karoli, whose disciples sometimes experienced him as a literal embodiment of Rama’s faithful servant. Called “Maharaj-ji” by devotees, Neem Karoli gave few verbal teachings and advocated no fixed regimen of meditation; instead he taught by example through informal “companionship” (*satsaṅg*) and encouraged group devotion through bhajan-kirtan and the performance of “service” (*sevā*), which in the Hindu context means both ritual worship and the maintenance of ashrams where food, accommodation, and sometimes educational or medical services are offered free of charge. In the late 1960s, a number of American seekers were drawn to Maharaj-ji and visited his two ashrams in India, located in the Himalayan foothills at Kainchi near Naini Tal and in Vrindaban, Uttar Pradesh. These included Richard Alpert, a Harvard professor of psychology whom Maharaj-ji soon renamed Ram Dass, Rama’s servant. Profoundly influenced by Maharaj-ji, Ram Dass returned to the United States and stayed for a time at Lama Foundation, an eclectic alternative community in the mountains outside Taos, where he wrote the likewise eclectic book *Be Here Now* (1971), which became something of an American spiritual classic—a visual and verbal collage drawn from a variety of wisdom traditions, but incorporating Ram Dass’s experience of the playfulness and power of Maharaj-ji.²⁶

26. Currently published by Random House on behalf of the Hanuman Foundation, *Be Here Now* has gone through more than thirty-seven printings, with some 1.2 million copies in circulation.

After Neem Karoli's death in 1973, his American devotees continued to meet informally to share devotion through singing and the exchange of stories and memories. Recalling a seemingly casual remark by the guru that "Hanuman will come to America," Ram Dass decided in 1976 to commission a marble murti. Sculptors in Jaipur were given a design, and devotees visited them at several points during the process of carving, polishing, and detail-painting to approve its execution. In early 1978, the human-sized image, weighing 1,500 pounds, was packed in a wooden crate and shipped from Bombay to San Francisco, where it landed in late spring. Its arrival posed a problem, however. Ram Dass offered it as a gift to the decentralized, somewhat anarchic community of American Neem Karoli devotees, most of whom had modest financial resources and a number of whom were ambivalent about, or even opposed to, the "Hindu habit" of murti worship. Proposals were offered to acquire land and build a shrine of some sort on the East or West Coasts where the majority of devotees resided, but no funds were forthcoming. As the summer waned and the master's death anniversary (*mahāsamādhi*, or "great absorption into bliss") approached, a devotee offered the murti temporary asylum at his small homestead outside Taos, provided that others would continue the search for a permanent home and would understand that he himself "wasn't into images." Thus Hanuman, still in his original packing crate, was driven through mountains and deserts to Taos, where he was eventually placed in a small, unheated adobe barn.

During the next four years, while debate continued over the right location for a permanent home and the money to acquire one remained elusive, a trickle of devotees came to Taos to visit Hanuman, opening the front of the crate to experience his darshan. With the help of a few others, the devotee-host began to make modest improvements to the barn, cleaning and whitewashing its walls and installing a space heater against the chill Taos winters; gradually he found himself serving as "caretaker" for an image that was taking on a life of its own. Visitors brought offerings of flowers and sweets, burned incense, and sang devotional songs learned in India. A consensus slowly grew that Hanuman had selected this spot for his American home, and in 1984 the host family offered to vacate the property, selling it at low cost to a new nonprofit corporation, the Neem Karoli Baba Ashram.

As volunteer workers came along, improvements to the property continued; a sun porch was built around the original barn, and bathrooms, a kitchen, and a second-story dharamshala were added. Celebrations of the guru's death anniversary, called "Bhandara" (*bhaṇḍārā*, a feast given for sadhus, generally in commemoration of the passing away of a renunciant leader), grew into three-day affairs attracting hundreds of pilgrims who camped in a nearby field or stayed in motels. Gradually the temple calendar expanded to include other seasonal celebrations, such as Guru Purnima, the full moon of late summer that is dedicated to spiritual guides, and Mahashivaratri, the "great night of Shiva," celebrated on the new moon in late February or early March (like most Hindus, Maharaj-ji's devotees understand Hanuman to be an avatara of

Shiva). In addition, weekly gatherings are held on Tuesdays and Sundays; both feature devotional singing and the latter includes eleven recitations of the *Cālīsā*. Resident caretakers conduct a daily cycle of morning and evening arti worship.

All is not sweetness and light, however. Devotees still argue among themselves and with outsiders over the future of the site. Many would prefer a grander, Hindu-style temple to the converted barn (plans are under way to build one), and some Indo-American pilgrims, who regularly journey for darshan from cities like Tucson and Dallas, occasionally object to the fact that puja and arti are conducted by non-Brahmans (including women), or worry that the food offered as prasad may be ritually impure; others, however, praise the relaxed yet pious atmosphere and appreciate the freedom they are given to commune with Hanuman without priestly mediation. A number of older devotees would prefer no temple at all, and worry that the ashram has “Hinduized” Maharaj-ji’s eclectic and inclusive teachings. Hanuman’s arrival in Taos and the lifestyles of some of his followers were crudely satirized by local writer John Nichols in a 1981 novel, *The Nirvana Blues*, and for most of the 1990s, the temple was embroiled in a costly series of lawsuits instigated by a neighboring property owner. Local prejudice against “idolatry” surfaces from time to time, even as the temple community has grown to include a handful of Native American and Hispanic devotees.

Having visited this ashram several times, I must add a personal note. There is already a modest body of scholarship on the temple-building and identity-preserving activities of South Asian immigrants to Britain and North America (e.g. R. Williams 2000; Waghorne 2004), yet scholars of religion seem inclined to regard Anglo-American-sponsored New Age temples and ashrams with more caution, if not with condescension for what they regard as their “inauthentic” appropriation of venerable traditions. Although members of such groups vary in their degree of understanding of the traditions they endeavor to adapt for American needs, a number of them have made an undeniable impact on American life, slowly cementing new squares into the nation’s increasingly variegated religious mosaic and offering additional options to spiritual seekers. My own experience of the Taos temple is that it subtly embodies an “authenticity” that goes beyond formal imitation or intellectual understanding, and its relaxed yet intense devotional atmosphere indeed recalls what I have experienced in India, especially at nonurban sites like Chirtakut or Vrindaban, where groups of pilgrims and sadhus gather for storytelling and kirtan. Outward expressions of devotion, learned on pilgrimage to India but now seemingly natural, include stooping to “take the dust” of the temple’s threshold, or full-body prostrations at the end of arti, as well as the surprisingly flawless pronunciation (memorized from recordings) of the constantly chanted *Cālīsā*. The mystique of the temple, for me, also includes its foundation story—what Indians term a *sthala purāna* or “sacred site-narrative”—which recalls older tales of revered images (such as Allaha-bad’s “Recumbent Hanuman”) who “choose” their permanent abode while being transported to some other destination.



FIGURE 6.5. The Taos Hanuman; photo by Rameshwar Das 2003, used with permission of Neem Karoli Baba Ashram, Taos, NM

And then there is Hanuman himself: if Ram Dass's commemorative gift drew an initially ambivalent response from its would-be receivers, it has clearly "grown" on many of them over the years. To my taste, this is one of the most beautiful modern murtis I have seen anywhere, and it is easy to understand the perception of pilgrims of varied ethnicities that it emanates a distinctive character and "awakeness" (*jāgrti*). Likewise striking is the fact that its very form embodies a message of intercultural transmission. The Taos Hanuman does not display any of the standard iconographic poses assumed by his counterparts in India, and the model that Ram Dass presented to the sculptors was a painting by an American woman, Christine ("Lakshmi") Tiernan. Inspired by an Indian poster, Tiernan's painting depicted the monkey messenger in midflight, holding a golden ring inscribed with Rama's name in Devanagari letters. This of course recalls the episode of Hanuman's mission to Lanka, but the painter and Ram Dass shared the feeling—the *bhāv*—that this Hanuman was crossing a vaster ocean, bringing a spiritual legacy to another continent.

Ultimately, the impact of a religious community depends not solely on its sacred sites, however charming they may be. The Taos temple is spiritual

center of a network of humanitarian and cultural activities conducted, often without external indications of such affiliation, by devotees of Neem Karoli Baba. When Ram Dass and others returned to the United States in the early 1970s, they carried with them an ideal of “service” that their guru saw Hanuman as embodying, and to which he gave a broad, humanitarian interpretation that transcended the standard activities of most Hindu ashrams and religious trusts. Inspired by Maharaj-ji’s example and by instructions he had given some of them, individual devotees entered or founded organizations offering social service. Ram Dass started the nonprofit Hanuman Foundation, partly funded from his book sales and lecture tours, which over time nurtured a variety of projects. The physician Larry Brilliant, who came to India with a busload of countercultural tourists in 1971 and whom Maharaj-ji later sent to work for the World Health Organization in New Delhi, eventually played a role in the eradication of smallpox from South Asia (Brilliant and Brilliant 1978). He then joined other medical workers in creating the Seva Foundation, which sought to reduce the incidence of blindness in the world’s poorest nations, especially through the provision of free cataract operations. During the past three decades, Seva has overseen more than a million such procedures in India, Nepal, Tibet, Guatemala, and Mexico, has created training programs to improve health care in fifty countries, and has given away some \$40 million in medical services and supplies.

In 1972, Ram Dass was inspired to donate 1,500 copies of *Be Here Now* to prison libraries throughout the United States. The following year, he collaborated with devotee Bo Lozoff in starting the Prison Ashram Project. Through individual correspondence, the project offered friendship and nonsectarian spiritual guidance (including training in meditation) to interested prison inmates. In time, this effort developed into the Human Kindness Foundation, based near Durham, North Carolina, which by the late 1990s maintained contact with some forty thousand prisoners throughout the United States. The foundation also opened Kindness House, a nondenominational intentional community, that emphasized service to others and spiritual study, in which ex-prisoners could live as part of their parole plan. In 1980, Ram Dass’s concern over the “American way of death” led him to establish, with Stephen Levine and Dale Borglum, “The Hanuman Foundation Dying Center” in Santa Fe, New Mexico, which included a telephone counseling service for the dying and their families. This experimental effort generated several publications and later inspired Borglum’s ongoing “Living/Dying Project,” which serves four counties in the San Francisco Bay area. Recognizing that medical personnel and even hospices lack the time and training to assist the dying in their psychological and emotional needs, the Project trains volunteers “to encourage awareness and compassion in our individual and collective relationship with death, to experience dying and being with the dying as a unique opportunity for spiritual awakening” (Borglund 1999:2). Cultural activities associated with the Taos ashram—where music plays such a prominent role in devotional expression—and with the wider Neem Karoli community came to include Triloka Records, founded by a devotee and later based in New York

City, a distributor of “world music,” including the eclectic jazz-rock-bhajans of California-based devotee Jai Uttal and the kirtans of New Yorker Krishna Das.

The people who engage in these diverse activities are likely to turn up, for rest and renewal, at the Taos ashram, especially at Bhandara time. They sit in the temple room by Maharaj-ji's symbolic bedstead and, facing Hanuman, sing for hours. Most of them also chant the *Cālīsā* regularly at home. Though few of them know Hindi, they consider the words of this text to be charged with spiritual power and recite it only in its original language. Many also read English translations and retellings of the Ramayana story, especially its beloved *Sundarakāṇḍa*. From conversations with such devotees, I have come to appreciate that they are not “casual” readers of the Rama epic; it is no exotic fairytale or cultural sourcebook to them. If they are not necessarily interested in the ways in which academic scholars problematize the tale, they have their own problems with it and, like devotees in India, wrestle with them in individual ways. Yet they love it, and their accounts have vividly demonstrated to me the story's continuing power to bridge oceans, touch hearts, and influence lives. At Bhandara in 1998, I conversed with a pilgrim in his late twenties who worked for the prison outreach project. We sat on the ashram's back porch as the sun was setting and animatedly discussed fine points of interpretation of several episodes in which he was interested. He told me that he was “raised on the Ramayana” by his devotee father in North Carolina—mainly through the reverent but distinctly American retelling by William Buck (1976)—adding, “We used to read it every morning, and we'd sometimes talk for hours about the characters and their meanings. It made us very close, and to this day I've never gotten tired of it. I want to teach it to my own children someday.” Listening to him, it was clear to me that Hanuman, bearer of both Rama's ring and his story, had indeed landed on American soil.

Encountering an Immortal

In a story inspired by the medieval legend of Alexander the Great's failed quest for the “water of life,” Jorge Luis Borges tells of a Roman tribune who stumbles on the spring, drinks, and becomes physically immortal. But Borges's narrator soon discovers that the fabled “city of the immortals” is in fact a tribe of ragged, ashen-faced men living in tiny desert caves. Bored with their unending existence and having realized (to paraphrase the Rolling Stones) “what a drag it is *not* getting old,” the immortals eventually disperse across the world, resolved to spend the rest of eternity seeking a hoped-for second spring that will contain the antidote to the elixir they consumed: the “water of death” (Borges 1962:105–18).

Borges's fable, reflecting modern angst and the potential ennui of technologically lengthened lifespans, is refreshing precisely because it goes against the grain of the magical appeal that deathlessness has always had for us mortals. In the folklore and mystical practice of South Asia, immortality (in Sanskrit, *amaratva*) has indeed been highly prized and assiduously pursued.



FIGURE 6.6. Hanuman in the Himalayas; poster, mid-twentieth century

Yet it should be noted that it seldom connotes literally “eternal life,” which belongs only to the ultimate divine principle(s). More commonly, it means living for a *very* long time: a cycle of world ages (*mahāyuga*), or a multicycle *kalpa* or “day of Brahma.” Hence the legendary “immortals” of medieval Hindu lore—seven or eight in number, according to an oft-quoted Sanskrit couplet—are more accurately described as “long-lived ones” (*cirañjīvi*).²⁷

27. The standard list is Ashvatthama, Bali, Vyasa, Hanuman, Vibhishana, Kripa, and Parashurama (Govindchandra 1976:294); some versions add Markandeya as an eighth. This does not exhaust the roster of deathless-but-earthly beings in Hindu lore; medieval yogic traditions add eighty-four “perfected ones” (*siddha*), and nine “lords” (*nātha*), most famously Gorakhnath, who (like Hanuman) is sometimes said to live in the mysterious Kadali Van. Siddha immortality is even claimed to outlast the periodic dissolution of the cosmos (White 1996:315, 326), a condition also enjoyed, according to the *Mahābhārata*, by the sage Markandeya (see *Mahābhārata* 3.186–88).

Hanuman always figures in such lists (along with another Ramayana character, the rakshasa king Vibhishana), and his longevity is the result of a shower of boons that he receives in most versions of the story. Thus, for example, Hanuman is undying because:

1. (According to Valmiki) as an infant, he receives boons from all the celestials following his wounding by Indra's thunderbolt; because these include perks like "not being able to be killed by any weapon" (*aśastravadhytā*) and "willing the time of one's own death" (*icchānusāra maraṇa*), they essentially do the trick, but in addition Yama, god of death, tosses in "freedom from illness" (*arogatva*) and Vishvakarma adds *cirañjīvatva* ("longevity") itself (*Rāmāyaṇa* 4.65.25–28, 7.36.12–40; cf. Bulcke 1999:542).
2. (Again according to Valmiki) following Rama's enthronement, Hanuman is offered boons, and he requests unending devotion as well as the right to remain "embodied" (*śarīre*) on earth for as long as Rama's story endures; Rama reiterates this boon just before he relinquishes his human form in the waters of the Sarayu (*Rāmāyaṇa* 7.40.16–18, 7.108.33–35; for a summary of the boons in various recensions of Valmiki, see Bulcke 1999:541–42).
3. (According to Tulsidas) when Hanuman visits Sita in the Ashoka Garden in Lanka and gives her Rama's ring and message, she blesses him to be "ageless and deathless" (*ajara-amara*; *Rāmcaritmānas* 5.17.2–3).

This overdetermined immortality has been highly productive of religious experience, lore, and speculation. Whereas the boons acquired by the infant Hanuman—forcefully extracted from the Vedic gods on pain of suffocation by his disgruntled father—suggest the self-willed achievement of magical powers and of physical immortality by yogic and tantric practitioners, those bestowed by Sita and Rama suggest Hanuman's self-effacing bhakti side and are linked to the immortality of Rama's tale, which (according to Brahma's boon to Valmiki) will be told "as long as the mountains and rivers shall endure" (*Rāmāyaṇa* 1.2.35). This more devotional interpretation sees immortality as a further extension of Hanuman's service and of his untiring taste for hearing stories of his Lord. Thus (some say) he stays on earth as Rama's "representative" (*pratīnidhi*) to help devotees in the darker ages to come, and willingly relinquishes "the bliss of Saket" (Rama's heavenly kingdom) for the sake of the sweetness of the Rama-katha on earth (Dube 1989:320; *Kalyāṇ* 1975:84).

As an earthly and embodied being (albeit one possessing the power to alter his form at will), Hanuman is thus "one among us" in an imminent and tangible way, a fact that modern storytellers like to stress. Sundd's repeated identification of Hanuman as "the only living god" appears, despite its Judeo-Christian ring, to be meant quite literally: Hanuman is the only deity, in the present kali yuga, inhabiting a physical body on earth (Sundd 1998:4, 66,

624). He is thus potentially visible to us if we make the right effort to see him; as another author puts it, “If you wish, you can cause him to manifest anywhere, whenever your devotion is capable of summoning him” (Soni 2000:35), and he periodically manifests of his own volition to devotees in distress (R. P. Sharma n.d.:iii). Additionally, his endless delight in hearing Rama’s story has led to the belief that he is present, seen or unseen, wherever it is retold (*Ānanda rāmāyaṇa* 1.12.143; cf. Bulcke 1999:543).

The concept of bodily immortality invites us to ponder a condition that, once again, situates Hanuman on a boundary, this time between human mortality and divine eternity. If an avatara is, so to speak, a “compression” of infinitude into a mortal frame, a *cirañjīvi* is just the reverse: an endless extension of corporeal life. And if the problem of mortals is (as the saying goes), “so much to do, so little time,” that of an immortal is, as Borges imagined, potentially just the opposite: a deathless being has, literally, “all the time in the world.” How does he spend it? In thinking about Hanuman’s immortality, devotees have often considered such related matters as the locales in which he might reside and the physical forms in which he might appear; they have also recognized him as temporarily or partially embodied in other human beings. I consider each of these topics below.

The Plantain Forest and Gold Mountain

In September 1989, while en route to the source of the Ganga, I spent a night in the Himalayan town of Uttarkashi. At dusk, I took a walk along the turbulent Bhagirathi, as the Ganga is called here. Famous since ancient times as the “Kashi (Banaras) of the north,” the town boasts an old temple to Banaras’s patron deity, Shiva Vishvanath, but I was intrigued to find, directly facing it, a large and obviously recently built one to Hanuman, housing a white marble murti standing in the “boon-granting” pose (with right hand raised palm-outward in blessing), flanked by several sindur covered and probably older embodiments. Adjacent to the main shrine was an assembly hall where an oversize copy of the *Rāmcaritmānas* rested on a stand. Behind it sat an elderly, shaven-headed man wearing the salmon-colored garb of a sadhu; the temple was otherwise deserted. We got into a conversation, at first about some of the icons in the temple, but then the subject of Hanuman’s immortality came up. The sadhu told me that Hanuman is present on earth “right now” and that it is possible to see him. Then his voice dropped almost to a whisper, and his eyes gazed past me into space. He spoke slowly.

In Garhwal there is a place called Pandukeshwar and, above it, a mountain called Hemkut. On this mountain is a village known as Rangvallipur, also called Kimpurushnagar. There the gods dwell, taking on bodies. You have to have proper eyes to see them. To some they will appear as ordinary people, but they are not. They are the great gods themselves. There Hanuman resides.

Spellbound by this strange and tantalizing narration of a Himalayan “address” for Hanuman, I asked the sadhu if he had been to the place he described, and he nodded. Had he seen Hanuman? He closed his eyes and said softly, “Yes.” Although its details were new to me, the sadhu’s account has since proved to have a long genealogy encompassing Puranic, yogic, and alchemical lore, as well as the experiences of individual devotees (and apparently the sadhu’s own). Contextualizing this account involves touring some fantastic landscapes located in remote regions of the subcontinent but, more important, at the limits of human experience: playgrounds of immortal beings, forests of bliss, and pools of nectar—at least for those with “proper eyes to see them.”

After the Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇa*, the earliest text to mention Hanuman’s immortality is the *Mahābhārata*. Its account of Bhima’s meeting with Hanuman in the Himalayas has been summarized as Story 39, but it deserves another look, both as a meditation on the theme of immortality (one that suggests just a hint of the world weariness found in Borges’s modern tale), and as *locus classicus* for one of the venues in which Hanuman is said to reside: the mysterious “Plantain Forest.” The meeting is one of a series in the Forest Book in which each of the three “foregrounded” Pandava brothers—those of the five whose personalities are highly developed—encounters a deity to whom he is closely related, and undergoes a test of some kind, ultimately receiving boons. Whereas Arjuna and Yudhisthira meet their divine fathers (Indra and Dharma, respectively), it seems fitting that Bhima meet not his father (since the amorphous wind is seldom personified in epic mythology), but Vayu’s other famous son, who, like Bhima, was renowned for physical strength. And whereas Arjuna’s “trial” involves martial dexterity, and Yudhisthira’s, wisdom, Bhima’s (again appropriately) focuses on his arrogance, born of his might.

The story unfolds as four of the Pandavas, accompanied by Draupadi and guided by the seer Lomasha, enter a remote region of the inner Himalayas en route to their anticipated rendezvous with Arjuna, who has been absent for five years on a quest to obtain divine weapons. Since Arjuna has been in the heaven of his father, Indra, Lomasha leads Arjuna’s kin toward the sacred but dangerous place where heaven and earth meet, beyond the visible mountain ranges of North India. Yudhisthira notes that their guide displays an “utterly new anxiety,” and considers sending his retinue to lower climes, but Bhima will not hear of it. As they ascend a mountain “peopled by seers, siddhas, and immortals,” a ferocious wind generates a dust storm that plunges them in darkness. Draupadi faints and Yudhisthira again despairs of going on, but Bhima summons his half-rakshasa son Ghatotkaca, who comes with a troop of grotesque cohorts. They pick up the exhausted Pandavas and take “the path of the siddhas,” an aerial route to Mount Kailash, alighting at Badri, the paradisaic ashram of Nara and Narayana, where they rest for six days. Here Draupadi spies the thousand-petaled lotus that drifts in on the wind and begs Bhima to fetch more. He departs forthwith and his furious ascent of the mountain is marked by gratuitous destruction of its flora and fauna—reflecting both

Bhima's blustery nature and his challenge to the demi-divine guardians of the high places.

This is made clear when Bhima climbs a high ridge and discovers "a very beautiful orchard of banana trees that stretched for many a league." He proceeds to trash this grove, and advances blowing his conch and slapping his upper arms. The animals of the forest flee in terror, but one creature—"a gigantic monkey"—is unperturbed, even bored by the ruckus. The poet introduces this fantastic yet feral being, combining the traits of several simian species, as if he and his audience, like Bhima, do not yet know who he is:

His thick, short neck lay on the cross of his arms; the waist over his hips looked slender below his towering shoulders; and he shone, as with a flag, with his erect, long-haired tail that was slightly bent at the end.²⁸ His face, like the beaming moon, showed red lips, a mouth with copper-red tongue, pink ears, darting brows, and round-tipped protruding tusks. The brilliant white teeth inside his mouth shed luster on it, and a massive mane crowned it like a mass of ashoka blossoms. Thus he sat, resplendent amidst the golden banana trees, ablaze with his beauty, like a blazing fire, staring fearlessly from honey-yellow eyes. (*Mahābhārata* 3.146.66–71; 1975:501)

There follows an exchange in which the monkey upbraids Bhima for his "cruel deeds" toward the forest animals, complains of his own infirmity and age, and finally (when prompted by Bhima's invocation of Hanuman) challenges him to remove his tail from the path. Bhima's failure at this task leads to the revelation of the monkey's name, which (true to his old habit) he follows with a compressed Ramayana, culminating in his request to the departing Raghuvir king that he himself live on "as long as the tale of Rama survives in the worlds!" "Now," he adds, "apsaras and gandharvas amuse me here by singing of the feats of that hero." After reluctantly yielding to Bhima's request that he display his "old form" (though it is only, he says, "as much of my body as you can stand seeing") and delivering discourses on time, dharma, and statecraft, Hanuman embraces Bhima "with his paws" and speaks in a voice "choked with affection," as his eyes fill with tears. "Do not tell anyone that I am here," he instructs, but adds that, "by touching in you another human body I have been reminded of Raghava" (3.150.5–6; *ibid.* 508–9).

Although it might appear to be another long detour in the meandering Book of the Forest, the story of Bhima's quest for the *saugandhika* flower offers a masterful display of one of the *Mahābhārata*'s most striking features: its

28. Although modern poster artists (and the *Mahabharat* teleserial) depict Hanuman sprawled on the ground with his recumbent tail blocking Bhima's path, the text depicts an erect, arched tail, as is typical of langurs when alert. The poet's description suggests that the tail formed an arch over which Hanuman challenged Bhima to leap (since to pass under it would abase him). When asked to lift it out of the way, Bhima did not bend down, but rather "pulled at the thing, which stretched high like Indra's rainbow, with both his arms" (*Mahābhārata* 3.147.16–17; 1975:503).

fugue-like variation on its own themes, evoking the cyclical structure of time with which it is so centrally concerned. The Pandavas's ascent of the Himalayas, complete with Draupadi falling by the wayside, prefigures their final journey in Book 18, and the windblown lotus recalls the similarly enchanting waterborne blossom of Book 1's "tale of the five Indras" (1.13.189). Hanuman's lectures to Bhima echo the didactic preoccupations of the epic, and his hierophany (including the detail of the receiver begging for the awesome vision to be removed) prefigures Krishna's display to Arjuna of his cosmic form. But the story is also notable for its glimpse of the "post-Rama" life and locale of Hanuman. It places him in a surreal "Plantain Forest" located above Himalayan snowfields, where the fruit and water (both said to be "like nectar") hint at immortality. To approach this place requires initiatory trials: storms, darkness, exhaustion, and aerial transport. Hanuman seems well settled into this "retirement home," close to the capital of the chthonic yakshas, and he likes to take long naps and enjoy diverting entertainment. He seems familiar with its routines, telling Bhima (just before dismissing him) that it is now time "for the women of the gods and gandharvas to come" (presumably to entertain him; *ibid.* 509). Though he vanishes from sight, it seems that he will remain in the forest, for he asks Bhima not to disclose his whereabouts to others. Like Alice's smiling yet evasive Cheshire Cat, Bhima's monkey is a playful and ironic interlocutor. When he teasingly complains of being "tired" and "sick," the audience understands, as Bhima does not, that he has already lived for thousands (or even, in the standard Puranic time scheme, hundreds of thousands) of years.²⁹ But although Hanuman reluctantly grants Bhima's request for a glimpse of his treta yuga form, the episode clearly relishes an immortal Hanuman who, in some sense, literally "ages" as the yugas advance, even as it reinforces the notion (so important in his later worship) that he can be aroused from a dormant state by being "reminded" of his powers.

As chapter 5 proposed, this tale became a prototype for others set in the dvapara yuga, involving Krishna's use of Hanuman to humble the pride of his associates. Yet its portrait of a somewhat lonely immortal (for the touch of Bhima's body awakens old memories and brings tears to Hanuman's eyes) whiling away the eons in a high-altitude wonderland would also prove germane to a sizable body of lore. Like Hanuman himself, the topos of his Himalayan abode would take on shades of meaning reflecting the experiences and ideologies of devotees. The Plantain Forest has been associated with a range of earthly locales, including a number of places in the Garhwal Himalayas. Thus a modern folk tradition holds that Hanuman resides on the summit of Banderpunch (*bandar pūñc*, "monkey's tail"), a 6,000-meter peak in the Yamunotri region, and it is said that a large monkey goes there every

29. According to Sundd's Puranic-style chronology, Hanuman was 877,026 years old when he met his half-brother (Sundd 1998: appendix p. 76). The original epic audience, however, probably understood the yugas to be of shorter duration—for instance, a kali yuga of 1,200 rather than 432,000 years (González-Reimann 2002:4).

year from the pilgrim town of Hardwar (Crooke 1968:1.87). Another modern account of sadhus encountering Hanuman situates the Kadali Van “in the dense forests of Nepal” (*Kalyān* 1975:81). Yet some medieval alchemists situated it far to the south, on the hill known as Shrishailam in Andhra Pradesh, which was known as “a source of healing herbs and magically rejuvenating waters” (White 1996:238).

In the Puranas (as in the oral account I heard in Uttarkashi), the Plantain Forest is usually located on “Golden Mountain” (*Hemakūṭa*), in the trans-Himalayan region known as *Kimpuruṣa-varṣa* or *Kimpuruṣa-khaṇḍa*. This is the “realm of the kimpurushas” and also of the kinnaras, hybrid beings—the labels are usually said to mean “What sort of a man (is this)?”—who, like Hanuman, are thought to combine human, animal, and supernatural traits. Sometimes imagined as half-equine, they are grouped with yakshas, gandharvas, apsaras, and rakshasas among the minions of Kubera, the club-wielding yaksha king who rules the magical Himalayan city of Alka. According to the *Matsya purāṇa*:

The people of Kimpurusha-Khanda have a complexion like that of heated gold, and they live up to ten thousand years. A stream of honey flows from a Plaksha tree, in that sacred Khanda, which the kinnaras residing there drink. On account of which they remain so healthy, without any grief, and happy and cheerful in their minds. . . . The womenfolk are known as apsaras. (*Matsya purāṇa* 114.62–65; 1972:310)

In a similar description in the *Mārkaṇḍeya purāṇa*, the land of the Kimpurushas is said to feature water abundantly bubbling up from the ground (whereas “here in Bharata we have rain”), and to grow “wishing trees” (that yield, instead of fruit, anything one desires); the people there are free of sickness (*Mārkaṇḍeya purāṇa* 56.20–23; 1904:282). This paradise resembles the secret realm where, in central and western Asian legend, a tree and spring of life lie paradoxically in a “land of darkness.” It was here, according to the Alexander Legend, that the Macedonian searched unsuccessfully for the stream that would make him immortal, and which, according to Sufi lore, one of Alexander’s companions found, and became the deathless Khwaja Khizr, “the green man” (Rizvi 1978:100).

These traditions converge in the medieval topos of the “Plantain Forest” (*kadalī vana*), also known as the “forest of lampblack” (*kajjarī vana*), and as the “forest of black mercuric sulfide” (*kajjalī vana*), the latter named for “the mineral hierophany of the sexual essences of Shiva and the Goddess” (White 1996:238). This multivalent forest became as renowned among tantrics, Nath yogis, and alchemists as it was among Vaishnavas. It was at times associated with eroticism—for the trunks of banana trees were metaphorically likened to women’s thighs, and banana groves, emblematic of fecundity, figured in Sanskrit dramas as sites for the amorous trysts of kings. Hence, for the more sybaritic tantrics and alchemists, the Plantain Forest was a place where a

liberated siddha could enjoy (literally) endless intercourse with the demidivine women who frequented it, whose lust would be aroused by the sight of his “diamond-like” physique (ibid. 237, 323). Negatively speaking, and especially among the misogynistic Nath yogis, the Kadali Van was a place of temptation, identified with Kamarupa in Assam, the Shakta “kingdom of women” where (in a popular Nath legend) Gorakhnath’s guru Matsyendranath (the “lord of fish”) was held captive and sexually depleted by voracious tantric sorceresses, until his pupil eventually freed him (ibid. 223, 231–36).³⁰ Viewed positively or negatively, the Kadali Van figures as the “most frequently recurring venue of Nath Siddha legend” (ibid. 113). In the sixteenth-century epic *Padmāvati* of Malik Muhammad Jayasi, which combines Hindu lore with Sufi allegory, the Kadali Van contains the “fountain of life” and is associated with Nath gurus like Gorakhnath and Gopichand as well as with Alexander and Khizr (e.g., *Padmāvati* 12.5, 20.11, 42.5, 1944: 91, 124, 288). In the North Indian oral sagas of the brothers Alha and Udal, it is the forest to which the battle-weary Alha, who has attained immortality, ultimately retires, though it is believed that he will, like King Arthur, return from his self-imposed exile someday (*Lay of Alha* 1923:20, 273). Both in story literature and in Nath legend, the Plantain Forest is additionally associated with vidyadharas, the “bearers of wisdom” to whose ranks, according to Jain narrators, Hanuman and his cohorts belong. Like yakshas, kimpurushas, and siddhas, vidhyadharas are fond of good living and sexual indulgence; they move freely through the skies but like to alight and sport on mountaintops (White 1996:57). The placement of Hanuman in a magic forest associated with immortality and with the powers sought by tantrics, yogis, and alchemists may help explain his veneration in Shaiva and Shakta traditions. The *Cālīsā*’s assertion, “You possess the elixir (*rasāyana*) of Rama” (verse 32) potentially links him to the alchemical quest, since the word *rasāyana* (a name for red mercuric sulfide, a key alchemical ingredient as well as a pigment often found in sindur) has long been used to refer both to alchemy in general and to the elixirs it yields (White 1996:187). Of course, the verse also permits a metaphorical and devotional interpretation, whereby *Rāma rasāyana* is read as “the elixir that is Rama/Rama’s name.”

In Vaishnava texts, Hanuman’s Kadali Van address is sometimes replaced by one in “the realm of the Kimpurushas” (*kimpuruṣa-varṣa*); e.g., in the ca. ninth-century *Bhāgavata purāṇa*, which states that he daily listens to the “song of Rama” (*Rāma-gāthā*) chanted there by gandharvas (*Bhāgavata purāṇa* 5.19.2). The later *Gargasamhitā* narrates the origin of this Himalayan paradise: at the time of the churning of the cosmic milk-ocean, Vishnu shed a tear of joy that fell into the pot of immortal nectar. There it grew into a seedling of the tulsi plant to which he gave the name Rangavalli (“colorful”). He planted it in Kimpurusha-varsha, and a city called Rangavallipura arose there, a place frequented by demigods and liberated souls. Every day, Hanuman goes there to hear recitation of the Rama story (*Gargasamhitā, viśvajit khaṇḍa* 26.22–26;

30. On the peculiar reverse-parallels of this tale with that of Hanuman’s own “fish-born” son, see chapter 7.

cited in *Kalyān* 1975:241–42). This story establishes a Vaishnavized mountain paradise founded on a different divine emission: not Shiva's seed (of rejuvenating mercury, granting power and immortality), but Vishnu's teardrop (of love, connoting overflowing emotion); clearly it suits Hanuman's bhakti rather than shakti persona, and it is accepted by later Vaishnava authors.³¹

Such accounts of Hanuman's "retirement home"³²—usually accompanied by the reminder that he remains capable of assuming countless forms and appearing in myriad locations—are now commonplace in popular literature (e.g., *Kalyān* 1975:367; D. Gupta 1980:33; J. Mishra 1987:236; Nagar 1995:63; Prem n.d.:323). They have their visual counterpart in a set of posters that depict the monkey meditating in lotus posture or engaged in chanting Rama's name. That these scenes are set in Kimpurusha-varsha is suggested both by the icy Himalayan peaks in the background, and by the fact that Hanuman is covered with white fur, an apparent visual coding for his "aged" status that is seen as well in posters and films of his encounter with Bhima. The lore of this locale circulates through even newer technology: in 1999, an Internet site displayed an allegedly miraculous photograph of Hanuman as an aged, anatomically correct monkey, reading the Ramayana. Under the heading, "Hanuman in the Himalayas—Truth Is Stranger Than Fiction," the accompanying text claimed that the photo was taken in 1998 by a pilgrim to Lake Manasarovar, near Mount Kailash. The pilgrim wandered into a lakeside cave, "saw a light" there, trained his camera on it, and snapped the photo. He later died mysteriously, but his companions developed the roll of film and discovered the image. Although it is in fact a blurred photo of an idiosyncratic marble murti, realistically painted with simulated brown fur, located somewhere in North India (I own several photos of this murti, presented to me in 1990 by Banaras Ramayanis who were fond of it but certainly aware of its fabricated status), this bit of cyber-folklore displays some of the stock motifs I have been discussing: the Himalayan location, Hanuman's aged appearance, and the hazards of trespassing on the hidden retreat of an immortal.

There is another "otherworld" in which some devotees locate Hanuman: a world that is not his but his Lord's. This is Saket, the heavenly archetype and transposition of the city of Ayodhya. Modern anthologies sometimes note that, unlike most of the other popular deities of Hinduism, "Hanuman-ji is not the lord of any divine world or transcendent realm" (*divya lok* or *dhām*; J. Mishra

31. Sanatana Gosvami in his sixteenth-century commentary *Brhadbhāgavātmṛta*, has Narada set out to find the greatest devotee of Vishnu. He first goes to a pious Brahman, who directs him to a great king, who sends him to Indra, who sends him to Brahma, who sends him to Shiva, who sends him to Prahlad. Prahlad reveals the answer—it is Hanuman, naturally—and directs Narada to Kimpurusha-varsha to have Hanuman's darshan (*Brhadbhāgavātmṛta* 1.4.37–61; cited in *Kalyān* 1975:94–95). Similarly, Raghuraj Singh's nineteenth-century hagiography *Rāmrasikāvalī bhaktamālā* includes another description of Hanuman's residence in Kimpurusha-varsha, where he listens, shedding tears of joy, to gandharvas singing of Rama's deeds (cited in R. P. Sharma n.d.:202).

32. Cf. *The Purāṇic Encyclopaedia* entry on "Kimpuruṣa," which reports (concerning Kimpurusha-varsha and using a curious past tense), "It was here that Hanuman spent his last days worshipping Shri Rama" (V. Mani 1975:411).

1987:236). Yet Valmiki's assertion, that all the creatures of Ayodhya followed their beloved Rama into the waters of the Sarayu and ascended to special heavenly worlds (*Rāmāyaṇa* 7.110), was interpreted by later Rama devotees to refer to an eternal realm comparable to the Golok (literally "cow world," the eternal Vrindaban) of Krishna bhaktas. To distinguish this realm from the worldly Ayodhya (which had become identified after about the fifth century CE with an urban site in northeastern India), they referred to it by an ancient and now little-used Buddhist name (Bakker 1986:1.11–12).

In the writings of Ramanandi initiates of the Rasik tradition, the topography of the city of Saket and its surrounding ghats, gardens, and pleasure groves—visualized by them in their meditative practices—was described in minute detail (Lutgendorf 1991b:220–24; B. Singh 1957:273–77, 365). Their accounts delineate a classic mandala with four gates, its cardinal avenues converging on the "Golden House" (*Kanak bhavan*), at the center of which

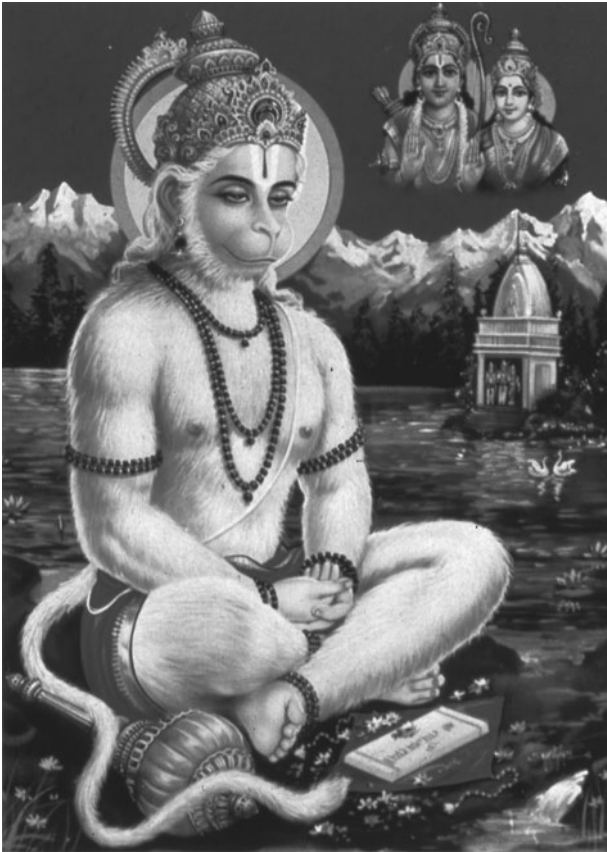


FIGURE 6.7. Hanuman meditating on Sita-Rama; poster, late twentieth century

Rama and Sita engage in endless, world-maintaining amorous play. In this tradition, Hanuman is understood to be one of the “eternal attendants” (*parikara* or *parṣad*) of the Lord and his Shakti. He appears (depending on the subject into which one is initiated) either as a stalwart guardian of the eastern gate (associated with Hanuman Garhi temple in the mundane Ayodhya), or (in his “secret” identity) as Charushila, one of the eight intimate female friends of Sita (van der Veer 1988:19, 162–64; N. Sharma 1987:865–81). The goal of Rasik practice is to visualize Saket so perfectly that one can actually go there in a spiritual body. In one devotee’s account of such a journey, Hanuman plays a typical intercessory role while displaying the servility characteristic of his portrayal in Vaishnava texts.

There I saw countless monkeys leaping about friskily, engaged in chanting Rama’s name. I stood rapt in adoration. Lord Hanuman escorted me into the inner palace, where I gazed on Lord Rama in human form. Hanuman approached the Lord, on whose left side Sita was resplendent and on whose right side Lakshmana was present. I saw that Hanuman, while chanting the Lord’s praises, sometimes rotated the royal fly-whisk over him, sometimes stood before him with palms joined and recited spontaneous hymns, sometimes held a white umbrella over him, and sometimes massaged his feet. And sometimes he did all these things at once. (*Bṛhadbhāgavatāmṛta* 2.4.260–61; cited in *Kalyāṇ* 1975:243–44)

Whether they visualize him in Kadali Van, Kimpurusha-varsha, or Saket, devotees like to point out that Hanuman is not limited by space or embodiment: he can take any shape and go anywhere at will. Many like to imagine him in the humble form with which he is most closely associated—e.g., “He is constantly roaming around in the guise of an ordinary monkey” (Shrimali n.d.:25)—and stories abound of his intervention, in this or another guise, in the lives of great saints of the past and ordinary devotees of the present. It is to some of these accounts that I now turn.

Close Encounters

In the kali yuga, Hanuman figures in the biographies of a number of famous saints. I have already described Tulsidas’s encounter with him as a leper—as in Bhima’s experience, Hanuman takes the form of an aged being “ridden with sickness”—but this is not to be their last meeting. Hanuman’s instruction to go to Chitrakut is accompanied by his promise to arrange darshan of Rama for Tulsidas there, and this occasions several more encounters. Rama and Lakshmana first appear to the poet as young noblemen on horseback, and Tulsidas fails to take special notice of them (*Bhaktamāl* 639; Growse 1983:xlvi; Rupkala 1909:763). When Hanuman reappears to point out this error, the poet is stricken with remorse, whereupon Hanuman promises him another chance. This time, when Tulsidas is seated on the riverfront during a fair,

grinding sandalwood paste for decorating the foreheads of pilgrims, Rama approaches in the form of a young boy. The boy inclines his head to receive a tilak, then mischievously takes paste on his own finger to apply to the poet's forehead. At this moment, Hanuman (who realizes that Tulsidas is again about to miss his chance) takes the form of a parrot in a nearby tree and squawks a now-famous couplet.

On Chitrakut ghat there's a great crowd of devotees.
Tulsi grinds sandalwood; Raghuvir gives him a tilak.

This *dohā* makes Tulsidas aware of his opportunity; he gazes ecstatically into the eyes of his child-Lord, who then vanishes. The story makes a nice counterpoint to the earlier one set in Banaras. Both involve the disguised appearance of deities and the failure of human beings, even saints, to recognize them; and of course both foreground Hanuman, the master of disguises.

