



The Many Lives of an Iconic Monument: Angkor Wat in Cross-cultural Imagination

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Abstract

This essay discusses the cross-cultural histories of Angkor Wat. It writes about the narratives connected with the monument and its interlaced concerns in the cultural history of Southeast Asia.

Keywords: cross-cultural, histories, legacy, premodern,

Every once in a while, the history of humankind uncovers narratives of extraordinary achievements: individual or collective quest to leave a mark through exemplary expressions of the human intellect, emotion, talent, and imagination. The journey of human artistic endeavour, too, has its share of inspired moments and milestones when especially gifted artists have opened new vistas of perception and imagination, ways of seeing the world we inhabit, and ways of imagining worlds beyond. Art historians today shy away from professing aesthetic value judgments that accord superlative or canonical status to a few works of art largely because such pronouncements could be politically motivated and may relegate certain other art forms and their histories to the margins. Yet, human aesthetic sensibilities continue to be naturally drawn to the qualitative excellence of some artistic expressions over others. One such monumental legacy is the renowned 12th-century Angkor Wat, an iconic structure that stands tall to this day in Cambodia.



Fig. 1: Angkor Wat, Cambodia. Image: Parul Pandya Dhar

Angkor Wat's 900-year old biography begins with its conception as a state temple-mountain dedicated to Vishnu worship during the reign of Khmer king Suryavarman II (r.1113-1150 CE) in the first half of the 12th century. Conceived in line with the idea of the Meru mountain in Indian religious and literary imagination, and materialized through Khmer royal patronage, artistic genius, and local preferences, Angkor Wat has been a symbol of cross-culturalism since its very inception. The motif of the mythical mountain Meru as the mountain of gods located at the centre of the universe with its peak representing the highest point on earth is well known in Indian cosmology and cosmography.¹Meru is the *axis mundi*, the central mountain with four buttresses and the navel of the universe encircled by concentric rings of land and seas upon whose summit is the city of gods. The realm of gods in heaven finds a parallel in the realm of kings on earth and the universal emperor or *chakravarti* has often been compared with ideas represented by the Meru.²



Fig. 2: King Suryavarman II atop Mount Shivapada, third gallery, Angkor Wat. Image: Parul Pandya Dhar.

These interpretations of the Meru travelled as ideas, mental images, portable objects, and texts along trade routes and were translated in the Hindu and Buddhist architecture of ancient Cambodia. The iconography of Meru in Cambodia at once lends itself to multivalent readings—metaphysical, religious, and political.³The grandest of temple-mountains built in the image of Meru are found at Angkor in Cambodia. These have been conceived on stepped terraces with the abode of god on its summit and with moats, causeways, barays and dykes around the pyramid-mountain evoking the imagery of the continents and seas encircling the Meru of Indic texts. Beyond its metaphysical symbolism, the system of barays and dykes also provided a means to collect and channelize water for the agricultural needs of the ancient Cambodian population. As state temples of successive Cambodian kings, the temple-mountains became ritual and political centres of the successive Angkorian capital cities. What is more, Cambodian artistic genius localized the Indic Meru concept on the substratum



of its autochthonous belief in the supernatural powers of the mountain, in accordance with the ritualistic requirements of kingship and concerns of water management. A cultural idea or a mental image expressed in the form of verbal imagery of the Indian Meru generated newer visualities in the form of the Cambodian temple-mountains among which Angkor Wat enjoys a position of privilege.

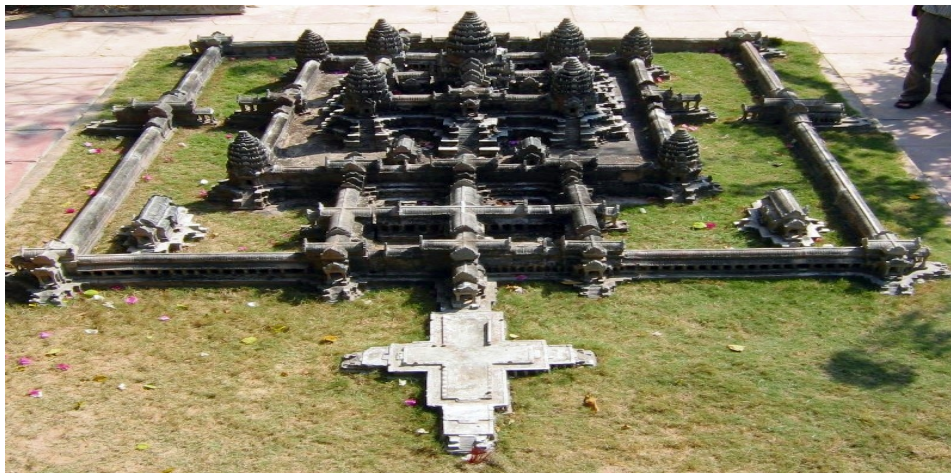


Fig. 3: Model of Angkor Wat by Dy Proeung. Source: Wikimedia Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