According to popular accounts, Hanuman became a regular visitor during Tulsidas' later career.³³ He appeared to the poet with the order that he write Rama's story in "simple and intelligible language" (D. Shukla n.d.:55), and sent an army of monkeys to frighten the "king of Delhi," who had imprisoned Tulsidas when the poet refused to perform a miracle on command (*Bhaktamāl* 644; Growse 1983:xlvi).³⁴ And late in the poet's life, Hanuman advised Tulsidas to compose a "letter of petition" (*Vinay patrikā*) to Rama, requesting relief from the kali yuga personified, who was tormenting the poet because the latter was converting too many people to righteous conduct; the successful outcome of this petition empowered Hanuman to discipline Kali (Tulsidas 1966:40). Another story popular with *Rāmcaritmānas* expounders claims that at several points during the composition of the epic, Tulsidas found himself unable to finish a verse; each time, Hanuman appeared and supplied the desired half-line.³⁵ According to one commentator, the immense popularity of the *Rāmcaritmānas* reflects the fact that Hanuman took such interest in it (Soni 2000:278). It is also said that Tulsidas's gratitude for all these favors led him to compose numerous praise-poems to Hanuman (e.g., the *Cālīsā*) and to "make them siddha"—charged with spiritual potency for the benefit of future reciters (S. Singh 1984:292).

Hanuman/Maruti plays an even more prominent role in the legends of Swami Ramdas (1608–81); indeed, the latter's disciples considered him an avatara of Maruti (this aspect of his legend will be considered separately,

33. Many hagiographies, following the *Mūl gosāīṃ carit*, assume the Chitrakut darshan to have occurred early in the poet's life, providing him with the divine charge required to author the *Rāmcaritmānas* (e.g. M. Gopal 1977:95; Sundd 1998:505).

34. Nagar reports the story as a "folktale" (*lok kathā*) and places it in Fatehpur Sikri during Akbar's rule. In this version, Tulsidas is imprisoned for forty days and composes the *Cālīsā* to appeal for Hanuman's help, as a result of which the monkeys appear (Nagar 1995:240).

35. See *Kalyāṇ* 1975:371 and Soni 2000:278–79, which both offer ingenious explanations for why particular verses posed problems.

below). In Mahipati's biography, Maruti first appears to Ramdas (still known by his childhood name, Narayan) when the latter is living in the forest, having fled his family to avoid marriage. When Narayan, in a state of spiritual despair, tries to hang himself with a vine, Maruti comes "at a bound," wearing crocodile-shaped earrings and "making his monkey cry of *bhu, bhu*" (Mahipati 1932:24). Just as he guided Tulsidas to Chitrakut, so Maruti escorts Narayan to Panchavati (modern Nasik), reputed site of the second hermitage of Rama and Sita. Here he presents the boy to Rama, who gives him the name "Ramdas." Maruti then sings the Rama-katha to Ramdas and advises him to go south, shun people, and "behave like one possessed by a devil" (ibid. 25-29). Later, during a period of intense sadhana on the banks of the Krishna river, Maruti appears to Ramdas thrice daily for twelve years, encouraging him in his repetition of the thirteen-syllable Rama mantra; finally (after 35 million repetitions) the Lord appears, together with Sita (ibid. 42-44).

Mahipati's Vaishnava account contrasts with other popular stories of Ramdas's initiatory experiences that reveal a hatha yogic influence. In these, Ramdas's twelve-year sadhana involves immersion up to the neck in the Godavari River and 130 million repetitions of the mantra. Maruti comes daily in the guise of a monkey and watches from a nearby tree. When the saint's body has been sufficiently purified by these practices, Maruti enters it in subtle form, causes the "serpent energy" (*kundalini*) to awaken and rise, piercing the energy centers (*cakra*) that lie along the spinal column, and finally making Ramdas siddha or "perfect." Maruti then reveals his "own form" (*svarūpa*), and the saint makes an image of it out of cow dung, thus starting (according to some accounts) a daily custom of murti-making that is said to account for the great number of Marutis now attributed to Ramdas's hand (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:402; S. Singh 1984:287-88).

A story told of another great Maharashtrian saint, the poet Eknath (d. 1498), reflects the belief that Hanuman is always present at performances of the Rama story, leading to the custom in some places of preparing a special seat (*āsan*) for him near the speaker (Patil 1979-80:127). It is said that once, in the city of Paithan, Eknath was expounding the *Sundarakāṇḍa* and had just come to the scene in which Hanuman enters the Ashoka Garden. Describing the garden, Eknath remarked that its flowers were white. Hanuman, who was invisibly present and listening attentively, instantly took form, seized the storyteller's wrist, and corrected him: "The flowers were not white, they were red. I know because I was there." Eknath, however, stuck to his position (since, through inner sight, he, too, "was there"), and the two got into an argument. To settle it, they resolved to call on Rama for a verdict. The prayers of two such exalted devotees soon brought the Lord to the spot, accompanied by Sita. Told of the dispute, Rama first asked Sita what color the flowers were, to which she replied, "They were blue," astonishing both devotees. Rama then smiled and explained, "You are all correct. The flowers were actually white, as Eknath says, but Hanuman saw them as red because of his anger at the rakshasas, and Sita saw them as blue because she perceived only my color everywhere" (Sundd 1998:132-33).

Two modern stories likewise concern Hanuman's presence, unseen or seen, at katha programs. I have encountered each in both written and oral versions and summarize them below.

A certain Ramayani, who was a sadhu, used to prepare a little seat for Hanuman directly facing him. One day, a lawyer who did not have faith came to the program and asked the reason for the empty seat. When told its purpose, he scoffed; "Since Hanuman doesn't come, why bother?" "He comes," the Ramayani replied, "but one can only see him with eyes of faith." "Can you show me proof?" asked the attorney. The storyteller told him to come the next day and to try lifting the seat. If he could do so, the Ramayani would cease to be a sadhu and become the lawyer's servant. But if the lawyer could not lift the seat, he would have to become the sadhu's disciple. The lawyer agreed to this, but added the condition that he be allowed to take the seat with him overnight, to ensure that the sadhu didn't tamper with it. That night, the sadhu worried over what he had done, reflecting that "one shouldn't wager on matters of faith." Still, he put his trust in God. The next day, the lawyer came to the katha, bringing the seat, which was set before the storyteller as usual. The Ramayani invoked Hanuman's presence through meditation and then began his discourse, signaling to the lawyer that he could proceed with the test. The lawyer began walking confidently toward the seat, but after only a few steps, his gait slowed, and he began to tremble. He stopped and stood staring at the seat with wide eyes, then fell unconscious. When he came to his senses, he bowed at the Ramayani's feet and asked to be accepted as his disciple. The Ramayani laughed and told him to go back to his family and career, but never to mock the power of faith. However, the man was so changed by his darshan of Hanuman that soon afterward he renounced the world of his own accord and went to Ayodhya.³⁶

A railway stationmaster had a keen desire to study the *Rāmca-ritmānas*, so he invited a learned Ramayani and arranged a public program. On the first day of the katha, he noticed a monkey sitting outside the railing of the enclosure; it sat calmly until the end of the katha, then left. On the second day, the monkey came again and sat inside the railing. Day by day, he came closer to where the stationmaster was seated in the front row. From the monkey's constant attendance, the stationmaster became quite attached to him.

36. I heard this story on three occasions in 1989–90: it was recounted to me by a merchant in a Banaras market; and then by Lakshmikant Mishra, a student of the well-known Ramayani Shrinath Mishra (November 1989); later, Shrinath himself told it during a katha at Janaki Mahal in Ayodhya (April 1990). The version above is my own retelling based on these accounts.

Hence he was not perturbed when the animal came and sat on his lap. The next day, he perched on his shoulders, and on the last day of the program, he climbed onto the stationmaster's head and sat there, clinging to his hair. But when the discourse ended, he scampered away and no one ever saw him again.³⁷

There are also many tales in which Hanuman responds to the summons of devotees in distress, and I close this section with two tales of such intervention. The first was told to me by Madhusudan Mishra, a Delhi Sanskrit scholar, on Diwali day in October 1989.

A wealthy merchant of Delhi who had no faith was on a train journey. At Aligarh, he left his compartment to buy something on the platform, and when he returned he found the carriage door bolted from the inside. He banged, but there was no answer, and since the train was leaving the station, he perched on the small metal step and clung helplessly to the door handle. As the train picked up speed, the merchant became terrified of falling. He thought of Hanuman, whom people call the "liberator from distress." He had never gone to his famous temple at Connaught Place, but now he made a vow: if he were liberated from *this* distress, he would definitely go. No sooner did he mentally pronounce this than the train came to a screeching halt. Someone also came and opened the carriage door. The merchant made his way back to his compartment and began to recover from his fright. But as the train was halted for some time, he made inquiry as to the cause. He was told that, just ahead, a great boulder was blocking the track. How it got there was a mystery, since there was no one in sight and no hill from which it could have rolled. The merchant was so impressed that he got down at the next station, returned to Delhi, and proceeded directly to the Connaught Place temple.

After telling this story, Mishra added his own account of a pilgrimage to the mountain shrine of Vaishno Devi. While climbing, he developed chest pains and shortness of breath, and his friends advised him to give up and descend. But he mentally worshiped Hanuman, whereupon he fell asleep for five minutes. When he opened his eyes, his alarming symptoms had left him, and he resumed the climb in high spirits. A Sanskrit shloka in praise of Hanuman came to him spontaneously; it became the first verse of a praise-poem (*stuti*) of

37. This story was published in *Kalyān*, contributed by one Sitaramdas Omkarnath, who claimed to have heard it "some years ago" from the stationmaster himself (1975:45). It was also told to me, with some variations, by the sadhu in Uttarkashi who informed me of Hanuman's abode in Garhwal (September 1989). The version given here is my own paraphrase of both accounts. A similar incident, involving a monkey appearing and ascending the dais at a Bangalore function at which a new commentary on the Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇa* was being formally released (the monkey grabbed the first copy, unwrapped it, and scanned a few pages), was reported by the *Indian Express* on January 25, 1999. (I thank Lance Nelson for this reference.)

108 couplets that he composed, in gratitude, on his return. But it was not all praise: one couplet requested a hundred thousand rupees for his daughter's dowry—and this, too, was soon provided!

The second story appeared in *Kalyān* and has been repeated in other anthologies. It concerns the common practice of telling the Ramayana to children, and its transformation, through a household emergency and a boy's faith, into a life-changing epiphany.

The wife of a prosperous pandit was telling the Ramayana to her 8-year-old son. Her husband was away from home, and a gang of about a dozen dacoits broke into the compound, intent on looting the family's livestock and possessions. The mother had just reached the point, in *Sundar kānd*, at which Hanuman's tail was set on fire. Hearing the robbers, she began trembling with fear, but her son said, "Why are you frightened, Mom? Why not call Hanuman-ji? He will definitely come to our aid!" When his mother remained speechless in terror, the lad himself cried out loudly, "Hanuman-ji, O Hanuman-ji! Some people have come into our house with clubs, and my mother is scared. Come here quick and burn Lanka later!" At once, a large monkey appeared from nowhere and leapt into the compound. Evading the blows of the robbers, he slapped several of them so hard that they fell down, and he pulled their leader's beard until he fainted with pain. The noise of the fight aroused the village, and the frightened bandits picked up their unconscious leader and fled. As the villagers entered the compound, the monkey bounded over the rooftop and vanished. The boy laughed and said, "Did you see, Mom? As soon as he heard my call, Hanuman-ji came and routed those villains!" (1975:522–23)

According to the (unidentified) contributor to *Kalyān*, this incident turned an already pious family into fervent Vaishnavas, who devoted much of their time to chanting the Lord's praises. Following his parents' peaceful demise, their 19-year-old son took initiation from a sadhu and went to Ayodhya, where he settled under a tree on the bank of the Sarayu. Known as Ramavadh Das, he lived without possessions, kept a smoky fire burning in all seasons, and likewise devoted himself to kirtan. He took no disciples, but was widely revered for his sanctity—and for Hanuman's continuing visits to him (*ibid.*).³⁸

Being Hanuman

The closest of all "encounters" with Hanuman is to become him, or rather, for him to become you—either temporarily, through an act of possession, or as

38. No dates are given for this figure, but the lifestyle described (outdoor residence, yogic practices, and the maintenance of a smoldering fire) is characteristic of the *tyāgī* branch of the Ramanandis, who have been an important presence in Ayodhya since the seventeenth century (see van der Veer 1988:107–30).

a lifelong incarnation. Since Hanuman is regarded as an avatara of Rudra-Shiva, his own incarnation might be termed an “avatara of an avatara.” Moreover, since he is also physically alive on earth, his human avatara might seem a redundancy. However, such metaphysical problems are solved, in the Hanuman literature, by the understanding that deities are not bound by physical form, and can, when they wish, project a “portion” (*aṃśa*) of themselves into others. Hence Hanuman can simultaneously be present in the Plantain Forest, in the divine city of Saket, in thousands of temple murtis, and in periodic special appearances as a frisky monkey. Given Hinduism’s openness to divine embodiment, avatara-hood is so frequently invoked in the lives of saints and gurus as to appear commonplace, and one even encounters contexts in which the word seems to connote little more than the English “symbol” (e.g., “all heroes are considered avataras of Hanuman”; *Ānanda rāmāyaṇa* 8.7.123, cited in Bulcke 1999:535). Yet in view of the range of deities available, it is interesting to consider, in the case of reputed Hanuman avataras, what has inspired this identification by their followers. What, in other words, do these people reveal about the god whom they are held to embody?

Among the earliest figures identified as an avatara of Hanuman was Murari Gupta, a companion of the great Bengali mystic Chaitanya (1486–1533). Noted for his physical strength and his devotional stance of self-abnegation (*dāśya bhāva*), he was further said—and this seems to have been the clincher—to possess a tail, which he kept hidden from most people (Sen 1987:52). Tulsidas (1543–1623), although acclaimed in his lifetime as a reincarnation of Valmiki, was further exalted by some later devotees as an avatara of Hanuman, reborn in the kali age to retell his own “lost” narration of the great story, which he had destroyed to spare Valmiki embarrassment (see Story 34).³⁹ Among Tulsidas’s contemporaries, Nabhadās, author of the famous hagiography *Bhaktamāl* or “garland of devotees” (ca. 1600), is said to have been born in “the lineage of Hanuman” (*Hanumān vaṃś*) and to have possessed a tail. Abandoned at age five during the famine of 1555–56, he was adopted by sadhus who initiated him into Rama bhakti and brought him to Galta, outside present-day Jaipur, where he devoted himself to the service of pilgrims and eventually composed his poetic glorification of saints of the past. His reputed simian lineage may signify more than devotional fervor, however, for the term *Hanumān vaṃś* appears to have been a euphemism for an untouchable community—a matter of discomfort to some later commentators on Nabhadās’s great work, which (as William Pinch has observed), displays great liberalism in including untouchables, shudras, and women among the saints (Pinch 1999:367, 378–99).

Maharashtra seems to have been particularly productive of Hanuman avataras, such as Devnath Maharaj, a seventeenth-century siddha who built a

39. According to C. N. Singh, this claim first appeared in the *Prema rāmāyaṇa*, a Sanskrit translation of the *Rāmcāritmānas* composed by an admirer of Tulsidas, Ramu Dvivedi, in the early 1600s. It was repeated in the commentary on Tulsidas’s epic composed in the 1820s (at Hanuman’s order, conveyed through a dream) by Jnani Sant Singh (aka “Punjabi-ji”), a Sikh from the Amritsar region.

temple and ashram west of Amaravati, and Ajrekar Buva of Bhangaon (dates unknown), who used to leap from tree to tree and consume (!) prodigious quantities of sindur (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:452, 455). But the most famous was Swami Ramdas, whose avatara-hood emerges as a major theme in Mahipati's early biography. As I have noted, Hanuman himself frequently appears in this account, producing a sort of double exposure. Indeed, when he presents Ramdas to Rama at Panchavati, he announces, "I have by a portion (*amśa*) of myself become an avatara, and I have come that I may place him at your feet" (Mahipati 1932:26). Although Ramdas's father learns in a vision that Maruti will be born as his son, he and his wife keep the baby's small tail a secret. But truth will out: the toddler soon displays a love of the outdoors, nimbleness and hyperactivity, a habit of making "monkey faces," and fearlessness of ghosts. Though he masters the entire school curriculum in a single year, he is more interested in climbing trees (*ibid.* 4–9). After renouncing the world, Ramdas lives alone in the forest, subsisting on fruits and tubers; he writes poetry on leaves, recites it to the animals, and then throws it in a river. When people approach him, he climbs trees and behaves like a madman (*ibid.* 50, 65). But there is, according to Mahipati, method to Ramdas's apparent "madness," and this manifests not merely in his visions of Maruti and Rama but also in the message that he gives to King Shivaji. When the latter, prodded by the court Brahmins, asks him his caste, Ramdas laughs and replies: "I belong to the monkey caste. . . . The Lord of Ayodhya, the husband of Sita, lived in company with monkeys. He has no caste and is quite separate from the four castes" (*ibid.* 92).

In the twentieth century, several charismatic holy men were identified by their devotees as Hanuman avatars. One of these was Devraha (also spelled Deoraha) Baba, who lived on a platform in the river Yamuna and was reputedly 250 years old at his death in 1989. It is said that in his early sadhana he, too, lived in a tree and ate only wild fruits (J. Mishra 1987:23–24). Another reputed avatara was Neem Karoli Baba (d. 1973), whose legacy includes the temple in Taos, New Mexico, described earlier in this chapter. A mysterious figure about whose early life little is known, "Maharaj-ji" traveled widely, clad only in a wool blanket and cotton *dhotī*, often appearing and departing unexpectedly, even from the ashrams that devotees constructed for him. He combined playfulness and even vulgarity with apparent omniscience and expressed his message in such simple utterances as "Love everybody. Feed everybody. Remember God. Tell the truth." The hundreds of tales of extraordinary experiences recorded by devotees include several in which Maharaj-ji hints at or manifests his avataric identity. Thus, asking a disciple to read aloud to him from the Tulsidas *Sundar kāṇḍ*, he casually said, "Read from the part where I am talking to Vibhishana" (Mukerjee 1990:83). Sitting with a group of disciples near a Shiva temple in 1968, Maharaj-ji suddenly gripped the hand of Sudhir Mukerjee, an economics professor from Allahabad University, holding it so tightly that (in Mukerjee's words) "I was feeling as if I were suffocating, as if my breathing were coming to an end." When Mukerjee looked at the master, "I saw, not Babaji, but a huge monkey sitting there, long golden hair over the whole body, the face black, the tail tucked under the legs" (*ibid.* 84). This experience cast

the previously skeptical Mukerjee into an altered state of consciousness that lasted for several hours, after which “whatever doubts I had cleared away and my whole perspective changed” (ibid. 85).

The spiritual figures hailed as avatars of Hanuman show some common features: a pattern of unpredictable, unrestrained, or even feral behavior (sometimes tangibly underscored by a vestigial tail), immense strength and devotion, and an indifference to social conventions and categories. Like Swami Ramdas, Neem Karoli Baba often displayed unconcern for the standards of purity maintained by his high-caste devotees. In the 1960s, he built a Hanuman temple for a Dalit community near his Kainchi ashram and mixed freely with the worshippers there. On one occasion, he refused to eat food brought from his ashram and instead turned to a ragged “untouchable” man who had brought sweetened milk in a dirty-looking glass. Sipping from it, Maharaj-ji announced “This is nectar,” and gave the rest to one of his Brahman devotees—who was obliged to consume it as the master’s prasada (ibid. 105–6).

An avatara—a lifelong epiphany—lies at one end of a spectrum of human-divine interpenetrations in the Hindu tradition, one that also includes the transitory but widespread phenomenon of possession. I have noted that Balaji-Hanuman, a specialist in treating unwanted possession, himself possesses certain devotees and prophesies and counsels through them. I will close this chapter with two other accounts of possession-like phenomena involving Hanuman bhaktas.

When I was conducting research on *Rāmcaritmānas* performance in Banaras in 1982–84, I met Ramnarayan Shukla, a pandit and storyteller employed by the Sankat Mochan temple, where he expounded the Tulsidas epic each afternoon in a distinctive and lively style. I soon became aware that he was famous in the city not only for his learning and rhetorical skill but also for his intense devotion to Hanuman. Though he had a home and family in the Assi area, he virtually lived in a small room at the temple, and his sadhana there occupied most of his days. And although he could expound the entire Ramayana (and was reputed to know both the Valmiki and Tulsidas texts by heart—a claim that I never found reason to doubt), he was most renowned for his emotionally charged retelling of Hanuman’s deeds. It was also well known that, during such performances (and especially when narrating a martial episode) he would sometimes enter a state in which, people sensed, he was overcome by the power of Hanuman. At these times, his head would begin to jerk violently from side to side, causing his long hair to fly in all directions. Yet Ramnarayan would continue speaking rapidly and lucidly, mixing his own narration with long quotations from Sanskrit, Braj, Avadhi, and Bhojpurī literature. His altered state might last ten minutes or more, then it would abruptly end, and he would resume his normal manner as if nothing had happened. Privately, Ramnarayan told me that he had no memory of these states and made no effort to induce them; he was aware of them only through the accounts of others. Though the common Sanskrit/Hindi terms denoting “possession” (*āveśa*, *carhnā*, *savār*, *ūparī havā*, etc.; see F. Smith 2006) were never used, either by Ramnarayan or others, to describe his behavior, it was

evident that people understood Hanuman to be present in a special way on these occasions. Introducing Ramnarayan at a large public program in Banaras, another storyteller said of him, "He is not just an exemplary worshiper of Sankat Mochan; he actually *shows* him to us."

In the course of my research I heard more than a score of Ramnarayan's kathas and recorded about a third of these, yet I was a bit disappointed that the extraordinary behavior I periodically witnessed would invariably happen when I had not brought along my tape recorder. Hence I was particularly pleased, one afternoon in August 1983, when Ramnarayan's special "mood" came on while my machine was set up and running. "Hanuman," it seemed, would at last be captured on tape and could be transcribed and analyzed along with the other performances I had recorded. However, as I walked home I began to have mixed feelings about this coup. I had great respect for Ramnarayan as a learned and devout man who made little effort to profit from his rhetorical gifts. I knew that he was reticent to speak of his unusual performances and that his regular listeners were likewise guarded and almost protective about them. I wondered whether I should ever play this tape for anyone or use it in my research; to do so seemed a violation. As it turned out, I need not have been concerned: though my recorder and microphone appeared to be in good order, and though the beginning and end of Ramnarayan's discourse came through loud and clear, most of that day's katha—including the relevant "possession" episode, of course—consisted of (as I noted in my field notes) "only a loud buzz." This had never happened before in many hours of recording, nor would it happen again—but then, I would not again attempt to capture on tape the "voice" of Hanuman.

The final story that I offer is another "further leap" involving transnational devotion, as it was sent to me by "Hanuman Das," the guru-given name of a Neem Karoli devotee who is active in the Taos temple community. The fact that he is a Caucasian American of diminutive stature adds to the incongruous charm of his account, which describes an incident that occurred in 1995, when he was staying at his guru's ashram in Vrindaban, Uttar Pradesh. One evening, he went for a routine visit to another ashram.

I went across the Yamuna to Deoraha Baba's ashram, which is all by itself in the middle of nowhere. I decided to stay for evening arti so it was quite late when I started back. There were two young women there from ISKCON,⁴⁰ and a sadhu asked if they could accompany me. Right away I had a premonition of trouble, since the area is known for gundas and dacoits. We walked until we reached the bridge. The night was pitch black, with no moon, and we had no flashlight. As we stepped onto the bridge I dimly saw some figures silhouetted against the lights of Vrindaban. I immediately became

40. The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (aka "Hare Krishna" organization) maintains a large complex in Vrindaban that is visited by many Western pilgrims.

apprehensive and told the women to get behind me and stay close. The figures spread out across the bridge; there were five, and they continued to come toward us. When they were very near they shouted something and ran toward us brandishing clubs. Without thinking, I shouted in a booming, extremely loud voice, "*Bajraṅgbalī kī jay!*" and I rushed toward them, continuing to shout "*Jay Hanumān!*" so loudly that it did not seem to be my voice. At the same time, I felt as if I became really big, and suddenly, even though it was pitch black, I could see everything as clear as day. The gundas became frightened, dropped their clubs, and began to run as fast as they could, with me close on their heels shouting "*Jay Hanumān!*" They ran so fast that they ran out of their shoes and left them behind.

Hanuman Das's success in routing the attackers, his experience of fearlessness, night vision, and of becoming "really big" are all suggestive of an intervention that, in the reports of the incident that began circulating around Vrindaban the next day, was confirmed by the testimony of some sadhus in Deoraha Baba's ashram. They claimed that, hearing the commotion and looking toward the bridge, they had seen a huge figure of Hanuman pursuing the terrified thugs.

All the accounts above, and all the instances of reputed avatars of Hanuman, concern male devotees. Indeed, Hanuman has been identified by several scholars as primarily a "men's deity" (Wolcott 1978:656–57; Alter 1992), an identification that seems natural enough given his association with strength, virility, and martial prowess. Yet a visit to any of the popular temples described in this chapter reveals that women comprise a substantial portion of his worshipers, and in a recent study of women's ritual practices in Banaras, a number of interviewees identified Hanuman as their "chosen god" (Pearson 1996:17–18, 98, 208). The recent advent in poster stalls of (what Patricia Uberoi calls) "cute baby" images of Hanuman, apparently modeled on older and more familiar icons of Krishna and Rama as adorable toddlers, may also be intended to evoke women's "maternal" devotion.⁴¹ Although it is probably safe to assume that many women find Hanuman appealing for some of the same reasons that men do (e.g., his worship is simple and inexpensive, and he is an "easily satisfied" deity who gives quick results), a closer examination of Hanuman's abundant lore suggests that his relationship to women, and indeed to gender polarity and the sexuality that is its most potent manifestation, is more complex than is generally acknowledged. This relationship is the subject of the next chapter.

41. As Uberoi notes, however, these images reflect a broader phenomenon of infant representations of a range of popular deities not previously depicted in this manner; thus Shiva and Ganesha also appear in infant form (Uberoi 2002).

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7

Like Mother, Like Son

Hanuman, Goddesses, and Women

Roughly midway through Valmiki's *Sundarakāṇḍa* and soon after Sita's first glimpse of Hanuman, the heroine expresses doubt as to whether the monkey is truly an emissary of her husband. It takes the form of a question—"How can there be a relationship between men and monkeys?"—that suggests the implausibility of a "relationship" (*samāgama*—a "coming together" or "union") of the human and simian species (*Rāmāyaṇa* 5.33.2, 1996:201). Sita's unease leads to a recital by Hanuman of the events since her abduction, especially the forging of an alliance between Rama and the monkey prince Sugriva. But Sita's query points to deeper ironies relevant to the larger epic; especially to the low status of the vanara in the hierarchy of the ancient Indian bestiary, which renders it a singularly inappropriate companion for a human hero. However, the pairing of men and monkeys, which seems so unlikely to the princess, has already been made in the story, not in order to magnify the human at the expense of the simian, but rather to signal their common insignificance in the eyes of a rakshasa lord seeking immunity from all the beings who might potentially cause his death. The incongruity troubling Sita is thus linked to the devious workings of the devas, for the slaying of her captor and her own release are indeed foreordained to occur through the "coming together" of men and monkeys.

However, I want to rephrase Sita's question in order to consider, first, what *women* have to do with monkeys. More specifically, what "relationship" could the chaste, normally secluded wife of an Aryan prince have with a forest-dwelling animal? This question will lead to two more: What do certain kinds of divine women— independent and powerful goddesses—have to do with monkeys?

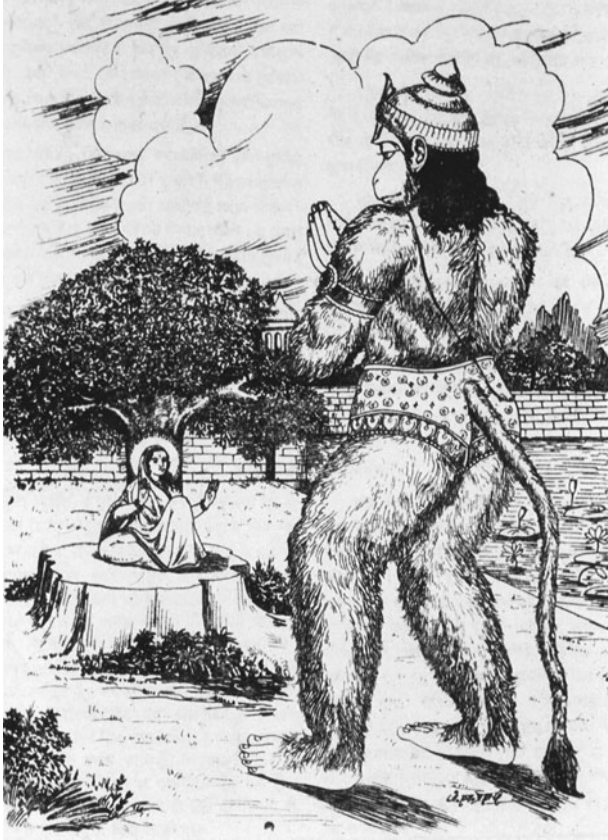


FIGURE 7.1. Hanuman displays his large form to Sita; illustration in *Kalyāṇ*, 1975

And what, if anything, does Sita, whom many regard as the submissive and subordinated “spouse goddess” par excellence, have to do with these wild, autonomous women? By reconsidering Hanuman and his lore through the lens of these questions, I will argue that the relationship of this so-called “men’s deity” to Sita, to independent goddesses, and to women in general, is complex and surprisingly malleable.

Folklorists point to the worldwide ubiquity of the motif of the “helpful animal”—a clever supernatural sidekick of the hero of tales.¹ The treatment of this motif generally assumes a male point of view, with the animal assistant helping a hero to attain the goals of his quest: fortune, glory, and a princess bride. However, the materials that I will be considering—a late-Vedic hymn,

1. On the diffusion and variety of such motifs (which comprise numbers B300–599 in the Thompson *Motif-Index*), see Thomson 1955–58:1.422–60.

various versions of the *Sundarakāṇḍa*, and contemporary folk practices and songs—suggest that a woman’s “helpful animal,” especially if he is a manlike monkey, may assume different roles, including the provision of protection, emotional support, and various kinds of intimacy.

Indrani and Vrishakapi

It is now time to revisit the anomalous hymn *Ṛgveda* 10.86, which was discussed briefly in chapter 2, in light of the interpretive problems it has posed. Indeed, this has been called “the strangest poem in the *Ṛgveda*” (Louis Renou, quoted in O’Flaherty 1981:257) and one of its recent interpreters likewise confesses “its almost impenetrable weirdness” (Jamison 1996:86, 88). Generations of scholars have puzzled over the question of why it was placed in the sacred collection at all, a problem sharpened for many in the Victorian era by its sexual content. My aim in revisiting this problem hymn is necessarily modest; not being a Vedic scholar I cannot hope to “explain” it, but only to examine and summarize the explanations of others. My interest arises from the name of its pivotal character: Vrishakapi or “bull-monkey/virile monkey,” which pairs *vṛṣa* (from the verb root *vṛṣ*, “to rain upon, to bestow abundantly,” used to refer to bulls and to virile males of any species) with one of the most common Sanskrit words for “monkey.” As I noted earlier, scholars who have studied the history of Hanuman worship in South Asia have examined this hymn for evidence of a Vedic “proto-Hanuman,” and a few have claimed to find it or to find signs of a “non-Aryan” cult of “monkey worship” being reluctantly incorporated into the Brahmanical fold via this enigmatic text.

I will only summarize the content of the hymn and refer interested readers to several existing translations (e.g., Griffith 1986:596–98; O’Flaherty 1981:257–64; Jamison 1996:76–87). Anyone pursuing the matter further, however, should not expect agreement among translators even as to some of the basics of the text, and their understandings diverge much further when they speculate on what it might mean. Hymn 10.86 belongs to the set of “dialogs” (*ākhyāna*) found particularly in the first and tenth collections, which are generally assumed to belong to chronologically late strata of the *Ṛgveda*. Here the conversation is between at least three speakers—Indra, his wife (referred to as *Indrāṇī*), and Vrishakapi—though some find evidence of four or even five participants. The hymn opens with Indra (or possibly his wife) complaining of a decline in Indra worship and soma offerings, a situation that succeeding verses (2, 4–5), spoken by the wife, blame on the monkey’s “erring ways” and defilement of “precious, well-made, anointed things.”² Indra defends the monkey, whom he characterizes as his friend. There follows an exchange in which Indrani boasts of her ability to satisfy a sexual partner—an

2. Unless otherwise specified, I use O’Flaherty’s translation (1981:259–61).

invitation to which the monkey apparently responds, at least verbally and by being physically aroused (6–7). Indra and his spouse continue to argue over the beast (8–9), and the monkey, and possibly *his* wife (*vṛṣākapyi*, “Mrs. Vrishakapi”) get into the discussion in verses 10–11, praising Indrani, whose husband “will never die of old age.” In verses 12–15, Indra, who says he is not happy without his monkey friend, again receives an abundant offering that fully satisfies him. Verses 16 and 17 mirror each other with bawdy but riddling assertions to be further discussed below. Verses 18–22 allude to the distant wanderings of the monkey, perhaps in banishment, and entreat him to return “home.” A final verse adds a seeming non sequitur, proclaiming the joyous birth of twenty sons to “the daughter of Manu, named Parshu.”

The history of interpretation of the hymn was summarized by J. R. Joshi in *Minor Vedic Deities* (1978). The commentator Sayana (ca. fourteenth century), perhaps drawing on verse 7, wherein Vrishakapi addresses Indrani with the affectionate and probably sexually teasing vocative *Amba* (“Mummy” or “little mother”), identified the monkey as Indra’s son—although some may feel that this only adds incest to injury. Late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century scholars advanced allegorical interpretations associating Vrishakapi with various climatic and astronomical phenomena; Joshi observes that these theories are “far-fetched” and “seem to neglect the general spirit” of the hymn (115–16). There was reason for such neglect, since the hymn’s “spirit” is apparently licentious; thus Ralph Griffith, in his 1896 translation, took recourse to euphemisms³ and skipped verses 16–17 entirely, “which I cannot translate into decent English” (1986:597). Likewise Hermann Oldenberg explained away the “uncouth humor” of the hymn by dismissing it as “the high-spirited inventions of an individual poet of the later *Rgveda* period” (1894, 1988:89). Scholars in the second half of the twentieth century, including R. N. Dandekar and his pupil Joshi, took a more forthright look at the hymn, proposing that it related to the worship of “fertility gods” or embodied “a virility-charm”; “Indra . . . is spoken of as having been exhausted when a bold lascivious monkey administered to him some medicine through which Indra regained his manly power.”⁴ Western scholars of the post-“sexual revolution” have plunged unblushingly into the debate, with unexpurgated translations and bold new speculations. The copious notes to O’Flaherty’s 1981 translation explore virtually every innuendo in the often teasing, punning speeches, and she calls a spade a spade in rendering verses 16–17:

[INDRANI] That one is not powerful, whose penis hangs between his thighs; that one is powerful for whom the hairy organ opens as it swells and sets to work. Indra supreme above all!

3. For example, compare his rendering of verse 6, “no dame hath ampler charms than I,” with O’Flaherty’s “No woman has finer loins than I.”

4. In Dandekar and Joshi’s view, the concealed “fertility god” of the hymn is Vishnu, although the evidence they offer to back up this claim seems unconvincing to me (J. Joshi 1978:118–24).

[VRISHAKAPI'S WIFE] That one is not powerful, for whom the hairy organ opens as it swells and sets to work; that one is powerful, whose penis hangs between his thighs. Indra supreme above all! (O'Flaherty 1981:260)

Of late, several scholars have proposed that the word *kapi* itself is used in the hymn as a mocking euphemism.⁵ The most sustained such argument is that of Stephanie Jamison in her 1996 monograph on the role of women in Vedic ritual. Expanding on the earlier observation of O'Flaherty concerning the resemblance between elements of the hymn and of the royal horse sacrifice (O'Flaherty 1981:261), Jamison offers the hypothesis that the hymn presents a "mock *asvamedha*," preserving some of the obscene banter ritually exchanged by key participants (priest, sacrificer, and sacrificer's wives) during one of the climactic events in the rite: the period when the sacrificer/king's chief queen mimes sexual intercourse under a cloth with the dead stallion (Jamison 1996:75,88). The uncouth, sexually forward "monkey," in this interpretation, was a sarcastic, diminutive euphemism for the stately horse—one of the most revered animals for the Vedic people and a surrogate for the king himself—which had just been ritually suffocated and hence was in a state of "reflex-conditioned tumescence and emission,"⁶ so that, as Jamison persuasively shows, the sexual manipulation prescribed in ritual manuals was hardly "symbolic." Euphemism and coarse parody were necessary on the verbal level, she argues, because the required "body language" of the rite was disturbing for participants.

Although *Rgveda* 10.86 is not prescribed in extant *Brāhmaṇa* literature on the horse sacrifice, Jamison builds a case for its paralleling both the sequence of the climactic events as well as their surviving ritual script, in which the sacrificer, priests, and royal wives crudely taunt the horse and one another, using sexually tinged diminutives and outright obscenities (Jamison 1996: 65–88). Just as Jamison rejects earlier arguments that the "obscene" hymn somehow accidentally stumbled into the Vedic corpus when no one was looking, so she insists that the horse sacrifice's "showcasing of extreme public sexuality . . . is not a freakish and aberrant spectacle, as it is sometimes presented, but the logical, if extreme, fulfillment of woman's function in ritual" (Jamison 1996:65). Further, she reminds us that this rite is not simply an elaborate way to glorify a king; its invocation in narrative literature points to its performance at times of crisis, especially when a king is without issue (e.g., Dasharatha) or otherwise seen as flawed. The homologizing of the stallion with the king (through its consecration and yearlong processional "campaign") permits the transfer of its potency to him when he ultimately inhales

5. Thus in a 1994 conference paper, Stanley Insler advanced the radical view that the "monkey" is in fact "the animus" of Indra's penis" (cited in Jamison 1996:277 n. 147).

6. Jamison 1996:68, citing J. Puhvel, "Aspects of Equine Functionality," in *Myth and Law Among the Indo-Europeans*, ed. J. Puhvel, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970:162.

the vapor of the broth in which its limbs simmer; his wives likewise absorb (perhaps literally) the stallion's virility.

Whereas the Vedic homologization of king with stallion may seem reasonable, why (assuming Jamison's reading to be correct) would an ancient poet call a horse a "monkey"? As I have noted, most interpreters of the hymn assume the "bull-monkey" to be a teasing euphemism for something else (Indra's son, Vishnu, a horse), yet they ignore the obvious question: why tease with *this* particular euphemism? As I observed in chapter 2, the prevailing view of monkeys in ancient India was as promiscuous, dirty, and inauspicious creatures. Jamison likewise observes, "Though it is hard to know where a monkey would fit in the *varṇa* system, I would wager that he would be a *Śūdra*" (Jamison 1996:77). To call a consecrated royal stallion a "bull-monkey" is thus an insult, which accords well, she thinks, with the atmosphere of crude burlesque that abruptly invades the rite at the moment when (in surviving liturgy) the queens address the dead stallion as "horsikins" (her rendering of the diminutive *aśvaka*) and taunt him to "fuck" them (the verb *yabh*; Jamison 1996:69). Similarly, I propose—putting aside the *aśvamedha* theory for the moment—that to call a subordinate male a "bull-monkey" (as Indrani does in the hymn) is likewise a taunt, an ambivalent indicator of both hostility and potential desire.⁷

Whether the ritual and hymn are indeed related, the purpose of the taunting of the animal surrogate in both cases appears to be the same: to restore vigor and credibility to the "real man" (O'Flaherty's translation, in this context, of *vīra*): the husband/Indra. Thus Indrani, in verse 9, calls the monkey an "imposter" who has set his sights on her "as if I had no man," adding immediately, "But I *have* a real man, for I am the wife of Indra" (O'Flaherty 1981:259–60; emphasis in original). Like the horse in the royal ritual, the monkey of the hymn is ultimately used to heighten the stature of another (anthropomorphic if not human) male. This is achieved through a curious and erotically charged triangle in which the monkey is at once the "raffish pal" (as Jamison puts it) of the husband and the desired/despised familiar of the wife. Just as the horse sacrifice's climactic release of ritual obscenity serves to reconstitute a weakened king via his wife's union with an animal surrogate, so the hymn's descent into lewdness serves to restore sacrificial offerings and self-confidence to Indra—a reading that explains, at least, why it concludes every verse with the affirmation "Indra above all!" (*viśvasmād Indra uttarah*).

It remains to comment on the once "untranslatable" verses 16–17, which I gave above in O'Flaherty's unembarrassed rendering. The hymn's problems

7. Note that in the strange tale of Nandi's curse on Ravana (Story 1.e), a monkey is similarly invoked to mock a powerful, virile figure. Given that bulls are not generally held to resemble monkeys, the story appears contrived, in a typical epic exercise in karmic overdetermination (since Ravana is already under threat of death from the loophole in Brahma's boon), to additionally explain (and excuse?) the role of monkeys in bringing about his downfall. Like the stallion in Jamison's *aśvamedha* interpretation, the great bull is called a "monkey" in order to mock him.

reach a sort of crescendo here, as so much depends on the (unknown) identity of the speakers, of the body parts invoked (is the “hairy organ” hers or his?), and on assumptions about the tone: taunt in the first verse and pious affirmation in the second, or vice versa? Though O’Flaherty tentatively attributes the verses to Indrani and Mrs. Vrishakapi, she adds a long footnote proposing other combinations and citing the great variety of “imaginative interpretations” that the lines have inspired. She concludes, “The most likely interpretation, however, is that Indrani praises the virile Indra and mocks the impotent Vrishakapi in the first verse, and Vrishakapi’s wife praises the self-controlled Vrishakapi and mocks the priapic Indra in the second” (O’Flaherty 1981:263 n. 14). Jamison attributes the lines to Indra and Indrani, or, in the ritual, to the king and his chief queen (the horse/Vrishakapi having been killed by this point), but demurs from guessing who says which. She argues persuasively, however, that the second speaker in this riddling exchange truly has the “last word,” and hence that it ultimately praises sexual self-restraint. The second utterance is thus in surprise contrast to the worldly wisdom of the first, which holds that “the sexually successful male has the power.” She concludes that, far from being a “fertility charm,” these verses offer “one of [the] earliest explicit statements” of the ideology “so frequently found in the epics: retention of semen creates power” (1996:83–84). This ideology will indeed be seminal to the later career of the aggressive but chaste “bull among monkeys,” Hanuman.

To summarize what I think may be said with some certainty regarding the Vrishakapi hymn: it presents a sexually charged triangle between a revered male deity, his consort (note that her name here is simply a feminization of his own) and a lewd and comical “bull-monkey,” in which the deity is paradoxically restored to vigor through his wife’s risqué interaction with the beast. Though a direct link to the climax of the horse sacrifice cannot be proved, there is strong evidence of a resonance of theme between the two, as well as a shared introduction, even in the midst of ritual bawdiness, of an ideology that champions sexual restraint.

Sita and Hanuman

In this section I will focus on the interaction between Sita and her husband’s monkey emissary in the *Sundarakāṇḍa*, the “Beautiful Book,” of Valmiki’s *Rāmāyaṇa*, a passage that has long been regarded as the structural and emotional “heart” of the epic. Located roughly midway through the text, it marks the point at which the protagonist’s fortunes, having reached their nadir, take a decisive upward turn. In addition, its multiple recapitulations of the greater story (most of which are narrated by Hanuman) “enhance still further the sense that the poem is centered here, that the *Rāmakathā* itself is inscribed within the book” (Goldman and Goldman 1996:15). This special status has been signaled by the belief that the *Sundarakāṇḍa* contains the “seed” (*bīja*) from which the epic grew, sometimes identified as shloka 5.34.3, in which Hanuman hands Rama’s signet ring to Sita. Notable too is the fact

that, in both manuscript and printed editions, this *kāṇḍa* is frequently reproduced independently and used for ritual recitation (ibid. 5, 20, 37, 80).

Equally striking is the fact of the physical absence, from virtually the whole of this book, of the epic's titular hero. Throughout the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Rama is seldom far from center stage, yet he reappears here only in the final five chapters, and then only as a passive listener to Hanuman's narration. Rama's absence, as the translators note, contributes in its own way to the atmosphere of "profound and pervasive devotion to him" that characterizes the book (ibid. 19), but it also provides the audience with alternate ideals. Through the epic's most detailed and emotionally compelling portrait of its heroine, "the *Sundarakāṇḍa* emerges in many ways as the Book of Sita," and it also constitutes "a kind of epiphany of Hanuman . . . to the status of a divinity" (ibid. 60, 40).

Thematically, the book divides into two principal components: descriptions of Hanuman's extraordinary feats (his great leaps, sudden and frequent growth to colossal stature, and destruction of enemies and of the physical environment); and his emotional encounter with Sita, which is bracketed by these passages and comprises, both in placement and emotional tenor, the heart of the book (*sargas* 28–39). These two components suggest the familiar themes of "shakti and bhakti" that are so often cited in explanation of Hanuman's appeal. The action of the book is launched, literally, with the incandescent account of his leap and flight to Lanka, which is punctuated by aggressive encounters with supernatural females (to be further discussed in the next section). This narrative mood (per Sanskrit aesthetic theory) of *vīrya* (heroism/virility) is replaced by one of voyeuristic wonder (*adbhuta*) and eroticism (*śṛṅgāra*) during the monkey's nocturnal tour of Lanka, in which he surveys Ravana's opulent palace and beholds the post-orgy slumber of his half-naked wives (5.7–9; cf. Jarow 2004). When at last Hanuman's gaze falls on Sita, the mood changes to one of *karuṇā* (pathos), as he watches her threatened by Ravana and hears her despairing resolution to end her life, which finally prompts him to reveal himself.

Two aspects of their encounter are especially relevant to my present topic. The first is the theme of restoration through an intermediary or surrogate: Hanuman, in effect, brings Rama to Sita, first through language (by recounting the Rama katha), and then through a physical token (the ring, which causes Sita to feel, in the book's celebrated, pivotal verse, "as joyous as if she had rejoined her husband"). The latter moment is indeed a "union" (*samāgama*) of sorts: a blissful prefiguring of the (more problematic) physical re-union of husband and wife after the war. Despite her concern over simian "inauspiciousness" (on which she twice remarks; 5.30.4, 5.32.21), Sita drinks in the monkey's words, and when she begs for more, he obliges with a remarkable verbal portrait of her husband. In twelve couplets (5.33.8–19) Hanuman catalogs Rama's physical attributes—with a detail that seems to anticipate both the conventional "toe-to-head" (*nakha-sikha*) descriptions of later poetry, and the prescriptions of treatises on temple iconography—to construct, through the medium of language, the body of the ideal man. This "restoration" of Rama, which finally convinces Sita that the ludicrous monkey

is truly his emissary, is not merely “symbolic,” for in renewing Sita’s hope, it also saves her life and thus literally effects Rama’s eventual success.

This leads to my second theme: the intense emotional tenor of the interaction that follows, beginning with the message from Rama that Hanuman delivers (5.34.39–44). Its portrait of a prince suffering the pangs of separation from his beloved far exceeds in tenderness anything we have heard Rama himself say in dispatching his messenger (cf. Rama’s terse speech at 4.43.12–13). Sita responds in kind:

No one is dearer to him than I or even as dear: not his mother, his father, or anyone else. Emissary, I wish to live only so long as I can hear news of my beloved. (5.34.29)

She then completes the exchange by offering two tokens of her own—again, one verbal and one tangible. For the first, she discloses an intimate incident from their conjugal life, beginning with Rama asleep with his head on her lap, of which the audience has been unaware (the story of the crow, 5.36.12–32). For the second, she hands Hanuman a hair ornament she has likewise kept concealed (5.36.52). Soon after, as Hanuman prepares to leave, Sita begins to cry and begs him repeatedly to stay another day, as she cannot bear “my grief at not being able to see you” (5.37.19–22).

This exchange between Sita and Hanuman constitutes one of Rama and Sita’s tenderest moments within the epic; indeed, it is their only recorded intimate “conversation.” The quotation marks are necessary, of course, since Rama is not actually present, his place being taken by his messenger. It is hardly surprising, then, that the traditional audience has always found it singularly “beautiful” (*sundara*), in a way that Rama’s later treatment of his wife, at their physical reunion, has not generally been felt to be. At the risk of going (with Hanuman) out on a limb, I will even propose that this scene, nestled in the “heart” of the *Sundarakāṇḍa*, is as close to lovemaking as Rama and Sita ever publicly come in Valmiki’s august epic.

Here I wish to return to the coarse imagery of the Vrishakapi hymn and its postulated link with the horse sacrifice in order to point to some structural parallels. The king who wished to perform such a sacrifice consecrated an animal surrogate and outfitted him with tokens of himself (royal parasol, etc.), and then sent him on a long and potentially agonistic journey, accompanied by an army, in order to ultimately effect, through the returned animal’s sacrificial death and union with the king’s wife, the restoration of the king’s virility and his “royal fortune” (*śrī*). Rama, deprived of both his kingdom and his wife and hence in the deepest crisis of his career, sends Hanuman forth with his signet ring. Accompanied by an armed force, the monkey ranges far and engages in combats before he ultimately proceeds to his fateful encounter and exchange of tokens with the princess. In the course of their interaction, the princess’s husband—via his animal surrogate—is similarly “reconstituted,” though not through the gross mimesis of the Vedic rite, but on the refined level of language and feeling.

The author of the *Rāmāyaṇa* was aware of the details of the horse sacrifice; he had described one performed by King Dasharatha in order to obtain sons, right down to the principal queens' night under the blanket with the dead horse (1.11–13; 1.13.27–28). But my purpose in citing the rite here is not to suggest a conscious parallel between the sequence of the ritual and the narrative of the *Sundarakāṇḍa*; rather it is to point to a shared way of thinking about or “through” animal surrogates who become intermediaries. The Vedic stallion is not a “scapegoat” in the biblical sense, but rather an extension of the king himself; hence his transformation into sacrificial victim is problematic and must be bracketed with verbal denials both sublime (the hymn containing the verse “You do not really die through this, nor are you harmed”; 1.162.21) and ridiculous (the banter about “horsikins” during the queen's night vigil). Like the horse, Hanuman is an animal surrogate capable of effecting the reversal of a king's waning fortunes, and he is likewise, at times, a comical figure.⁸ Unlike the Vedic horse or Vrishakapi, however, Hanuman serves only as a go-between for sundered lovers and plays no sexual role himself; for Valmiki's monkey messenger is “a virile but largely de-eroticized figure whose libidinal energies are sublimated in the service of his master” (Goldman and Goldman 1996:55). To better understand this poetic sublimation of the observed behavior and popular conception of monkeys, we must reconsider the ideological underpinnings of the epic, which require that (in the Goldmans' analysis) “forces associated with an ego and a sensuality unmoderated by the powerful strictures of *dharma* are . . . projected outward from human to nonhuman societies” (ibid. 32)—thus onto the poem's monkeys and rakshasas. Indeed, excessive sexual appetite is one of the negative traits that coexist with more exalted qualities in Rama's vanara allies. Vali's appropriation of Sugriva's wife Ruma is, according to Rama, the principal crime for which the elder monkey is slain (*Rāmāyaṇa* 4.18.18–22). After Vali's death, Sugriva too appropriates his brother's widow, Tara, as well as a large harem, and becomes so immersed in dalliance as to forget his obligation to Rama; he must be threatened with death in order to bring him to his senses. Unbridled appetites leading to unacceptable behavior are also displayed near the end of the *Sundarakāṇḍa* when the returned search party loots Sugriva's honey orchard, becoming drunk and insolently baring their hindquarters to their elders (*Rāmāyaṇa* 5.59–61). That this scene appears to be an amusing set piece with little bearing on the advancement of the story simply underscores the poet's adherence, in his portrait of the creatures from whom his exiled hero is constrained to seek aid, to cultural understandings of *kapitva* (Goldman and Goldman 1996:64).

Hanuman becomes the great exception to this broader bestial rule. His night journey through the sleeping rakshasa capital includes inspection of

8. Herman Jacobi dismissed large portions of the *Sundarakāṇḍa* as spurious because of what he termed the “burlesque” quality of Hanuman's deeds—a judgment not supported by the critical editors and other recent scholarship (Goldman and Goldman 1996:28).

Ravana's dining room and boudoir—passages that offer spectacles of excess for the audience's voyeurism. Yet in each case it is clear that Hanuman himself is not distracted by these sights: the demonic buffet is cataloged without comment, and in the royal bedchamber, the messenger briefly ponders whether he has committed a sin in gazing on the king's wives and concubines, only to conclude that his dedication to his mission and lack of lustful feelings exonerate him from this charge (*Rāmāyaṇa* 5.7–9, esp. 5.9.34–42). Sita is not initially so sure of him. Seeing Hanuman, she falls in a faint, recalls the proverbial inauspiciousness of seeing a monkey, and suspects that he is Ravana in disguise (*Rāmāyaṇa* 5.30.3–4, 5.32.10–16). These reactions assume special poignancy for the audience that has just witnessed Hanuman's exemplary detachment, and lets it anticipate the manner in which he will win the princess's confidence.

These scenes invite reflection on a matter nowhere mentioned in the Sanskrit epic but that would assume great significance in Hanuman's later cult: the notion of his strict celibacy or brahmacharya. The vanaras in the search party are described as pining for their wives and families and it is never stated that Hanuman lacks such ties. Similarly, his ruminations over the sin of beholding women belonging to another (*parakīyā*) do not preclude the possibility of his having wives of his own, and much later in the story Bharata presents him with sixteen maidens in gratitude for his role in Rama's victory—a gift that merits no special comment (*Rāmāyaṇa* 6.125.44–45). Yet the *Sundarakāṇḍa*'s portrayal of Hanuman's sexual detachment seems to have contributed to the later conception of his celibacy. According to Bulcke and Govindchandra, the prominence given to this trait by vernacular poets reflects the increasing association of Hanuman with Shiva and with yogic traditions. Thus in the ca. 1450 Oriya *Mahābhārata* of Sarala Dasa, Hanuman receives from Shiva the boon of being born with an “adamantine chastity belt” (*vajra kaupīna*), and Tulsidas in the *Vinay patrikā* hails the divine monkey with epithets (*manmatha-mathana*, “the churner of Kama,” and *ūrdhvaṛetā*, “one whose semen is drawn upward”) that evoke Shiva and his hatha yogic followers (Bulcke 1999:543; Govindchandra 1976:295–96; *Vinay patrikā* 29.3). This view of Hanuman has made him (so to say) a poster boy for the alleged physical and spiritual benefits of semen retention, a regimen that coexists comfortably with misogynist notions of women as vampiric temptresses but less so with the householder lifestyle that most men adopt for the greater part of their lives. But if Hanuman's broad appeal involves the “union of opposites” characteristically associated with Shaiva and Shakta deities, then one might expect to find alternative representations in which his sexual and familial life is given scope for expression—and indeed I will turn to such representations shortly.

The emotional weight of the dialog in the Ashoka Garden suggests more than the interaction between a princess and an emissary, and one way in which Hanuman's relationship to Sita has been understood is as a fictive “son.” In Valmiki's text, Hanuman reverently addresses Sita as “Devi,” and she responds by calling him “best of monkeys” (*kapivara*) or “hero” (*vīra*). In

the *Rāmcaritmānas*, the monkey sometimes refers to her as “Mother” and she responds in kind, with the colloquial and affectionate *tāt* (“son”; e.g., 5.17.6–9); modern authors often expand on this theme through saccharine speeches (e.g., D. Gupta 1980:64–71). This symbolic kinship, expressive of an intimate but de-eroticized relationship, also reflects patriarchal family norms, in which a son appears as a young wife’s “savior” in the context of her in-laws’ home and as a replacement for the affection of a sometimes emotionally distant spouse. Similarly, Rama’s physical distance from Sita—which, in her desperate ruminations, she periodically interprets as the willful withholding of his affections—is bridged by his messenger, who first appears to her in diminutive form, “the size of a cat.” When Sita laughs at this childlike being’s claim to be able to rescue her, Hanuman proudly swells to display his “mountainous” stature, inviting her to climb on his back; though she declines the offer of physical rescue, Sita is duly impressed. One need not be a Freudian to suggest that Hanuman’s behavior evokes the boy child’s wish to “show off” and “be big,” like his father, for his mother. Hanuman and Sita’s relationship may thus be considered in light of the extreme closeness of the mother-son bond in many South Asian families (cf. its melodramatic representation in popular Hindi films; A. Sharma 1993:176); this understanding suggests that they are in a real sense “akin.”

They are akin in another sense too: as embodiments of shakti. Hanuman repeatedly observes that Sita possesses “the blazing power” to destroy Ravana and his city (5.49.21,33, 35; 5.53.18, 23); he modestly attributes all of his own deeds to the power of Sita’s asceticism, and declares that as a result, Ravana is as good as dead and that Rama will serve as “the mere instrument of his destruction” (5.57.2–5, 16). Similarly, Sita tells Ravana that she is capable of reducing him to ashes, but refrains from doing so “because I have not been so ordered by Rama and because I wish to preserve intact the power of my austerities” (5.20.20). Hanuman likewise declares that he is capable of rescuing Sita himself, and she twice confirms that this is so, but each time asks him to refrain from acting, lest “Raghava’s reputation . . . be diminished” (5.35.57; 5.54.3). These passages reveal the importance of the theme of sublimation and subordination—to the authority of “Rama’s orders” and to Rama himself—that is such a central concern of the Sanskrit poet and that provides a counterweight to the episodes of rampant shakti that punctuate his *Sundarakāṇḍa*. Later storytellers, however, would often expand on this shared characteristic of heroine and monkey, in some cases tilting the balance away from subordination to a more autonomous exercise of power.

Devi and Langurvir

I now leap more than a thousand years to consider a group of narratives, icons, and practices that again pair a divine female with a monkey. The first set of materials are narratives that belong to what A. K. Ramanujan termed the “meta-Ramayana,” which is inclusive of variant but related tales in all the languages of South and Southeast Asia. The second set comprises materials

related much more loosely—if at all—to the traditional Rama narrative, and attested primarily through modern ethnographic accounts. All these materials highlight a relationship between a goddess and a monkey sidekick or, as I prefer, a “familiar” (invoking the archaic resonances of this term);⁹ a relationship expressed, to varying degrees, through devotion, protection, violence, and (occasionally) risqué sexuality.

Most versions of the Ramayana place Hanuman in encounters with two menacing supernatural women during his flight over the ocean: Surasa, the “mother of snakes” (actually a goddess who has been sent to test him), and a demon named Simhika; he overcomes the first by trickery and the second by violence (e.g., *Rāmāyana* 5.1.130–78), in both cases achieving victory through his characteristic trick of altering his size. As the Goldmans note, these episodes involve “the projection of the female as the nightmarish, gargantuan, and all-devouring form that recurs frequently in traditional Indian literature,” and that seems to invite psychosexual interpretation (Goldman and Goldman 1996:52 and n. 176). Coupled with Hanuman’s proud display of an enormous form to Sita after she has mocked his puniness (5.35.35–39), these episodes suggest to some researchers a male child’s fantasied response to both the perceived “bad” (threatening or angry) and “good” (nurturing and loving) aspects of his mother (Kakar 1978:79–103; cf. Sattar 1990:152–74).

A third challenge appears as Hanuman is about to enter Lanka, and it takes the form of a female gatekeeper generally understood as the city’s tutelary goddess (*bhūdevī*; see Story 10). Their violent interaction stops abruptly when the goddess, recognizing the monkey as the fulfillment of a prophecy regarding Ravana’s downfall (or, in some versions, as her own spouse, Shiva), gives him her blessing to enter the city. In certain retellings, she is then requested by Hanuman to leave (thus permitting Rama’s assault on the city) and is dispatched elsewhere, sometimes under his escort, on the promise that she will receive worship there. Thus the story figures, as I noted in chapter 5, in the origin myths of several temples and explains Hanuman’s presence there as a guardian or sidekick to the resident Devi. Similarly, in many versions of the Ahiravana story, Hanuman’s defeat of the bloodthirsty goddess of the netherworld involves varying degrees of violence or collusion (see Story 21). The monkey’s virility is also highlighted in this tale cycle, though only obliquely, in his encounter with his “fish-bannered” son, Makaradhvaja, about whom I shall say more shortly.

The final goddess encounter I will mention is with Sita herself, though not as the desperate, imprisoned queen of the *Sundarakāṇḍa*, but as a fearsome warrior celebrated in several Bengali and Assamese narratives as the destroyer of yet another Ravana—this time a hundred- or thousand-headed one against whom Rama and his forces are powerless. In these tales,

9. According to *Webster’s II* (1995): “domesticated, tame [used of animals]; a close friend or associate; a spirit, often assuming animal form, believed to serve esp. a witch” (404). The European witch’s familiar was understood to be a demonic servant and paramour, often Satan himself in animal form.

Hanuman is dispatched to Ayodhya to fetch Sita, who emanates or assumes a ferocious form, assisted by bloodthirsty “mothers,” and dispatches the demon (Coburn 1995:5–16). In an Assamese drama on this theme, the aroused goddess then emits a fiery brilliance that threatens to destroy the universe; Rama is too frightened to face her, and Hanuman must again be summoned. He falls at the goddess’s feet and delivers a song of praise that transforms her, at last, into a modest and auspicious wife. In analyzing the drama, William Smith finds himself puzzled by its mixed Vaishnava-Shaiva/Shakta subject matter, and speculates that Hanuman’s climactic role “could have been played just as well by one of the other characters” (1994:141). However, as I have noted, the divine monkey’s cultic career challenges the assumption that “Vaishnava” and “Shaiva/Shakta” elements can be decisively separated, and he evidently enjoys a special relationship with the martial goddess, though this needs to be explored further.

To do so, I turn to the northwestern states of Kashmir, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, western Uttar Pradesh, and eastern Rajasthan, where local goddesses with mythical connections to both Vishnu and Shiva are often worshiped together with two servants or bodyguards: Langurvīr (*Laṅgūrvīr*, “hero monkey/virile monkey”), who is widely identified with Hanuman, and Bhairava. In her study of the “seven sisters” of the Punjab hills, Kathleen Erndl explains Hanuman’s presence in the shrines as one aspect of the “Vaishnavization” of older Nath, tantric, and Shakta cults in the region. This process has led to the gradual (and partial) “taming” of these goddesses, who are understood to be both virgins and mothers, through links with Vaishnava narratives and through the abandonment of animal sacrifice and other tantric, power-generating rites at their shrines (Erndl 1993:43). The most popular of these deities today is Vaishno Devi, who is worshiped in the form of three stone mounds in a cave temple high on a mountain called Trikuta (“triple peak”) above Jammu in Kashmir State, which has in recent times become the goal of large-scale pilgrimage. Her origin story, recounted by Erndl, places her birth in the South during the treta yuga, as a maiden likewise named Trikuta who undertakes austerities in order to win Vishnu (then incarnate as Rama) as her husband. When Rama learns of her vow, he protests that he can have but one wife, Sita, but promises to marry her in his future advent as Kalkin, the tenth avatara of the current cosmic cycle, who will bring the kali age to a close.¹⁰ He sends her to the Himalayas, accompanied by Hanuman/Langurvīr, to practice austerities and await his future coming. En route, she is pursued by the lustful Bhairava, whom she decapitates with her trident, though she grants him the boon of receiving worship near her shrine. It is interesting to note that the story identifies Vaishno Devi’s original name as Trikuta (“three summits,” also the name of the mountain on which she presently resides, and of her aniconic murti in the form of a triple stone

10. Cf. the naga princess of the netherworld, whose desired union with Rama is cleverly deferred by Hanuman in Story 21.c.

outcropping); this was the name of the mountainous island on which Lanka was built and therefore an epithet of its *bhūdevī*. The story is thus an apparent multiform of those noted earlier in which Hanuman requests the female guardian to depart (cf. the tale of the Kashmiri goddess Khir Bhavani, another “Vaishnavized” devi who is accompanied by Hanuman and Bhairava; see Story 10.c).

In Erndl’s interpretation, Langurvīr and Bhairava represent the dual paths of the vira or tantric hero: the “right-hand” approach of bhakti, and the “left-hand” quest for divinity and power by one who “seeks union with the Goddess through meat, wine, and sex” (Erndl 1993:161). Yet to aspire to sexually possess the goddess is to court death, and Erndl suggests the parallel between the sexually forward Bhairava and the lustful buffalo-demon Mahisha, who is decapitated by Durga in the classic Sanskrit praise-poem *Devīmāhātmya*. The alternative is to become a nonthreatening “son/servant,” and in the sanitized posters of Vaishno Devi now sold throughout India, her narrative is compressed into a benevolent lion-riding goddess flanked by a banner-waving Langurvīr/Hanuman and Bhairava as a smiling child (who nevertheless carries his trademark bloody sword and severed human head—the latter emblematic of his taste for blood sacrifice, but also potentially read in this context as a symbol of his own death at the Mother’s hands). Both Erndl and Wangu observe that the origin myths of Vaishno Devi and Khir Bhavani, which link them to the Ramayana and to the respectability of a (future) match with Vishnu/Rama, appear to be late and contrived. Yet the widespread presence, throughout much of northwestern India, of Langurvīr as the Devi’s attendant—a role typically played elsewhere by aggressive, nonvegetarian local gods—suggests that the monkey’s relationship to her may be older and more complex.

The last chapter noted the distinction between the *dās* and *vīr* aspects of Hanuman popular in Rajasthan, and the association of the latter with Bhairava as an ambivalent village guardian. Lindsey Harlan observes that many Rajasthani goddesses have a “white” and a “black” Bhairava as twin bodyguards/consorts, associated respectively with “right-” and “left-handed” religious practice. Whereas the “white” persona (*Gorājī*) is perceived as “temperate and easy-going” and receives vegetarian offerings, his “black” counterpart (*Kālājī*) is “kinetic, fierce, and powerful” and a “salacious, virile trickster” who seduces women and may accept flesh and alcohol (Harlan 2003:139–42, 213). According to Komal Kothari, in modern temples the white Bhairava is sometimes replaced by Hanuman, who, like Bhairava, is an avatara of Rudra, but who also represents vegetarian and Vaishnava values that are desirable to middle-class patrons. Such “Vaishnavization” thus appears to replicate the pattern observed by Erndl and Wangu, though it stops short of altogether sanitizing the simian familiar of the goddess.

His staying power is demonstrated by a further body of lore in this region: the genre of folk song known as “languriya” (*laṅgūriyā*, *lāṅguriyā*). Attested in both Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, these songs have received modest scholarly attention (Entwistle 1983; P. Manuel 1994), but (in my view) inadequate explanation, particularly of their simian imagery. Languriya is the name both

of their predominant melodies and of their principal character, a being who (in the context of temples such as the “seven sisters” of Punjab or Kaila Maiya in eastern Rajasthan, where the songs are often sung at fairs) is readily identified with Langurvīr/Hanuman, the Mother’s bodyguard. This identification is also common in the Braj region, where images of Languriya receive worship as part of Divali celebrations, and further south in Bundelkhand, where women worshipping Durga during the autumn “nine nights” sing songs and make vows to their “darling” Languriya (*Kalyān* 1975:439, 474). Among transcribed Languriya songs, some are indeed simply bhajans to the goddess, but many others appear “secular” in theme and involve the singer’s address to an imaginary companion whose relationship to her body is evidently as something other than a guard. Indeed, many of the songs (performed by both women and men) are bawdy, which is not surprising given that the genre’s name derives from the word *laṅgūr* (and its variants *laṅgul*, *lāṅgūl*), which identifies a common species of black-faced, long-tailed monkey, but also connotes both “tail” and “penis,” has the adjectival sense of “impudent” and “mischievous,” and, in the slang of the Braj region, can refer to a woman’s paramour and/or to her younger brother-in-law (*devar*) with whom she is intimate and can exchange saucy and teasing remarks, or more (Entwistle 1983:90). Entwistle glosses the name as “one who has a large tail/penis”—I personally favor “that long-tailed rogue”—and describes Languriya as “a boyish or youthful figure” who “has the reputation of being a womanizer . . . and behaving in a lecherous manner, for which he is sometimes said to have been imprisoned, fined, or otherwise punished” (89).

Entwistle’s brief study includes lyrics to fifteen Languriya songs, in which “long-tail” is described as fond of meat, wine, and cannabis, is said to be always sleepy (as a result of nocturnal carousing), and (in more devotional lyrics) is seen waiting on the richly ornamented goddess in her mansion, fanning her as she reclines on a sandalwood bed. He adds that other songs, “not recorded here, deal in sexually-explicit terms with their relationship” (Entwistle 1983:92–95). Kothari similarly told me in 1996 that Rajasthani village Languriya songs identify him as a “friend” to barren women, but warn, through sexually explicit lyrics, of his wayward ways: “He’ll come by night, he’ll sleep with you, he’ll do this, he’ll do that.” Further to the east, in Braj, Manuel likewise notes the widespread popularity, great variety, and imaginative but coarse imagery of Languriya songs, such as the automotive-metaphor-laden “Langur’s bore is down,” popular among truck drivers (P. Manuel 1994:45)—though he too, like Entwistle, sees no link with Hanuman.

Yet I have already observed that devotees explicitly make such a link, and this is further evidenced by a lengthy text sold to pilgrims outside Rajasthan’s famed Balaji temple in Menhdipur (*Camatkārī* 1988). This nearly 600-page anthology consists principally of bhajans and kirtans to be performed in front of the resident deities, and these include thirty-two Languriya songs. Although one may assume that these printed versions are (like Entwistle’s samples) well expurgated, they retain a saucy flavor while suggesting the range of Languriya’s activities. Thus he plays *causar* (a dice game related to Parcheesi and

associated with intimate relaxation) with the devi, or swings her on a golden swing in her hilltop palace, sports with singing and dancing joginis while wearing a rakish red hat, and is repeatedly addressed as a confidant by both female and male singers. The former coquettishly entreat him to bring them gifts such as motor cars and high-fashion saris, or beg him to come into their hut “just once” (such bawdy songs resemble those to junior brothers-in-law and paramours); the latter complain to him of their own “joginis” (here a euphemism for wives) who have taken up “English fashion” (i.e., modern urban ways) and become hard to please or control (songs 382, 383, 393, 405, 408, 411). In one song, Languriya himself is said to have succumbed to “fashion” (the English word is used) and now neglects his home and children, wears polyester clothes, and drinks tea with “hippy girls” (song 402). Still other songs urge Languriya not to become a drunkard, or one of today’s corrupt politicians (songs 407, 410). Apparently, the compilers considered these satirical vignettes of contemporary waywardness to be suitable entertainment for Menhdipur’s Hanuman-Balaji, his tough henchmen, and the legion of subdued spirits in his entourage.

Although Entwistle provides valuable data on the Languriya tradition in Rajasthan, he says little about its simian imagery. He briefly tries to link Kaila Devi’s ambivalent sidekick with Krishna bhakti, before concluding that “though there is evidently some general correlation underlying the worship of different Devīs accompanied by male attendants . . . it is now difficult to determine whether such correspondences are ancient, fortuitous, coincidental or fabricated in retrospect by generations of fanciful storytellers.” Moreover, he finds Languriya himself to lack “a fixed identity,” hence “the popular imagination has been free to make up songs about him more or less at whim” (Entwistle 1983:91). I would counter that, although Languriya songs are clearly imaginative and whimsical, their lyrics reveal enough consistency to suggest that his fluid identity—as trickster, son, confidant, servant, protector, and paramour—is connected with a desirable sort of deviousness and is broadly consistent with the longtime characterization of a “bullish monkey” as both protective and threatening, comical and alluring, as well as with narrative themes that survive in the popular lore and worship of Hanuman.¹¹ I will consider another of these suppressed but persistent themes later in this

11. That such a folk understanding of Hanuman as a woman’s potential partner is not exclusive to northern India is suggested by the *basavi* tradition of Karnataka, reported to me by folklorist M. Chidanandamurthy of Bangalore in January 1990. According to Chidanandamurthy, a *basavi* is a woman who is considered to be married to Hanuman, generally through a ceremony performed in a temple, with the monkey god sometimes represented by a coconut. Such a marriage may result from an oath taken by a girl’s parents, especially if she falls seriously ill, to dedicate her to Hanuman if she lives. A *basavi* is not considered a prostitute, but is free to live with any man she chooses, and to change partners; if asked, she will say, “Hanuman is my husband.” Like the temple dancer of the *devadāsī* tradition, the *basavi* can never be widowed, because her husband is immortal. Hence she is always in the auspicious state of a married woman and consequently may be invited to string the bride’s necklace (*maṅgalasūtra*) at the time of marriage, and to participate in other rites such as waving the oil lamp for the *maṅgala kārya* ceremony. Since a *basavi*’s property belongs to her and not to a human spouse, it is generally inherited by her natal family, and this is also true of any children she may have. For some rural families with daughters, this is an appealing option for holding onto property.

chapter, but first I need to clarify the links between the materials already presented.

Scholars and Their Tales

I have now offered three examples, spanning as many millennia, of the relationship between a divine woman and a monkey. It remains to consider their meaning, by pondering what connections—if any—may exist between them; in short to construct (as scholars are wont to do) an explanatory narrative linking them. I can suggest several ways of doing so.

The first is to conclude that, interesting as these sets of materials may individually be, there is in fact little or no connection between them. The Vrishakapi hymn is anomalous within the *Rgveda*, and so obscure and burdened with wildly different interpretations (including several that lack a “monkey” altogether) that we can conclude nothing from it. Valmiki’s shape-shifting simians may be his own invention, with no link to previous monkey lore. The songs concerning Devi and Langurvīr may likewise have arisen independently; their association with Hanuman may be only a retrospective attempt to connect local traditions to a prestigious and pan-Indian narrative (thus every local goddess is now homologized to Durga and every local guard monkey to Hanuman). Though this explanation is defensible as a cautious scholarly position, it denies links (e.g., of Hanuman and Languriya) that worshippers themselves often perceive and acknowledge.

A second approach is to suggest that the Vrishakapi and Languriya themes, despite the vast temporal divide that separates them, both reflect an indigenous folklore in which men and women fantasize about a diminutive but oversexed monkey “other” who might threaten and/or tantalize a woman. At a certain historical moment, this theme was adopted and transformed through a brilliant epic poem that became so influential that it largely effaced the older lore, and that transformed both monkey and woman into powerful but ultimately subordinated figures, “united” primarily in their self-restraint and shared devotion to a male authority figure. The old lore subsequently survived only in marginalized or resistant retellings (e.g., tribal and Jain Ramayanas, Shakta myths, and the Buddhist and Islamic Rama tales of South-east Asia). In this interpretation, the modern Languriya folklore represents a resurfacing, in a nonelite context, of some of the repressed but implicit themes of the woman-monkey encounter. This interpretation is in keeping with much modern scholarship that views high-culture, normative texts like the Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇa* as ideological tools in the maintenance of a caste- and gender-based status quo, and regards dissenting or nonstandard practices and retellings, especially among women and low-caste males, as marginalized but persistent forms of “subaltern resistance.” Apart from its explanatory merits, however, I note that this is a decidedly “etic” view, from the (assumed) Olympian perspective of the modern academy, and reflects that intellectual community’s own (often unacknowledged) materialist ideology.

Yet a third explanation would see the first and second narratives—the Vrishakapi hymn and the *Sundarakāṇḍa*—as relatively closely linked, both temporally and thematically, since the woman-animal interaction in both serves to magnify a male authority figure. The woman is utterly devoted to, or is but a feminine shadow of, her husband—“Indrani,” who is fortunate because her husband “will never die,” and Sita (who is likewise known at times as *Ramā*), who restrains her own shakti in deference to her spouse. Indrani is important because she is the *wife* of “a real man, a hero,” who, in the last analysis, stands “above all,” as does Sita’s spouse in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. However, moving beyond the Sanskrit poem to a consideration of its historical destiny, I note that, over time, woman and monkey gradually begin to acquire greater importance. This process becomes particularly apparent in Rama narratives in regional languages and in the increasing worship, after about 1000 C.E., of both Devi and Hanuman as independent but periodically linked deities. A goddess like Vaishno Devi enjoys the respectability of marriage to Rama/Vishnu, but this is put off to the distant future. In the meantime—and for the duration of the interminable kali yuga—everyone’s two favorite characters from the *Rāmāyaṇa*’s most popular book are back, “playing” in the spotlight at center stage: the goddess and her frisky son/servant/paramour. The “Vaishnava” connection at such shrines, reflected in the Mother’s generally benign temperament, vegetarianism, and pending marriage, make it all right for urban middle-class devotees to undertake pilgrimages there. Yet these associations are peripheral to actual activities at the temples, which often reflect themes of violence (e.g., myths of decapitated devotees, and sporadic though controversial animal sacrifices), risqué outbursts (Languriya songs), and possession phenomena, in which the goddess “plays with” and empowers her (mainly female) devotees in the form of “wind” (*pavana*, incidentally, Hanuman’s father and alter-ego), making them prophesy, dance ecstatically, or whip their unbound hair about them wildly (Erndl 1993:105–34).

This third interpretation may also be read from an “emic” perspective. Indeed, it readily adapts to the traditional temporal scheme of four ages, since the Veda—in which Indra is “supreme above all”—belongs to the golden age (*krita yuga*), and the Rama narrative unfolds at the end of the *treta* and the beginning of the *dvapara yugas*. The Puranas, medieval Ramayanas, and modern Languriya songs all belong to the *kali yuga*, which is a time of dharmic decline, when society is in disarray and women no longer obey their husbands or servants their masters. Yet whereas people conventionally bemoan this, they may also note that the present age is not without its perks: salvation, once reserved for high-born males who sponsored intricate sacrifices or practiced interminable austerities, is now accessible to all through simple, inexpensive devotional practices: pilgrimage, faith, and repetition of the holy Name (see e.g., *Rāmcaritmānas* 7.102a, b; 7.103; González-Reimann 2002:178–80, 208). Nowadays, both Devi and Hanuman are commonly cited as “deities of choice” for stressful modern times, and are said to be “awake” (*jāgrta*)—alert and responsive to devotees’ needs, both mundane and spiritual (Soni 2000:273).

Yet if I posit an evolutionary trajectory for goddess-monkey narratives, I do not mean to imply that a later one ever fully effaces its antecedents. Apart from the Vedic hymn, all the traditions I have described enjoy some currency in popular Hinduism, and worshipers exercise agency in determining which to highlight. This is a point overlooked in some recent scholarship, with its penchant for labeling people as “subjects,” only to stress their *subjugation* to hegemonic powers—especially those of the modern state—while giving little importance to their *subjective* values and experiences (which may run counter to the scholar’s own ideology). The same woman who adores the “husband-avowed” (*pativrata*) Sita and servile Hanuman in the context of urban, Sanatan Dharm-style temple worship, may undertake a pilgrimage to the independent and powerful Vaishno Devi and her sidekick Langurvir or, in the context of a wedding or fair, may herself assume the sung role of saucy mistress to the lecherous Languriya. Propriety (*maryādā*) may at times be a straitjacket, but it may also be a strategy, and female agency may equally express itself through self-satisfaction or self-restraint.

To close this section with a bound back to my chapter title, in the dark age it is possible to “like” both Mother and simian son without necessarily having to like, be like, or even bother much with Mother’s husband. And like Mother, devotees may find that in the long run, a bullish, lovable, and faithful monkey supersedes even the most ideal man. I will return to this last point in my concluding chapter, but first I must go underground and reconsider the surprising adventures that befell Hanuman there.

Something Fishy about Hanuman

Several modern images of Hanuman share a feature that is comparatively unusual in his iconography: in each he holds a banner or standard (*dhvaja*, *patākā*). One image may be termed “dominant,” as it is a mass-produced twentieth-century image, now marching confidently into the twenty-first, notably on the brownish-ochre cover of the “pocket” (*guṭkā*) edition of the Gita Press recension of the *Rāmcaritmānas*, itself the dominant vernacular retelling of the Rama story in contemporary North and central India. The Gita Press was partly inspired by the Bible-distributing fervor of Christian missionaries, and its pocket *Rāmcaritmānas* has appeared in millions of inexpensive copies. On its cover, a muscular Hanuman strides forward, hefting a huge mace in one hand, while with the other planting a flagstaff—like the American soldiers in the Iwo Jima memorial—from which flutters a banner bearing the motto, “Victory to Sita and Rama” (*Jai jai Siyārām*).¹² A variant on this appears in the Vaishno Devi poster noted in the previous section, in which Hanuman’s banner displays the legend, “Victory to the Mother!” (*Jay mātā kī*, or the Punjabi *Jay mātā dī*)—a shift in focus relevant to themes I have already introduced in this chapter. Both the Gita

12. The alternative spelling of “Sita” deliberately captures a folksy pronunciation common in rural areas.

Press and Vaishno Devi images, however, present Hanuman as bearing the standard of another deity to whom he is subordinated.

Yet there is another flag-waving Hanuman that is more ambiguous in message. This image may be termed (invoking the nomenclature of biology) “subdominant” or “recessive.”¹³ K. C. Aryan and Subhashini Aryan refer in their 1975 book *Hanumān in Art and Mythology* to “the fish symbol usually seen on the flag in Hanuman’s hand . . . the symbol of eternity and immortality” (20). Two elements in this statement warrant comment. First, despite the authors’ remark that such images are “usually seen,” their published collection of 136 plates and numerous engravings contains only two specimens in which the monkey hero holds such a flag. The first is an apparently twentieth-century wooden door panel from Rajasthan that appears as the book’s frontispiece; the second is a metal sculpture from Himachal Pradesh, identified as eighteenth century (frontispiece, plates 72 and 73).¹⁴ Both are martial images depicting a variation on the five-headed (*pañcamukhī*) form of Hanuman, which is associated with certain late tantric texts and practices (see chapters 3 and 8). Like most five-headed images, the Rajasthani relief features ten arms bearing an array of weapons and ritual objects; the Himachali sculpture is two-armed. Both figures wear shields or breastplates, probably alluding to the ritual, likewise called a “shield” (*kavaca*), by which five-headed Hanuman is invoked for protection. The Himachali image has a series of globular lumps appended to the lower side of its tail—an apparent reference (confirmed by several Rajasthani *patākā* paintings from roughly the same period) to Ravana’s severed heads, which the figure triumphantly displays.¹⁵

My second observation concerns the flag that these murtis also hold; for their Hanuman may be labeled *matsya-ketu* or *makara-dhvaja*, “one having a fish (or crocodile/sea monster) as his standard.” The Aryans offer the straightforward explanation that the fish is a symbol of Hanuman’s boon-acquired incorruptibility and immortality (*ajara-amara*). However, these qualities do not exhaust the significance of fish in Indian iconography and mythology. *Makara-* (or *matsya-*) *dhvaja* and *makara-ketu* are epithets of Kama, the Hindu Eros, who also bears such a banner; in his case, the “life” represented by the aquatic creature is not merely immortal, but generative and

13. The former refers to “an ecologically important life form subordinate in influence to the dominant of a community” (*Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 1998: 1834), and its prefix suggests downward motion or repression (as in *subordinate*, *subaltern*, etc). The label “recessive” suggests the comparative rarity of this image today and the fact that it may have been somewhat more visible in the past.

14. Another such image, unseen by me, is said to exist in a temple in Puri, Orissa, where it is called Makaradhvaja Hanuman. According to the author of a temple guide, the image holds a sword in one hand and a *makara*-emblazoned banner in the other, and represents Hanuman’s victory over Kama, whom he prevented from entering the city of Lord Jagannath: “By seeing him, thoughts of lust are instantly quelled” (D. Gupta 1980:232). This makes sense given Hanuman’s strict celibacy and his association with the Kama-conquering Shiva. However, as I shall propose, other interpretations are possible.

15. That Hanuman is not described, in most literary Ramayanas, as severing or thus displaying Ravana’s heads, is irrelevant in this iconographic context. The allusion is more likely to the tradition that Rudra/Shiva, who appears in eleven avatars, was not fully satisfied by Ravana’s offering of his ten heads. Hence the eleventh avatara, Hanuman, became responsible for the demon’s ultimate defeat (see notes on Story 1.c).

sexual, and its heraldic presence signals no “victory” over it. The motifs of folk art (wherein pairs of fish often adorn the walls and bedspreads of bridal chambers) and lyric poetry suggest, indeed, that the South Asian equivalent of the English euphemism for nature’s concupiscence—“the birds and bees”—might be “the fishes and bees” (Reeves 2002). Since *dhvaja* means not only “flag” but also “flagstaff” and (by metaphorical extension) “penis,” the compound *makara-dhvaja* also refers to a literal compound in traditional pharmacology, touted as a powerful male aphrodisiac (Coomaraswamy 1993:149). Moreover, in the popular Ahiravana tale (Story 21), this same compound often appears as the name of Hanuman’s fish-born son, who lives in the netherworld and who likewise wields a banner bearing an image of a *makara*.

Since Hanuman is famous as a confirmed bachelor and exemplary celibate, these swirling piscine associations appear curious. In this section, I will develop arguments already implicit in this book that the two images of standard-bearing Hanuman point to two broad “standards” of behavior in his lore: one in which he appears as the subaltern lieutenant of Rama and devoted “son” of Sita (or another goddess), a figure exemplifying subordination and strict (and especially sexual) self-control; and another in which he is an avatara of Rudra/Shiva and a protean god of power and virility, who might potentially become a woman’s consort and lover, and the father of a fishy son. The former, celibate Hanuman is unquestionably dominant in Indian popular culture today, especially in printed media; the latter is subdominant or submerged, even (literally) submarine. To fish out this vestigial dimension of Hanuman’s character—which has bearing on the gendered discourse of popular Hinduism—I will dip into several pools of imagery and lore that relate him, and the monkey race of which he is the most celebrated representative, to discourses on sexuality and its regulation.

Lust Incarnate

The threat, and titillation, of sexual relations between simian and human, which appears to figure in the Vedic Vrishakapi hymn, resurfaces again in medieval story literature—e.g., in a bawdy tale in a Sanskrit anthology in which a bride abandons her new husband for a virile monkey lover encountered during a night in the forest (Tull 1997).¹⁶ It also appears in a sculptural motif found in a number of medieval Hindu and Jain temples, in which a diminutive monkey is depicted in the act of disrobing a voluptuous apsara or a demure human maiden (*alasā kanyā*). Such images appear in tenth- to twelfth-century temples in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Orissa; the Orissan

16. As Herman Tull points out, this theme recurs “with some frequency” in both Sanskrit story literature and vernacular folklore. His analysis of a late-fifteenth-century variant (which also leads him to discuss the Vrishakapi hymn and the *Rāmāyaṇa*), focuses on the fictional portrayal of women as sexually insatiable, of men as reserved or even impotent in the context of marriage, and of a threatening simian “other” who embodies the protean energies of the forest (Tull 1997). I return to this scenario (which is by no means confined to India) in chapter 8.

examples are especially numerous, and sometimes include the detail of the monkey (in the act of pulling down the woman's girdle or sari, or placing its paw on her breast or buttocks) displaying an erect penis.¹⁷ The range of responses elicited by such images is suggested by a verse from the Jain poet Ramachandragani in praise of a temple built by King Kumarapala of Patan (now in Gujarat), who reigned during the second half of the twelfth century:

There, in that temple, the statue of a lady who struggled to hold fast to her girdle as a monkey untied its knot, made young gallants feel desire and confirmed the steadfast in their rejection of sensual delights; it disgusted the pious and made old ladies feel embarrassed; while it made young men laugh and young girls wonder. (*Kumāra vihāra śataka* 112)¹⁸

The poet clearly enjoys the iconographic convention of projecting human carnality onto the animals who most closely resemble us, and wittily notes the range of reactions that it evokes—from disgust to laughter to lust—in different kinds of viewers. Such urbanity is indeed characteristic of the copious narrative literature produced by Jain authors, including their many versions of the Ramayana in which Hanuman, and simian sexuality, are given a distinctive Jain twist.

Jain retellings of the Rama-katha are notable for their sheer profusion; V. M. Kulkarni's survey lists forty-five major works on the theme, spanning a time frame from the early centuries of the common era to the seventeenth century (Kulkarni 1990:12–14). As counter narratives to the Valmikian archetype, they are notable both for their alterations to its story (a number of which have already been described) as well as for their adherence to certain of its features. In an oblique way, they testify to the popularity of the Ramayana and its characters during the first millennium, when there is little archeological or epigraphic evidence to suggest the worship of either Rama or Hanuman, and they introduce important motifs that will later reappear in Hanuman's expanded biography.