Just as art forms may be products of a cross-cultural imagination, they may also be reinvented through the act of being re-interpreted years, decades, and even centuries after their making.⁴ With time, Angkor Wat began to be cloaked in newer sheaths of meaning—inside and outside of Cambodia. Viewed through the prism of religious ideology, the patron-king of Angkor Wat, Suryavarman II, had established this temple's principal identity as Vaishnava to strike a distinct note from the dominant Shaiva belief systems that qualified the monuments of kings who had just preceded the making of Angkor Wat.⁵ Suryavarman II assumed the posthumous name 'Paramavishnuloka' to reiterate his personal devotion and identification to

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Vishnu even though his patronage to other Shaiva monuments is also well-recorded. After the death of Suryavarman II in c. 1150 CE and the subsequent ‘sack of Angkor’ in 1177 CE, the next powerful ruler of Angkor, Jayavarman VII (1180-1219 CE) chose Buddhism as the state religion and built the grand Buddhist Bayon temple in his city of Angkor Thom not far from Angkor Wat. When exactly the changing religious focus at Angkor impacted perceptions of Angkor Wat’s religious focus is difficult to indicate with precision, but the temple gradually began to be received as a place of Buddhist worship in Cambodian popular imagination.

Irrespective of its shifting religious focus, king Suryavarman II’s memorial temple, Angkor Wat, situated amidst a palimpsest of Cambodian cities, palaces, and temples, was singled out as a unique monument in modern Cambodia. The temple’s centrality in Cambodian popular and political imagination can best be understood by its persistent presence on successive Cambodian flags since the time of the French Protectorate in 1863. From this time onwards and through the changing political fortunes of Cambodia until the present, the main quincunx of temple-towers of Angkor Wat have, with minor variations in representation, become emblematic of Cambodian identity. Graphic representations of Angkor Wat have been the focus of Cambodian flags of the French Protectorate of Cambodia (1863-1941 & 1945-1953), Kingdom of Cambodia (1953-1970) and the Khmer Republic (1970-1975). The flags of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979) and People’s Republic of Kampuchea (1979-1989) also feature yellow silhouettes of the towers of Angkor Wat against a red backdrop. Angkor Wat has continued to be the central focus on successive flags of the State of Cambodia (1989-1991) and the current flag of Cambodia (1993 to the present).⁶

Angkor Wat’s cross-cultural histories have continued to exert influence well beyond the monument’s local reimagination as the emblem of a free Cambodian nation. India’s struggle



for independence from British colonial power during the latter part of the 19th- and early part of the 20th century went hand-in-hand with a search for cultural motifs and symbols that provided evidence of India's civilizational centrality in a pre-colonized Asia. Monuments such as Angkor Wat in Cambodia and Borobudur in Indonesia were perceived as symbols of India's immense contributions and cultural dominance over these regions. This emergent nationalistic zeal unwittingly overlooked Southeast Asian agency in the transfer and localization of Indic culture across Asia by perceiving Southeast Asian cultures as mere extensions of India's superlative contributions to the world. The role of Southeast Asian cultures in reimagining Indian cultural ideas and forms within an essentially Southeast Asian milieu was lost in the celebratory recognition of Southeast Asia as 'Greater India'.⁷ Changing perceptions of the nature of India-Southeast Asia cultural interactions over the past six decades or so have increasingly accorded greater agency to Southeast Asia in the assimilation and localization of Indian cultural ideas and forms. This shift in perception from notions of 'Greater India' to 'Indianization' to 'Localization' now seems to have come a full circle in academic writings. Southeast Asian cultures in Indian popular imagination, however, appear to still consider the presence of Indian cultural ideas and forms across Southeast Asia as direct transplants from India, ignoring the processes of selective assimilation and localisation of Indic cultural motifs by Southeast Asians. Some issues emerging from such a discussion through the lens of two Indian initiatives concerning Angkor Wat in the recent decades deserve further elaboration.