"Monkeyness" itself is an enduring concern of Jain authors. The earliest surviving Jain Ramayana, Vimalasuri's *Paumacariya*, opens with a recent convert to Jainism, King Shrenika, expressing doubts about the tale to a Jain teacher; the latter attributes these to the influence of "bad poets" (*kukavi*) and

17. For examples of such images from Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, see Desai and Mason 1993:89–90, and plates 13 and 42. For Gujarat, see H. Singh 1982:160 (but note that the same motif possibly occurs in images referred to on pp. 137 and 150, where the diminutive, disrobing figure clutching the woman's thigh is described merely as a "gana"). For Orissa, see Donaldson 1987, 3:1398–1400 and figures 3962–71. I am indebted to Heinrich von Stietencron and Vasudha Dalmia for alerting me to this motif and for providing references to the Desai and Donaldson books.

18. The translation is by Phyllis Granoff (1993:90). In January 2002, I saw a large billboard along a highway in central Maharashtra that repeated this visual convention: a leering monkey attempting to pull the sari off a glamorous but distressed damsel. The billboard bore no verbal message apart from the name of a sari emporium in a nearby town.

“promulgators of false scriptures” (*kuśāstra vādin*); he then offers a “corrected” version narrated by the *tīrthaṅkara* Mahavira himself (Chatterjee 1978:275; Jaini 1993:216). The king’s doubts involve ethical issues of special concern to Jains (e.g., Did the rakshasas truly consume meat and blood? Did Rama actually slay deer?), as well as some of broader interest to Ramayana audiences (Did Rama really kill Vali treacherously?). Several of them concern monkeys, who are placed by Jains in the lower animal-plant realm (*tiryāṅc*) in the fourfold classification of living beings: Could such low creatures truly have overthrown a mighty king like Ravana and built a causeway over the sea? Vimalasuri’s response to these concerns is to introduce the narrative feature, already noted, that would remain constant in subsequent Jain retellings: both the Sanskrit epic’s vanaras and their rakshasa opponents were actually humanlike vidyadharas—demigods who had acquired magical powers of flight, shape-shifting, and extraordinary strength. Those inhabiting the forest city of Kishkindhi (Valmiki’s Kishkindha) were known as “vanaras” because of their custom of adorning their gateways, shields, and crowns with images of the large monkeys who abounded in their region (and whom, as pious Jains, they left unmolested and even fed), and their magical weapons included “nooses” in the shape of monkey tails.¹⁹ The issue of the “real” identity of the vanaras and rakshasas nearly always receives elaborate treatment in the opening chapters of Jain retellings of the Rama-katha, through a rehearsal of the respective genealogies of these two vidyadhara clans (e.g., cantos 1–12 in the *Paumacariya*; cantos 1–3 in Hemacandra’s *Triṣaṣṭi śalākā puruṣa carita*), accompanied by condemnation of the “heretical” (Hindu) understanding of the nature of these beings.

In Jain narrative, the lifestyle of vidyadharas, although acquired through hard-earned merit in previous births, does not reflect ascetic values but, rather, a voluptuary *joie de vivre*. These embodiments of the fantasies of a largely bourgeois community combine piety and vegetarianism with palatial living punctuated by robust loveplay in the company of numerous wives. In this respect, too, Hanumat/Anuman (as Jain texts generally call him) is exemplary: in the Jain “universal history” of recurring time cycles, he is one of the twenty-four Kamadevas, “heroes with especially lovely bodies,” who are embodiments of eros (*kāma*), yet destined to end their lives as Jain monks who will attain liberation (Cort 1993:197; Jaini 1993:217). The special attraction that Hanumat has for women is often cited (e.g., *Mahāpurāṇa* of Pushpadanta, canto 74), and it figures prominently in some of his exploits. Thus Vimalasuri’s retelling of the *Sundarakāṇḍa* includes Hanumat’s night of loveplay

19. Kulkarni insists on viewing this anthropomorphism, which the *Paumacariya* explicitly links to the Jain view of monkeys as low, insignificant creatures, as an example of “the growing spirit of rationalism” of Vimalasuri and other Jain teachers, which he repeatedly praises and even cites as an example of their “modernism” (1990:78, 228, 239)—a curious move given that the Jains’ vidyadharas fly through the sky, cause objects to materialize by magic, and live for thousands of years. I propose that this narrative transformation has nothing to do with “rationalism” in the modern sense, but everything to do with Jain discomfort over the Valmiki story’s category-transgressing animal co-stars.

with “the Lankan beauty” (canto 52)—a bawdy transformation of the encounter with the female guardian of the city, Lankini, discussed earlier.²⁰

Vimalasuri’s story forms the principal source for many subsequent retellings, such as Ravishena’s seventh-century *Padma purāṇa*. According to Kulkarni, the other principal strand of Jain Ramayana retellings begins with Gunabhadra’s mid-ninth-century Sanskrit *Mahāpurāṇa*, and is reflected in Shilacharya’s *Caūppanna mahāpurisacariya*, a Prakrit epic composed in 868 c.e., and in Pushpadanta’s tenth-century *Mahāpurāṇa*, in Apabhramsha. The retelling by the great scholar Hemachandra of Patan (1089–1172) as the seventh book of his monumental Sanskrit work *Triṣaṣṭi śalākā puruṣa carita* (“deeds of the sixty-three exemplary men”) combines elements from both narrative traditions. Although the identification of Hanuman as a vidyadhara remains constant, there are some suggestive elaborations of his role. In Gunabhadra’s and Pushpadanta’s narratives, he uses his wizardry to actually assume the form of a monkey in order to converse with Sita in her place of captivity, and during the subsequent battle, Rama’s allies again take on simian forms to wreak havoc in Lanka, setting it afire with their flaming tails and dragging Queen Mandodari by the hair in order to disturb Ravana’s worship (Kulkarni 1990:123, 160, 164–65). That Jain authors, even while maintaining their party line concerning simian-bannered vidyadharas, thus managed to reinsert monkeyness into the story suggests the irresistible popularity of the Ramayana’s furry warriors and of Hanuman himself.

Yet although Jain Rama tales are clearly revisions of a Valmikian archetype, a few of their innovations appear to have struck a chord with audiences, particularly in southern India, and sometimes recur in later folk and regional Ramayanas produced by non-Jains. An example, already noted, is the oft-told tale that identifies Sita as Ravana’s daughter, abandoned because of a prophesy that she will cause her father’s death (Bulke 1999:295–96). The transformation of Valmiki’s highly sapient simian into a vidyadhara bon vivant, on the other hand, achieved its greatest elaboration outside India, in the libidinous (and once again unembarrassedly monkeylike) Hanuman of most Southeast Asian Ramayanas, yet it left a persistent trace even in Hindu lore. The tale in which it is found—that of Hanuman’s slaying of a subterranean demon—displays other motifs that appear to be of Jain provenance. Virtually all Jain Ramayana-tellers, from Vimalasuri onward, posit the existence of a second Lanka located in the netherworld (*Pātāla-Lāṅkā*), which is another vidyadhara kingdom to which vanara and rakshasa dynasties flee into temporary exile whenever their earthly territories are invaded (e.g., *Paumacariya* canto 6, *Śatruñjaya māhātmya*, canto 9). A second notable feature occurs in the episode of the mortal wounding of Lakshmana by Ravana’s shakti weapon during the battle in Lanka; while Hanuman and other heroes are away fetching an

20. Interestingly, once Hanumat finds Sita, Vimalasuri’s account of the *Sundarakāṇḍa* story adheres closely to the Valmikian model, which suggests that this episode had already won acceptance by audiences as the emotional “heart” of the epic.

antidote, the vidyadhara troops, fearing another attack, erect a magic citadel of seven ramparts around the stricken prince and his grieving brother (*Pau-macariya* canto 62, *Triṣaṣṭi śalākā puruṣa carita*, canto 7). Both these motifs will later reappear in the widespread Ahi-/Mahiravana saga (Story 21), together with a new character who, though undreamed of by the Jains, echoes a feature of their Kamadeva-incarnate Hanuman.

Fishing Down Under

Like many questing heroes who descend into the netherworld, Hanuman faces trials as a result of which he learns something important about himself. Most notably, through a dramatic encounter at the very portal of the subterranean kingdom, this lifelong celibate finds out that he has sired an offspring, Makaradhvaja, who now stands before him barring his way. Although the pace of these narratives allows Hanuman little time to reflect on this remarkable situation, I would now like to do so. In many respects, it appears to confirm the English (and Hindi) adage, “Like father, like son” (*Jaisā bāp, vaisā betā*), for Makaradhvaja is his father’s physical double, possessing strength nearly equal to his own, and sharing his ethos of unwavering devotion to a royal patron. These facts, coupled with his birth narrative in most versions of the story, suggest the dispensability of a mother and recall similar but more ancient tales—patriarchal fantasies in which eminent men clone themselves without messy domestic entanglements, and in which women (if they appear at all) serve as mere vessels for the men’s “infallible seed” (*amogha vīrya*). Often, these tales involve water and, occasionally, fish. Thus in the Puranic myth of the birth of Skanda/Kartikeya, Shiva’s seed, spilled when his loveplay with Parvati is interrupted, is placed in the waters of the Ganga for a time, though neither the river goddess nor the Himalayan consort really becomes the “biological” mother of his powerful son.²¹ In the *Mahābhārata*, sage Bharadvaja, glimpsing a scantily clad apsara, ejaculates into a wooden trough (*drona*), which itself becomes the womb and name-giver for his warrior son (*Mahābhārata* 1.121). The priest who officiates at King Dasharatha’s sacrifice to obtain sons, Rishyashringa, was similarly said to have been born when his father, Vibhandaka, ejaculated into a lake after sighting an apsara. A doe ingested his semen; her maternal role receives nominal recognition in the “antelope horn” (*rśyaśṛṅga*) emerging from the young sage’s head, and perhaps also in the “horny” qualities that will eventually permit his seduction by courtesans.²² A vestigial shadow of

21. Recall that Hanuman himself, in the popular birth story found in the *Śiva purāna*, is engendered when Shiva ejaculates after seeing Vishnu’s beguiling female form as Vishvamohini (Story 2.1); the seed is carried by sages to the place where Anjana is engaged in penance, and is placed in her ear (*Śiva purāna* 3.20.3–7). In this case, however, the son’s physical appearance owes everything to his mother’s accursed condition, though he inherits his father’s power.

22. The seduction of Rishyashringa is recounted at *Rāmāyaṇa* 1.8–9 and at *Mahābhārata* 3.110 (which also describes his birth, and where Yudhishtira, on first hearing that the sage’s mother was a deer, worries that he was born “in forbidden miscegenation” but is reassured by the story).

the mother may be more pervasive if the offspring is female; thus in the *Mahābhārata* story of the origin of the royal family of Hastinapura, King Vasu ejaculates while hunting in the forest; his seed falls into a river and is swallowed by a fish (actually another fallen apsara named Adrika), who is later caught by fishermen and cut open to reveal human twins in her belly.²³ The boy is adopted by a local king and grows up to become Raja Matsya (“King Fish”); the girl, though beautiful, is more corporeally “fishy” and is left among low-class fisherfolk; she will be purged of her piscine odor and imbued with an extraordinary lotus-perfume only when she herself receives the favor (and semen) of the roaming sage Parashara, which will sire the dark preceptor and epic narrator Vyasa (*Mahābhārata* 1.57.37–68). The watery imagery of these tales is striking, and the apsaras who figure in so many of them as fleeting “mothers” are themselves said to have been born of the cosmic waters in the beginning of creation, and continue to receive worship, particularly to ensure the birth of sons, as water goddesses in some regions (Feldhaus 1995:118–45). Yet though their presence may evoke the fluid medium of our common conception, it also serves to elide any significant maternal contribution to it. In these stories, the father’s seed is all-powerful and nearly all-sufficient in determining the shape and destiny of the child.

Yet even a fish wife/mother, relegated to the depths, doesn’t altogether disappear. In my analysis of the Ahiravana stories, I noted Hanuman’s affinities with the serpents who dwell under the earth’s surface and in the waters, as well as his “crooked” (*terhā*) qualities that make him such an effective adversary for the snaky sorcerer of Nether-Lanka. But the stories also point to his relationship to fish, a relationship underscored by his own occasional appearance bearing a fish banner. Of course, in the versions of the Ahiravana story best known in India, there is no relationship in the usual sense, for Hanuman has never seen his submarine “spouse,” nor perhaps she him. She simply ingests water containing his sweat or spittle (eliminating even the orgasmic lapse of control attributed to ancient sages and kings), and since Rudra/Hanuman is potent in every particle of his being, she becomes pregnant. She is then quickly disposed of in a demonic fish fry, but not before a monkey child is extracted from her belly. She doesn’t altogether disappear from the story, however. Her son—who looks entirely simian and who knows full well his father’s identity—continues to “uphold” her, literally, on his standard. We are never told the reason for this heraldic display, but I propose that it echoes another motif of significance to the Rama narrative: that of the abandonment of wife and progeny by a hyper-dutiful hero, for which atonement of some sort must eventually be made. Thus we find numerous popular expansions on Valmiki’s *Uttarakāṇḍa* (e.g., Story 35.g) in which Rama’s twin sons not only capture their father’s sacrificial stallion, but also defeat or kill him and his brothers, persisting even after they know who he is, and

23. Cf. Story 2.b, wherein an accursed apsara named Adrika is a friend of Hanuman’s mother, and herself becomes the mother of his dark counterpart, the King of Ghosts.

castigating him for his unjust treatment of their mother. The young princes are thus permitted to give expression—before the obligatory but perfunctory reconciliation—to sentiments that have been shared by generations of audiences.

By entering the service of Rama's enemy Ahiravana and then challenging the father he has never known, Makaradhvaja likewise appears to seek retribution for his own "abandonment" and that of his mother, and a few tellings of the story also accord the latter a more substantial role. In the ca. eighteenth-century Tamil version translated by Zvelebil, she is given a name, Timiti; her son, who is named "Fish Hero" (*Maccavallapan*), resembles her more than he does his father, and is referred to as a "fish-demon" (Zvelebil 1987:187).²⁴ This Tamil variant appears related to Cambodian and Thai versions of the Rama story, which give prominence to Hanuman's romance with the submarine queen named "Golden Fish" (*svaṛṇamacchā*, *suvaṛṇamatsya*). Their liaison occurs either while he is crossing the sea to locate Sita, or during the causeway construction, when an army of sea creatures threaten the project. In the Thai *Rāmakien*, Golden Fish is a "serpent maiden" sent by Ravana to lead this attack. In both versions, Hanuman seduces the fish queen and fathers a heroic and truly hybrid son, usually depicted with the upper body of a monkey and the tail of a fish, whom he later meets on his rescue mission to Patala (Bulcke 1999:440; Govindchandra 1976:231, 236–38).²⁵

Such mammalian and piscine miscegenation may have held particular fascination for people living on islands and in coastal regions, whose diet depended heavily on fish and who understood the abundant life of the watery depths to be linked to the well-being (and reproductive capability) of higher mammals. The ca. sixteenth-century Malay *Hikāyat Serīrām* contains an interesting variant on the tale of Hanuman's childhood attempt to devour the sun, in which the monkey child is punished not by Indra's thunderbolt but (like the Greek Icarus) by the sun's own heat. Immolated, he falls into the sea, where his bones are gathered together by fish, which permits him to be restored to life (Govindchandra 1976:257). In Southeast Asian stories of the causeway battle, Hanuman's defeat of the sea creatures' attack involves either sexual conquest (as in the Thai *Rāmakien* and Laotian *Rāmajātak*) or ingestion: in the Malay version, he uses his tail to agitate the ocean water, stirring up silt and forcing fish and crabs to surface, whereupon he and his cohorts happily devour them. Though the greatest elaboration of this tale occurs in a Buddhist or Islamic cultural environment (wherein the Rama story, freed from Brahmanical and yogic ideology, readily surrendered its top billing to a promiscuous and tricksterish Hanuman) it occasionally surfaces in India as well and may, like the Rama tale itself, have originated there. The story of the

24. Sattar cites other accounts in which the son is named *Matsya-garbha* or "fish-womb" (1990:158).

25. This hybrid superhero is a favorite subject for the lids of silver betel-nut boxes made by modern Cambodian craftsmen. I am grateful to Robert P. Piccus of San Francisco, who showed me his collection of these containers.

fish attacking the causeway—albeit sans seduction of their queen—occurs in the ca. sixth-century Prakrit poem *Setubandha* (aka *Rāvaṇavāh*) and in several tenth-to-sixteenth-century South Indian Ramayanas (Bulcke 1999:440). In addition, synopses of the Rama story in French and Portuguese by two travelers to India, dated to the late-seventeenth century, both include the detail of Hanuman making love to a crocodile maiden (*makarī*) while bathing in the sea after burning Lanka (ibid. 224, 544)—an indication that even some comparatively recent Indian storytellers were willing to accord Makaradhvaja a less-than-immaculate conception.²⁶

All such concupiscent monkey business is of course entirely absent from the modern printed sources of the coalescing *Hanumāyana*, yet Hanuman's fishy son—seeded by a drop of saliva, phlegm, or (most often) sweat—usually remains in the Ahiravana story, as does, implicitly, the piscine mother whose banner he waves. Interestingly, a few recent storytellers venture further, giving the submarine “wife” a more prominent role. In one Hindi version, she is no ordinary fish but Savita, the daughter of the ocean god and sister of Lakshmi, the goddess who emerged from the churning of the cosmic waters to become Vishnu's wife. Savita, too, seeks a divine spouse and propitiates Shiva through austerities. But when he refuses her because he is already wed to Parvati (though this is hardly a problem for Shiva in other tales!), she asks instead for a son like him (as Hanuman's own mother is reputed to have done), and the god prophesies her impregnation from a drop of his sweat when he is in the form of a monkey. This comes to pass, she gives birth to an aquatic monkey, and she and her son eventually encounter Ahiravana in the depths. The demon fights Makaradhvaja but cannot defeat him, so he makes him his guard and champion. When Makaradhvaja at last meets his father, he indignantly asks Hanuman for what crime he “exiled” the young monkey's mother. Savita herself then appears, alive and well, and bows at Hanuman's feet in a kind of reconciliation, and the story proceeds as in other versions (D. Shukla n.d.:38–42).

Savita's attempt to trick Shiva into marrying her, and his countertrick of granting her a child out of wedlock, reappears in Soni's *Māruti mahimā* in an elaborate variant that is unique among my sources in pushing the link with the fishy maiden back to Hanuman's rambunctious childhood. Here young Hanuman and a band of equally mischievous companions journey, on a lark, to the Himalayas, where they enter the music pavilion of the gandharva king Chitraratha. Running rampant, they play with and destroy the musical instruments stored there. The angry Chitraratha imprisons them but later releases their ringleader, Hanuman, on condition that he learn to play all the instruments he has destroyed. Hanuman studies music with Shiva and eventually returns to perform for Chitraratha (the story thus explains the South

26. Sattar cites several variants in which the fish woman's impregnation by sweat occurs, not after the burning of Lanka, but during Hanuman's earlier disemboweling of the sea monster Simhika, which suggests to her a displacement of that violent act's sexual implications (1990:159).

Indian tradition that identifies Hanuman as preceptor of one of the schools of classical music). The gandharva king is so pleased by the young monkey's attainments that he not only releases Hanuman's cohorts but insists on marrying his daughter to the new maestro. The wedding ceremony begins, but on the third circumambulation of the sacred fire (the seventh would seal the marriage), Hanuman remembers that he is a lifelong brahmachari and flees southward. Chitraratha instructs his daughter, now half-wed to an absconding monkey, to pursue him. Reaching the shore of the southern ocean, Hanuman feels thirsty and cups his hands to take a drink of water; a tiny female fish swims into them. When Hanuman asks who she is, she reveals that she is his bride, and when he asks what she wants, she cleverly requests the boon of a son like him. Hanuman ponders for a time and then agrees to grant her wish, on condition that she remain in her fish form and not bother him further. Eventually, when he burns Lanka, he favors her with a drop of perspiration, and she conceives Makaradhvaja (Soni 2000:269).²⁷ Here, Hanuman's near ingestion of a dissatisfied "bride" is neatly transmuted into her ingestion of his bodily fluid, permitting her to become the mother of his son.

A third effort to give the fish wife her due occurs in the television serial *Jai Veer Hanuman's* lengthy retelling of the Ahi-/Mahiravana story (here featuring both demons as brothers). When Hanuman approaches the vulva-like gateway of the underground city of Mayavati ("illusion-ville"), he finds a handsome young monkey standing guard and wonders why he feels strangely attracted to him, musing aloud, "Maybe it's because we are both monkeys!" The young guard, who feels similarly drawn to Hanuman, identifies himself as Matsyavallabha ("beloved of fish") and says that his mother will be pleased to hear that he has met a noble vanara warrior. But when Hanuman tries to pass through the gate, the boy sternly announces, "Much less you, I would not allow even my own father to enter!" This provokes Hanuman to issue a verbal challenge, whereupon the guard signals his own willingness to fight by declaring, "My mother is a heroic woman!" (*vr̥ strī*). They grapple, and just when he is about to kill the youth, Hanuman utters his own name. Awestruck, Matsyavallabha hails him as his father. Thinking this a ruse to avoid death, Hanuman gives an indignant speech about his unwavering celibacy. A beautiful woman appears, wearing a fish-shaped silver crown, addresses Hanuman as "husband" and "lord of my life" (*svāmī, prāṇ nāth*), declares "This is our son," and chides Matsyavallabha for not recognizing his father. Hanuman, looking both confused and angry, insists, "A brahmachari does *not* have a wife!" He denounces both of them as "sorcerers" (*māyāvī*), but the woman retorts that "illusion" (*māyā*) cannot fabricate true marital bonds (*riṣṭe*).

She then recounts her own story: she is a celestial woman who fell in love with Hanuman when he was undergoing instruction by the sun god. Seeing the young monkey expand his body to place one foot on the eastern and

27. The author notes that the story is unattested in literary Ramayanas but states that he has heard it from "holy men" (Soni 2000:269).

western horizons (so as to follow the sun's course across the sky) she resolved that he alone should be her husband. Surya Deva became angry and cursed her to be a *makarī*—and she is now known by this name—but a drop of Hanuman's perspiration fell into her mouth and entered her womb. Later, Makari and her son were captured by Mahiravana. He made Matsyavallabha his guard and Makari the maidservant of Chandrasena, a captive serpent princess whom Mahiravana wants to marry (though her heart is, in fact, set on Rama). Further, Surya had prophesied that Makari and her son would be freed from captivity when Hanuman came to Mayavati (Episode 33). Once this has all been explained to Hanuman, the three members of this odd "family" conspire to destroy the demon brothers and rescue Rama and Lakshmana, and Makari assists her "husband" in this effort during the next two episodes. It is she who brings Hanuman to Chandrasena, after telling him to become tiny and hide in a basket of flowers. With Chandrasena's help, Hanuman discovers the secret of how the brothers can be slain: their souls reside in five magic bees kept in a box that is in the custody of Vayu. To obtain them, Hanuman will thus have to fight his own father—nearly suffocating him, in fact—just as Makaradhvaja earlier fought him (Episode 34). Hanuman then dispatches the demons during the usual tantric puja in the Devi temple, using the "show-me" motif (see Story 21.d). Later, he fulfills his promise to Chandrasena to bring Rama to her bedchamber, but by taking the form of a bee, he hollows out the leg of the bed on which the naga princess had hoped to seduce Rama. The bed collapses when Rama sits on it, signaling the impossibility of their union, and Rama comforts the maiden with the promise that he will wed her in his next incarnation. Hanuman then brings the rescued brothers back to the surface to resume their fight with the aboveground Ravana (Episode 35).

These rich and curiously persistent tales of Hanuman's fishy son and wife may be understood as part of an effort, already noted in chapters 3 and 5, by the authors of the growing *Hanumāyana*, to make their hero as complete a character as possible, which includes placing him in the context of a "family," albeit an unusual one. The storytellers clearly delight in the unexpected twist of supplying Hanuman with a son, whose existence astonishes his father but who eventually wins his grudging acknowledgment, signaled by Rama's own gift of lordship over the netherworld. Yet the existence of a son implies a mother, who in turn connotes a lasting "bond" (*riṣṭā*), tying Hanuman to someone other than Sita-Rama, and both the authors and their hero treat this with much greater ambivalence. Yet even if not fully acknowledged, the fish wife too stubbornly persists in these tales; her claim on Hanuman is implicitly championed by her son, and in the examples I have just cited, she assumes agency and presses it herself, albeit with the modesty incumbent upon an upper-caste Hindu wife. Her presence testifies to the attraction of eros and domesticity that even Hanuman cannot altogether escape—an attraction signaled by her very species.

The Sanskrit words *matsya* and *makara* have enduring erotic associations. The former is a generic word for "fish," which, as already noted, symbolizes auspicious fertility; the latter can also have the more specific meanings of

“crocodile,” “shark,” or “dolphin.” Makara-shaped earrings are worn by Kamadeva and also commonly by Vishnu, Krishna and (in the vision of Mahipati’s Ramdas) by Maruti. The name has been used since ancient times to designate a mythical aquatic creature associated with fertility, eroticism, and life, but also (especially in ascetic traditions) with enervating sexuality and death, often personified in the female of the species, the she-crocodile or *makarī*. As a denizen of the waters, the makara/makari is imbued with their protean life and serves as “vehicle” for the goddess Ganga, bestower of fecundity and blessings. But as a carnivorous “seizer,” the creature signifies the perils of attachment to samsara, embodying a devouring force that drags one downward (Coomaraswamy 1993:32, 142). Recall that in another mini-epic incorporated into many versions of the Rama tale, Hanuman is waylaid, en route to the Himalayas to fetch life-restoring herbs for Lakshmana, by a demon named Kalanemi who has disguised himself as a sage. In his ashram pond, Hanuman slays a makari who seizes his leg and tries to drag him under; she proves to be an apsara under a curse.²⁸ Similarly, in the teleserial version of the Ahiravana story, the celestial woman’s lust (suggested by her desiring to marry Hanuman after seeing him swell his body) is punished by the curse to become a makari, though she is later rewarded with a fine simian son who is “beloved of fish” and fiercely loyal to her. In Jain texts, as I have noted, Hanuman is himself an avatara of the makara-bannered Kamadeva, giving him special license to enjoy erotic adventures prior to his conversion to the path of the *tīrthāṅkaras*—those “ford makers” who pass over the ocean of transience and its grasping makaris. This portrayal is in stark contrast to Valmiki’s Hanuman, who, if not explicitly celibate, certainly sublimates his own desires to the service of his master. For at least a millennium, Hindu tradition has made him an avatara not of Kama, but of Kama’s enemy and destroyer (*kāmāri*), Shiva, the bull-bannered ascetic and yogi who is a storehouse of withheld potency. Yet Shiva is not eternally celibate; he is paradoxically both a yogi and householder, his periodic bouts of loveplay with Parvati are also celebrated, and young girls commonly pray to be granted a faithful and loving husband like him.²⁹

In the mainstream biography of Hanuman, such erotic elements are suppressed, but they slip in nevertheless though “cracks” in the story, such as the nether-narrative set in the Looking-Glass world of Patala, under the sea. In Hindu mythology, the waters—always understood as coextensive with a cosmic ocean—are the reservoir of all life and potentiality, and many things get temporarily consigned to their depths, including the celestial treasures that must be churned out of them at the start of each new cosmic cycle by the devas and asuras. Similarly, the cataclysmic fire of Shiva’s wrath is placed in a mare’s head

28. The episode occurs in the Bengali *Rāmāyaṇa* of Krittibasa (6.72; cited in Nagar 1997:2, 144–47) and in the *Rāmcaritmānas* of Tulsidas (6.57–58); cf. Story 20.b.

29. A curious parallel to the Makaradhvaja story occurs in the tales of the yogic master Matsyendranath (“lord of fish”) and his rescue by his pupil Gorakhnath, himself the most influential name in medieval hatha yogic traditions. According to David White, these popular tales reflect “a cleavage within the tantric tradition” between sects that incorporated sexual intercourse into their ritual practice, and those (such as the misogynistic

that is submerged in the ocean to await its release at world's end (O'Flaherty 1975:159–61). In my interpretation, the tale of Ahiravana suggests that Hanuman's abundant sexuality, both as a simian and as an embodiment of Shiva, is suppressed but not eliminated; it goes where sublimated things go—down, to the depths—and there takes on a life of its own, as fishy “son” and fishier “wife.” From this perspective, Makaradhvaja, waving the piscine banner of eros, may be understood as the chaste hero's chthonic double, who preserves the erotic energy that, in his surface-dwelling sire, must be rigidly restrained. Needless to say, when the two come to blows, it is the father who usually wins, suppressing the son with the latter's own luxuriant *langūl* (“tail,” but also “penis”).³⁰ But once Rama is rescued, the young monkey is again released, consecrated with blood (as yakshas once were), and given sovereignty over the sybaritic netherworld; perhaps he is still reigning down there, accompanied by the fish mother to whom (compensating for his absent father) he is devoted.

Taken together, the goddess legends and Languriya songs that I have considered in this chapter, as well as the still-proliferating Ahiravana stories, may be interpreted as cracks in Hanuman's adamant cultural chastity belt, through which the sublimated (but never entirely subdued) fish-cum-crocodile of eros swims out, challenging the dominant upper-caste male ideology of semen retention and its frequent and oppressive corollary: the devaluation and demonization of women. It leaves in its wake ripples of other roles for the long-tailed hero: as father, husband, lover, and a woman's own “helpful animal.” Today, amid a sea of saffron banners heralding the simplified message of a homogenized and hypermasculine Hindutva (and often bearing the now militant slogan “*Jay Sītā-Rāma*”), the recessive fish flag still flutters here and there, hinting at more complex and submerged meanings.

Naths) that advocated retention of semen (1996:235). As I noted in the last chapter, the perilous realm from which Gorakhnath retrieves his master is known as Kadali Vana or Kadali Rajya (the plantain forest or kingdom), a place commonly associated with immortality (including that of Hanuman), but here a fatal paradise of sixteen thousand women whose shapely thighs resemble plantain trunks. The captive Matsyendranath is near death from seminal depletion when his pupil, disguised as a woman (as Hanuman will disguise himself as a goddess in the netherworld), awakens him from his stupor. But the guru is held back from escaping by the presence of a son named Binduknath (“lord of a drop [of semen]”) whom he fathered on its queen. To free him from this attachment, Gorakhnath slays and skins the youth, displaying his hide to his horrified parents; later he revives and even multiplies him. Matsyendranath finally wakes up to the illusory nature of samsara and follows his pupil to safety (ibid. 236–37). This story's parallels to the Ahiravana cycle are striking yet never precise; the master to be rescued is (like Rama) a spiritual “father” to the hero, but it is the former's, rather than the latter's, son who briefly impedes the mission and who must be subdued; the “fishy” father is ultimately brought out of the magic kingdom, whereas Hanuman's fishy son remains in the netherworld as its new ruler. With its vampiric villainesses, the Nath story is more misogynist and dismissive of the validity of the householder's life.

30. An exception is the Tamil version translated by Zvelebil, wherein Hanuman is unable to defeat Maccavallapan and eventually falls at the fish-demon's feet. But when the latter realizes that his opponent is his father, he dutifully discloses the secret of rendering him unconscious so that Hanuman may enter the city (Zvelebil 1987:185–88).

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8

Monkey in the Middle

Hanuman and His Kin in Transcultural Discourse

In tracing the rise of Hanuman to his present popularity, preceding chapters have suggested that his role as an intermediary is closely linked to the simian form in which he usually appears. In this concluding one,¹ I return to the sometimes-problematic issue of “monkeyness” (*kapitva*) and the discourse it has generated; I also consider, for comparative purposes, the role of monkeys in the lore of several cultures. I then examine Hanuman’s invocation in the discourse of Hindu nationalism and his recent success as (what I term) a “middle-class god.” Finally, I reexamine the much-invoked formula of “shakti and bhakti,” especially in light of recent iconographic and theological statements that suggest Hanuman’s elevation to a more encompassing divine role.

The Monkey Problem

In 1990, when I was in India researching Hanuman worship, scholars and devotees occasionally pressed me for my views on “the monkey problem.” My initial curiosity about this “problem” was soon replaced

1. The chapter title comes from an old children’s game wherein two players toss a ball back and forth, while a third—the “monkey” or “it”—stands between them and tries to intercept it. A successful interception frees the “monkey” to replace one of the tossers, who then becomes the new “monkey.” In a more agonistic variation (reported to me by an ex-Brownie Scout), the object of the two players or teams is to *strike* the hapless “monkey,” who must repeatedly dodge their throws. The game structure thus points, as do certain common English idioms (e.g., to “make a monkey of” someone), to a disparagement of the monkey that is common to many cultures. However, I also intend it more broadly to suggest the human perception of the monkey—and the Hindu perception of Hanuman—as a being that challenges boundaries.

by resignation to politely listening to exposition, often at tedious length, of its various “solutions.” Thus a learned Banaras gentleman, a great devotee of Hanuman, having answered my questions about various texts and temples, eagerly broached the topic that was clearly on *his* mind: “Tell me now, what do you think? *Who were the vanaras, really?*” When I replied that I simply took them to be as Ramayana-tellers described them—deities incarnate as marvelous monkeys—he dismissed this naive idea with a wave of his hand. First, he cited a number of theories regarding the possible identity of a human or protohuman group that Valmiki had so labeled: Dravidians, various Adivasi tribes, the Chinese, Neanderthals, “Bigfoot” and the Yeti, and so on. He rejected each in turn before proposing his own ingenious “solution”: through a careful reading of the Sanskrit *Rāmāyana* and a reassessment of world geography in the *treta yuga* based on astronomy and continental drift, he had concluded that Rama’s forest allies were none other than “your own red Indians!” Hanuman was a Native American.

Through a number of such conversations, the “monkey problem” has come to interest me, too, but from a different angle. I am less concerned with its ostensible solutions than with its own history: with the problem of how and for whom it came to be perceived as a problem in the first place. For with one ancient exception (the Rama narratives associated with the Jain tradition) it is a problem that seems never to have occurred to Indian storytellers, audiences, or visual artists prior to the late nineteenth century.² It arose then as one response to the discourse of colonial authorities and their academic experts and reflected anxiety over the nature of a popular deity whom Western scholars placed in the “primitive” categories of “zoomorphic” or “totemic” gods, and who was not (like Ganesha) associated with an auspicious animal or readily reducible to a “symbolic” interpretation. The beloved Hanuman belonged to a species whose public image was of impure pests: diminutive primates whose names were often used as labels for despised human “others” who unsuccessfully “aped” the ways of their betters. The British themselves regularly jeered at their imperial subjects, from Ireland to Bengal, as “apes” (Mitter 1994:149; Corbey 1995:345), and North Indians, noting the ruddy complexions of East India Company soldiers, responded by dubbing them “red monkeys” (*lāl bandar*)—alluding to the faces and rumps of the rhesus macaque—and even making them, in one folktale, the descendants of Rama’s causeway-building allies Nala and Nila, who were clever at engineering and were rewarded with a “white island” (*śveta dvīpa*) in the Far West, from which, it was prophesied, their descendants would rule the world in the *kali yuga* (van der Veer 1988:14).³

2. On the Jain transformation of the vanaras into anthropomorphic vidyadharas—an act of religious onepmanship and narratological sleight-of-hand—see chapter 7, esp. n 19.

3. Van der Veer cites a popular history of Ayodhya, *Avadh kī jhāñkī*, by one Sitaram, published in 1930. The story is sufficiently well known to appear in an elaborate variant from Maharashtra, retold by an early-twentieth-century spiritual master, in which Rama’s “eighteen million million monkeys” are blessed by Sita to reincarnate as the English, while the “good” rakshasi Trijata, who befriended Sita, is reborn as Queen Victoria (Upasni Baba 1957:2B, 542–54). I am grateful to Michael Kovitz for this reference.

Hanuman, in short, came from a bad family. Moreover, as I have noted, the Ramayana-related folklore of Bengal and adjacent regions—the epicenter of the early colonial encounter—was prone to play up his grosser simian characteristics (see, e.g., the notes on Synopsis 6 in chapter 5). Such monkey business took on even more troubling dimensions for the English-educated in India following the publication in 1859 of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, which quickly created a furor throughout the English-speaking world and beyond.⁴ Hindu intellectuals, accustomed to a yuga-based time frame and to belief in transmigration that posits no absolute division between humans and other life forms, generally found Darwin's theory less threatening than did their counterparts in the West; indeed, its challenge to biblical authority regarding the timetable of Creation was viewed as a potential vindication of Indian thought, and Bengali reformer Keshub Chander Sen pointed out that the succession of Vishnu's avatars—from fish to turtle to boar to man-lion, and so on—could be interpreted as an allegory of the evolutionary process, presciently recognized by ancient Hindu sages and now confirmed by modern science (Killingley 1995:181, 183–190). Yet the most controversial and widely publicized corollary of Darwin's ideas in popular media worldwide was the so-called “monkey theory”: the notion that human beings were descended from and directly related to simian species. This proved to be, in certain contexts, disturbing to Indians as well, because in the aftermath of the intellectual triumph of Darwin's theory in England (largely complete by the 1880s, despite continuing popular controversy), notions of social Darwinism began to infect British policy toward “subject races.”

The discourse that positioned human beings at the apex of a hierarchy of creation, and white Anglo-Europeans, in turn, at the apex of human races, long preceded Darwin and his theory. It reflected the prevailing medieval and Renaissance taxonomy of creation as a “great chain of being,” an idea ultimately derived from Plato (Asquith 1995:311). “Species,” in this schema, were understood to be divinely created and immutable categories positioned along a cosmic chain. The reports by certain late-classical authors concerning “monstrous races” living at the periphery of the known world were often assumed to refer to “missing links” between the human and animal realms, reflected in such creatures as satyrs, dog-headed men, pygmies, and the hairy and forest-dwelling “wild men” of European folklore (*Homo ferus* or *Homo sylvestris*). It was evidently to provide such a link that Albertus Magnus in his encyclopedic

4. The controversy that followed the publication of what has been called “the most important book of the century” (Irvine 1955:83–126) is the subject of a copious literature. The most detailed studies are confined to England and the United States and document the debate that raged throughout the 1860s and '70s in lecture halls, newspapers, and journals, as well as the popularized but pervasive references to the “monkey theory” that rapidly percolated through mass culture. A smaller number of works examine the effect of Darwin's work in non-English-speaking countries (e.g., Germany, Italy). A single study focused on the Islamic world identifies the first Muslim theological response to *Origin* as a Persian-language treatise composed in India in 1881 (Ziadat 1986:85). On other Indian reactions, see Killingley 1995 and Watt 1999, chapter 3. I am grateful to Carey Watt for directing me to relevant literature on the worldwide Darwinian debate and for showing me portions of his dissertation, which has since appeared in revised form as *Serving the Nation* (2005).

twelfth-century *De animalibus* posited “pygmies and apes,” on the basis of their “semblance” to human beings (*similitudines hominis*), as an intermediate category between human and animal realms (Janson 1952:85). Yet the relationship between the highest “links” in the great chain was most often understood in terms of a concept that Horst Janson styles “devolution”:

According to this traditional view . . . apes were “man’s poor relations,” debased replicas of ourselves, just as men were the “poor relations” of the angels. The principle linking these three estates was that of devolution, not of evolution: man had been “demoted” from the level of a potential angel through an act of divine displeasure, while the ape had similarly forfeited his status as a human being. (Janson 1952:13)⁵

Thus the forest-dwelling *Homo sylvestris* was thought to be a “degenerate” species produced through the union of “lustful women” with apes, a misogynist motif that enjoyed wide currency in medieval and Renaissance lore (Spencer 1995:14–15; Morris and Morris 1966:55–61). During succeeding centuries, these two concepts—of “monstrous races” as subhuman links in the chain of creation, and of their debased status reflecting some kind of transgression—would profoundly influence European responses, during the voyages of discovery and the subsequent era of colonization, to the new peoples and primates they encountered, particularly in the subtropical regions of the world.

Travelers’ and explorers’ reports of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are often scarcely less fantastic than those of Greco-Roman navigators, and they tend to confuse wild men and other fabled “monsters” with both indigenous peoples and anthropoid primates. Thus Sir Thomas Herbert theorized that the black men he beheld at the Cape of Good Hope in 1627 were of “the descent of satyrs” and then suggestively added that they also resembled baboons, “which I could observe kept frequent company with the women” (Pieterse 1995:343; cf. Janson 1952:336 on similar responses to the first reports of Hottentots). For men of science, it became imperative to sort out this riot of cross-bred species and to rank them in the hierarchy of the great chain. When a young chimpanzee was shipped to London from Angola at the end of the seventeenth century and promptly died there (the usual fate of African primates after such journeys), its corpse was dissected by the anatomist Edward Tyson, who demonstrated its remarkable similarity to humans. Yet though he inadvertently helped establish the discipline that, nearly two and a half centuries later, would become known as “primatology,”⁶ Tyson was more concerned to position the strange African beast within a “great chain”

5. Janson borrowed the phrase “man’s poor relations” from the title of a popular 1942 book on anthropoid primates by Earnest Hooton.

6. This term, along with “primatologist,” was coined by Theodore Ruch in 1941, when he compiled a bibliography of some 5,000 studies of primates for Yale University Medical School (Haraway 1989:24).

taxonomy that was at once cosmological and political. He identified the dissected chimp as “an intermediate Link between an Ape and a Man,”⁷ and noted, in his dedicatory epistle, that the creature bore the same relationship to man as his own exalted patron, one Lord Sommers, did to the angels (Nash 1995:56). As Richard Nash has observed, Tyson’s essay served “to lessen the anxiety of taxonomy generated by boundary creatures who threaten the stability of human identity” and thus “to police the boundaries of the human” (ibid. 60).

Indeed, the policing of boundaries fueled the European obsession with taxonomy in the eighteenth century, best epitomized by the thirteen editions of Linnaeus’s massive *Systema naturae* (1735–88). Blending careful observation with theological suppositions, Linnaeus’s grand schema still reflected the Greco-Roman fabulist heritage, for example, in his designation of the newly discovered chimpanzee as *Simia satyrus*. Moreover, Linnaeus continued to uphold the medieval view that variation among species arose through degeneration from an originally perfect creation (ibid. 232). The genus *Homo*—the ultimate divine fabrication—was especially problematic. The first edition of the *Systema* divided it into four color-coded varieties (white, red, yellow, and black), but the tenth to thirteenth editions added two additional “wild races,” *Homo ferus* and *Homo monstrosus*, and noted that a hairy, apelike *Homo troglodytes* had been reported by certain travelers (ibid. 229–30). Such assignments were much debated as news of strange peoples and primates continued to arrive in the West,⁸ but the most widely held post-Linnean view was that the human races of the Tropics, albeit anatomically *Homo sapiens*, occupied the lowest rungs of the human ladder, just above the status of monkeys and apes. By the late eighteenth century, advances in comparative cranioanatomy were held to have demonstrated “a hierarchy of intelligence and cerebral organization, from the ‘most perfect’ European on through the ‘lower races’ to the anthropoid apes and other less intelligent mammalian forms” (Spencer 1995:18). The “black” race was generally ranked below the “yellow” and “red,” and so British anatomist William Lawrence could confidently assert in 1819 that “the Negro structure approaches unequivocally to that of the ape” (ibid.).

In this ideological climate, the rapid intellectual victory of Darwin’s theory reflected not merely superior science but the ideological needs of empire. In Jan Pieterse’s assessment, the theory “politicized the chain of being” and rapidly became “the theoretical canopy of the imperial panorama of power, providing a view that extended not merely worldwide but across evolutionary

7. In medieval and Renaissance Europe, the term “ape” referred primarily to the “Barbary ape” (*Macaca sylvana*) of North Africa and Gibraltar, which was actually a species of nearly tailless macaque.

8. Linnean categories have always been controversial and are still debated today. The late-twentieth-century discovery that chimpanzees and humans have more than 98 percent of their DNA in common has prompted biological anthropologist Robin Dunbar to propose a revision of genus *Homo* to include three species: chimpanzee (*Homo troglodytes*), pygmy chimp (*Homo paniscus*), and human (*Homo sapiens*); the two chimp species are presently classified in the genus *Pan*, emphasizing the uniqueness of human beings as the only extant species of genus *Homo* (Cavalieri and Singer 1995:373).

time as well" (1995:345). The "great chain of being" now became a "ladder of progress" along which human cultures were hierarchically positioned. The rise of paleoanthropology during the second half of the nineteenth century proceeded apace with the elaboration of social Darwinism and eugenics—the latter driven by fears of racial degeneration through miscegenation with "inferior" stock. As Piet de Rooy notes, "the rapid expansion of evolution theory . . . shortened the distance between humans and animals and expanded it between blacks and whites" (1995:201). Widely popular during the early twentieth century was German biologist Ernst Haeckel's theory of three human races ranked in descending order of superiority from white Aryans, to yellow Mongols, and finally (just above apes) black Africans (*ibid.* 198).

The cross breeding, at the height of British imperial power, of a popularized Darwinism and a eugenically bolstered concept of devolution spawned an ideological monster for educated Indian subjects. Although the discourse that located human "races" along a hierarchical trajectory was not unacceptable to many elite Indians (who gloried in the "Aryan" identity posited by Orientalists and accepted that darker-skinned low-caste and tribal communities were "less evolved"; Killingley 1995:183), they were also acutely aware of the prevailing British assumption, bolstered by Christian triumphalism and Victorian medical discourse, that all Indians were representative of a mixed and "fallen" stock, whose once-pure Aryanism had been "enervated" through sexual profligacy and miscegenation. This ideology was echoed in the writings of Indian intellectuals who sought to explain why, if "historical progress" led cultures to progressively "evolve," that of India appeared to have declined; thus M. G. Ranade, in a collection of lectures published in 1902, invoked evolutionary theory and "its other aspect of what may conveniently be called devolution" to explain the "decay and corruption" of Indian society (cited in Killingley 1995:180). The "devolutionary" paradigm was echoed in influential scholarship on Indian religion and art. Thus Monier-Williams in *Religious Thought and Life in India* (1883) narrated Hinduism's steady downhill slide from the "high mental capacities and strong moral feelings" of the Vedic Aryans (who were understood to be cousins of Westerners and practitioners of a "natural" religion based on reverence for cosmic forces, albeit "unguided by direct revelation") to a latter-day "Hinduism" that was "Brahmanism modified by the creeds and superstitions of Buddhists and Non-Aryan races of all kinds, including Dravidians, Kolarians, and perhaps pre-Kolarian aborigines"—in short, a degenerate mishmash reminiscent of the dreaded *varna-sankara* or "mixing of social orders" of Brahman legalists (1974:3–4, 210; cf. Martin 1914:202, 226). Similarly, the judgment of prominent art historians that post-Buddhist Indian art displayed a gradual slide into barbarism and excess was bolstered by invoking vague "racial" categories. James Fergusson's *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* (1876) detailed the influence of non-Aryans, such as "Dravidians," "Turadians," and "Dasyus," whose religion was characterized by "superstitious fetishism" and whose supposed "racial" predilections Fergusson identified in specific features of medieval buildings (33–34, cited in Guha-Thakurta 1992:179–81; cf. Mitter 1977:264–65).

Such critiques were absorbed by the native intelligentsia not merely through volumes of prestigious foreign scholarship, but through school curricula and newspapers and journals. Editorials and letters to the editor in such publications as *The Hindoo Patriot*, published from Calcutta, regularly adopted the language of colonial scholarship to describe Hindu murtis as “devoid at once of imaginative richness and chastity of conception, and . . . daubed with the hideousness of savage imagery” (21 June 1855; cited in Guha-Thakurta 1992:68). A more “realist” religious art, partly inspired by Western academic painting and incorporating three-dimensional figure-modeling and perspectival illusion (e.g., in the paintings and chromolithographs of Ravi Varma and others) represented one tangible response to this discourse, but I now want to consider certain intellectual responses with particular relevance to Hanuman worship, for the formulation of which Indian thinkers again drew on Orientalist scholarship.

A *locus classicus* for the “monkey problem” and its solution may perhaps be found in Sir William Jones’s 1789 article in *Asiatick Researches*, “On the Gods of Greece, Italy, and India,” which contained a brief synopsis of the Rama story. Jones combined the post-Renaissance reading of myth as an allegory of natural forces and astronomical phenomena with euhemerist and historical-diffusion theories. Although he began his essay by warning readers against “arguments . . . that one idolatrous people must have borrowed their deities, rites, and tenets from another,” he soon plunged unblushingly into such claims himself. Thus he expressed confidence that scholarship “would prove Dionysos and Rama to have been the same person,” and Hanuman, by extension, to have been “no less a personage than Pan,” who had commanded Dionysos/Rama’s “army of Satyrs” (Jones 1970:196, 228–30).⁹ The monkey god clearly intrigued him, and though he noted the ongoing veneration of “the large breed of Indian apes” (i.e., langurs), he also speculated on a very different source for Hanuman’s legend: “Might not this army of Satyrs have been only a race of mountaineers, whom Rama, if such a monarch ever existed, had civilized?” (ibid. 229). Though merely an aside in an account heavy with comparative mythographic musings (e.g., Was Mount Meros, on which Dionysos was born, identical to the Himalayan Meru?), Jones’s speculation would prove to be of great moment, lifting the Rama story out of mythology and placing it, potentially, in “history.”

During the nineteenth century, this approach to the epic was bolstered by the equally influential theory of an ancient “Aryan conquest” of the

9. Despite Jones’s generally benign view of Hinduism (which would be countered by the Christian triumphalism of scholars of the next century), there is a tone of both whimsy and condescension in such “satyrizing” of the divine monkey. Since the Renaissance, few Europeans had taken Greco-Roman deities seriously as embodiments of religious meaning; they had been reduced to decorative or allegorical motifs, or misunderstood historical personages. In Jones’s essay, the rational Orientalist, with his world-scanning vision, sees beyond the local religious figure to his “true” identity as a transposition of an obsolete demigod of ancient European paganism. Hanuman’s contemporary worshiper is thus shown to be locked in an archaic, if quaint, stage of culture. Interestingly, the confusion of actual simian species with the satyrs of Greco-Roman mythology has a long history, and Pliny himself situated the satyrs “in the tropical mountains of India” (Nash 1995:53).

subcontinent. Edward Moor's 1810 *Hindu Pantheon* includes a substantial account of Hanuman that repeats Jones's identification of the deity with Pan and with langurs, yet makes no mention of the "mountaineer" theory (1968:252–54, 262–64). But when Moor's work was reissued fifty years later, its editor introduced a long passage drawn from Monier-Williams's *Indian Epic Poetry* (1863:6) that explains the genesis of Valmiki's epic, "which notwithstanding its wild exaggerations rests in all probability on a foundation of historical truth."

A body of invaders, headed by a bold leader, and aided by the barbarous hill tribes, may have attempted to force their way into the peninsula of India as far as Ceylon. The heroic exploits of the chief would naturally become the theme of songs and ballads, the hero himself would be deified, the wild mountaineers and foresters of the Vindhya and neighbouring hills who assisted him, would be politically converted into monkeys, and the powerful but savage aborigines of the south into many headed ogres and blood-lapping demons (called Rakshasas). These songs would at first be the property of the Kshatriya or fighting caste . . . but the ambitious Brahmans, who aimed at religious and intellectual supremacy, would soon see the policy of collecting the rude ballads, which they could not suppress and moulding them to their own purposes. . . . Those ballads . . . were modified, obscured by allegory, or rendered improbable by monstrous mythological embellishments. (cited in Moor 1968:20)

Several standard narratives of nineteenth-century Indology are crystallized in this passage: an authoritative "history" that postulates the gradual deification of a human hero, equates epic monkeys and demons with tribals and Dravidians, and charts the evolution—which in the Indian context necessarily means the decline—of the Rama tale itself from factual (if "rude") ballads to a "monstrous" epic fabricated by scheming priests.

Like Darwin's theory of evolution, this euhemerist interpretation of the Ramayana as a historical *roman à clef* gradually pervaded many levels of discourse about the Indic past, as Indian scholars internalized the views of Western "authorities," even though these were often at variance with indigenous opinion and taste. This led, in many publications, to a kind of intellectual schizophrenia, reflected in the authors' ability to recapitulate and endorse Western interpretations and critiques while simultaneously holding to more traditional assessments of the inherent "truth" of epic and Puranic legend. In the twentieth century, the historical reading of the Rama tale was enthusiastically embraced by academically trained scholars who combined historical, text-critical, and archeological approaches with a sometimes panditlike literalism in the interpretation of Valmiki's poem, and who composed monographs with titles like *The Riddle of the Ramayana* (Vaidya 1906) and *India in the Ramayana Age* (Vyas 1967). In approaching the vanaras, such authors

tended to gloss over the epic's references to simian physiognomy and behavior as "poetic exaggeration," but to take other descriptions literally and use them as the basis for "ethnographic" analyses of the social organization, dress, and religious customs of the supposed "vanara tribes" (Sankalia 1992:70-84; Ramashraya Sharma 1971:278-83; Vaidya 1906:93-97, 151-57; Vyas 1967:45-59).¹⁰ Because there was no historical evidence for the existence of such peoples, it was necessary to push the sources of Valmiki's narrative back into prehistory. Speculation sometimes focused on the physiognomy of early humans, or on the etymology of place names: Might not the trait of "prognathism" or prominence of the jaw have given certain early peoples an apelike appearance? (Patil 1979-80:125) Could the name of the Andaman Islands, home to "Stone Age" aborigines, be a corruption of "Hanuman"? (Govindchandra 1976:379-83; M. Joshi 2001:92-121).

Such writings at the higher end of academic scholarship are mirrored by more eccentric treatises like C. N. Mehta's *Sundara kāṇḍam or The Flight of Hanuman [The Vanara (Superman) Chief] By Air* (1941), which argues that the events and places of the Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇa* were not "mere figments of the poet's imagination" but rather "based on facts" (preface). Like many others, Mehta was at pains to demonstrate that the "divine weapons" used by Rama and his contemporaries were actually "Aeroplanes, Fire-arms and Electric weapons, gases and smoke" indicative of a technologically advanced civilization (ibid. 292). Mehta glosses vanara as "superman" (presumably, in 1941 India, of the Nietzschean rather than DC Comics variety), but also identifies Hanuman as Chinese (since the *treta yuga* world consisted, following Haeckel, of white, yellow, and black races, coded in the epic as Aryans, monkeys, and rakshasas), and as a skilled pilot, who flew to Lanka "probably in a big fighter Monoplane, full of arms and ammunition including incendiary bombs" (ibid. 336-38, 329). Mehta traces Hanuman's route across Southeast Asia and the western Pacific, all the way to a down-under Lanka "some where near the present Australian Alps" (*sic*, ibid. 330). This effort to render the Sanskrit legacy "scientific" is part of a pervasive discourse traceable at least to Swami Dayanand Sarasvati's exegesis of the Vedas (1875). It remains so common today that its assumptions often appear as commonplaces requiring no explanation, as in Swami Venkatesananda's popular synopsis of the Valmiki epic (1988), which glosses Rama's weapons as "revolvers" and "missiles," the demons' chariots as "armoured cars" and "aircraft . . . equipped with eight gun-turrets for firing missiles." Tellingly, the Swami never once uses the word "monkey"; instead, he leaves "vanara" untranslated, but glossed in a preface as "probably 'dwellers in the forest'; tribesmen" (Venkatesananda 1988:16, 313, 255-56, xiii).

10. Ramashraya Sharma, identifying the vanaras as "a primitive people perhaps still emerging from a nomadic state," observes that the only fields in which they appeared to surpass others in this condition were "medicine" (invoking Sushena, the physician brought by Hanuman to diagnose Lakshmana) and "bridge building" (invoking the causeway to Lanka; 1971:282). For additional discussion of such approaches, see Goldman and Goldman 1996:62-64.

Mehta was less equivocal, and his fanciful racial theories (“proven” by, for instance, the Chinese wearing of braids, which suggest to him monkeys’ posterior appendages) were central to his own eugenic and nationalist agenda: “[to ensure that] . . . every Indian Aryan will appreciate the true glory of Rama and worship him as a real Aryan Hero, to which Race he has the honour to belong and in which he must scrupulously try to prevent admixture of blood resulting in the production of *Varna-Sankaras*” (1941:339).

Euhemerist solutions to the monkey problem also influenced the polemic literature of sociopolitical movements, especially in southern India, of tribal uplift, anti-Brahmanism, and Tamil nationalism, which reinterpreted Rama as a hated North Indian invader, whose sycophantic court poet further insulted the conquered Dravidian peoples of the South by transforming them into animals and demons (e.g., in E. V. Ramasamy Naicker’s Tamil “anti-Ramayana”; see Richman 1991a). But such racial theories about the Rama story made their way more slowly into the Hindi belt, where they had to face an epic hermeneutic and robust religious practice that took “monkey-ness” more seriously. Although Arya Samaj writers adopted the rationalizing, monkeys-as-tribals hypothesis in their denunciation of the “corruption” of the Vedic tradition by superstitious and self-serving *paurāṇikas* (e.g., Kushvah 1986), a Sanatan Dharm swami, writing in *Kalyāṇ* in 1975, could still devote a long article to proudly listing every simian epithet and attribute described by Valmiki, and then assailing academics who fail to accept the literal truth of the poem’s talking, flying monkeys (55–57).¹¹ Racial and historical rationalizations do occasionally creep into Hindi *Hanumāyana* texts; thus in the “autobiographical novel” *Pavanputra*, Hanuman digresses to discuss Darwin’s theory and admits that his possession of a tail poses problems for some of his modern votaries (B. Mishra 1987:213–16); similarly, the Sanskrit *Māruti caritāmṛtam* includes a Hindi preface that identifies Hanuman as the member of “a human race whose national emblem was a ‘tail’ (*laṅgūl*) which they carried with great affection” (Chaturvedi and Kunal 1996:14). More typically, however, authors assume and even celebrate Hanuman’s monkeyhood, at times emphasizing and problematizing it (because of the lowly status of worldly monkeys) only in order to make a religious point. Thus in Soni’s *Māruti Mahimā*, Parvati is aghast when Shiva informs her that he intends to assume monkey form in order to serve Rama, but eventually accepts his humble choice, even volunteering to become his tail (2000:6–12). The suitability of the “lowly” (*nīc*) monkey form for service is echoed in another *Kalyāṇ* essay, which notes that a monkey requires no shelter, clothing, cooked food, and so

11. Cf. Madhavacharya Shastri’s article in the same volume, which pointedly queries how, in light of Hanuman’s knowledge of grammar and the Veda, anyone could suppose him to be merely “a *kī-kī-kī-kī* shrieking, roof-tile-snatching, clothes-pilfering cohort of the red-faced rhesus or black-faced langur.” Yet in the next sentence, the author rails against intellectuals who consider the Valmiki *Rāmāyana* to be “a fantasy novel.” The *ādi kavi*, Shastri declares, has clearly described Hanuman as *both* a great scholar *and* as furry and possessing a tail. “Why doubt this?” he asks (74–75).

on. The author adds, “You can’t serve Rama if you are preoccupied with your caste status, rules about food and cleanliness, and so forth. Hanuman-ji has shown the way in this respect” (1975:51–52). The unproblematic nature of Hanuman’s *kapitva* even for learned (though not English-medium-educated) devotees was demonstrated to me in a conversation in 1989 with the elderly Ramji Pandey, the chief Ramayani of the Maharaja of Banaras’s famous Ramlila and a lifelong scholar of Hindi and Sanskrit Rama literature. I had been showing Ramji Hanuman posters and asking him to tell the story to which each referred. Coming upon an image in which an erect, muscular, and manlike Hanuman held Rama and Lakshmana on his shoulders while they fired arrows at Ravana, Ramji announced that, although it was true that Hanuman sometimes carried the brothers during the battle, this particular painting was “incorrect and imaginary.” The reason was simple, he continued: “Hanuman-ji is a monkey, and they can’t walk upright like that. They go on all fours mostly”—here Ramji mimicked monkey locomotion by bending forward and pawing the air with his arms. “Valmiki says that Hanuman-ji carried Rama and Lakshmana, yes, but on his *back*; he never carried them on his shoulders. So this picture is wrong!”

The authors of several other *Hanumāyana* works grapple with the monkey problem in a distinctive way, reminiscent of the approach of ancient Jain storytellers. Eschewing both allegorical and literalist approaches, they have Hanuman identify himself as neither monkey nor man, but as a member of another category of being. As I noted in chapter 3, in the beginning of Sudarshan Singh’s “autobiography,” Hanuman explains that he is a “demi-god” (*upadevatā*), of which there are numerous “races” (*jāti*), each associated with, but distinct from, a species of earthly animal (1984:6–8; cf. Mishra 1987:9). This approach rescues Hanuman from prehistory, preserves his monkey form, and yet rationalizes it in quasi-scientific terms.

The author of the most comprehensive work of Hindi-language scholarship on Hanuman, Govindchandra, offers no such tidy solution, though he is only too aware of the problem, which resurfaces regularly in his signal 450-page study. Instead, he presents every possible explanation for Hanuman’s physiognomy, deploying each as the occasion requires with no evident concern for their mutual contradictions. Thus he serially endorses Camille Bulcke’s argument that Hanuman was originally a popular yaksha folk deity, F. E. Pargiter’s view that he was a Dravidian god reluctantly accommodated in the Brahmanical pantheon, and Dineshchandra Sen’s theory that his worship is a vestige of an archaic but pervasive cult of monkey worship. In addition, Govindchandra regularly invokes the supposed Aryan conquest of the Deccan and South and the notion that the vanaras were “a half-civilized race of the Stone Age,” although he adds that they “nevertheless . . . achieved the distinction of producing an architect like Nila, who constructed a bridge between India and Sri Lanka” (1976:17–19, 22–24, 104, 172–76, 306–10, 375–84). Despite his great knowledge of Hanuman lore (or perhaps because of it), Govindchandra seems unable to make up his mind on the relative merits of

these theories. The frequency with which he returns to originary issues suggests the extent to which they trouble him, as does his occasional anxious aside (e.g., “Hanuman is said to be a creature possessing a tail. This is really the biggest obstacle to considering him a man”; *ibid.* 179).¹² Yet when he focuses on the portrayal of Hanuman in literature and visual art, such concerns vanish into an unselfconsciously celebratory evocation of simian traits. In short, this notable researcher seems to want to have his monkey and humanize him, too.

Govindchandra's erratic approach exemplifies what to me is one of the most interesting aspects of “monkey problem” discourse: the fact that it is no problem at all in the context of worship, wherein Hanuman is unfailingly invoked in hymns, prayers, and stories that celebrate his monkeyness. As with some other kinds of discourse in India, the historicizing of the Ramayana comfortably coexists—sometimes in the same persons—with its own contradiction. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has recently argued, “historicism” and the Anglo-European ideological baggage it necessarily carries has become ingrained in and indispensable to educated Indians (Chakrabarty 2000:27–42). Where discussion of Hanuman and the Ramayana is concerned, this imperative of historicism appears to be signaled, both in English and Hindi publications, by the shift into the past tense in such questions as: “Who *were* the vanaras?” or “Where *was* Lanka?” Worship, however, is a different matter, for people don't supplicate a “has-been,” but a present-tense being who can respond to their needs. And like other Hindu deities, the emphatically living and “awake” (*jāgrta*) Hanuman necessarily comes “with attributes” (*sa-guṇa*), which include, at the minimum, a simian lower visage and luxuriant tail.

Elsewhere I have proposed that the depiction, by certain twentieth-century poster artists, of a “hairless, humanized” Hanuman may reflect awareness of and an attempt to visually address the “monkey problem,” deemphasizing simian characteristics and depicting Hanuman as a “buffed” and muscle-bound superman (Lutgendorf 2003a). But whereas individual authors can offer radical reinterpretations of a mythical story, a poster—which aspires to appeal to a broad and diverse audience—cannot compromise on key elements of the iconographic code. A tail-less monkey-man (as Govindchandra realized) is not merely an oxymoron; he is a *man*. Paradoxically, the iconic Hanuman can never devolve *that* far. In my reading, furless and humanlike Hanuman evolves in popular visual culture as the embodiment of a compromise: not a simian but a semiman, whose *kapitva* is trimmed to its barest essentials and whose gleaming, muscular body—modeling an evolving middle-class ideal of consumerist corporeality that is also reflected in the torsos of post-1980s Bollywood heroes—is inscribed with the competing texts of myth and history. Once again, Rama's plucky monkey manages a singular feat of bridging.

12. Similarly Nagar, approvingly quoting Vaidya's views that the vanaras were primitive non-Aryans, frets that “the biggest hurdle in so assuming is the tail” (Nagar 1995:207).



FIGURE 8.1. Hanuman as a furless, humanized muscleman; poster, early twenty-first century

Monkey as Monster, Monkey as Mirror

Although “monkey problem” discourse that focuses on a euhemerist reading of the Ramayana is unique to colonial and postcolonial India, South Asians are not the only human beings who have had a problem—and fascination—with monkeys and apes.¹³ I cannot conclude this study without briefly examining, for comparative purposes, the broader range of responses to these animals across time and space, an endeavor that (although it can merely touch on a vast literature) should clarify that the cult of Hanuman is, so to speak, but one subspecies of the broader human preoccupation with simians as signifiers of similarity, difference, and mediation.

However, because I am specifically concerned with the religious meanings of monkeys, I first want to briefly revisit the Orientalist trope (introduced

13. I intentionally use these terms interchangeably and unscientifically (as has generally been the practice until recently) to encompass all animals belonging to the suborder of anthropoid primates, which includes true monkeys (with tails) and tail-less apes (chimpanzees, gorillas, and orangutans—none of which are native to South Asia). Human beings, of course, are now recognized as constituting the third main—and likewise (mostly) tail-less—division of this suborder (Napier 1976:11–13).

in chapter 1) of “monkey worship” as an explanation for Hanuman’s origins. Early European scholars of the Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇa*, puzzled by Hanuman’s “insertion” into the narrative beginning in Book 4, sought in vain for literary or historical evidence of a precursor figure. Despite their failure to find one, it was an easy slide, in the atmosphere of the time, into the assumption of an archaic cult of a nameless “ape god.” Their speculations became sources for later scholarly writings on the human response to simians, such as William McDermott’s *The Ape in Antiquity* (1938), and for popular works such as Ramona and Desmond Morris’s *Men and Apes* (1966). McDermott, a careful scholar of Mediterranean antiquity, tellingly finds it “really surprising” that Western classical authors who mention the monkey in India “seem to be wholly unaware that the animal was sacred”; however, he defers to the superior knowledge of his Orientalist secondary sources to add, “yet the sacred character of the animal was surely established at that time” (73). The Morrises include a garbled retelling of the Rama story and the assertion (with no source cited but apparently drawing on Victorian readings of the Vrishakapi hymn) that in prehistoric India an ape-god was “the embodiment of masculine virility . . . [and] had the status of consort to the Earth-mother” (21).

Such Western discourse was reflected in the writings of Indian scholars. Dineshchandra Sen, author of an important early study of Bengali Rama tales, found Hanuman’s prominence in the post-Valmiki evolution of the story an embarrassment, since in his view there were “nobler characters” in the Sanskrit epic. Moreover, since Rama himself invariably appeared in temples as part of a triad (Rama-Sita-Lakshmana), Hanuman was the sole character from the epic to boast a robust independent cult (Sen 1987:53, 45). Sen explained this by claiming that adoration of simians was not simply “one of the oldest forms of Indian worship,” but was merely a local example of “that almost universal worship of apes in the pre-historic period to which the historians have referred” (ibid. 44, 46, 53). The historians cited refer to Egypt, Babylon, and Japan, but the scattered instances of simian sacrality that they note (to be discussed shortly), even when shored up with examples of the decorative or whimsical use of monkey motifs in art, hardly suggest what Sen grandly termed “the march of the great Ape through the boundless space of time” (ibid. 54). Yet since this alleged cult had vanished from other high civilizations, Sen’s theory (which would be repeated by later scholars of Hanuman; e.g., Govindchandra 1976:1–8, 307–309, Nagar 1995:217–19) implicitly colluded in the Orientalist trope of “eternal India” as a quaint but in-structive museum of atavisms.

The imagined history of “monkey worship” occludes a more significant narrative of the misreading and misrepresentation of other people’s religious practices. In the modern West, it still carries the sort of associational baggage exemplified by the American classic film *King Kong*, in which a white male adventurer sails to a remote island inhabited by dark-skinned savages who sacrifice virgins to their “ape god.” Indeed, the 1933 Hollywood premiere of the film included a performance, by a bogus “African troupe,” of a “Dance of

the Sacred Ape" (Warner 1995:358)—despite the fact that the cultures of sub-Saharan Africa have shown notably little religious interest in anthropoid primates. The term may also evoke the so-called monkey temple in Banaras, thus mislabeled in numerous guidebooks and travelogues, and sought out by generations of Western tourists on the assumption that it is a place where monkeys are venerated; in fact, it is a Durga temple in which a colony of opportunistic macaques, kept at bay by guards with bamboo staves, have taken up residence, although they have, in this context, no special link with the Devi.¹⁴

Instances of human veneration of simians are, in fact, comparatively rare in the historical record, and even where they are found, they usually represent but one facet of a more ambivalent—and frequently more negative—response. If animals in general are, in Claude Lévi-Strauss's famous dictum, "good to think with" (*bonnes à penser*),¹⁵ I would add that different kinds of animals seem to inspire different thoughts. If the nobility of lions and the virility and windlike swiftness of horses have been widely admired, anthropoid primates have typically evoked responses that focus on their *similarity to* and *difference from* their human observers. Indeed, although the Latin word *simia* (from which are derived the English "simian" and French "singe," etc.) appears to derive from *simus* (meaning "snub nosed"), its resemblance to words connoting "similarity, likeness" gave rise early on to such tellingly punning aphorisms as that of the second-century BCE Roman poet Ennius, which epitomizes the human "problem" with these animals: "The ape, that vile beast, so similar to us" (*Simia quam similis turpissima bestia nobis*; cited in McDermott 1938:141).

The single well-documented, if not altogether well-understood, example of the veneration of monkeys in ancient times comes from Egypt, home to a religion that, like the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, posited relatively fluid boundaries between animals, humans, and gods and that portrayed certain prominent deities as animal-human hybrids (Pieterse 1995:341). Among the several monkeys familiar to them, the Egyptians regarded as sacred a single species of baboon native to Ethiopia (*Papio hamadryas*, known to Greco-Roman authors as *cynocephalus* or "dog-head," because of its canine facial appearance), and associated it with both the sun and moon.¹⁶ Images of seated male baboons, hands raised in adoration of the rising sun, adorn the columns of several temples, and mummified baboons unearthed at the Valley of the Kings were also placed in seated posture (Morris and Morris 1966:10).

14. Cf. the Morrisises, who note that "large numbers [of monkeys] are kept in temples where they are attended by priests. The monkey temple at Benares is one of the most famous" (1966:22–23).

15. Significantly, the phrase occurs in *Le Totémisme aujourd'hui* (1962; cited in Leach 1974:44), a work in which the great French anthropologist critiqued then-prevalent notions of "totemism"—notions that linger in scholarly theories concerning "monkey worship" in ancient India.

16. On the wider career of the cynocephalus in ancient and medieval Eurasia as a "monstrous" human-animal hybrid and on the problem of human "othering" through such imagined beings, see White 1991.

That sculpted baboon images often display erect penises—a mark of lasciviousness in the view of later observers—may have indicated the connection of both the sun and the animal with fertility (McDermott 1938:7, 9, 82–83). But the cynocephalus was also associated with the moon and sacred to its god Thoth, a healer and magician, the scribe of the gods and guide (together with the jackal-headed Anubis) of the souls of the dead. Its image regularly appeared atop scales, signifying postmortem judgment, over which Thoth presided, and the god himself was sometimes depicted in the form or with the head of a cynocephalus (ibid. 8). It should be added, however, that the Egyptians venerated a whole menagerie of animals, and also that their regard for the “dog-headed” baboon did not extend to other monkey species, who appeared in their art as leashed pets or as droll grotesques adorning the lids of cosmetic jars. Such satirical motifs (e.g., of costumed monkeys playing musical instruments) recur somewhat later, possibly through Egyptian inspiration, in the art of ancient Mesopotamia, where there is no evidence of primates being accorded sacral status (ibid. 11, 14–15).

Elements of Thoth worship were transposed by later Greeks and Romans onto the mystery cult of Hermes Trismegistus, who was likewise a magician, healer, and psychopomp, and gemstone rings carved with images of ithyphallic baboons enjoyed a vogue in the late Roman empire, possibly as aphrodisiac charms (Janson 1952:281 n. 49). But the more common response to the Egyptian baboon deity in classical Mediterranean cultures was ridicule, which turned to revulsion in the writings of Jewish and Christian authors. A minor decorative motif in Greek art, monkeys appear to have had no sacral significance; on the contrary, they represented “the epitome of everything hideous and ignoble, so that the epithet ‘ape’ . . . almost invariably denotes a sycophant, a trickster, a person of grotesque ugliness or excessively low morality” (ibid. 287). In his *Historia animalum*, Aristotle briefly describes three species of anthropoid primates and notes that they represent a category morphologically situated between men and quadruped animals; his terse observation would later definitively establish the “link” occupied by these animals in the “great chain of being” (McDermott 1938:38, 88). The Romans sometimes kept monkeys as exotic pets, but the sight of one in a dream was held to be an evil omen and the creature was broadly viewed “as an example of ugliness and mischief”; in Latin glossaries, *pithecus* (“ape”) is sometimes defined simply as *monstrum* (ibid. 34, 149). The second-century Roman physician Galen dissected a number of “Barbary apes” when he had difficulty obtaining human cadavers and declared (and exaggerated) their anatomical resemblance to men. Yet his observations were tinged with a moral judgment, and he presented his specimens as comic “imitations” of humans, noting that “because their imitation of man is not perfect . . . these lapses from perfection give even the most degraded of men a feeling of superiority” (ibid. 95, 109).

Such “imitation” took on ominous implications for the Jewish and Christian traditions, whose Scriptures declared the human form to be the “image of God.” Hebrew writers found the stump-tailed posterior of the Barbary

macaque especially problematic, for God had declared in *Leviticus* 22.23 that animals were to have tails. A Jewish legend even claimed that Adam himself was created with a tail, which God later removed as a sign of human exaltation over bestial creation (Janson 1952:18–19, 134–35). In one Talmudic tale that circulated widely in medieval times, Adam’s amputated tail, rather than his rib, became the raw material used to make Eve, an indication that “beside Adam, Eve . . . is as an ape compared to a man” (ibid. 134). The stump-tailed macaque was viewed as an uppity beast trying to conceal its true nature and to “ape” human rank, hence as “a monstrous and presumptuous animal simulacrum” (Spencer 1995:14). A variant on the story claimed that God himself had cut off the ape’s tail as punishment for its presumption, leaving “scars” on its backside: the ischial callosities or “sitting pads” common to Old World monkeys (Napier 1976:19). The patristic writings of early Christianity denounce the “idolatrour” Egyptian worship of plants and animals, but “usually single out the worship of apes as the most revolting of these practices” (Janson 1952:16). They also stress the wickedness of the animal’s supposed “imitation” of human ways. The devil was sometimes called “God’s ape” (*simia Dei*) because he tried unsuccessfully to imitate God’s creative acts (Morris and Morris 1966:36), and the label “likeness of the devil” (*figura diaboli*) came to express “the ‘official’ Christian view of the ape from the collapse of the Roman Empire until the Gothic era” (Janson 1952:20). Implicit in this view was the absolute divide between rational and soul-endowed “man” and the rest of nature, which the ape’s liminality threatened. The masculine pronoun is appropriate, because in this male-authored discourse, women (like monkeys) were seen as problematic, boundary-straddling creatures, more prone to transgression than men (ibid. 109, 134–36). Late medieval paintings of the Fall sometimes feature an ape slyly munching one of the forbidden apples; the gullible Eve points to the beast in order to sway her consort’s resolve to uphold God’s commandment. Other paintings pair a black ape, symbolizing desire and the “lowest” in nature, with a white unicorn, animal emblem of Christ (ibid. 107–18). Only slightly more charitable was Bernardus Silvestris’s declaration, at the conclusion of his twelfth-century “Creation of the Animals,” that the ape was God’s final effort prior to making Adam, and was left as an example: “a deformed image of man in a state of degeneracy” (ibid. 29).

Yet the stern judgments of clerics and scholars do not altogether reflect popular attitudes toward the animals that, from the twelfth century onward, were imported into Europe in greater numbers from Africa and subtropical Asia. Seen at close range as the pets of aristocratic families or as the dancing accompanists of itinerant *jongleurs* at carnivals, monkeys appeared less diabolical than ridiculous. Though still regarded as counterfeit humans who could never quite pull off their charade (an old Dutch and German proverb declares “The higher the ape climbs, the more he reveals his behind”; ibid. 38), simians were again portrayed, as in ancient art, as comic imitators, especially of pretentious authority figures such as priests, schoolmasters, and dandified nobles. This convention became common in Gothic *drolleries* and extended

to the eighteenth-century *singeries* of Watteau and others (ibid. 169, 191 n. 43). In Dutch popular engravings of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, costumed monkeys appeared as embodiments of “folly and inversion,” displaying “undesirable, uncontrolled behavior”; as Gerard Rooijackers notes, “monkeys exemplified the Other and thus permitted articulation and demarcation of the Self” (1995:327–28). Although this is a fairly consistent theme in European representations (the monkey’s association with the pagan and feminine “other,” and with Satan as the ultimate, diabolical “other”), it acquired its most acid articulation in the context of intercultural antagonism—from the first-century Ignatius of Antioch’s declaration that non-Christians were but “man-imitating apes” to World War I propaganda posters that depicted the enemy as a rampaging gorilla menacing “civilization,” the latter usually appearing in the form of a scantily clad white woman (Pieterse 1995:345). American World War II posters gave similar treatment to the Japanese, especially favoring the “dwarf” chimpanzee.¹⁷ The related motif of the monkey as potential rapist or paramour of human women is likewise both hoary and enduring; I discussed it in the Indian and Southeast Asian context in the preceding chapter. For the Middle East, Europe, and America, the Morrisises assemble twenty-eight pages of medieval to modern variations on the theme, from the *Arabian Nights* to *King Kong* (1966:54–82); more recent scholarship has shown its consistent ideological underpinning of sexism, racism, and titillation (e.g., De Rooy 1995; Kruk 1995; Tull 1997; Warner 1995).

Implicit in much of the material that I have been considering is the notion of the monkey or ape as a counterfeit or degraded human, whose simian status reflects punishment for a transgression. Historically, this is the most widely attested human response to anthropoid primates. A Jewish legend traces the origin of apes to the wickedest of the three classes of men who built the tower of Babel: those who contrived to place idols at its summit. As punishment, God turned them into apes. In one of the Greco-Roman legends of Hercules, a diminutive race of men who attempted to deceive the hero were punished by the gods by becoming *cercopes* (“tailed ones”). A Muslim story holds that apes originated when a group of Jews were cursed for violating the Sabbath, and an Algerian tradition traces them to a group of men deprived of speech by divine wrath (McDermott 1938:22, 60–62). The Arabic *nisnas*, used in modern Egypt to mean “monkey,” is probably derived from *nas* meaning “people, man,” and alludes to their former human state, of which they were deprived as punishment for “godless behavior” (Kruk 1995:33). A medieval European legend tells how, when God visited Adam and Eve after the Fall, Eve concealed some of her progeny out of shame over her sexual activity; as punishment, God transformed the hidden children into monkeys (Morris and Morris 1966:127). Beyond Europe and the Middle East, the motif of transgression and meta-

17. Interestingly, the Japanese (for reasons that will become clear shortly) did not return the favor, preferring to caricature their enemy as a demon, badger, or horse (Asquith 1995:310).

morphosis into a simian is preserved in the Mayan *Popul Vuh*, and also occurs in Southeast Asia—as, for instance, in the tale of a wicked couple who are tricked by a god into squatting on red-hot bricks; when their backsides are burned red, they flee in shame into the forest (Janson 1952:106 n. 94). Similar local tales have been reported of the orangutans of Indonesia (Barnard 1995:77) and of the chimpanzees of the Ivory Coast and Upper Guinea (Joulian 1995:282; Richards 1995:271). Even the Japanese, who are lately famous for their “sympathetic” attitude toward their local macaques, traditionally considered the animal inauspicious or defective—“a human being minus three pieces of hair”—and although their folktales involve many instances of cross-species transformation, those involving monkeys are rare and nearly always feature the one-way metamorphosis of a human who has incurred divine punishment (Knight 2003:85–86; Ohnuki-Tierney 1995:300). In chapter 2, I noted examples of such tales among tribal groups in India; even in the lore of Hanuman, a theme of transgression and of being “marked” as simian in punishment is found in the tale of his wounding by Indra (although the more explicit idea of monkeyhood resulting from a curse is transferred to his mother, the fallen apsara Anjana). In summary, the transcultural abundance of stories of punitive transformation confirms Janson’s assertion that, when faced with the discomforting similitude of simians, humans in general have tended to become “Darwinists in reverse.” Indeed, it was the tenacity of such attitudes that prompted an international scandal over the scientific theory that finally challenged the notion of “devolution” (Janson 1952:13, 98).

However, the widespread acceptance of Darwin’s theory did not put a stop to storytelling about primates. It spawned the now-discredited “science” of eugenics and later the disciplines of paleoanthropology and primatology. The explosion of primate studies during the second half of the twentieth century resulted in an enormous body of information, disseminated not merely through scientific publications but through films, television documentaries, and photo essays in *National Geographic* magazine. This academic and popular discourse, in turn, has recently become the object of a critical meta-literature variously informed by postcolonial, ecological, feminist, and animal-rights perspectives (e.g., Corbey 1995). Beginning from the provocative premise that “western primatology is simian orientalism,” feminist historian of science Donna Haraway’s *Primate Visions* (1989) offers a sweeping survey of twentieth-century Euro-American primatological research (with brief excursions to Japan and India) that seeks to expose its hidden narratives and agendas, its gendered and often racist discourse, and the stake in its findings held by governments, corporate sponsors, and mass audiences (1989:10). Noting that “monkeys and apes have a privileged relation to nature and culture for western people: simians occupy the border zones between those potent mythic poles” (ibid. 1), Haraway sees unacknowledged ideology and myth influencing the questions that researchers ask and the answers they discover. Scientists, no less than epic poets, are storytellers, and modern primatologists, according to Haraway, “produce stories about primates while simultaneously

telling stories about the relation of nature and culture, animal and human, body and mind, origin and future" (ibid. 5).¹⁸ Her analysis of the persistence of religious themes—of lost paradise and future teleology—in the language of primate research proposes that the varied human responses to the monkey as "mirror" and as "monster," as "self" and as "other," resurface in the supposedly objective world of modern science (ibid. 133–85, 196).

If speculation about the "monkey problem" in India has been driven by the anxieties aroused, in a colonial and postcolonial context, by a popular deity who blurs the boundary between human and animal, its Western counterpart has similarly, for more than three centuries, revolved around "policing the boundary" between species and, implicitly, between human beings and the rest of "nature" (Roebroeks 1995:177).¹⁹ The evolutionary theory of human origins as well as the tales told, in the late twentieth century, by primatologists and genetic researchers, have repeatedly called this boundary into question, and the intelligence and adaptability of higher primates has caused some researchers to reflect on the seeming arbitrariness of human dominance. Noting the "extremely advanced" social structure and impressive geographical range of macaques (which, in the Pleistocene era, extended to the British Isles, from which they were apparently ousted by *Homo sapiens*), John Napier wryly observed, "I am convinced that had not man arrived on the primate evolutionary scene, these ubiquitous creatures would have ruled the world" (1976:21, 96). On a more popular level, such musings are reflected in a tradition of storytelling that humanizes simians or turns the evolutionary tables, to reverse the zoo hierarchy of displayer and displayed. Tales of human entry into a land of monkeys (which may have their *locus classicus* in Valmiki's *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*) have proliferated in Euro-American fiction since the eighteenth century, resulting in such satires as *Nicolai Climii Iter Subterraneum* by the Danish Baron Holberg, in which a human hero visits the kingdom of the Martinians, a race of foolish monkeys; translated into most European languages, it had gone through thirty-four editions by 1800. In the mid-nineteenth century, Léon Gozlan's popular novel *Les émotions de Polydore Marasquin* similarly told of a Frenchman shipwrecked on an island ruled by monkeys and apes, who slowly rose to a high rank among them through deft political maneuvering (Janson 1952:339–42; Morris and Morris 1966:49).

18. Thus in the field study of monkeys and apes, Euro-American researchers for most of the twentieth century focused on the "nuclear family," (supposed) male dominance, and the mother-infant bond, whereas Japanese primatologists stressed larger group dynamics and "community" behavior (Haraway 1989:174–75, 244–75). Apart from their role as mothers, female animals were largely ignored prior to the 1980s, when the legacy of women's liberation and of the entry of female researchers into the field provoked new questions and different kinds of observations, with the result that some primate societies are now characterized as "matriarchal" (ibid. 279–367).

19. Such "policing" is readily apparent in the opening of the chapter "Apes, Monkeys, Lemurs" in naturalist S. H. Prater's classic *The Book of Indian Animals*. After observing that "these animals have many of the same structural characters as man," Prater feels obliged to add that man "in mental development stands alone and unapproachable among all creatures. The immeasurable superiority of the human intellect marks the line of cleavage between man and animal" (1971:23, emphasis mine). Needless to say, no such paean to human exceptionalism accompanies the entry on any other animal.

Twentieth-century fantasies include *Monkey Planet* by Pierre Boule, about a French astronaut named Ulysse Merou who visits a world where monkeys and humans have switched roles. A “Darwinian jest” that implicitly dealt with serious issues of racism and mistreatment of animals, it became the basis for Hollywood’s popular *Planet of the Apes* films (Morris and Morris 1966:50–52). Perhaps equally common in fiction has been a reverse plot in which a monkey or ape enters human society. In Thomas Love Peacock’s eighteenth-century *Melincourt*, a deftly tutored chimpanzee rises through the British social hierarchy to eventually become a Lord, and in E. T. A. Hoffman’s early-nineteenth-century *Kreisleriana*, an ape named Milo achieves similar success in Vienna (Janson 1952:343–45). More recent examples of the use of simians in fiction, some now hybridized with Hanuman lore, include *El Mono Gramático* by Octavio Paz (1974, translated into English as *The Monkey Grammarian*), Robert Antoni’s *Divina Trace* (1992, in which a chattering Hanuman offers a Creole account of Caribbean colonization), and Vikram Chandra’s *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* (1995, featuring an immortal monkey narrating the modern history of India). Erasmus, the hero of Danish writer Peter Høeg’s 1996 novel *The Woman and the Ape*, belongs to a race of higher primates that evolved in temperate climates; he becomes the lover of a human woman who (in a reversal of the *King Kong* scenario) rescues him from her egotistical primatologist husband. Heavy on the critique of science and industry, the novel ends in a kind of apotheosis, elevating Erasmus to the status of a messenger sent by nature to warn humans of their ecological transgressions. In its final sentence, the heroine tellingly describes him as “one-third God, one-third animal, and one-third human” (Høeg 1996:261), a formula that might well apply to representations of Hanuman. In Hindi, the “autobiographical” novels discussed in chapter 3 bridge the gap between such art-fiction satires and the more devotional *Hanumāyana* literature.

The themes I have been discussing—concern over human/animal boundaries and their articulation through both storytelling and science—figure in two Asian traditions that need special mention here, since they involve religious understandings of simians by people who live in proximity to them. Both Japan and China had sustained cultural contact, through trade and Buddhist pilgrimage, with India and Southeast Asia, which resulted in early exposure to the Rama story (Mair 1989:675–97), and it is possible that its motifs inflected what, in each case, are evidently old and indigenous ways of “thinking about” monkeys. Significantly, neither civilization has assumed the radical divide between human and animal or between nature and culture that has shaped Western thought on the subject. In Japan, where “humans are considered different, but not exalted over other animals” (Asquith 1995:309, 315), a local species of macaque (*Macaca fuscata*), sometimes called the “snow monkey,” is today considered the “national monkey” and is said to be the only animal referred to in speech with the honorific *san*, otherwise reserved for humans (Knight 2003:85–86). Within the Shinto tradition, a “monkey deity” (*saru kami*) named Saruta Biko is attested in texts dating to the eighth century. He is associated with liminal spaces such as village boundaries, functions as

a messenger between heaven and earth, and serves as a mediator between humans and *kami* or spirits, particularly the powerful Mountain Deity. He has a special connection with horses and is used in rites intended to protect them from disease (Ohnuki-Tierney 1987:48–50; 1995:301). In Ohnuki-Tierney's analysis, the fact that, to the Japanese, the monkey is “the animal considered to be most similar and therefore closest to humans . . . has made it in turn a revered mediator during early periods in history and a threat to the human-animal boundary in later periods, fostering ambivalence that is expressed by mocking the animal.” Additionally, the monkey is associated with Japanese “outcastes”—the so-called “special status people” who, like him, mediate between human beings and gods, yet also serve as bearers of pollution (Ohnuki-Tierney 1987:6–7, 75–100).²⁰ In the twentieth century, research by Japanese primatologists on macaques and other anthropoid primates itself became the subject of (Western) anthropological inquiry, especially for its more “empathetic and intuitive” approach to its animal subjects.²¹

In China, the “monkey problem” for modern scholars has centered on the quest for the origins of the immensely popular “Monkey King” Sun Wu-k'ung (aka Suen wu-kung) of Taoist and Buddhist legend, the most endearing character in the hundred-chapter novel *Hsi-yu Chi* (“Record of the Westward Journey,” or, in Anthony Yu's celebrated English rendering, *The Journey to the West*), one of the most beloved works of premodern Chinese fiction.²² Authored anonymously and first published in 1592, this sprawling narrative fictionalizes the historical journey to India of the Buddhist pilgrim Hsuan-tsang (596–664 CE) with a blend of Taoist, Buddhist, and Confucian traditions. To the core tale, repeatedly retold since Hsuan-tsang's own account, supernatural elements gradually accrued, including four traveling companions: a monkey, a pig, a dragon-turned-horse, and a water spirit metamorphosed into a mace-bearing bodyguard. The monkey who becomes a novice monk is first attested in two thirteenth-century versions, but by the time of the *Hsi-yu Chi* he had come to dominate the tale; indeed, Arthur Waley's greatly abridged 1943 translation was titled simply *Monkey* (Yu 1977:ix, 5–9).

20. John Knight's study of human-animal interactions in Japan contains a long chapter on monkeys, which further details the complexity (and frequent negativity) of local responses to macaques (2003:84–122).

21. Reportedly, Japanese scientists have generally assumed that monkeys have “minds, souls and abilities to perform complex social behaviour” (Asquith 1995:314) and have also acknowledged that they form emotional ties with the animals, reflected in the concept of “feeling one” with them articulated in their publications, as well as in the “monkey funerals” sometimes performed at their labs (Haraway 1989:244, 251–52; Corbey 1995:6). Although some Japanese primatologists have been accused, by both Westerners and other Japanese, of excessively “anthropomorphizing” their animal subjects, their distinctive approach has, in Haraway's analysis, played an important part in “the construction of a specifically Japanese scientific cultural identity” (Haraway 1989:245, 251).

22. Western accounts sometimes conflate the Chinese and Indian traditions, identifying Hanuman as the Hindu “monkey king” (e.g., Janson 1952:279 n. 22). Although Indian authors do sometimes refer to him by epithets meaning “lord among monkeys” (e.g., *vānarānām adhiṣam*, in the Sanskrit shloka introducing Book 5 of the *Rāmcarimānas*), it is significant in the Ramayana that Hanuman is not a king, but rather a royal minister and servant. The monkey monarchs in the story—the violent and impulsive Vali and the fratricide Sugriva—are flawed and ambivalent characters, expressive of the more negative aspects of *kapitva*.

The novel opens with a brief cosmogony that soon yields to a vision of a primordial stone egg atop a mountain, from which hatches a plucky and opportunistic monkey. Rays of light flash from his diamond eyes and penetrate to the highest heaven, where they trouble the supreme celestial bureaucrat, the Jade Emperor. Worse transgressions follow: after establishing himself as king of his species, Monkey goes on a quest to acquire immortality, which he eventually obtains from a Taoist sage. He then assumes the title "Great Sage Equal to Heaven" and unleashes mayhem, stealing a king's arsenal and compelling the dragon lords of the four oceans to give him a divine weapon, the "compliant iron rod." Faced with numerous complaints, the Jade Emperor sends his generals in an unsuccessful attempt to defeat the upstart, and then tries to co-opt him with a minor appointment in the heavenly stables (for in China, as in Japan, the monkey deity had a special link with horses). Monkey soon rejects his lowly position and devours the heavenly peaches of immortality, attaining (like Hanuman) a distinctly overdetermined deathlessness. He becomes Sun Wu-k'ung, "the monkey awake to emptiness" (alluding to the Mahayana Buddhist doctrine of the void). When this "bogus immortal" reveals his intention of overthrowing the Jade Emperor and assuming his throne, Buddha himself is summoned. Challenged to display his special leaping-cum-flying skill (translated by Yu as the "cloud-somersault"), Monkey travels in an instant to the farthest reaches of the universe, where he scrawls graffiti on one boundary column and urinates at the base of another; when he returns, he finds both marks of defilement on the Buddha's fingers, proving that he has never left the Perfect One's palm. His fingers then become bonds that imprison Monkey beneath a mountain, but he is offered liberation after five centuries provided he become a monk and accompany a scripture-seeking pilgrim to the Western Paradise.

The bulk of the novel concerns this journey and features a long series of supernatural dangers, nearly all of which are overcome through Monkey's fantastic strength, courage, and wit, as well as his persistent (and usually well-founded) disobedience to the novel's human "hero," the monk Tripitaka (the fictionalized Hsuan-tsang), whom translator Yu aptly characterizes as "joyless and humorless . . . dull of mind and peevish in spirit, his muddle-headedness matched only by his moral pusillanimity" (*ibid.* 44). Indeed, throughout the novel, the portrayal of the monk seems intended "to stress his absolute need for . . . the protective guidance of Sun Wu-k'ung" (*ibid.*). Monkey thus emerges as the novel's true hero, and though periodically allegorized in Buddhist terms as the restless and impetuous "monkey of the mind," whose instability must be "tamed" by a higher power (a theme found in the Indian *Jātaka* tales), Sun Wu-k'ung displays traits more suggestive of a culture hero who embodies the pragmatism, pluck, and resourcefulness so admired by the Chinese. Introducing himself to the monk (in the first of many self-eulogies), he proudly catalogs some of the very *siddhis* for which Hanuman is famous.

I, old Monkey, possess the ability to subdue dragons and tame tigers, and the power to overturn rivers and stir up oceans. . . . If I want to

be big, I can fill the universe; if I want to be small, I can be smaller than a piece of hair. In sum, I have boundless ways of transformation and incalculable means of becoming visible or invisible. (ibid. 302)

Not surprisingly, postrevolutionary scholarship in the People's Republic has tended to downplay the Buddhist framework of the story and to view Monkey (whom Chairman Mao is said to have particularly admired) as a "magnificent heroic character . . . whose defiance and love of independence we have come to cherish" and whose "subjugation" by a Buddhist monk constitutes a "basic flaw" in the narrative (ibid. 54).

The *Hsi-yu chi's* parallels to the Rama story have occasioned much debate since 1920, when a Japanese scholar first proposed that the Indian tale had influenced the Ming novel (Mair 1989:704; Yu 1977:10–11). As Victor Mair notes, the resemblances are too numerous to be merely coincidental, particularly if one assumes the Ramayana to refer not simply to the Valmiki poem (as those who argue against Indian influence have tended to do) but to a broader oral and vernacular storytelling tradition (1989:662–65). A Chinese translation of a Sanskrit collection of Buddhist tales, produced in Jianye (modern Nanking) in 251 CE, includes a version of the Indian epic that in fact follows Valmiki closely, but gives an even more prominent role to Hanuman, whom the narrating Buddha, at tale's end, reveals to have been an incarnation of Indra and also the future Buddha Maitreya (ibid. 675–79).²³ But Ramayana influence probably entered China not only via the silk road from Central Asia and Tibet, but by the southern sea route through the Malay archipelago. The earliest Monkey stories, from the Tang dynasty, feature a "white monkey" hero who conquers both demons and damsels, and thus resembles the playful and promiscuous Hanuman of Southeast Asian Rama tales (ibid. 670–71, 697).²⁴ In the later Ming novel, however, although Monkey retains his mischievousness and magical powers, the trait of carnal appetite (for both food and sex) is transferred to another of Tripitaka's traveling companions, a muckrake-toting pig.

In light of the compelling evidence in favor of Ramayana influence, it is worth considering what is at stake for the Chinese scholars who have fervently argued against it, in one case castigating a colleague who advocated it for his alleged "slave mentality . . . worshipping everything that comes from abroad and denigrating his own native country" (ibid. 708). Clearly, Sun Wu-k'ung is considered a national treasure, and the thought that he might be an "imitation" or "import" is deeply troubling to some Chinese. Scholarly efforts to find an indigenous source for the character have focused on the weak evidence of a Tang dynasty short story in which a water spirit briefly assumes a simian

23. Cf. the Indian tradition, noted in chapter 6, that Hanuman, after living a *kalpa*, will become the next Brahma.

24. Sattar notes that in the Thai *Rāmakiern*, Hanuman possesses a magic trident that he hides in the form of a "diamond hair" near his chest; cf. the similarly concealed iron-rod weapon of Sun Wu-k'ung (1990:80 n. 63).

appearance (ibid. 706–10), a move that is reminiscent of the attempts by European and Indian researchers to locate a pre-Valmikian yaksha or vidyadhara precursor to Hanuman.

Yet the Chinese-ness of Monkey has never been at issue for audiences, either of the novel or of the popular performance genres that draw on its story. Chinese operas regularly include the crowd-pleasing episode of Monkey's theft of the peaches of immortality from the Jade Emperor's garden, and this and other Taoist motifs that pervade the story may indeed reflect an old and indigenous cult of an overreaching monkey who leaps between earth and heaven, and that became inflected, in time, with motifs from a renowned and multiform Indian narrative. Despite the centuries-long effort of the classical literati to suppress nonelite and vernacular literature and lore (ibid. 730–31), and the postrevolutionary crackdown on religious expression, a Taoist folk cult of Monkey survives on Taiwan and in Singapore, where he is revered as a trickster, esoteric preceptor, healer (especially of children and horses), and as an exorcist (Elliot 1950; Schipper 1995). Such beliefs and practices appear to be based as much on popular “thinking about” the region's native species of macaques and gibbons as on foreign tales told by Buddhist teachers.

I will close this section by returning to the Indian subcontinent and saying more about its own simian species and their relationship to both human beings and to Hanuman. As I noted earlier, the monkey most often linked to Hanuman in visual art and folklore is the common langur (*Semnopithecus entellus*, also known as *Presbytis entellus* and *Pygathrix entellus* in the complex world of post-Linnean taxonomy); indeed, the nontechnical name for these primates (based in part on the belief that their black faces date back to a fiery incident in Lanka) is simply the “Hanuman langur” (Koenig and Borries 2001:122; McDermott 1938:74; Prater 1971:30, 39–41). They belong to the subfamily *Colobinae*, whose members are mainly arboreal and leaf eating; hence they abound in the (fast-disappearing) forests of the subcontinent, though they have successfully adapted to the human-settled landscape and especially to sacred sites where pilgrims feed them handfuls of dried chickpeas. Another common species is the rhesus macaque (*Macaca mulatta*), which belongs to the mainly ground-dwelling and omnivorous subfamily of *Cercopithecinae*; among Hindus in Nepal, it is said that this is the animal more closely associated with Hanuman and honored accordingly (Koenig and Borries 2001:125). In a whimsical essay, naturalist M. Krishnan argued that the bonnet macaque of South India (*Macaca radiata*), which is a favorite of street performers and has a somewhat longer tail than its northern rhesus cousin, was the model for the literary and visual representation of Hanuman, at least in the southern Deccan (Krishnan 2000).²⁵

25. On the shifting fortunes of rhesus populations in South Asia, see the long-term research of Southwick and Siddiqi (1994a, 1994b); Southwick, Siddiqi et al. (1982); and Southwick, Teas et al. (1982). Many other species of monkeys—including capped langurs, Nilgiri langurs, and lion-tailed macaques—are found in India, though they occur in more limited geographical areas and in lesser numbers (see Prater 1971:23–43).



FIGURE 8.2A. “Hanuman langurs” with friend at Chitratkut

Haraway notes, “Hanuman is primarily represented as a langur, but has come to stand for all monkeys, who share then a sacred status,” but she correctly adds that human-monkey interactions “are a complex mix of tolerance, competition, exploitation, and mutualism among all the species and cultures concerned” (1989:260; cf. Southwick and Siddiqi 1994a). More commonly, the implications and consequences of simian “sacrality” in India have been misreported by Western authors. The Morrisises, echoing other accounts (cf. Monier-Williams 1974:222), assert that “in modern India, pious Hindus protect their sacred langurs with a passion that defies all rational economic arguments,” and add that “no true Hindu would dare to lift a finger against one in defense of his property” (Morris and Morris 1966:10, 23). Yet the truth is that Hindu fingers (usually gripping a stone or a bamboo staff) are regularly lifted to drive away monkeys, that economic considerations



FIGURE 8.2B. Macaques at Tulsi Ghat, Varanasi

(“rational” or otherwise) often decide the fate of “sacred” animals, and that (in India as elsewhere) human population pressure threatens monkey habitats. Citing the joint research of Indian and American primatologists, Haraway notes “a deep ambivalence among local populations toward the monkeys. Villagers were usually unwilling to kill the animals . . . but they were often pleased to see them trapped and removed” (Haraway 1989:262).²⁶

For many years, such trapping was the first step in a lucrative global trade in Indian primates that supplied laboratories in Europe and America. During the 1950s and '60s, the kidneys of macaques were used to produce polio

26. Cf. Prater, who (in describing rhesus macaque behavior) abruptly follows the trope of simian sacrality with a dose of reality: “To raid fields or gardens of a morning or evening is their common and established practice, to which popular and religious sentiment permits little check. Capture and export on a large scale has now depopulated many areas” (1971:36–37). Knight describes similarly ambivalent responses to macaques among rural people in Japan (2000:97–115).

vaccine, resulting in an enormous “harvest” of the animals.²⁷ But revelations concerning nearly two decades of “medical” experiments conducted by the U.S. military (in which trained macaques died agonizing and precisely monitored deaths to measure the ability of soldiers to “perform” after receiving lethal doses of radiation in a simulated atomic conflict) produced an outcry in India that led, in 1978, to a ban on monkey exports (*ibid.* 259–60). Sacred or otherwise, monkeys often compete with people for scarce resources, and recent field surveys have found some populations to be in decline because of expanded urbanization and agriculture. As Haraway wryly observed, “For monkeys, as for people, the bomb and the green revolution . . . are survival issues that simultaneously constrain and enable the forms which knowledge may take” (*ibid.* 263). In reflecting on the closing decades of the twentieth century, I would add, to Haraway’s list of “constraints,” another that has become a survival issue for some people and that, in India, sometimes involves “thinking with” monkeys: religious nationalism.

Hanuman and Hindutva

The story could be entirely apocryphal. But, the people of Ayodhya in Faizabad district of Uttar Pradesh swear it is true. On February 1, 1986, at 10:40 AM the district judge of Faizabad, K. M. Pandey, began hearing an appeal filed by a local advocate, Umeshchandra Pande, whose prayer was that the locks put on the controversial Ram Janam Bhoomi temple located inside the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya be removed permanently and Hindus be permitted general entry to have darshan and perform puja. At 4:40 PM the judge ordered that the locks be removed and the temple be kept open for general worship. Throughout the proceedings, it is said, a monkey sat atop the court building and when the order was passed it violently shook the flagstaff from which the national tricolour was fluttering. (Balakrishnan 1989:30)

The story above, reported in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, concerns a court decision to open a mosque in Ayodhya to Hindu worshipers. The mosque had been locked since December 1949, when a small metal image of the infant Rama appeared in it—miraculously, according to those who believed that the spot marked Rama’s ancient birthplace and also the site of a grand temple in his honor supposedly demolished during the reign of the Emperor Babar in the early sixteenth century. Others claimed that a band of local activists had engineered the “miracle” in order to seize the site, Hindu claims to which were historically dubious (Noorani 1991:67–71). Already in

27. For example, in just six months during 1960, 68,516 monkeys were exported (Morris and Morris 1966:251).

1949, at the height of Nehruvian “secularism,” the government response of sealing the premises had resulted in the mosque’s being closed to Muslims, whereas a Hindu priest was permitted regular access to worship and care for the murti, which remained visible through a locked gate.²⁸ The structure thus became a de facto temple, even as lawsuits brought by both Muslim and Hindu plaintiffs were permitted to languish in the courts. However, the 1989 ruling, in giving dramatic recognition to the Hindu claim to the site, appeared as a legitimization of Hindu majoritarianism and a fateful blow to state secularism. The *Illustrated Weekly* correspondent appeared to recognize this approaching sea change in Indian politics as he jauntily (or ominously, depending on one’s perspective) described a “large monkey”—there was no need to further identify him—violently shaking the national standard, whose three bands of color represent the religious diversity and equality that are supposed to be guaranteed by the constitution. Communal monkey business, he seemed to imply, was now afoot at the highest levels of Indian politics.

In this section, I want to address Hanuman’s invocation by the advocates of “Hindutva,” a neologism connoting “Hindu-ness” but, more broadly, the notion that a monolithic and homogeneous “Hindu culture” represents the defining feature of the Indian nation. This will precede my discussion of the broader phenomenon of Hanuman’s appeal to the “middle classes” (a problem term that I will attempt to clarify). The two topics are not unrelated, for it was the expansion of electoral support for the ideology of Hindu nationalism from a narrow base of high-caste adherents to a vast and diverse pool of “middle-class” voters, through a series of strategic moves and counter moves by both the long-ruling Congress Party and its right-wing challengers during the 1980s, that brought avowedly Hindu nationalist parties to power in several states and at the federal level in the 1990s. An appeal to the rhetoric and imagery of the Ramayana played an important role in this process, and, of course, “where Rama’s story is, there is Hanuman.” Yet a nuanced appraisal of the deployment of Ramayana themes in politics must be sensitive not only to Hanuman’s predictable presence in such discourse, but also to the specific circumstances in which he is invoked, as well as to his sometimes surprising absence. When and why is Hanuman invoked (or conversely, avoided) when Hindutva zealots advocate “Ramraj,” the “rule of Rama”?

At first glance, Hanuman’s association with militant Hinduism may appear to need little explanation or analysis. As Rama’s obedient lieutenant, a god who speaks eloquently but carries a big stick, a ferocious assailant of dharma-threatening Others, and a staunch celibate aglow with virility, Hanuman embodies many of the recurring tropes of Hindutva ideology: its glorification of physical and military strength, its insistence that Hindu men

28. Though a popular Hindu pilgrimage site since the late eighteenth century, Ayodhya had a small Muslim community primarily consisting (as in much of North India) of artisan castes. Ironically, many of these residents, some of whom came under brutal attack from extremist outsiders in the course of the Ramjanambhoomi agitation, were woodworkers who produced Hindu religious paraphernalia, such as ornamental bookstands for sacred texts and the wooden sandals favored by sadhus.

“prove” their manliness through violent encounters with the demonized members of minority communities, and its implicit agenda for the subordination of the lower classes and religious minorities to a benign but absolute authority—a primordial and monolithic Hindu nation-state ruled largely by upper-caste leaders. Given these themes, and given the success of Hindu nationalists’ manipulation of the campaign to “liberate” the Ramjanambhoomi (*Rāma janmabhūmi*), Hanuman might appear to be (in current American lingo) the ideal “poster boy” for their political program. Indeed, he has sometimes functioned in this way, perhaps most notably in several of the monumental murtis described in chapter 1, which I will briefly revisit below in the context of the political activities of their patrons. Some may also detect Hindu nationalist preoccupations in the increasing musculature of Hanuman in late-twentieth-century popular art, though this is in fact a phenomenon that invites more complex interpretation.²⁹ Powerful religious images are inherently multivalent and can be invoked to support a range of ideological positions; in analyzing their political uses, one must be alert to the historical specificity of each such effort and also to its potential limitations as it clashes with other interpretations found among worshipers.

Modern Hindu nationalism arose primarily in North India during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth; its ideology was articulated chiefly by men belonging to upper castes, and indeed, most commonly by Brahmans. Such men were accustomed to speaking for “Hindu society” as a whole, since it was Brahmanical ideology that had delineated the (theoretically) fourfold social order and assigned rank and function within it. At the same time, these men represented their own caste and class interests and those of allied groups, and they had ample cause for anxiety. Not only was their land under the rule of the most aggressively unassimilable outsiders that it had ever encountered, but these rulers engaged, particularly after 1857, in a critique of Indian civilization that struck at the roots of elite male identity. In addition to the theme of racial degeneration that I discussed earlier in this chapter, a persistent claim of British discourse was that Hindu males were effeminate, a condition supposedly fostered by “fatalistic” and “world-negating” (or, in the case of Rasik bhakti, even explicitly feminizing) religious ideologies, by prejudices against manual labor, and by a hot and enervating climate (M. Sinha 1995:3, 15–16). Such factors, it was claimed, had led to the easy conquest of the region, first by Central Asian and Arab invaders and subsequently by the British themselves. As Indians began to agitate for greater rights and autonomy, they had to address these persistent charges of their unfitness to rule. A glorification of Hindu manliness and militancy, manifested in mythological heroes such as Hanuman and

29. In an essay titled, “Muscularity and its Ramifications,” art historian Kajri Jain discusses increasingly muscular poster images of both Rama and Hanuman (ironically, the latter were popularized, in part, by a Muslim bodybuilder and poster painter, P. Sardar, whose own physique served, via a mirror, as model for his favorite deity), arguing that they reflect, among other things, the depiction of empowered subaltern heroes in popular culture, and especially in Hindi cinema, after the mid-1970s (2001; see also Lutgendorf 2003a).

Bhima and in historical figures such as Shivaji, Guru Govind Singh, and Rana Pratap emerged as one compensatory strategy, with Muslims serving (in lieu of the British, who could not be openly criticized) as the enemy against whom it was deployed. In addition, in some areas Hindu communities who had prospered under Muslim-governed regimes that had preceded the British—such as Kayasths and Kashmiri pandits in Awadh—set about, after the fall of their former patrons, reclaiming a Hindu identity through the rhetoric of “Muslim oppression” (S. Joshi 2001:103–5).

But if traditional North Indian elites experienced pressure from “above” in the disparagement of their foreign rulers, they were also conscious of pressure from the lower strata of their own society. For despite its many exploitative features, the colonial era offered new possibilities for social mobility, as Charu Gupta has observed.

New jobs were created in relatively respectable occupations, with lower castes being appointed in railways, as manual servants of British families, as peons in offices, as municipal sweepers and scavengers. There was increasing migration, a loosening of traditional caste ties, some extension of leisure time, and a simultaneous forging of new alliances which gave people a limited sense of liberation and security. (2001:15)

The “caste uplift” movements to which I referred in chapter 2 translated new economic and educational opportunities into sociopolitical agitation that criticized both the higher castes and Muslims. For upper caste men, the double pressure of imperial and subaltern critiques led to a perception of malaise that was often expressed through the trope of the degenerate kali yuga, now especially associated with “loss of manliness, assertive lower castes and disorderly women” (ibid. 18).

Prescriptions to address the loss of masculinity included a discourse on brahmacharya as well as calls for physical training, to be achieved either through “manly” team sports on the British model or through the revival of akhara culture, now idealized as the once universal martial-arts discipline of Hindu males in a vanished golden age—though it was in fact, as Mrinalini Sinha notes, little adopted by elite men because of its rustic and lower class associations (1995:21).³⁰ When the All India Hindu Mahasabha was founded in 1915, one of its declared aims was to “improve the physique of the Hindus and promote the martial spirit amongst them by establishing military schools and organizing volunteer corps” (C. Gupta 2001:233). This theme was repeated by influential spokesmen such as Madan Mohan Malaviya, who in his presidential address to the Mahasabha in 1923 recommended the building, in

30. Similarly, the RSS would officially encourage indigenous sports such as *kabaddi*, associated with village culture, although most of its young urban recruits preferred cricket or soccer (Anderson and Damle 1987:92).

each village and urban neighborhood, of a Hanuman temple and an akhara (*Kalyāṇ* 1975:17). Stricter control of women was enjoined to protect “racial purity” and “Aryan” bloodlines, especially from abduction and forced conversion by “rapacious” Muslim men. Indeed, “abduction hysteria,” largely based on rumor, was rampant during the 1920s, feeding into the twin discourses of threatened Hindu manliness and the demonization of Muslims (C. Gupta 2001:243–57). One of the first recorded invocations of Hanuman in a paramilitary organization occurred in this context when the Hindu Mahasabha in the United Provinces established youth cadres known as *Mahābīr Dal*. Though the name might be glossed “corps of great heroes,” it invoked (as a spokesman explained) “Hanuman and the way he aided in Sita’s release who was abducted by Ravan. In the same way we have to aid the release of our women from present-day abductors” (*ibid.* 256–57).³¹

The most important such group was the RSS, or Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, founded in Nagpur in 1925 by the Maharashtrian Brahman Keshav Baliram Hedgewar. The standard translation of its Sanskritized name—“national volunteer corps”—elides the historical import of its central neologism, *svayamsevak*, which was coined to translate the English “volunteer,” and hence hearkens back to the “volunteer movement” controversy of the 1880s, when middle-class Indian men pressed for the right to form groups that would promote “courageous and manly behavior” through “regular training . . . in drill” (M. Sinha 1995:80–81). Although it was argued, even by many colonial officials, that such organizations would pose no threat to the British regime, the right to form them was repeatedly denied, provoking great resentment. The RSS “volunteer” thus became, via Sanskritic back-translation, the fulfillment of a long-standing nationalist prescription: a “volunteer” in a distinctly militant sense, who was to restore Hindu masculinity through martial drill and promote Hindu unity through standardized ideological training in devotion to the “nation,” now conceived as coextensive with the “Hindu race” (Anderson and Damle 1987:36). The Sangh’s tireless emphasis on *saṅgathan* or “organization”—exemplified by its own elaborate infrastructure of supreme leadership, regional “circles,” and local “branches”—earned it wide admiration, even from Indians who did not necessarily endorse its ideological program, for it, too, countered a colonial cliché about the “disunity” and “disorganization” of Indian society. At the same time, *saṅgathan* was understood to imply a particular kind of social unification: the setting aside of class and caste differences to present a united Hindu front to threatening Others, especially Muslims, whom RSS ideology tirelessly vilified. This agenda proved more problematic, at least until the 1980s, since the RSS and the political parties that eventually emerged from it remained dominated by the upper castes and had only limited success in recruiting swayamsevaks from lower social orders.

31. Abduction rumors regularly resurfaced during episodes of communal unrest throughout the twentieth century, and were blamed, for example, for instigating anti-Muslim riots in Jaipur between 1989 and 1992 (Basu 1996:73).

Hedgewar was a devotee of Maruti and is said to have always carried a small statue of the deity with him; early recruits likewise recited their membership pledge before a framed icon of Maruti, usually flanked by those of Swami Ramdas and Shivaji. But Hedgewar's anointed successor, Golwalkar, who headed the RSS from 1940 until his death in 1973, was an atheist and iconoclast who advocated the exclusive worship of the nation itself, feminized and divinized as Bharat Mata ("Mother India"). He replaced Hedgewar's favored slogan for ending daily prayers, "*Jai Bajrangbali, Bal Bhim ki jai!*" ("Hail Hanuman, hail mighty Bhima!"), with "*Bhārat mātā kī jai!*" ("Hail Mother India!"), and adopted as a focus for devotion an unmarked saffron pennant known as the "Bhagwa Dhvaj" ("holy flag"; Anderson and Damle 1987:76, 82, 91; Rajagopal 2001:58–59). It was before this emblem that RSS volunteers, arrayed in neat rows and clad in their distinctive white shirts and khaki shorts, recited Sanskrit prayers and engaged in calisthenics and paramilitary drills. The regimented RSS shakha was in many ways the antithesis of the traditional akhara (the latter characterized by a martial but nonmilitary ambiance, relaxed and individualized regimes of self-improvement, intimate physical contact through wrestling and oil massage, lower class and vernacular ethos, and an implicit but strong mood of bhakti-style pietism), and dual membership in akhara and shakha was relatively rare (Alter 1992:261–63). Yet though the majority of RSS recruits were upper caste, they were seldom upper class; most represented what Christophe Jaffrelot terms "downwardly mobile" Brahmans and Kshatriyas for whom the recovery of "lost" pride was an important concern, as well as small-time merchants from commercial castes who were anxious to elevate their status through the Sanskritic aura of the organization (1996:431).

Although the "communalization of politics" at the national level in the 1980s and the subsequent victories of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) took many Indian intellectuals by surprise, the ground had been slowly prepared over some six decades by the efforts of the RSS and its political offshoots, the Jana Sangh Party (founded in 1951), the BJP (which succeeded it in 1980), and the religiopolitical Vishwa Hindu Parishad or VHP ("World Hindu Council," founded in 1964). The leaders of all these groups initially came from the ranks of swyamsevaks, and they shared the goal of remaking secular India into a Hindu rashtra (*rāṣṭra*, "nation"). In Jaffrelot's analysis, they also shared implicit strategies for achieving this goal, including "stigmatization" (uniting Hindus against alleged threats from other communities and foreign powers) and "emulation" (adopting features of the threatening ideologies that were imagined to have contributed to their success, while presenting such borrowing as a return to the "lost" practices of a Hindu golden age). A third strategy was "ethnoreligious mobilization": achieving popular support through adroit manipulation of symbols with widespread appeal, such as the cow and (most successfully, after the 1980s) the alleged Ramjanambhoomi (ibid. 5–7, 201, 523).

Another offshoot of the RSS was the Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram or Centre for Tribal Welfare, based in Madhya Pradesh, a state in which large numbers of so-called adivasis or aboriginal people—Sanskritically romanticized as *vanavāsī* or

“forest dwellers”—live on the cultural margin and near the bottom of the caste ladder. Founded in 1952, the VKA aimed to “reconvert” tribals (who, according to Hindu nationalists, fall easy prey to the conversion efforts of Christian and Muslim missionaries) to Brahmanical Hinduism through the establishment of schools, bhajan groups, and temples. After decades of small-scale activity, the number of VKA activists reportedly increased sixfold following the highly publicized conversion to Islam of a thousand Dalits in Tamil Nadu in 1981, and the organization launched a program to construct Hanuman temples in tribal villages, reasoning that Hanuman, “a tribal divinity close to Ram whose army he commanded in the *Ramayana*,” would be the key to the “reintegration” of wayward vanavasis into the Hindu fold (*ibid.* 322–23).

Hanuman figures in a similarly indirect way in the history of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. Among its prominent early leaders were Swami Chinmayananda and Prabhu Datt Brahmachari, two men who, decades later, would leave their mark on the Indian landscape in the form of monumental images of Hanuman, posed as the virile guardian of the nation and its capital city (see chapter 1). Both are what Jaffrelot calls “modern gurus”: founders of ashrams and political activists, yet not the heads of venerable ascetic lineages or temples and consequently “in search of a platform and greater legitimacy” (*ibid.* 194–200).³² They found it through an organization that attempted to unite the diverse ideologies and practices of Hinduism under a single umbrella through convening massive “parliaments” of religious leaders, such as those held at Allahabad in 1966, 1979, and 1989. The proceedings of these assemblies (which, in order to ensure maximum attendance by the committed or merely curious, were timed to coincide with the megafestival of the Kumbha Mela) exemplify Jaffrelot’s notion of the strategy of “emulation,” whereby Hindu nationalists sought to promote a “syndicated Hinduism”³³ that would more closely resemble, in organization and practice, Christianity and Islam (*ibid.* 78). Thus at the 1966 meeting, a subcommittee was assigned the task of drawing up a “code of conduct” to govern all Hindus, and it subsequently called for “standardized religious rituals” that included veneration of the sun

32. Chinmayananda preached primarily in English, promoting a rationalized, “scientific” version of Vedanta, which appealed mainly to urban people. Prabhu Datt preferred Hindi; he had been the editor of the Varanasi daily *Āj* during the 1920s and later became close to Golwalkar, who persuaded him to run (unsuccessfully) for parliament (Jaffrelot 1996:195, 199). He subsequently founded an ashram near Allahabad and (among other activities) launched his fund-raising effort to sponsor the “biggest Hanuman” in India. Jaffrelot notes that early VHP supporters included relatively few leaders of well-established sects and sadhu lineages. As the Ramjanambhoomi movement attracted greater publicity, the VHP drew wider support from sadhus, whose ranks are dominated, in North India, by Ramanandis. However, even within Ayodhya, many sectarian leaders remained skeptical of the VHP’s methods and goals (van der Veer 1987; Rajagopal 2001:220–24). The exceptions were, again, the aggressively upwardly mobile, such as Mahant Nritya Gopal Das of Choti Chavni ashram in Ayodhya, an ambitious impresario who had erected a colossal “Valmiki Bhavan” to rival the Tulsi Manas Temple in Banaras, as well as a huge replica of the South Indian image of Vishnu as Lord Ranganatha, the tutelary deity of the conservative and Brahman-dominated Shrivaisnavita sect, with which the Ramanandis have historical but contested links. Eventually the janambhoomi agitation acquired sufficient momentum that it became virtually impossible for sadhus to oppose it; one who outspokenly did, Baba Lal Das of Ayodhya, was murdered in November 1993 (Jaffrelot 1996:452).

33. Jaffrelot cites Daniel Gold and Romila Thapar’s use of this phrase.

in the morning and evening, increased use of the mantra *om* (especially in its written form, e.g., on pendants and visiting cards), and the keeping of a copy of the *Bhagavad-gītā* in every home (ibid. 200, 347–48). In 1982, the VHP created a “Central Margdarshak Mandal” or supreme directorial council (of which Chinmayananda and Prabhu Datt Brahmachari were members) that aimed to institutionalize religious authority and enforce collective behavior through an ecclesiastical hierarchy loosely modeled on that of Catholicism (ibid. 351–52). The demand to “liberate” certain religious sites that had allegedly been usurped by Islamic structures, which the VHP increasingly pressed after the mid-1980s, similarly represented an effort to reorient Hindu devotion around a narrow range of (notably North Indian and Brahman-dominated) sacred sites. The eventual decision to focus on Ayodhya as the “Mecca and Jerusalem” of Hindus was significant, given the city’s status as a relatively modern and mainly regional pilgrimage place (Lutgendorf 1997a).³⁴

It was in the context of the Ayodhya “liberation” movement that the most notable and sustained invocation of Hanuman by Hindu nationalists occurred. During an earlier phase of the agitation in June 1984, VHP leaders announced the formation of a “youth wing” known as the Bajrang Dal, invoking Hanuman’s folksy Hindi epithet of *Bajrangbali* or “iron-limbed hero”; the name may thus be loosely translated “army of Hanuman.” This was to be led by Vinay Katiyar, a longtime RSS member belonging to the comparatively low Kurmi caste. It was envisioned as a looser, less organized, and less demanding version of the RSS, requiring no uniform or participation in daily drill, but sponsoring ideological and martial training camps that would teach young Hindu males “how to be bold” (Jaffrelot 1996:363, 447). As the Ayodhya agitation grew more aggressive, the role of “Bajrang Dal activists” was repeatedly cited in newspaper accounts, especially in the context of violent demonstrations and communal riots. Thus members of the Dal were said to have marked out the site for the “shilanyas” (foundation stone-laying) ceremony for the Rama temple in November 1989, in defiance of government orders (ibid. 399). And when BJP President L. K. Advani conducted his “chariot pilgrimage” (*rath yātrā*) across India to Ayodhya in the autumn of 1990, sparking numerous riots in his wake, he was accompanied by young men wearing monkey masks (ibid. 416). These activists are alleged to have played a key role in the first assault on the Babri mosque in October 1990, when some of them became “martyrs” at the hands of Uttar Pradesh police, and their role was again noted two years later when a mob estimated at between 75,000 and 150,000 people, following vitriolic anti-Muslim harangues by VHP and BJP leaders, attacked and demolished the structure on December 6, 1992. In the rioting that convulsed much of India during ensuing months, in which several thousand people—mainly Muslims—died,

34. During the ceremony to lay the foundation stone of the Ramjanambhoomi temple in November 1989, the VHP called on Hindus throughout India to turn in the direction of Ayodhya—an obvious allusion to the Islamic custom of facing Mecca during prayer (Jaffrelot 1996:400).

the violent role of the Bajrang Dal was repeatedly cited in the press, and the organization (along with the RSS, the VHP, and two militant Islamic organizations) was formally (and briefly) banned as part of the lukewarm response of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's government (ibid. 461–65).

Yet despite its routine citation in media accounts, hard facts about the “army of Hanuman” are notably elusive, and published works on Hindu nationalism provide sometimes conflicting information concerning its adherents.³⁵ Rajagopal's media-oriented study of the Ramjanambhoomi agitation treats the Dal chiefly in two footnotes, one of which defines it as “a loosely disciplined but widespread outfit of militant Hindu youth, largely Backward Class, formed under the supervision of Hindu nationalists to ‘guard’ Hindu temples and processions, mainly from Muslims. Its formation was an open declaration of the Hindu nationalists’ preparation for communal violence” (2001:301 n. 6). However, another note, in the context of a discussion of the VHP's role in fomenting riots, quotes BJP General Secretary Govindacharya, in a 1992 interview with the author, claiming that the Bajrang Dal was “an urban middle class phenomenon, and petit bourgeois in character”; its young adherents, he added, “would run away at the sign of a fight,” leaving the real action to “the scheduled castes, the Valmiki.” A similar opinion was offered by the deputy inspector general of police for Uttar Pradesh, who cited the Valmiki and Khatik communities as “fighting castes” cultivated by the RSS for rioting and looting (ibid. 216, 356 n. 18).³⁶

Jaffrelot's study includes data on Bajrang Dal members whom he interviewed in Bhopal and environs in the mid-1990s, some of whom had participated in the assault on the Babri mosque. He noted that most seemed to come “from high caste families whose socio-economic status was marginal,” and that many were unemployed or involved in the lottery business; several expressed fear and resentment of the growing economic power of “backward castes.” Though they voiced admiration for the discipline of the RSS, they lacked sufficient dedication to join it and preferred the “loose structure” of the Bajrang Dal (Jaffrelot 1996:428–31). Yet Jaffrelot cautions against reductionist analyses that assume “that people mobilized only for the emotional reasons intended by the Hindu nationalists,” and notes the often diverse motives of those attracted to the movement (including women who found participation in the Durga

35. When I interviewed a reputed Bajrang Dal leader in Ayodhya in the spring of 1990—a stout, middle-aged man who, throughout our conversation, oversaw the counting, by a group of women crouching on the floor, of a large mound of coins—I asked several times about the number of Bajrang Dal members and what constituted “membership.” Each time, my interviewee exchanged smiles with several other men in the room and then replied that there was “no membership as such,” but that, since the Dal was the VHP's “youth branch” (*yuvak sākḥā*), any person between the ages of 18 and 35 who joined the VHP was “automatically” a member of the Bajrang Dal. The aim of the group, he said, was to instill courage and shakti into Hindu youth, and there were ambitious plans to create a nationwide network of akharas for physical training. When I asked whether any such akharas actually existed, the man again smiled and replied that they would be created “later on,” once “Hindu *rāṣṭra*” was established.

36. “Scheduled caste” is a government-sanctioned euphemism for so-called “untouchables” or Dalits. On Valmiki (aka *Bālmikī*) caste identity and their sometime endorsement of Hindu nationalism, see Leslie 2003, esp. 63–64.

Vahini or “army of Durga,” a female version of the Bajrang Dal founded in 1990, to be personally empowering in the context of conservative North Indian patriarchy; cf. Basu 1996:76–78). The narratives of young men who had returned from the mosque demolition showed less religious fervor than “a taste for adventure” and a thrill at the defiance of authorities. As Jaffrelot notes, the Rama of these urban youths “shares many things in common with stereotypical heroes of Hindi popular cinema,” and appeals to young men who are “unemployed and to a large extent devoid of self-esteem” (ibid. 428–29).

Hindu nationalist leaders have had to balance their strategies of “ethno-religious mobilization” and of orchestrated communal violence to encourage Hindus to vote as a bloc with the demands of their core constituencies—urban shopkeepers, white-collar workers, and the postliberalization upper middle class—for an authoritarian government that will “maintain order.” Though such voters may endorse the need to periodically “teach minorities a lesson,” they recognize that too much rioting and looting is bad for business and may even endanger their own safety, and they distrust a movement that appears to be “out of control” (ibid. 435, 448, 458). Indeed, the widespread perception of Bajrang Dal lawlessness following the mosque demolition led to efforts in 1993 to organize it on the RSS model, by adopting a Boy Scout-like uniform of blue shorts, white shirt, and saffron scarf. Three hundred and fifty training camps were reportedly held, and an instructional handbook published (ibid. 478). Yet in the carnage that has periodically erupted in many parts of India, it has remained sufficient for a young man to tie on a saffron scarf and seize a weapon, in order to claim temporary “membership” in the “army of Hanuman.”

The success of Hindu nationalists since the 1980s depended on a massive mobilization that enabled their movement, in Jaffrelot’s words, “to play down its elitist, Brahminical image in favour of a nationalist devotionism borrowing from *bhakti* forms of worship” (ibid. 527). They returned, ironically, to a strategy pioneered by Mahatma Gandhi, who also drew extensively on Ramayana imagery, though in the service of a different vision of Ramraj (Lutgendorf 1991a:378–82). The VHP and BJP reified and homogenized popular iconography and practice in their processions of sacred chariots, lamps, and bricks through India’s small towns and cities—the sites emphasized in Advani’s 10,000-kilometer “chariot journey” (Dwyer 2000:78). Yet given the prominence of Ramayana themes in their most successful agitations, Hindu nationalists’ invocations of Hanuman have proved to be surprisingly limited and to have a paternalistic and condescending dimension. This too suggests the essentially high-caste roots of their ideology and of their underlying fear—masked by their demonization of non-Hindu Others—of the rising aspirations of the lower orders.³⁷ In the ideology and practice of

37. As Sumit Sarkar has observed (1996:288), it may be more than a coincidence that the founding of the RSS occurred in the same city (Nagpur) which had seen, five years earlier, the “All India Depressed Classes Conference,” at which B. R. Ambedkar embarked on the radical course that would eventually lead him to urge fellow Dalits to convert to Buddhism.

Hindutva, Hanuman seems to have been considered good for “little” people: children, tribals, Dalits, and unruly urban youth who lack the discipline to join the RSS.³⁸ For such folk, the “guardian of Rama’s door” is apparently to serve as a subaltern model and as a point of entry to the more refined practices of higher status Hindus, represented by the VHP’s stress on the *Bhagavad-gītā*, the mantra *om*, and the leadership of (mostly) Brahman acharyas.³⁹ In advocating Hanuman as the “natural god” for “forest-dwelling” tribals, Hindu nationalists implicitly endorse a euhemerist reading of the Ramayana—in which, of course, many of them believe—as an historical allegory of “Aryan” conquest and assimilation of dark-skinned aboriginal peoples, who were then relegated to the lowest “limbs” of the “organicist” *varnāśrama* model of Hindu society that still forms one of the cornerstones of Hindutva ideology (Jaffrelot 1996:535).⁴⁰ Such an interpretation has prompted a backlash among some tribal and Dalit activists, who have responded by rejecting both Rama and elite Hinduism with the angry cry, “We are not your monkeys!”⁴¹ The claim that even the Bajrang Dal, whatever its socioeconomic composition, assigns the truly “dirty work” of communal massacres to the “Valmiki” (i.e., the *Bālmīkis*, a North Indian Dalit caste whose members often work as municipal sanitation workers) is similarly suggestive of the reactionary social vision of Hindu nationalism, and also perhaps of its capacity to further alienate those whom it is supposed to “reclaim.”⁴² It was these same Balmiks who, in 1989, went on a protracted strike, disrupting garbage collection in several North Indian cities, to protest the plan to end the television *Ramayana* serial with Rama’s enthronement and the idyllic vision of Ramraj. They demanded the further enactment of the controversial seventh book, *Uttarakāṇḍa*, of Valmiki (whose descendants they claim to be), in which Sita is banished by Rama and given shelter by Valmiki, who becomes guru and surrogate father to her twin sons.⁴³

38. The “youth wing” identification of the Bajrang Dal (despite the fact that some of its purported “activists” were men in their thirties) doubtless encouraged the winking, boys-will-be-boys response of senior VHP and BJP leaders to its orchestrated acts of violence. During Advani’s “chariot procession,” the BJP leader’s supposed embarrassment at the excesses of his retinue led to press reports portraying “a civilized, Rama-like Advani leading his motley troops of Bajrang Dal activists, his monkey army, into battle” (Davis 1996:48).

39. Chinmayananda stated that his Himalayan colossus (see chapter 1) was intended as the first step in instilling devotion to Rama into the “Pahadi people” (*Hanumat vibhūti* 1987:7). Himalayan Hindus who have often been regarded by plains dwellers as rustic and somewhat deviant in their religious practices.

40. Such interpretations of Hanuman had earlier been promoted by Hindi authors of the pre-Independence period, such as Ayodhya Singh Upadhyaya and Shyam Nandan Kishor, who, according to Mularam Joshi, depicted Hanuman as, respectively, “a great patriot who should inspire the youth of the nation” and as “the great leader of tribals and Dalits” (2001:33–34).

41. This is the refrain of a song (the verses of which describe Rama as an arrogant invader for whom tribal people carried out forced labor, e.g., of building a bridge to Lanka) attributed to Dalit activist Daya Pawar, and performed by Sambhaji Bhagat and party in a five-minute video documentary of the same title made by Anand Patwardhan in 1993.

42. Amrita Basu notes that local-level “Balmiki” rivalry with poor Muslims—both groups situated near the bottom of the social ladder—figured in the riots in Ghaziabad and Khurja in 1990 and ’91 (Basu 1996: 74–75).

43. Although a popular Hindu story identifies Valmiki as an outcaste robber who was “converted” into a Rama devotee through the intervention of sages, many modern-day Valmiki reject this and instead regard him as the supreme being of a universal (and pre-Aryan) faith. See Leslie 2003, esp. 12–17, 47–74.

This Dalit demand for a public airing of Ramayana episodes that are odious to some high-caste Hindus, appropriately backed up by piles of rotting garbage on the streets, was a classic display of the “weapons of the weak” and an example of the assertiveness of the lower orders that drives many in the middle classes to embrace Hindu nationalism. In this case, it caused the Supreme Court to issue an order to the national network Doordarshan for the extension of the serial, resulting in twenty-six episodes of the *Uttar Ramayan* (1989–90).

Hindutva leaders’ implicit insistence on the servile status of Hanuman and his adherents suggests the persistence of what Jaffrelot has identified as a fundamental contradiction common to the rhetoric of all Hindu nationalist groups: that between the ideal of “a Hindu *Rashtra* evolved on the model of the Western, egalitarian nation,” and the values of Brahmanical culture, especially the *varṇa*-based caste system (Jaffrelot 1996:78). Yet among the “little people” who worship Hanuman—and on whose mobilization the success of Hindu nationalist parties depends—he is not experienced as a “minor,” subaltern or “folk” god, but as an empowering, comprehensive, and (increasingly) even all-sufficient deity. It is to this understanding of him that I now return, via a social category that is both rather amorphous and indisputably prominent in contemporary India.

Middle Class and Climbing

My observation of Hanuman’s mediatory role and protean nature leads me to reflect on his link to a social group that is similarly in-between and notoriously hard to define: the Indian middle class. Like Hanuman, this is a problem entity for scholarly observers. If economists and statisticians have debated its definition and extent, historians and anthropologists have mostly ignored it, the former preferring to study elites or (lately) “subalterns,” and the latter the (rural) “folk.” In her study of late-twentieth-century Indian consumer culture, Rachel Dwyer notes that academic discourse evidences a seemingly “universal distaste for the middle classes, which is ironic given the social origins of most academics” (2000:58). Irony aside, the dismissal of middle-class culture as vulgar and inauthentic by authors who are themselves nearly always middle class is not really surprising, since upward aspiration—manifested among academics as a claim to intellectual (if not material) elitism—is a solidly middle-class trait.

Dwyer’s study, albeit focusing on the somewhat atypical environment of Bombay (now officially renamed Mumbai), India’s commercial and entertainment capital, provides a useful overview of the evolving Indian middle class or classes—she alternates between singular and plural, stressing the “wide variety of economic, occupational, political, ideological and cultural positions” that these terms necessarily encompass. From its first usage in eighteenth-century England to refer to a class of people positioned between the non-working landed gentry and manual laborers, the term has always been

characterized by a certain “incoherence as a category” (ibid. 58–59; cf. S. Joshi 2001:1). Emerging out of premodern mercantile communities and the colonial professional class, the Indian middle class underwent dramatic expansion after Independence, to become (Dwyer argues) the culturally “hegemonic” class at the close of the twentieth century (ibid. 60–79). This hegemony is especially exercised by what she calls the “new middle class,” a *nouveau riche* group consisting of “highly paid professionals who participate in global employment networks” (ibid. 62). This group often prefers to think of itself as an “upper class,” yet it remains, in its tastes, more closely allied to the lower middle class from which it emerged than to what Dwyer calls the “old middle class”: the post-Independence “national bourgeoisie” of professionals and bureaucrats, who “created one hegemonic version of Indian culture, perpetuated through government organizations (academies, universities, museums, etc.)” and whose language of power—the new Sanskrit—was English (ibid. 83–85, 90–91). In contrast, the “new middle class,” though it appropriates English for advancement, is equally comfortable in the vernacular, and its art form par excellence is popular Hindi cinema, which has generally been dismissed as vulgar trash by the cultural arbiters of English-language media. Finally, Dwyer posits a “lower middle class” consisting of vast numbers of people who have recently acquired access to education, urban lifestyles, and modern consumer goods. These include members of “backward castes” and other traditionally low-status groups who have advanced through government “reservation” programs, as well as prosperous farmers who benefited from the “green revolution” of the 1970s.

Although economists’ estimates of the size of the Indian middle class, based on spending power, vary between 25 million and 100 million people (ibid. 79), these comparatively small figures—at best, less than a tenth of the population—do not adequately suggest the significance of the label as an aspirational category and a new form of self-definition. To be “middle-class” in India today surely means to be above the “poverty line,” to have adequate food, clothing, and shelter, as well as a degree of access to life-enhancing nonessentials. These include the vastly expanded range of consumer goods that, especially since the 1980s, have come to be seen as indices of the good life, but they also include education, literacy, and the increased self-esteem that they bring. As a self-label, “middle class” may also signal a downplaying of older ascribed identities, especially of caste, and the crafting of new ones through voluntary activities and organizations (Waghorne 2004:20–21). Sanjay Joshi speaks of the “project of self-fashioning” that has long been central to middle-class identity, and also of the trickle-down effect of middle-class aspirations (2001:2, 56). I propose that the label “middle class” represents the hope of a better life to hundreds of millions of people, most of whom are of too modest means to be considered “middle class” by economic indicators. If it is not what the majority of Indians presently are (and an estimated 400 million still live below the austere government definition of the “poverty line”), it is what the majority *would like to be*, and it is in this sense that its tastes and values are, as Dwyer suggests, increasingly normative.

Its anxieties may be normative as well. A recurring theme in studies of modern urban India is of the experience, especially of middle-class people, of vulnerability, powerlessness, and frustration. Psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar, writing of the “middle-class” patients who flock to Menhdipur’s Balaji temple seeking relief from affliction caused by possessing ghosts, discusses the underlying fear that, in his view, often contributes to their symptoms: “Surrounded by a vast sea of poverty and the visible evidence of human degradation that it leads to, the unspoken and unacknowledged fear that one may someday sink into this sea is a specter that haunts almost everyone in urban India” (1982:44). Similarly, Ashis Nandy, writing of the efforts of middle-class people to maintain their dignity, notes the fragility of their identity in the face of the omnipresent “terror of the slum” (1998:5). Others speak of less menacing but more mundane and pragmatic difficulties; describing the daily lives of young wrestlers in Banaras, Joseph Alter details the routine challenges they face whenever they leave the safe space of the akhara.

A ponderous, monolithic bureaucracy must be negotiated when seeking admission to schools. A formidable legal apparatus must be penetrated when applying for building permits, licenses, and interstate transportation documents. Tension is inherent in dealing with police and other public officials. And one feels alienated by a pervading sense of powerlessness when performing everyday tasks such as buying rations at a state-run store, making reservations for a bus or train, or waiting for a shipment of building materials for the construction of a government-subsidized house. (1992:243)

Writing of Hindu nationalism, Rajagopal sees its incendiary discourse as addressing “the outraged self-respect of lower middle class men unable to assert themselves as they used to and responding to the fierce competitive pressures of the marketplace with frustration” (2001:232). Even Dwyer’s more sanguine account notes that the Indian middle classes “remain economically fragile not only at the lower end of the economic scale but in the face of the ever downward slide of the rupee on the global markets” (2000:79–80).

I cite these statements, which accord with my own experience of living for several years in middle-class neighborhoods of large and medium-sized Indian cities and conversing informally with dozens of friends and neighbors, not in order to paint the daily lives of middle-class people in excessively bleak tones, but to suggest the specific kinds of afflictions (*sankat*) that they face in their pursuit of happiness. To address these, many seek divine assistance, and of a particular sort. In their daily encounters with the lassitude and corruption endemic to Indian bureaucracy, middle-class people know that they can rarely succeed without an “in,” indeed without *influence* (in Hindi, *sifāris*): a “connection” or middleman who can expedite access to the required persons and resources. I propose that, in the religious realm, this vital intercessory role is played by “middle-class gods”: efficacious midlevel agents in the divine hierarchy, situated between the (generally benevolent but sometimes distant

and aloof) pan-Indian celestials, and the more constrained and often more ambivalent local functionaries such as viras, nagas, and goddesses-of-the-soil. As I proposed in chapter 1, several of the most effective and popular “middle-class gods” share a number of features: they are “second-generation” deities with well-known (and often multiple) birth narratives that highlight their powers and efficacy, and their genetic link is most often with the shakti-manifesting Shiva and Devi. They often have a martial ethos, which appeals to middle-class worshippers both because the latter continue to idealize the values of the old aristocracy, and also because they seek tangible and potent intervention in their lives. They need deities who can be tough and even aggressive when necessary, yet they eschew those whose violent nature invokes the stigma of the rustic and “primitive” (e.g., through a demand for blood sacrifice).⁴⁴ In Tamil-speaking South India, Skanda/Murugan—a son of Shiva associated with both martial power and an alluring beauty that elicits devotion—has been one of the most popular such deities in recent times. Joanne Waghorne relates his emergence, in the early twentieth century, as “the quintessential Tamil god,” to the sociopolitical ascendancy of non-Brahman groups; by the latter half of the century, Murugan shrines were said to outnumber those to his father Shiva by roughly forty to one (Waghorne 2004:90, 182; on his similar rise in Sri Lanka, see Obeyesekere 1977). In northern India, various Devis homologized with Durga—such as the virginal-yet-maternal, militant-yet-vegetarian Vaishno Devi and her “sisters” in the Punjab hills—fill the “middle-class” prescription and have likewise risen to phenomenal popularity in recent decades (Erndl 1993).

And then there is Hanuman. Previous chapters have offered examples of his present popularity across much of India and have also proposed that the historical spread of his veneration as an independent deity was associated with periods of relative social mobility and of the self-assertion of nonelite groups. If he is presently emerging (as I now suggest) as the pan-Indian “middle-class god” par excellence, this may be related to his perceived effectiveness in meeting the needs of a vastly expanded but often struggling constituency that likewise identifies itself as being in the “middle.” A liminal immortal who delivers both the gods and the goods, Hanuman embodies the moxie and

44. Even among the deva-disparaging Jains (a community that was arguably already “middle class” in premodern times), the need for a feisty spiritual mediator has in recent years led to the phenomenal success of (in John Cort’s phrase) a “Jain analogue of Hanuman” known as “the bell-eared great hero” (*Ghaṇṭākarna mahāvīra*; Cort 1997; 2001:222). This protector deity reportedly appeared to an early-twentieth-century monk, Buddhisagar, after a forty-day fast undertaken because the Jain laity were turning to non-Jain deities (such as Sufi pirs, for the cure of childlessness or spirit possession, and, very likely, to Hanuman himself). “Bell-ears” is considered a “passionate hero,” hence not yet liberated from samsara, and therefore able to assist Jains with their mundane problems. Wrote Buddhisagar of his discovery: “His assistance in fulfilling desires is preferable to the assistance of gods and goddesses who possess incorrect faith.” According to Cort, his shrine at Mahudi in Gujarat is now “one of the wealthiest Jain temples in India”—which would make it very wealthy indeed (ibid. 91). Iconographically, his muscular physique, mustached face, and hefted club closely resemble Hanuman murtis popular in Gujarat and Rajasthan—minus the tail, of course. It is significant that a special day for worshipping Ghantakarna is the moonless day of Karttik, anciently associated with yakshas and unquiet spirits (ibid. 164) and also Hanuman’s “dark” birthday (see notes on Story 3).

resourcefulness required to get ahead, paradoxically coupled with the reverence for order and hierarchy that often signifies having arrived. In the oft-told tales of his childhood, he repeatedly experiences suppression by the powers that be, but always manages to turn this to his advantage. A rambunctious newborn, he soars skyward to seize the rising sun—an act that the celestial elite interpret as a challenge to their authority. Indra hurls the upstart back to earth and permanently disfigures him, marking his “lower” status by the broken jaw that gives him his name. But because Hanuman is the scrappy son of the life force itself, his offended father goes on strike and the gods find themselves short of breath; in the end, they must not only revive the child, but give him a portion of all their energies. Still crudely energetic, Hanuman now begins to annoy sages, disturbing their meditations and trashing their hermitages. They too punish him, this time with a curse: not to lose, but to forget his strength, and to recover it only in the role of perfect servant to a celestial deity incarnate as a man. As Rama’s own subaltern, Hanuman might appear effectively tamed at last—the dancing pet monkey of Story 8—but the iconographic and narrative record I have outlined suggests otherwise. True, in “classical” texts and images, the monkey may be shown as merely the servile sidekick to the hero (cf. his dwarfish, attendant figure in Gupta friezes or Chola bronze tableaux, which Sanskrit iconographic treatises dictated might reach only to “the chest, the navel or hip of Rama”⁴⁵), but in folk tales, *Hanumāyana* texts, and new, middle-class-built temples, he is more likely to appear as a huge, rampant figure, triumphantly hefting club and mountain peak while crushing a demon—sometimes with a tiny Rama and Lakshmana, just snatched from Ahiravana’s clutches, perched doll-like on his shoulders. Indeed, when the Old Order passes and his adored master departs the scene, the not-so-meeek Hanuman (literally) inherits the earth.

If Hanuman’s abilities as an emissary and go-for are highlighted in the Rama story, their mundane implications are elaborated in popular lore. Tulsidas’s poetic allegory in *Vinay patrikā* of a long journey through a celestial court, at the climax of which Hanuman brokers the delivery and acceptance of the poet’s “letter of petition,” has been appropriately updated by modern storytellers, who sometimes describe Rama’s court as an “office” complete with desk and file cabinets, and Hanuman as his outer-office “secretary,” whose intervention alone guarantees access to the Boss—as the *Cālīsā* declares: “You are the guardian of Rama’s door; none enters without your leave” (*Hanumān cālīsā* 21). Similarly, pilgrim guidebooks to Ayodhya refer to the town’s myriad temples as “courthouses” (*kacahrī*) and “secretariats” (using the English word), and advise pilgrims to ensure the success of their journey by worshipping at Hanuman Garhi before proceeding to other sites (Bhagirathram 1978:17, Tripathi 1984:79–80). Hanuman is also as present in the marketplace as he is in the court, advertising (among other things) ayurvedic tonics, plant nurseries, and the “ABT Parcel Service” of Bangalore, which

45. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography* (1914:190), cited in Waghorne 2004:26–27.

displays him, mountain in hand, on its logo, because (as its proprietor told me in 1990) he is, like them, “efficient, swift, and safe.”⁴⁶ And it seems only appropriate that the first “middle-class” car to emerge on the deregulated market at the start of the consumer boom of the mid-1980s (an Indo-Japanese *lok-wagon* that was the brainchild of an overreaching political youngster who briefly soared high before falling to earth—Sanjay Gandhi) should bear one of Hanuman’s commonest patronymics: Maruti.

I once described Hanuman’s status in present-day Hinduism as “the most important god who isn’t God” (Lutgendorf 1997b:329). By this I meant that, for most devotees, his in-betweenness and subordinate role is too central to his efficacy to ever accord him supreme divine standing. Although Hanuman is immortal, he is not generally granted the titles “eternal” or “unborn” (*śāśvata, aja*), for his epithets constantly remind worshipers that he is “second generation”—a son of the wind, of Shiva, of Vishnu, of Sita—and they are also aware that his immortality was won by his own hard work. He is also subsidiary—a “portion” of Shiva, an emissary of Rama, a guardian and familiar of Devi—and thus (to some) a “minor deity,” though I have argued that his cultural role is hardly so. Like his devotees, Hanuman stands in the *middle* of things—between heaven and netherworld, divine and demonic realms—but unlike ordinary mortals, he moves easily and masterfully between them, carrying messages and performing mediation. A god who is more like us and less like the Holy Other, he becomes the safest and surest medium for the attainment of a dual plenitude, *shakti and bhakti*. I will return to this pleasantly rhyming formula shortly as I continue to chart Hanuman’s still-ongoing ascent. For, like all scholarly arguments about gods, my assignment of “middle-class” status needs to be checked against the testimony of Hanuman’s own worshipers.

“I love Rama, but . . .”

It appears that the Indian mind visualized “The Perfect Man” not in the image of a man, but in the image of Hanuman, the monkey.

—R. Nagaswamy, “The Concept of Hanuman”

With or without a grandiose new VHP-sponsored temple in Ayodhya, the status of Rama in contemporary Hinduism hardly seems insecure. His long-armed, beatifically smiling figure appears on countless posters and altars, and

46. The use of Hindu deities in advertising—widespread since the first lithographed labels and woodcut matchbox illustrations of the nineteenth century—has occasionally come under attack in recent years by the watchdogs of a new sensibility that posits a sharp divide between the sacred and the secular. Of course, given the ubiquity of the practice (I recall a vendor’s cart that used to pass in front of my apartment in Banaras every day, bearing a painting showing Shiva and Parvati happily licking kulfi-on-a-stick) only certain displays raise objections. Thus a clothes dealer in Raipur in 1986 was forced, following a complaint by several local attorneys, to withdraw handbills that depicted Hanuman wearing a pair of tight jeans—suggesting, perhaps, both a sensuality and a globalized consumerism that were unacceptable. (Reported in *India Today*, Nov. 30, 1986; I am grateful to Kailash Jha for sending me this clipping.)



FIGURES 8.3. Hanuman “delivers” as logo of a Bangalore courier service, 1990

his name echoes not only in rustic greetings and dirges for the dead, but in political slogans capable, under certain circumstances, of bringing down governments. Yet when it comes to popular religion, as Diana Eck once observed, people “vote with their feet,” beating a path to the deity or shrine that best services their needs (1983:xvi). When such “votes” are counted—and one need only go to Ayodhya on Rama’s birthday and compare the surging sea of humanity at Hanuman Garhi with the modest streams of worshipers at Kanak Bhavan, or heed the many devotees and scholars who declare, “It is no exaggeration to say that Hanuman is worshiped more in India than his own lord, Rama” (Soni 2000:292)⁴⁷—it is quite reasonable to propose that the popularity, veneration, and influence of Rama’s *story* (and of one of its characters) should not be confused with that of Rama himself.

Indeed, many people have had problems with Rama. His most universally admired actions occur early in his story when he renounces his right to the throne and departs for the forest, thus combining the cherished traits of obedience and self-sacrifice of a dutiful son and loyal brother with the revered path of asceticism and world renunciation. But once in the forest, and later on when he returns to assume kingship, many of his acts become problematic: the teasing and mutilation of Ravana’s sister Shurpanakha, the assassination of the monkey king Vali to placate his younger brother Sugriva, the alliance with another junior brother to slay the learned Brahman Ravana, and the execution of the Shudra Shambuka for practicing asceticism—each of these episodes has aroused debate over the centuries and has inspired retellings in which storytellers grapple with what are clearly, for audiences, persistent doubts about Rama’s behavior (Richman 2000). Rama’s treatment of Sita following his victory, and again after their return to Ayodhya, has probably aroused the most widespread condemnation, causing some of his most ardent literary votaries to simply omit it, though the audience has never, on this account, forgotten it (Kishwar 2000). A comment I heard from an elderly man in Banaras—“I love Rama, but I cannot forgive the way he treated Mother Sita!”—appears to reflect a not uncommon attitude. Although the Ramayana also offers many examples of Rama’s compassion and his transcending of social barriers—such as his friendship with a tribal chief, his reverence for the vulture Jatayu, his honoring an outcaste woman by eating her “polluted” fruits, as well as his companionship with lowly monkeys—the controversial episodes continue to cast a shadow for many, and may help explain why the “exemplar of propriety” (*maryādā-puruṣottama*), has historically proved to be a less popular figure than his fellow avatara of Vishnu, the mischievous and alluring “exemplar of divine play” (*līlā-puruṣottama*), Krishna. The opinionated

47. Other testimony: “To the people of the South, Hanuman is a much more intimate and loving form to worship than his great Lord, Sri Rama. Hanuman temples are more frequent in the villages of the South” (Menon 1987:62). “Today in comparison with the worship of Rama, that of Hanuman is rather more widespread” (Bulcke 1999:551). “Today, Sri Hanuman’s temples are seen more in abundance than those of Sri Ram” (Sundd 1998:405). “It is no exaggeration to say that in Ayodhya the monkey god Hanuman is even more revered than Rama-Sita” (van der Veer 1988:23).

Ghurye, writing on *The Legacy of the Ramayana*, devotes much ink to cataloging Rama's faults, especially his treatment of Sita, which Ghurye calls (using language he generally reserves for Muslim conquerors) "brutally barbarous." He finds (like many audiences) more to admire in Lakshmana and Sita, yet opines that both are ultimately "tragic" figures; Hanuman, he concludes, "stands out as the only non-tragic and nobly successful character" in the tale (Ghurye 1979:20–24, 267–72).

The harsh patriarchal and societal dharma that Rama upholds is implicitly challenged in the *Hanumāyana* tale of the rescue of the king of Kashi from Rama's wrath (Story 32). Here Hanuman is cast as the champion of the spirit of devotion not to Rama himself (who appears as the willing instrument of a mean-spirited Brahman's revenge for a petty slight, and then as personally spiteful) but to his *name*. Hanuman's eventual victory over his master highlights a host of admired qualities: loyalty to one's mother, to supplicants seeking refuge, and to the weak oppressed by the strong; it also displays the triumph of emotional bhakti over fastidious and status-conscious orthodoxy (embodied in Vishvamitra's Brahmanic pride and Rama's royal arrogance). Though the tale ostensibly proves that the divine name is greater than its bearer, it also shows that Hanuman is, in effect, more powerful than Rama, an idea also found in several popular couplets attributed to Tulsidas, such as:

Knowing Rama's devotee to be greater than Rama himself, Tulsi
says King Rama became a debtor, and Hanuman his creditor.
(R. P. Sharma n.d.:249)⁴⁸

Criticisms of Rama also figure prominently in versions of the Ramayana that include an eighth book, *Lava-Kuśa kāṇḍa*, named for Rama's twin sons. This appendix, which contains the story of Rama's horse sacrifice, closely parallels *Hanumāyana* Story 35, and usually includes (before the requisite father-son reconciliation) the defeat and denunciation of Rama by the boys for his mistreatment of their mother.

Historians of religion have noted the tendency for exalted deities to become "otiose"—distant and withdrawn—and to be eclipsed by more active and appealing gods. Ancient India saw the gradual replacement of Dyauspitr by Indra, of Indra by Vishnu and Shiva, and of the "wide-striding" Vishnu (increasingly found reclining on the Ocean of Milk, having his feet massaged by Lakshmi) by his more active human avatars. Rama and Krishna continue to have legions of votaries, but both have also shown signs, in their theologies, of receding behind (for Rasik devotees) active feminine "powers" (*hlādinī śakti*) and (for common folk) approachable intercessors.⁴⁹

48. See also the *Rāmcaritmānas* verse that serves as epigram to this volume.

49. Sureshchandra Seth, writing in *Kalyāṇ*, remarks that he adores the name "Rāma" and the form of Krishna, but worships Hanuman because he is the guardian of the "door" leading to both (1975:191).

Arshia Sattar argues that Valmiki's Rama is already a largely "passive hero," whose actions are transferred onto Hanuman, "who does all the things that Rama should have done" (Sattar 1990:253). Apart from periodic royal veneration of Rama as an exemplar of kingship, devotion to Rama, since roughly the fourteenth century, has tended to abstract him from his story (as in the *nirguṇa* Sant tradition), and at times even from his human persona—as in the cult of *Rāma-nāma*, which has become truly popular in North and central India. Writing on premodern Tamil Nadu, Kamil Zvelebil noted a similar tendency for Rama to become a transcendent but aloof deity, *Rāmasvāmī*, or to merge with his brother as a divine dyad, *Rāmalakṣmaṇar*. In Zvelebil's account of the rise of Hanuman, popular culture responded to this by adopting "a new hero of superhuman proportions yet not too distant and utterly divine . . . who would be *active*, have even 'human' follies and weaknesses, and yet be invincible" (1987:xl-xli). Hanuman's versatility, coupled with the phenomenon of the otiose god, suggests the paradoxical question: Can an intermediary and intercessor become all-sufficient and supreme?

Five Heads and No Tale

In recent decades, an unusual image of Hanuman has proliferated in poster stalls throughout India. It portrays the deity with a central monkey head flanked by pairs of other animal heads on each side, and with an impressive spread of ten arms, each bearing an object or weapon. In my research, I sometimes asked devotees to tell me the stories to which posters referred; this generally resulted in detailed accounts that unpacked the (often dense) narrative content of these images, suggesting that each was, indeed, a sort of condensed polychrome Purana. But the image just mentioned was different, and inquiries as to its "story" mostly drew a blank. Everyone could identify it easily enough—as "five-faced (*pañcamukhī*) Hanuman"—yet almost no one could provide a narrative to accompany it or even an explanation of its striking features. This was all the more puzzling because the image seemed to be increasingly common. A variety of representations of it could generally be obtained from any modest-sized poster stall, and sindur-coated stone versions received worship in the sancta of freshly built shrines in Ayodhya, Jaipur, Hardwar, and Chitrakut. In eastern Uttar Pradesh, several senior Ramayana scholars told me that the image, rarely seen in their youths, had now become commonplace.⁵⁰ Clearly it was, in some sense, "popular," yet it seemed to exist beyond the confines of the familiar Rama narrative and to

50. B. P. Singh, author of numerous learned works on Rama bhakti, appeared puzzled by the image when I showed it to him in 1990, finally calling it "a symbol of primordial energy" (*ādi śakti kā pratīk*); neither he nor his brother seemed familiar with it. Similarly, *Rāmcaritmānas* aficionado C. N. Singh of Banaras noted in 1990 that the image, fairly common at that time, was rarely encountered in his area forty years before.

be, in fact, without a story.⁵¹ Or rather, perhaps the image was its own text: a self-contained theological essay—but communicating *what*? The most common response I heard was simply, “It is tantric,” or “It has a lot of *power*” (*parākram*, *shakti*). My interest was piqued, and I inquired further. I discovered, in time, that although this Hanuman lacks a tale, he has a history and even a text.

In chapter 3 I discussed the proliferation of tantric literature devoted to Hanuman, including short texts in which he is invoked to ritually construct a protective shield (*kavaca*). The most common such text concerns a “shield of five-headed Hanuman” (*pañcamukhī Hanumat kavaca*) and describes the same composite form depicted in modern posters and murtis. This text, usually said to be excerpted from the *Sudarśana samhitā*, is now regularly included in printed works devoted to Hanuman’s ritual worship.⁵² It largely consists of “visualization verses” (*dhyāna śloka*) that systematically describe the five-headed form.⁵³ These verses are introduced by others of a sort standard in tantric anthologies that identify, according to a set of categories with ultimately Vedic reference, the basic features of the spiritual “shield” being constructed.⁵⁴

51. A few devotees identified the image as a “ferocious form” (*ugra rūpa*) assumed by Hanuman in order to slay a specific demon, most commonly Ahi-/Mahiravana; others, however, claimed that the form Hanuman assumed on this occasion had eleven heads and twenty-two arms, a figure seldom encountered in iconography. The association of the five-faced image with the Ahiravana story may be a southern tradition. A newspaper article concerning a 36-foot murti of this form being installed in Tamil Nadu (mentioned in chapter 1) retells the story of the slaying of “Mayilravana” (“peacock Ravana,” a Tamil name for the subterranean demon) and of Hanuman assuming a five-faced form “with divine power of all the lords” in order to kill the five wasps that sustained the demon’s life (Srinivasan 2003; cf. Story 21.c). Similarly, the television serial *Jai Veer Hanuman*, produced in Andhra Pradesh, depicts the monkey hero assuming this form to kill the subterranean Ravana (Padmalaya Telefilms 1995: Episode 35). This link seems appropriate in that both the image and the Ahiravana tale highlight an energized and autonomous Hanuman; moreover, both have shadowy and “tantric” associations. Yet the *pañcamukhī* form is not, to my knowledge, mentioned in any of the northern texts that retell the Ahiravana story, and the most common poster image alluding to this tale—in which Hanuman bears the rescued princes on his shoulders and suppresses the demon under one foot—shows the monkey in his normal, single-headed form. Only two Hindi story anthologies in my collection mention the five-headed icon. One simply confirms its lack of an explanatory narrative, observing, “Although one finds no story of such an incarnation, worship texts describe its propitiation” (S. Singh 1984:18). The other, Narendra Sharma’s *Hanuman rāmāyana*, provides a narrative in which a five-headed rakshasa named Durjaya obtains the boon that he can be slain only by someone having a similar form; Hanuman sprouts the requisite number of heads to dispatch him. Sharma also claims that a few temples now celebrate the “birthday” of this manifestation (1987:793–97).

52. Catalogs of Sanskrit manuscripts reveal a modest number of texts titled *Hanumat kavaca* or *Pañcamukhī Hanumat kavaca*, often said to be excerpted from either the *Brahmāṇḍa purāṇa* or the *Sudarśana samhitā*; of those that bear copying dates in their colophons, none predates the seventeenth century. The Banaras Hindu University collection includes thirteen *Hanumat kavaca* manuscripts, the oldest dating to 1840 CE, and six *Pañcamukhī Hanumat kavacas*, of which the oldest is dated 1828 CE. The collection of the Vrindaban Research Institute includes six *Hanumat kavaca* texts (the oldest dated 1646 CE), and sixteen *Pañcamukhī Hanumat kavaca* manuscripts (most undated, but the oldest dated one copied in 1870 CE). The catalogs of the R. V. Sahitya Sansthan Research Library, Udaipur, list four manuscripts of the *Pañcamukhī Hanumat kavaca*, all undated, and one text (likewise undated) titled *Pañcamukhī vira Hanuman mantra*.

53. *Dhyāna* is usually translated “meditation, contemplation.” However, in tantric practice meditation often takes the form of guided visualization of divine forms.

54. My translation is based on the Sanskrit text with Hindi commentary given in Shivadatt Mishra’s *Hanumat rahasyam* (1971:132–40).



FIGURE 8.4. Five-headed Hanuman; poster, mid-twentieth century

Thus, of the mantras of the invocation of the five-faced Hanuman *kavaca*, Brahma is the seer, Gayatri is the meter, awesome five-faced Hanuman is presiding deity. *Hrīm* is the seed-mantra, *śrīm* is the shakti, *krauṃ* is the nail,⁵⁵ *krūṃ* is the shield, *kraiṃ* is the weapon. *Phaṭ!*

Garuda said, “Thus I will explain the visualization, listen, Lovely One.

The Supreme Lord created this visualization of his beloved Hanuman. (1)

55. *Kilaka* literally means “nail,” “pin,” or “bolt.” In the Vedic tradition, it refers to a key element in powerful mantras, which “nails down” their efficacy (see Coburn 1991:104–5, 107–8).

Having five faces, fifteen eyes, and ten arms, exceedingly terrible,
 it grants the fulfillment of all aims and desires. (2)
 To the east the face of a fierce monkey, radiant as a billion suns,
 a face having sharp teeth and arched eyebrows. (3)
 To the south the fierce face of the great being, man-lion,
 very terrible, with radiant form, awful and fear-destroying. (4)
 To the west, the fierce face of Garuda, with curved beak,
 immensely strong, stifling all serpents and destroying poisons,
 ghosts, etc. (5)
 To the north the fierce face of a boar, dark and glittering as the
 firmament,
 destroyer of the netherworld, lions, ghouls, fevers, etc. (6)
 Above, the terrible horse-face, supreme destroyer of demonic titans,
 the face, best of seers, that destroyed the great warrior Tarakasura. (7)
 The one who seeks shelter will have all his enemies destroyed
 by visualizing the five-faced Rudra, Hanuman, treasury of mercy. (8)

The visualization continues with a description of the weapons (sword, trident, club, etc.) held in each of the deity's ten hands.⁵⁶ The remainder of the text consists of instructions for a series of ritual "placements" (*nyāsa*) of deities onto the limbs of the reciter's body, followed by long strings of mantras, which combine (apparently meaningless) "seed-syllables" with salutations to "the monkey" (*markaṭa*), to be accompanied by oblations of water. The *kavaca* concludes with a stock passage identifying the benefits to be obtained from its recitation (*phalaśruti*, "a hearing of the fruits").

By reciting this *kavaca* once, all enemies are destroyed. By reciting it twice one obtains sons and grandsons. By reciting it thrice all wealth is acquired, and four recitals destroy all ills. Five recitations give one power over all creatures and six give power over all deities. . . .

The sequence continues to the symbolic Rudra-number of eleven recitations, which "give success in all undertakings." Some manuals detail additional uses: written on paper and carried in one's hand, the *kavaca* yields wealth; repeating it ten times at night brings success at dice; written on birchbark, red silk, or a palm leaf with ink made of three scents and placed in an iron amulet case that is then worn on waist, neck, or upper arm, it fulfills all wishes (D. Gupta 1980:148).

56. The ninth verse lists the objects as sword, trident, "skull staff" (*khaṭvāṅga*, a weapon of Bhairava), noose, goad, mountain, fist, mace, tree, and water pot. Visual representations often show considerable variation, with some of Hanuman's hands holding Vaishnava symbols such as conch, lotus, and discus, or rosary and bell; on the other hand (so to speak), a severed head may also appear.

The verbal icon created in the *kavaca* text seems to have begun appearing in tangible form in about the fifteenth century—as in a small murti at Mandasar in Madhya Pradesh; a 16-foot image said to have been carved in ca. 1500 by a Ramanandi sadhu into a cliff below Jodhpur Fort;⁵⁷ an early-sixteenth-century bas relief at the Ekambaresvara temple in Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu (Nagar 1995:plates 6, 146). Such figures are found in greater numbers after the seventeenth century, especially in Rajasthan, in the form of drawings known as *patākā* (“flag” or “banner”) that were evidently meant as ritual and meditative aids. The Aryans’ book contains a series of such drawings, the earliest dated to the late seventeenth century; the figure is sometimes densely inscribed with mantras (Aryan and Aryan 1975:51, 52, 57, 59, 63; cf. Nagar 1995:plate 153b). In *patākās*, the extra heads often sprout out of Hanuman’s crown, though they sometimes appear (as in modern posters) arrayed symmetrically on either side of his own.⁵⁸ Writing on Hindu mythology in about 1800, the British soldier and chronicler Edward Moor puzzled over the meaning of one such image, with “four animals represented in Hanuman’s coronet . . . a horse, a boar, a lion, and a bird” (1968:262–64). A temple survey conducted at roughly the same time in Pune recorded a single *pañcamukhī* image among the eighty-nine Marutis in the city (Ghurye 1979:147). That such a manifestation of Hanuman at one time figured in the religious life of Nepali Hindus is indicated by the presence of a five-tiered temple dedicated to him in Kathmandu, said to have been constructed in 1655 CE.⁵⁹ In summary, pre-twentieth-century representations of five-headed Hanuman seem to have been comparatively late and sporadic, though they are geographically widely attested.

The textual and artistic representations of *pañcamukhī* Hanuman evoke five animal forms associated with heroic acts of Vishnu. The shlokas allude to the mythological associations of these forms and hence their relevance to a worshiper’s needs: Narasimha, the fear-destroying man-lion; Garuda, the enemy of

57. On the Mandasar image, see Govindchandra 1976:336, and Nagar 1995:264; the Jodhpur image is described in *Kalyān* 1975:424; its history was narrated to me by local devotees in 1996.

58. Other two-dimensional images in published collections include a Pahari-style painting from Jammu, dated to the eighteenth century, and several Mysore-style paintings attributed to the early nineteenth (Nagar 1995: plates 2, 5, 147–49, 151).

59. According to a modern account, the image is “believed to be very tantric in form and mysterious enough to accept even sacrificial offerings” (i.e., blood sacrifices), but is off limits to the general public and accessible only to a priest who performs a daily “secret service” (Deep 1993:60). Further confirmation of this unusual Hanuman’s presence in Nepal is provided by a metal sculpture (dated to the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries) that appears in Madanjeet Singh’s survey *Himalayan Art*, wherein it is misidentified as “a manifestation of Vishnu” (1971:213, 218). Singh connects this image with *vyūha* forms of Vishnu worshiped in Kashmir (see below). However, the Nepali image shows the standard alignment of heads described in the *dhyānam* text, and the forward- (presumably eastward-) facing head is clearly that of a ferocious monkey (Singh calls it “a demon”); the figure stands astride a recumbent female, presumably a suppressed rakshasi. See also the Nepali painting, identified as nineteenth century, in Nagar (1995:plate 3). Another Nepali image, together with three others from Pahari schools of painting, is briefly discussed by D. C. Bhattacharya in his book *Iconology of Composite Images*. Citing a single Nepali manuscript that terms the image “Hanu-Bhairava” and clearly unaware of the tradition of five-headed representations of Hanuman, Bhattacharya places the image in his chapter on “dual forms” (1980:22–24). He also mistakenly identifies the heads in two of the paintings, reading the lion or man-lion head as a jackal or “an animistic human face” (ibid. 22).

snakes and antidote to venom; the boar Varaha, who plunged into the netherworld to rescue the earth from demons; and the lesser-known “horse-necked” Hayagriva (aka Hayavadana, sometimes ranked among the twenty-four “minor avatars” of Vishnu), who is likewise said to have gone to the netherworld to retrieve the Vedas (Coomaraswamy 1928:47). The composite would appear to consist as much of these deities as of Hanuman, yet the text identifies it with him, and the monkey face, in the auspicious eastern direction, is the nucleus which the others—each described as “fierce” or “awesome” (*vakra*, literally, “twisted”)—enhance with their respective powers. In sculpted images, the monkey head faces the worshiper, and the accompanying (and appropriately tailed) body belongs to it; the other heads are aligned as per the *dhyāna* prescription.

The iconographic and theological roots of five-faced Hanuman are hoary and reflect both Vaishnava and Shaiva traditions. In an ambitious study of the pervasive “multiplicity convention” in Indian art (the depiction of deities with multiple heads and limbs), Doris Srinivasan notes that the number five was already used in Vedic liturgy and ritual to denote completeness or totality, and that some of the earliest identifiable Vaishnava and Shaiva icons show a fivefold structure (Srinivasan 1997:163–66).⁶⁰ These include five-faced lingas honoring Rudra/Shiva, and representations of the “five heroes” (*pañca vīra*) of the Vrishni clan (among them, Krishna) who were worshiped in the Mathura region several centuries before the common era (ibid. 119–23, 211–18, 233–35, 318–19). Srinivasan argues that the latter cult contributed to the development of an early Vaishnava theology and iconography in which the supreme lord Narayana produces “four emanations” (*caturvyūha*) bearing the names of Vrishni heroes, which may be represented by heads facing in the cardinal directions (ibid. 218, 220). Such an image, referred to as *Vaikunṭha caturmūrti* (“the penetrating Lord of four visages”), is described in the *Viṣṇudharmottara purāṇa*, a text associated with the *Pāñcarātra* school and probably composed between ca. 600 and 900 CE, as well as in other northern *Pāñcarātra* texts (e.g., the *Jayākhya saṃhitā*). This visualization places the anthropomorphic head of Vasudeva to the east, flanked by Narasimha and Varaha to the south and north respectively, with an “angry” (*raudra*) head of the sage Kapila to the west, adorned with earrings, a third eye and the matted locks of a yogi (e.g., *Viṣṇudharmottara purāṇa* 3.44.9–12).⁶¹ Sculptural representations of such a figure likewise have a long history, but are especially well attested from ca. ninth-century Kashmir, where

60. In addition, note the worship of the five *dhyāni* buddhas of tantric Buddhism, each associated with a primary color, direction, and mystical realm (Bharati 1965:23), as well as the concept of the “five winds” or “breaths” said to collectively constitute *Vayu/prana*.

61. Srinivasan speculates that such images represent a visualization of the early Vaiṣṇava *vyūha* cosmogony—in which the universe evolves through a series of divine “emanations” likewise associated with Krishna and his earthly kinsmen—which is already attested in the *Nārāyaṇīya* section of the *Mahābhārata* (12.321–38). She proposes that the lion and boar heads were originally intended to signify the *vyūhas* Samkarshana and Aniruddha (with Kapila representing Pradyumna), rather than avatars, but that the *vyūha* doctrine later merged with the practice of the *Bhāgavata* sect, which worshiped Krishna and four of his kinsmen as the “five heroes” (Srinivasan 1979; I am grateful to John S. Hawley for referring me to Srinivasan’s article and to the tradition of *Vaikunṭha caturmūrti* images).

Pāñcarātra doctrines were influential.⁶² These icons position the Vasudeva visage facing the worshiper and set the entire fourfold figure astride the divine bird Garuda (Srinivasan 1979:44). Moreover, there exists at least one variation in which the “angry” head of Kapila is replaced by that of a horse, and another in which a horse substitutes for the lion (Agrawala 1976:388).

Thus all of the constituents of *pañcamukhī* Hanuman, with the exception of the monkey himself, were combined in earlier Vaishnava iconography to connote an epiphany of Vishnu as cosmic creator. The visual parallel between this composite murti and the modern five-faced Hanuman—extending even to the directional placement of the lion and boar visages—is too close to be merely coincidental, yet the late *dhyāna* text makes no reference to *Pāñcarātra* doctrine or indeed to Vishnu. It appears unaware of any visual or theological precursors, even as it substitutes, at its visual center, a monkey’s face for that of the supreme lord Vasudeva/Narayana. Further, no modern text on Hanuman (including the copious research of Govindchandra) and no devotee whom I interviewed made any reference to Vaishnava *caturmūrti* images (which, it must be added, although historically well attested, are virtually unknown to modern worshippers).⁶³

Since procedures for visualizing five-faced Hanuman and for constructing his protective “shield” are now a standard feature of inexpensive tantric self-help books, a similar desire to invoke occult forces may lie behind the dissemination of posters of this form. I propose that the spread of such popular literature and iconography may reveal broader processes within mainstream (and again, especially middle-class) Hinduism. The very printing of such ostensible esoterica is of course indicative of a new emphasis on accessibility and democratization of ritual practice, but I would like to introduce the terms “Vaishnavization” and “tantrification” to label complementary processes that are likewise suggested by these materials.⁶⁴ A text such as the *Hanumad rahasyam* (S. S. Mishra 1971) would no doubt be regarded, by a scholar of medieval tantric traditions, as a vulgar latter-day appropriation of esoteric Shaiva/Shakta beliefs and practices; moreover, it is a text that, through its invocation of the Rama narrative, subordinates Shiva to Vishnu as the latter’s exemplary devotee. It may thus be cited as an instance of a broader process of “Vaishnavization” that a number of scholars have viewed

62. According to Srinivasan, a four-sided sculpture from Bhita in Allahabad District, dated to the second century BCE and previously identified as a “fourfold yaksha,” may in fact be *caturvyūha* Vishnu (1979:41–43; 1997:218–20).

63. S. K. Ramachandra Rao asserted in an interview in 1990 that five-faced Hanuman was promoted in late-medieval Karnataka by teachers of the Madhva sect, who wanted their own fearsome tantric protector-deity, comparable to those worshiped by Shaivas, such as Kala Bhairava and Virabhadra. This claim is not implausible, since Hanuman’s role in early Madhva worship has been little studied (see chapter 2). Yet given the paucity of premodern *pañcamukhī* Hanumans in South India, I am skeptical of this as a primary explanation for the figure’s popularization.

64. I intend the evocation of M. N. Srinivas’s well-known label “Sanskritization,” as well as the American sociological term “gentrification”—though I will argue that something like the reverse of these processes is involved in five-faced Hanuman’s popularity.

as characteristic of the evolution of popular Hinduism during the past millennium—a process that has figured in the growing status of both the Rama and Krishna stories and in the rise of pilgrimage sites associated with these narratives.⁶⁵ Such a transformation, these scholars argue, is not simply a matter of changing devotional tastes or of substitution of nomenclature, but shows a preference for the pan-Indian, Sanskritic, and Brahmanical over the local, vernacular, and folk. It also reflects, in certain specific instances, aspirations for improved social status, such as the “caste uplift” movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, noted in chapter 2, which were often accompanied by the adoption of Vaishnava rituals and behavioral norms (Pinch 1996:esp. 81–114). Shaiva traditions in general and tantra in particular endured a harsh critique during the second century of colonial rule, dismissed in British discourse as (at best) “primitive superstition,” and (at worst) “hellish abomination,” whereas Vaishnava bhakti (Krishna’s amours excepted) was sometimes guardedly admired for its supposed resemblance to Christianity. Such critiques were directly absorbed by the English-educated elite, but their echoes filtered down to reinforce the austere Vaishnava morality of mercantile communities and of upwardly mobile artisan and agricultural groups. Their influence may be seen in the mythological and ritual sanitization of Shakta deities such as the “seven sisters” of the Punjab hills or the Kashmiri Khir Bhavani, who have in recent times become vegetarian, fallen in love with Vishnu, and (as noted in chapter 7) acquired Hanuman as their attendant—often supplanting or complementing Bhairava.⁶⁶

Yet I also want to argue that this “sanitization” of popular religion has never been total, and that something like an opposite or complementary process has also occurred, especially in the post-Independence period. Indeed, the modern “tantric” literature and iconography of Hanuman challenges assumptions regarding alleged “Vaishnavization.” It disseminates “secret” techniques and empowering images and places allusions to Vaishnava narrative within a ritual context that is squarely Shaiva/Shakta. Indeed, it might as well be characterized as an example of the “tantrification” of Vaishnavism, reflecting a yearning among mainstream, Sanatani⁶⁷ Hindus in North India for access, through a feisty and populist deity, to sources of transformative power

65. See Charlotte Vaudeville’s argument, in “Braj, Lost and Found,” that the local religion of Vrindaban and environs centered on the worship of Shiva and local goddesses and snake deities prior to the arrival of Bengali Vaishnava “missionaries” in the fifteenth century (Vaudeville 1976). Similarly, Bakker and van der Veer have argued for the preeminence of Shaiva and Nath yogi sacred sites in Ayodhya prior to the twelfth century, and a gradual “Vaishnavization” that accelerated only after the sixteenth century (Bakker 1986:125, 145; van der Veer 1988:15, 90). As noted in chapter 2, Verghese characterized the popular religion of the city of Vijayanagara as Shaiva prior to the sixteenth century, when a shift in courtly patronage favored the Shrivaisnava and (to a lesser extent) Madhva sects (1995:7–9).

66. On the Punjab hill goddesses’ transformation from Shakta to (nominally) Vaishnava figures, see Erndl 1993:43–48. Wangu attributes the shift in the iconography and diet of Khir Bhavani, as well as her association with Rama and Hanuman, to middle-class Kashmiris’ discomfort with their tantric heritage in the aftermath of the British critique (1988:175–83).

67. Sanatani (*sanātāni*) is an adjective referring to those who identify themselves as adherents of Sanatana Dharma, an ancient term that came to be used in the late nineteenth century as a way of distinguishing

associated with esoteric paths. C. N. Singh remarked to me in 1990 that the appeal of five-faced Hanuman, like that of astrology and “tantra-mantra,” is rooted in the modern middle-class desire for a “quick fix” for worldly problems. Yet such worshipers are uneasy with deities redolent of the “primitive” and the uncontrolled. In contrast to the unruly Bhairava, “the god of transgression *par excellence*” (Visuvalingam 1989:157), the half-feral Hanuman seems more domesticated and user-friendly, a Rudra whose rages are restricted to their proper demonic targets and whose reverence for dharma is beyond question. The divine monkey manages at once to combine Shiva’s propensity for being easily pleased (*āśutoṣa*) with Rama’s concern for “dignity” and self-limitation (*maryādā*); he blends Bhairava’s edgy energy with an adamant yogic calm and a Vaishnava emotional excess.⁶⁸ Such “encapsulation” is also made visible, I propose, in the proliferating image of five-faced Hanuman: an epiphany that reveals the humble “servant of Rama” growing to incorporate not simply the fivefold powers of the awesome Shaiva deities of the classical tantric pantheon, but the majesty of Vishnu-Narayana as embodied in his “emanations” and avatars. Leaving aside the esoteric interpretations that have historically been associated with the individual heads, this image most obviously confronts the viewer with a “cosmic form” (*viśvarūpa*), “radiant as a billion suns,” reminiscent of that assumed by Krishna in the eleventh chapter of the *Bhagavad-gītā* and itself now visually familiar through poster and video incarnations.⁶⁹ The ease with which Hanuman—whose shape shifts and eruptions into gigantism punctuate his role in the Ramayana narrative—can assume this stature, and the logic of its encoded theology, is suggested by the phenomenon of its proliferation in the absence of narrative exegesis. A visualization of an empowering but mostly unknown mantra, it requires, for most devotees, no further explanation than that it has “a lot of shakti.” It presents a god who manages to be at once “Vaishnava,” “Shaiva,” and “tantric”—a “minor” deity caught in the act of assuming an integral and encompassing role.

Shakti and Bhakti Revisited

The formula I have provisionally translated “power and devotion” has become almost a slogan among contemporary Hanuman worshipers, especially those

mainstream, image-worshiping Hindus from the (often iconoclastic) adherents of “reformist” sects, especially the Brahma Samaj and the Arya Samaj (see Lutgendorf 1991a:360–71).

68. In analyzing the cult of Bhairava, David White has described developments akin to those that I have traced here for Hanuman, including a pre-modern origin myth linking the deity to both Shiva and Vishnu (who created, respectively, his “black” and “white” forms from the dirt of their bodies), and his recent “taming” and sanitization, especially in urban, middle-class contexts (White 2003:5, 11–13).

69. Srinivasan argues that the totalizing metaphysical connotation of *viśvarūpa* as divine “omniform” is vital to the development of multiform iconography (D. Srinivasan 1997:137–41). She also distinguishes between early four- and five-faced images of Vishnu and Shiva that seem to represent “theological statements” and “do not tell a story,” and later multiheaded and multiarmed images that allude to Puranic narratives and to the divine *līlās* celebrated by devotional traditions (ibid. 12–13). In this typology, the (mostly) narrative-less *pañcamukhī* Hanuman corresponds to the older and more theologically ambitious variety.

who regard him as their “chosen deity.” If these two terms allude to dual aspects of Hanuman’s persona that have been repeatedly noted in this book, it appears that, in premodern times, these aspects were more generally separated in worship, as is still sometimes the case in rural areas. Thus it is said that Hanuman murtis may be divided into two basic types: those in “servile form” (*dāsa rūpa*) and emblematic of bhakti, and those in “heroic” or “virile form” (*vīra rūpa*), which are charged with shakti. According to Pandit Dube, the worship of the dasa form should be performed with “pure” (*sāttvika*) offerings (vegetarian and dairy foods), whereas the vira form is to be invoked with “passionate” (*rājasa*) offerings (the pandit does not specify what this means, but in the context of other deities it may connote nonvegetarian food and liquor; *Kalyān* 1975:369). In Maharashtra, members of the Ramdasi sect similarly worshiped two forms of Maruti that they termed dasa and *bhīma* (fearsome, terrible) respectively (Deming 1928:174). Among Ramanandis, the two aspects seem to have corresponded to the main subdivisions of the order, into *tyāgīs* or wandering “renouncers,” who practiced strenuous yogic disciplines, and Rasiks (“savorers” of the sweetness of devotion), who resided in temple-monasteries and practiced visualization based on selected Ramayana episodes. The Hanuman of the former was an avatara of Shiva, often represented by a simple stone smeared with sindur. That of the latter was a heavenly *parśad*, one of the inner circle of eternal servants of Sita-Rama (van der Veer 1988:148–59, 162–64, 175). In rural Rajasthan in recent times, according to Kothari, the dasa and vira forms of Balaji/Hanuman were respectively coded by the position of the deity’s feet: the right foot forward connoting the mild, devotional form, and the left foot forward indicating the ferocious, demon-slaying one. I have heard similar distinctions voiced by devotees of particular shrines; thus at the Chiraumhula Hanuman temple near Rewa, Madhya Pradesh, a pilgrim told me that some images possess bhakti but no shakti, and vice versa. Whether the “atmosphere” of a given temple expresses more the dasa/bhakti or vira/shakti side may also be signaled by the accompanying presence of, respectively, the *trimūrti* of Rama-Sita-Lakshmana or the linga of Shiva. The persistence of this divided persona suggests that Hanuman continues to be more closely akin to Shiva and his associates (who regularly display alternately “gentle” and “terrible”—*saumya* and *raudra*—aspects, usually by assuming special forms), than to Vishnu (who is less prone to fragmentation in his personality).

I propose that the relevant semantic fields of the terms “shakti” and “bhakti” in the Hanuman formula are broader than the conventional translation suggests, and also extend beyond “Shaiva” and “Vaishnava” sectarian labels to encode a more extensive history of theologies and praxes. They reflect, in fact, two worldviews and bodies of tradition that have powerfully shaped the development of Hinduism. As an embodiment of shakti, Hanuman expresses the raw life (and death) forces of nature and the deities (mainly Shaiva and Shakta) who control them, and also the sadhana that aims at increasing personal mastery over these cosmic forces, yielding occult powers, autonomous perfection, and even physical immortality. The reigning

metaphors for such physiospiritual outcomes evoke images of solidity: the “diamond-like” bodies of siddhas, tantric magicians, and yogis. Shakti also connotes this power in human beings, especially the virility in men and the life force in women and goddesses, with whom Hanuman enjoys special relationships. On the other hand, as an exemplar of bhakti, Hanuman stands for self-effacing love and service and for the sadhana that pursues surrender to a loving God. Here the predominant metaphors are of fluidity: the “drowning” of the Tamil Alvar poets in the ocean of Vishnu; Tulsidas’s “river of love” and “lake” of Rama’s deeds, in which he invites readers to immerse themselves; or Mirabai’s motif of being “died” in the color of Krishna—all images suggestive of the flow of heartfelt emotion and the dissolution of the ego-self. In expressing this ideal, the powerful Hanuman too appears to melt: posters show “Bhakta Anjaneya” clasping finger cymbals in each paw, chanting *Rāmanāma* in ecstasy with tears streaming from half-closed eyes.⁷⁰ Yet even this bhakti persona retains a raw and energized shakti component, perhaps best epitomized in the ubiquitous icon of the chest-tearing Hanuman—and poster artists seemingly relish the shock value of his bloodied fingers and the dripping gore around the wound. Hanuman’s dual aspects thus constitute, I propose, a shorthand for two of the principal currents in Hindu religious history, and their confluence creates a paradoxical yet highly desirable ego-ideal: that of being powerful, autonomous, and self-realized, and yet simultaneously of having an “open heart” and ready access to deep feeling, especially self-giving love. Used most often (in my experience) by middle-class worshipers, the shakti-and-bhakti formula again suggests their perception of Hanuman as a full-service deity who offers a complete range of divine attributes and functions in a singular and accessible form.

Higher Bounds

Chote Wrestler said, “I don’t want any *darshan-varshan*. I am the slave only of Hanuman, the god of the red loincloth, and as far as I am concerned all other gods and goddesses are so much straw!”

—Shrilal Shukla, *Rāg Darbārī*

In Shrilal Shukla’s biting satirical Hindi novel *Rāg Darbārī* (“music of the court,” 1968),⁷¹ the inhabitants of the fictional eastern Uttar Pradesh village of Shivpalganj invoke only a limited range of deities: Rama, who is equated

70. The contrast between the two orientations I discuss here is effectively crystallized in a story told of Allama Prabhu, a ca. twelfth-century Virashaiva poet-saint of Karnataka. Challenged to a display of spiritual powers by the immortal yogi Gorakhnath, Allama struck the ascetic with a sword, which merely glanced off Gorakhnath’s diamond-like, perfected body (*siddha śarīra*). Allama then gave the sword to Gorakhnath, but when the latter struck the saint, who had entirely effaced himself in devotion to Shiva, the weapon passed through him as if through air. The yogi was confounded and had to admit defeat. Here, both contenders were “Shaiva,” though they represent tantric vs. bhakti sadhanas (Ramanujan 1973:146).

71. The novel is available in English translation by Gillian Wright (S. Shukla 1992).

with dharma and impartial justice (both quite remote from the everyday experience of the villagers); Shiva, to whom they symbolically offer the cannabised milkshakes (*bhāṅg*) they consume daily; a nameless local Devi whose jungle temple bustles once a year on its festival day but otherwise serves as the deserted site of romantic trysts; and—most consistently and above all—Hanuman, the god of strength, pluck, fearlessness, but also of compassion, mercy, and devotion. His devotees in the novel include wrestlers, peasants, and bureaucrats from the nearby city, such as the district inspector of schools, who falls prostrate before Hanuman’s shrine and rises with “a hundred tears of devotion . . . dripping from his eyes” (ibid. 159). The pugnacious wrestler Chote, a thug in the service of the local strongman (that his name means “little one” is both an ironic allusion to his size and a connotation of his low social status), makes the above pronouncement of Hanuman’s supremacy during his own visit to the goddess’s annual fair, when he doesn’t even deign to enter her shrine for darshan. Yet some readers may recognize that his audacious assertion echoes that contained in the thirty-fifth verse of the *Hanumān cālīsā*:

Pay no heed to any other deity,
Serving Hanuman, one obtains all delight.

Of course, it would seem that few reciters take this injunction literally; most Hanuman worshipers are quite willing to approach other deities at appropriate times and places for their respective specialties. Yet the status of particular gods may also change over time, and Ashis Nandy has observed that the focus of modern mass media and of homogenized, VHP-style Hinduism on a relative handful of pan-Indian gods is causing many folk, tribal, and regional ones to “face extermination” (Nandy 1997). As the “default deity” of some new urban subdivisions (chosen, as one temple trustee in a Bangalore suburb explained to me, because he “would appeal to everyone,” regardless of regional and sectarian background), Hanuman himself has certainly supplanted other gods. As if to justify such divine “imperialism,” the *Hanumāyana* literature, particularly in some of its most recent examples, inclines toward ever more grandiose theological assertions, creating (to venture an analogy with “Christology”) a “Hanuman-ology” that parallels my reading of the implicit message of the *pañcamukhī* icon and the shakti-and-bhakti formula.

In asserting that Hanuman is the most efficacious deity in the present kali yuga, several authors use the adjective *pratyakṣa*, literally meaning “before one’s eyes, manifest” which seems to refer to Hanuman’s immortality, ubiquity, and responsiveness (M. Joshi 2001:1; Soni 2000:1). These qualities are also signaled by terms meaning “awake” or “aroused” (*jāgrta*, *jāgtā*). Karunapati Tripathi, writing in *Kalyāṇ*, defines an “awake” deity as one who “definitely bestows benefits according to faith” (1975:80). A worshiper in a Hanuman temple in Madhya Pradesh defined a *jāgrta* deity as one who is “alive, responding to your calls,” and added that when Rama departed for heaven, he handed over the earth to Hanuman, who is thus now the most

powerful and “awake” god. As I noted in chapter 6, Sundd favors the biblical-sounding phrase “the only living god,” to which he sometimes adds “who is awake,” explaining that, in this dark age, “all other gods are sleeping” (1998:624). Another *Hanumāyana* author extends the range of divine immanence somewhat but comes to a similar conclusion concerning Hanuman:

Wise people say that Shri Hanuman, Mother Durga, and [the river] Ganga are the manifest (*pratyakṣa*) divine powers in the kali yuga. . . . Hanuman alone is capable of bestowing all four aims of life. This is the reason that, in this kali yuga, more temples are found to him than to any other deity. Therefore, if you want power, wealth, fame, peace, happiness, and prosperity, then take shelter at the feet of Shri Hanuman. You will obtain both this world and the world beyond. (Soni 2000:273–74)

The author adds that one should begin journeys or any other task by remembering Hanuman because he is the simplest and most accessible deity (*saral* and *sulabh*; *ibid.* 274).

One explanation I sometimes heard for Hanuman’s all-sufficiency depends on his relationship to supreme (but distant) divine authority: since Hanuman has Sita-Rama in his heart and they (jointly) are the ultimate divinity, incorporating all other gods, then it follows that to propitiate Hanuman satisfies all divine powers, and there is no need to bother with others. Sometimes, however, others are specifically mentioned as being identical with, or encompassed within, Hanuman. Of course, it is frequently asserted that Hanuman is one with Rudra/Shiva, and so to worship him is the same as worshipping Shiva himself. A more unusual equivalence, involving another of Hinduism’s most popular figures, is asserted by Sundd, who details a series of parallels between the deeds of Hanuman and those of Krishna (both went as prewar emissaries, both displayed a cosmic form, both held up mountains with their hands, etc.) to conclude that Hanuman is equivalent to Krishna (1998:396). Yet he goes even further: since Sita calls Hanuman “son” in the Ashoka Garden, this child of the monkey Kesari, of the wind god Vayu, and of Shiva, also becomes “the maternal grandson of mother-goddess Earth.” And since Rama himself was born from a fire sacrifice, Hanuman is also the grandson of Agni. Linking him, in this manner, to the five traditional elements in *sāṃkhya* metaphysics, Sundd concludes, “Sri Hanuman thus became Sankat Mochan for the universe, becoming controller of the responsibilities of wind, fire, water, sky and earth” (*ibid.* 283).

A similarly elaborate articulation of “Hanuman-ology” appears in Mularam Joshi’s 2001 study *Hemaśailābhadeham*.⁷² After disposing of “monkeyness” in

72. The title comes from Tulsidas’s Sanskrit eulogy to Hanuman at the beginning of *Sundar kāṇḍ*, and refers to him “having a body like a mountain of gold”; a subtitle identifies the author’s topic as “the scientific dimensions of Hanuman literature.”

a standard euhemerist manner (i.e., proposing that Hanuman was a prehistoric inhabitant “of the Mysore region,” labeled a monkey because of his “small size and agility in battle”;22), the author offers subsequent chapters devoted to Hanuman as a human being, a devotee, and finally, an avatara. He ingeniously relates these to the developmental stages of human life: thus a child is “restless and ignorant,” like a monkey; through education it becomes a socialized person; an adult may then acquire devotion; and this may ultimately lead to oneness with God, symbolized by avatarahood—hence Hanuman is the archetype for human beings. Moreover, like his father Vayu, Hanuman is “attributeless” (*nirguṇa*) and so may be imagined in any form one likes (ibid. 174–76). This leads to the rhapsodic eulogy with which Joshi ends his book:

If we perceive Hanuman’s true form with discernment, then we behold him everywhere, in colossal and tiny form, fly and cat form, human and divine form, child and old-person form, monkey and avatara form. (ibid. 177)

But Joshi’s concept of avatara exceeds the usual understanding of Hanuman as an embodiment of Shiva. Avatars, he writes, are mortal beings, whereas Hanuman is an immortal. Arguing that Hanuman is not the incarnation of any single deity (and moving far beyond the Rama story), Joshi deploys Advaita metaphysics to assert that Hanuman is the incarnation of *om-kāra*, the “sound of *om*,” the primordial sound-seed and vibrational ground of the cosmos. This means that he is “the *brahma*-essence, the benefactor of the world,” and is in fact none other than *Parabrahma*—the “ultimate reality” (ibid. III, 120–21).

Joshi’s metaphysical flights may be variously interpreted. Penned by a retired Brahman professor and following on his earlier euhemerist gymnastics, they appear to offer yet another strained solution to the “problem” with which I opened this chapter: the need still felt by some Hanuman worshipers to sanitize, abstract, and write away what Swami Chinmayananda candidly called “that apparently ridiculous and seemingly insignificant form of a monkey” (1987:6).

Yet I suspect that they coexist (as they do for many other educated devotees) with heartfelt devotion to a charmingly complex and thoroughly *sa-guṇa* Hanuman. And so I read, in this final, overreaching leap by a modern devotee, but a further installment in the remarkable saga of the Son of the Wind and of the uplifting messages that he delivers. At once cosmic and comic, subhuman and supernatural, aggressive and contemplative, earthy and divine, Hanuman exemplifies and transfigures the boundary-challenging role that simians have characteristically played for human cultures. And like all living beings, he (and his tale) continues to grow.

Epilogue: “Lord of Ecology”

I conclude this volume with a personal reflection on another recent, provocative, and (in my experience) anomalous expansion of Hanuman’s cultural



FIGURE 8.5. Hanuman radiating effulgence; poster, late twentieth century

messages. In his eccentric English-language epic, Sundd extends his eulogy of Hanuman as “lord of the five elements” to identify him as “Lord of Environment and Ecology” (1998:433–38). Though it occupies a mere six of the tome’s 816 pages, this passage acknowledges several of the perils facing life on our planet: the threat to the ozone layer caused by atmospheric pollution, and the discharge of toxins into rivers (here Sundd focuses on the involvement, in the 1980s and ’90s, of the mahant of the Sankat Mochan Temple in the campaign to clean up the Ganga). The octogenarian and retired military man’s interest in such a timely and important subject is (like several other aspects of his book) unusual. In years of listening to religious discourses in India and reading through volumes of popular Hindu literature, I have encountered almost no mention of the environmental degradation that threatens

every part of the world and that seems particularly acute on the densely populated subcontinent. Although religious leaders sometimes boast of the superiority of Hinduism's "reverence for the earth" and awareness of "the unity of life" to an alleged Western estrangement from and exploitation of nature, they have, with only a few exceptions, shown little practical concern for the environmental crisis facing their land—the air pollution choking urban areas, the presence of industrial effluents and other waste in groundwater, the mounting piles of non-biodegradable refuse, and the lax enforcement of environmental laws. And Hanuman's middle-class votaries, who made the "Maruti" India's national car (and now may aspire to own gas-gulping "sport utility vehicles"), seem particularly intent on aping the callous consumerism and throwaway mentality of Americans. In recent years, however, a small number of nongovernment organizations have begun to draw on the resources of Hindu mythology and practice to promote environmentally healthy lifestyles. Sundd's brief passage made me wonder what role the resourceful Hanuman might play in this effort.

Although, as Donna Haraway observes, the "culture/nature" divide that characterizes Judeo-Christian thought is an ideological construct that is not found everywhere (1989:246), it seems to me that something not altogether unlike it informs the ancient and enduring Indian dichotomy, pervasive of epic and Puranic narrative, between the settled human realm of village, city, or kingdom, and that of the "forest" (*vana*, *aranya*, *jaṅgala*)—a protean domain of beauty, danger, and mystery, and the abode par excellence of supernatural forces. It is to the forest that the royal heroes of Indian epic repair, to hunt in sport or suffer in exile, and it is there that they encounter adventures that transform their lives (Lutgendorf 2000a). Some two millennia before Western environmentalism emerged in the aftermath of the industrial revolution and the exploitation by European settlers of the North American continent, Indian storytellers (anticipating pioneer environmentalist John Muir) described a realm whose "wildness" was also, in a sense, "the preservation of the world": a place of quietist "forest teachings" and adventurous and transformative quests. And their tales also reveal, as I have argued elsewhere, an implicit ecological vision of a "crowded cosmos" in which every life form has its place, and wherein acts of destruction must always stop short of extinction, because of the need to preserve, for each species, "the seed of the future" (*ibid.* 282).

As I noted earlier, in several Asian cultures in which monkey deities have appeared, these beings have shown a special capacity to mediate between the human and (a variously conceived) "natural" realm. In Japan, Saruta Biko was associated with the god of the mountain, for whom he served as a messenger to human beings. In China, Sun Wu-k'ung seemed most at home on his own "Flower-Fruit Mountain," with its waterfall and forests, where he "played" happily with his simian subjects. In one episode from the *Hsi-yu Chi*, he "restored" the mountain after an ecological catastrophe caused by the excesses of human hunters (*Hsi-yu Chi* 28; Yu 1978:33–39). Sun Wu-k'ung's response of grief and rage might likewise be interpreted (at least from our present

perspective) as dramatizing the need for restraint in human exploitation of the earth's resources. His acts of environmental restoration (he obtained "sweet, divine water . . . to wash his mountain and make it green again," and planted a variety of trees on the ravaged slopes) offer a hopeful vision of renewal, as well as a welcome break from the tendentious piety of his human master (*ibid.* 39).

In India, Hanuman has long been associated with liminal spaces that mark the boundary between human habitation and unsettled "jungle," as well as with the mountains and (vanishing) forests, where his devotees occasionally encounter him and where his (sometimes) honored cohorts the langur and macaque still "play." Moreover, he has, through his father Vayu, a special identification with the air that is the breath of all life. Associating this supernatural being—a matchless mediator between the animal, human, demonic, and divine realms—with "ecology," a relatively new concept even in English and still perhaps without an adequate translation in an Indian language, seems not inappropriate; indeed, it is but a small step for one who already plays so many roles. But it could be a great leap, for his human devotees, toward liberation from the self-generated *saṅkaṭ* that now menaces all earthly life. I would be very happy if this book about Hanuman, who is so good at averting disasters and bridging dire straits, can contribute in any way to delivering this message.

Appendix

Two Poems in Praise of Hanuman (Attributed to Tulsidas)

Hanumān Cālīsā (Forty Verses to Hanuman)

(*invocatory couplets*)

Having polished, with the dust of my master's feet, the mirror of
my heart,

I narrate the pure fame of Raghupati, which bestows life's four
fruits.¹

Knowing this body to be void of intelligence, I recall the Son of the
Wind.

Grant me strength, intelligence, wisdom, and remove my afflictions
and shortcomings.

(*verses*)

1. Victory to Hanuman, ocean of wisdom and virtue,
Hail monkey lord, illuminator of the three worlds.
2. Rama's emissary, abode of matchless power,
Anjani's son, named "Son of the Wind."
3. Great hero, mighty as a thunderbolt,
remover of bad thoughts and companion to good.
4. Golden-hued and splendidly adorned,
with heavy earrings and curly locks.
5. In your hands shine mace and banner,
a thread of munja grass adorns your shoulder.

1. This *dohā* immediately follows the Sanskrit benedictory verses that open Book 2 (*Ayodhyā kāṇḍ*) of the *Rāmcaritmānas*. The traditional "four fruits" or goals of life are righteousness (*dharma*), prosperity (*artha*), pleasure (*kāma*), and spiritual liberation (*mokṣa*).

6. Shiva's son and Kesari's joy,
your glory is sung throughout the world.
7. Supremely wise, virtuous, and clever,
you are ever intent on Rama's tasks.
8. You relish hearing the Lord's deeds,
Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita dwell in your heart.
9. Taking tiny form you showed yourself to Sita,
assuming awesome form you burned Lanka.
10. Taking terrible form you slew demons
and completed Ramachandra's mission.
11. Bringing the healing herb, you revived Lakshmana,
and Rama, overjoyed, clasped you to his breast.
12. Greatly did the Raghu Lord praise you:
"Brother, you're as dear to me as Bharat!
13. May the thousand-mouthed serpent sing your fame!"
So saying, Shri's Lord held you in his embrace.
14. Sanaka and the sages, Brahma and the gods, great saints,
Narada, Sarasvati, and the king of snakes,
15. Yama, Kubera, and the directional guardians,
poets, and pandits—none can express your glory.
16. You rendered great service to Sugriva,
presented him to Rama, and gave him kingship.
17. Vibhishana heeded your counsel
and became Lord of Lanka, as the whole world knows.
18. The sun is two thousand leagues away,
yet you swallowed it, thinking it a sweet fruit.
19. With the Lord's ring in your mouth,
you leapt the sea—what wonder in that?
20. Every arduous task in this world
becomes easy by your grace.
21. You are the guardian of Rama's door,
none enters without your leave.
22. Sheltered by you, one gains all delight,
protected by you, one fears no one.
23. You alone can contain your glory,
the three worlds tremble at your roar.
24. Ghosts and spirits cannot come near,
Great Hero, when your name is uttered.
25. Disease is destroyed and all pain removed,
brave Hanuman, by constantly repeating your name.
26. Hanuman releases from affliction
those who focus on him in thought, word, and deed.

27. Rama the renunciant reigns above all,
you carry out all his work.
28. Whoever brings any yearning to you
obtains the fruit of immortal life.²
29. Your splendor fills the four ages,
your fame shines throughout the world.
30. You are the guardian of saints and sages,
the destroyer of demons, the darling of Rama.
31. You grant the eight powers and nine treasures,
such was the boon given by Mother Janaki.
32. You possess the elixir of Rama
and remain eternally his servant.
33. Singing your praise, one finds Rama
and forgets the sorrows of countless lives.
34. At death, one goes to Rama's realm
or is born on earth as his devotee.
35. Pay no heed to any other deity,
serving Hanuman, one obtains all delight.
36. All affliction ceases, all pain is erased,
when one recalls the mighty hero, Hanuman.
37. Victory, victory, victory to Lord Hanuman!
Be merciful even as is the Master.
38. Whoever recites this a hundred times
is released from bondage and gains bliss.
39. One who reads this Hanuman Chalisa
gains success—Gauri's Lord is witness.
40. Says Tulsidas, Hari's constant servant,
"Lord, make your abode in my heart."

(benedictory couplet)

Son of the Wind, banisher of affliction, embodiment of
auspiciousness,
dwell in my heart, King of Gods, together with Rama, Lakshmana,
and Sita.

Sankat Mocan Aṣṭak (Eight Stanzas to Sankat Mochan Hanuman)

1. In childhood you devoured the sun
and the three worlds became dark.
At this, the whole creation was terrified,

2. Some Hindi commentators interpret this as "obtains immortal fruit in this life."

for who could undo this calamity?
 Then the gods came and entreated you
 and you released the sun and averted the crisis.
 Who in the world doesn't know, Monkey,
 that your name is Sankat Mochan?

2. In dread of Bali, the monkey lord lived on a hill,
 and saw the Great Lord coming on the path.
 Surprised, the great sage then pronounced a curse,
 How could the poor fellow think of what to do?³
 Assuming Brahman form you brought the Lord
 And so banished the servant's [Sugriva's] sorrow.
 Who in the world doesn't know, Monkey,
 that your name is Sankat Mochan?

3. When you went with Angad in search of Sita
 the king of monkeys made this declaration:
 "No one will escape me alive, who
 sets foot here without bringing tidings."
 When everyone was staring at the sea, exhausted,
 you brought news of Sita and saved their lives.
 Who in the world doesn't know, Monkey,
 that your name is Sankat Mochan?

4. When Ravana was tormenting Sita
 and telling the rakshasis to bring her around,
 just then, Great Lord Hanuman,
 you went there, slaying mighty demons.
 When Sita asked the ashoka tree for an ember
 you gave the Lord's ring and removed her grief.⁴
 Who in the world doesn't know, Monkey,
 that your name is Sankat Mochan?

5. When the arrow pierced Lakshmana's breast
 his vital breath departed, struck by Ravana's son.
 You brought physician Sushena along with his house,
 then, Hero, you transported the Drona mountain
 and came, giving the *sañjivana* herb with your own hand,⁵
 thus you saved Lakshmana's life.
 Who in the world doesn't know, Monkey,
 that your name is Sankat Mochan?

3. The meaning of these two lines is unclear, as Sugriva is neither a "great sage" nor does he utter a curse on seeing Rama. The allusion may be to the curse of sage Matanga, which prevented Sugriva's brother Vali (Bali) from setting foot on the hill on which the former was staying, although this makes no sense in the context. Evidently, I am not the only one to be confused; the two Hindi prose glosses on the poem in my possession simply skip these lines.

4. The reference is to Sita's desperate decision, in the *Rāmcaritmānas*, to end the pain caused by her separation from Rama by immolating herself. Lacking a source of fire, she first requests a star to fall to earth, and then asks the ashoka tree, whose shoots have a reddish tinge, to release a "burning coal." It is at this moment that Hanuman, sitting on a branch above her, drops Rama's signet ring (which is sometimes thought to be studded with rubies, and hence resembles an ember); see *Rāmcaritmānas* 5.12.7–12, 5.12.

5. The name of the herb more commonly appears as *sañjivani*.

6. When Ravana, battling fiercely
 threw the serpent noose over everyone's heads,
 the Raghu Lord and his entire army
 became senseless in this awful affliction.
 Hanuman brought the lord of birds [Garuda],
 cut their bonds, and averted this calamity.
 Who in the world doesn't know, Monkey,
 that your name is Sankat Mochan?

7. When Ahiravana carried the Raghu prince
 along with his brother, to the netherworld,
 he conceived the favored stratagem of making them
 choice sacrifices to the goddess.
 Just then you went there as savior
 and slew Ahiravana with his whole army.
 Who in the world doesn't know, Monkey,
 that your name is Sankat Mochan?

8. You've done great work for the gods,
 Great hero, so look here and consider this:
 What troubles afflict a poor wretch like me
 that can't be removed by you?
 Quickly dispel, O Great Lord Hanuman,
 Whatever afflictions are mine.
 Who in the world doesn't know, Monkey,
 that your name is Sankat Mochan?

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Glossary

- acharya (*ācārya*): A spiritual preceptor exemplifying virtuous conduct (*ācāra*).
- adivasi (*ādīvāsī*): Literally, “first resident,” a neologism coined to translate English “tribal, aboriginal” and now widely used to refer to supposedly indigenous groups.
- akhara (*ākhārā*): A traditional center for gymnastics or training in wrestling or other martial arts.
- apsara (*apsarā*, also *apsaras*): A voluptuous celestial dancer, singer, and courtesan.
- arti (*ārtī*, *ārātī*): Literally, “supplication”; a ritual of worship of a deity or human exemplar, usually accompanied by the waving of a brass tray bearing a lighted lamp and accompanied by a song of praise, also called an “arti.”
- asura (*asura*): The “old gods” or elder cousins of the Vedic devas, who were cheated by the latter of the nectar of immortality (*amṛta*).
- Bhairava (*Bhairava*, also *Bhairoṃ*, *Bheru*): An awesome, ambivalent, and often transgressive form of Rudra/Shiva, widely depicted as a dark youth carrying a sword and severed head and accompanied by a dog.
- bhajan-kirtan (*bhājana-kīrtana*): Devotional chanting and singing, and also the texts performed in such sessions. In some regions, the latter term also refers to a performance by a professional narrator, incorporating storytelling interspersed with group chanting.
- bhakta (*bhakta*): One who practices bhakti; a devotee.
- bhakti (*bhakti*): Literally, “participation, sharing,” but more commonly translated “devotion.”
- bhuta (*bhūta*): A type of ghost capable of possessing people.
- Brahma (Brahmā): The “grandfather” of the Vedic devas and creator of the cosmos.
- brahmachari (*brahmacārī*): A practitioner of brahmacharya.
- brahmacharya (*brahmacarya*): A lifestyle characterized by morality and self-restraint and usually requiring strict celibacy.

- chakra (*cakra*): Literally, a “wheel” or disk; the discus weapon of Vishnu; in hatha yoga, one of the energy centers lying along the spinal column.
- chela (*celā*): A disciple or student.
- dacoit: An Anglicization of the Hindi *dākū*, a bandit or highwayman.
- daitya (*daitya*): “The offspring of Diti”; a category of or other name for an asura, one of the enemies (and elder cousins) of the Vedic gods.
- danava (*dānava*): “The offspring of Danu”; a category of or other name for an asura, one of the enemies (and elder cousins) of the Vedic gods.
- darbar (*darbār*): The “court” of a king or magistrate, or the temple of a deity.
- darshan (*darsāna*): Literally, “seeing”; eye contact with a deity or holy person, or the sight of a sacred place.
- dasa (*dāsa*): A slave or servant.
- Dasanami (*Dasanāmī*, *Daśanāmī*; “of ten names”): An order of renunciants said to date back to the ca. eighth-century philosopher Shankaracharya.
- deva (*deva*; fem. *devī*): A “god” or “goddess” (from the Sanskrit root *div*, meaning “to shine,” and etymologically related to modern English “divine,” etc.).
- Devanagari (*Devanāgarī*: “[Script] of the divine city”), the name of the alphabet most commonly used for writing Sanskrit, Hindi, and several other Indian languages.
- devar (*devara*): A husband’s younger brother.
- dharamshala (*dharamśālā*, *dharmasālā*): A hostel for pilgrims, often attached to a temple.
- dvapara yuga (*dvāpara yuga*): The third of the four ages in the classical Hindu time cycle.
- gandharva (*gandharva*): A supernatural being often imagined as a singer or musician in Indra’s court.
- ghat (*ghāṭa*): A “landing” on the bank of a river or reservoir, usually marked by a flight of steps descending into the water.
- hatha yoga (*haṭha yoga*): (Literally, “forceful union”) an ideology and praxis centered around postures and exercises aimed at physical health and spiritual perfection.
- jogini (*joginī*): A variant folk pronunciation of yogini—a female practitioner of yoga—also connoting a sexually aggressive woman who may possess supernatural powers.
- Kadali Vana (*kadalī vana*, Hindi: *Kadalī van*): A “plantain forest,” often said to be situated in the Himalayas, where immortal beings reside.
- kali yuga (*kali yuga*): The fourth and most debased of the ages in the classical Hindu time cycle.
- kama (*kāma*): One of the four “aims of life,” signifying pleasure or the satisfaction of (especially sexual) desire, and also the name of the love god.
- katha (*kathā*): A story, especially a religious tale; also, the oral narration of such a story.
- kirtan (*kīrtana*): A melodic devotional chant, usually of a series of divine names.
- krita yuga (*krta yuga*): The first and most perfect of the four ages in the classical Hindu time cycle.
- Kshatriya (*kṣatriya*): A member of the warrior-aristocrat class.
- laddu (*laddū*): A popular ball-shaped sweetmeat made from ghee and sugar combined with either chickpea flour (*besan*) or milk solids.
- langot (*laṅgoṭa*, also *laṅgoṭā*): A triangular piece of cloth fastened into an undergarment for covering the loins, and worn by athletes, sadhus, and manual laborers.
- Languriya (*Lāṅguriyā*, *Laṅguriyā*): “One having a long tail”; a trickster-like figure often identified with Hanuman.

- Langurvir (*Laṅgūra-vīra*): “Hero monkey/virile monkey”; a deity popular in north-western Indian and commonly associated with Hanuman.
- linga (*liṅga, liṅgam*): A rounded column or mound emblematic of Shiva.
- mahant (*mahant*): A traditional and usually hereditary proprietor or manager of a shrine.
- mantra (*mantra*): A sacred verbal formula imbued with spiritual power.
- murti (*mūrti*): A sacred embodiment, generally in the form of a sculpted image of clay, wood, stone, or metal.
- naga (*nāga, fem. nāgin*): A semidivine being in the form of a snake, especially a cobra.
- Naga (*nāgā*): A “naked” ascetic, but referring to armed sadhus of various orders.
- pahalvan (*pahalvān*): A wrestler.
- pahalvani (*pahalvānī*): The wrestling lifestyle, encompassing diet, exercise, and celibacy.
- pandit (*paṇḍita*): “Wise, learned”; a trained religious specialist or scholar, usually a Brahman.
- pir (*pīr*): A Sufi master.
- pishacha (*piśāca*): Sometimes translated “goblin,” but a type of unquiet ghost capable of possessing people.
- prana (*prāṇa*): The vital breath, wind, or air that pervades the cosmos; sometimes subdivided into five “breaths” (*pañca prāṇa*).
- prasād (*prasāda*): An item (usually food) offered to a deity or holy person and then returned to the devotee as a consecrated “leftover.”
- preta (*preta*): A type of ghost capable of possessing people.
- puja (*pūjā*): Ritual worship of a deity or holy person, usually with incense, flowers, lamps, water, and sweets, often accompanied by prayers or singing.
- pujari (*pūjārī*): One who performs *pūjā*, especially in an official capacity in a temple.
- Purana (*purāṇa*): An adjective meaning “ancient, old,” but designating a voluminous body of Sanskrit texts containing mythological, legendary, and ritual material.
- rakshasa (*rākṣasa*): Carnivorous beings with superhuman powers, often regarded as earthly embodiments of the asuras or elder cousins of the gods.
- rakshasi (*rākṣasī*): A female rakshasa.
- Rama-katha (*Rāma-kathā*): “The story of Rama,” i.e., the Ramayana, but also used by scholars (e.g. Bulcke) to encompass all written, oral, visual, and performance variants.
- Ramlila (*Rāma-līlā*): A performance of the Rama story, most often staged as an outdoor drama by amateurs during the Dashera festival.
- Ramraj (Hindi *Rām-rāj* or Sanskrit *Rāma-rājya*): The reign of Rama as king of Ayodhya, understood as a time of perfect prosperity and righteousness.
- Ravana (*Rāvaṇa*, usually glossed as “one who causes [others] to wail”): The king of the rakshasas and enemy of Rama.
- sadhana (*sādhana, sādhanā*): A disciplined regimen of spiritual practices, such as meditation, fasting, prayer, devotion, etc., aimed at a goal.
- sadhu (*sādhu*): A holy man, often an ascetic, who has taken religious vows.
- samsara (*samsāra*): Literally “wandering through [the world of transmigration]”; the process of repeated births and deaths, and the realm in which this occurs.
- Shaiva (*śaiva*): An adjective referring to devotees of Shiva (*Śiva*), and their religious ideology and practice.
- Shakta (*śākta*): An adjective referring to devotees of goddesses and of the feminine energy, shakti, and their religious ideology and practice.

- shakti (*śakti*): Power, energy, or life-force, thought to reside especially in goddesses and women; also, the female consort of a male deity.
- shastra (*śāstra*): A Sanskrit treatise purporting to systematically treat a body of knowledge or practice.
- shloka (*śloka*): The most common Sanskrit poetic meter, consisting of two lines each divided into two metrically-equal feet.
- Shudra (*śūdra*): In the classical Brahmanical social order, a member of the fourth class of serfs and servants. Ineligible for Vedic initiation, they are supposed to serve the three “twice-born” classes.
- siddha (*siddha*): Literally, “accomplished, perfected,” a term applied to spiritual masters, especially of the tantric and yogic traditions, and also to icons believed to be especially powerful.
- siddhi (*siddhī*): An occult “accomplishment” or supernormal power, said to be eight in number.
- sindur (*sindūra*): A paste made of oil and any of several red or orange pigments.
- soma (*soma*): A sacred (but now unknown) plant whose extracted juice was one of the key offerings in Vedic sacrifices, especially to Indra.
- svayambhu (*svayambhū*): “Self-born, self-manifest”; an adjective describing a sacred image believed to not be of human fabrication.
- tilaka (*tilaka*): A forehead decoration indicating religious observance and sometimes sectarian affiliation.
- treta yuga (*tretā yuga*): The second of the four ages in the classical Hindu time cycle, during the latter portion of which Rama appears on earth.
- Vaishnava (*vaiṣṇava*): An adjective referring to devotees of Vishnu (*Viṣṇu*), and their religious ideology and practice.
- vanara (*vānara*): A common Sanskrit word for monkey, probably derived from the word for forest (*vana*), and referring to an animal “of the forest,” though in practice used exclusively for simian species.
- vidyadhara (*vidyādhara*): Literally “bearer of wisdom,” a demigod or perfected human being.
- vira (*vīra*; Hindi *vīr*, *bīr*): A hero, often a warrior slain in battle and regularly propitiated at hero stones or mounds.
- Vishnu (*Viṣṇu*): The divine preserver of the cosmos, who periodically manifests through avatars.
- vrata, vrat (*vrata*): A fast or vow, especially popular among women, involving self-discipline, ritual, and the recitation or hearing of a “vrat story” (*vrata-kathā*).
- yaksha (*yakṣa*): A class of supernatural beings associated with natural sites, particularly rocks, trees, and ponds.
- yakshi (*yakṣī*): A female yaksha, usually pictured as a voluptuous woman entwined in vegetation.
- yantra (*yantra*): A (usually geometric) diagram associated with a deity, sometimes inscribed with mantras, and intended for use in meditation and worship.

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