Replicating Angkor Wat in India: In the March of 2012, national and international news carried reports about a *bhumipujan* (foundation ceremony) for a grand project envisaged by the Mahavir Mandir Trust, Patna, to build a massive temple complex, 'Virat Angkor Wat

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Ram Mandir', in the likeness of Angkor Wat in the eastern Indian State of Bihar.⁸The chosen site was to be named 'Angkor Nagar'⁹—a sprawling area located about five kilometres from Hajipur in the Vaishali district of Bihar. The site was already sacred as the Ramayana heroes, Ram and Lakshman, are believed to have visited the place along with their guru, sage Vishvamitra. The idea then was to build a 'larger' replica of Angkor Wat which would enshrine the gods Ram-Sita, as well as Radha-Krishna, Shiva-Parvati, Ganesh, Surya, and the ten incarnations of Vishnu. Cloning or imitating Angkor Wat appears from these reports to have been a positive reaffirmation of the significance of Angkor Wat's special place as a grand monument for Hindu religious worship, especially Vaishnava worship. This positive affirmation of a Cambodian temple complex was simultaneously perceived as a direct extension of and consequence of forms of Hindu worship in India, especially the worship of Shri Ram and also the (proposed) consecration of a gigantic Shivalinga. This proposed contemporary reinvention of Angkor Wat in India in the shape of a Ram and Ramayana *mandir* is a selective appropriation of shared premodern cultural histories strategically reworked to suit the current motives and religio-political aspirations of a section of believers in India. It is, paradoxically, quite at variance with contemporary perceptions of Angkor Wat as a site of Buddhist worship in Cambodia.



Fig. 4: An earlier design of the proposed replication of Angkor Wat in Cambodia as ‘Virat Ramayana Mandir’ in Bihar, India. This design may have been further revised as per news reports. Source: <http://manavektamission.org/interfaith-harmony/bihars-muslim-community-donates-land-for-worlds-largest-hindu-temple/>.

Interestingly, Cambodian contemporary perception of the Indian project to replicate Angkor Wat—the face of their national identity—was far from positive. Their official response termed it as ‘a shameful act’—one that would “undermine the value of the country's best-known tourist attraction which has been a World Heritage Site since 1992”.¹⁰ In early June 2015, Cambodia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation lodged a formal objection with the Government of India on this issue. Their main contention was that “...this copy of Angkor Wat Temple for commercial benefit seriously violates the World heritage which is of a universal and exceptional value of humanity”..., that “the Angkor Wat Temple is the emblem that has been used in the Cambodian national flag for many centuries.” The Cambodian government requested India to seriously reconsider and stop the building of a replica of the Angkor Wat in India to “nurture the traditional historical relations between the



two countries and peoples.”¹¹ Replicating a ‘grander’ Angkor Wat in India was perceived by Cambodia as a challenge to its unique identity on the one hand and as a threat to the revenue generated through tourism in the Angkor area. It was reported that “the 12th-century site attracted 842,719 foreign tourists in the first four months of 2015, raising \$24.1 million from ticket sales.”¹² Subsequently, in September 2015, in order to ensure good diplomatic relations, the Indian government directed that adequate changes be incorporated in the design plan of the proposed Indian Angkor Wat temple complex to ensure that it was not a replica or a clone of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Angkor Wat and the name of the temple complex was changed to ‘Virat Ramayana Mandir’.¹³

The Cambodian objection to replicating an iconic site of worship in a contemporary world of copyright laws and infringements would have appeared strange to a premodern interconnected Asian cultural zone! The example of the Mahabodhi temple at Bodhgaya and the history of its replication in pre-modern times will help us understand this better. Bodhgaya emerged as a significant Asian Buddhist pilgrimage centre at least since the third century BCE (Maurya period) and has remained so to the present. In c. 400 CE, the Chinese pilgrim, Fa Xian, had recorded the presence of a simple Bodhi temple at Bodhgaya, made sacred by its immediate proximity to the Bodhi tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment. In the late-6th century (588), a Sri Lankan monk by the name Mahanama donated towards a dwelling for the Buddha at Bodhgaya. In the seventh century, the Chinese pilgrim-monk, Xuan Zang travelled to Bodhgaya and gave a detailed account of the Mahabodhi temple and its environs. The Mahabodhi at Bodhgaya has since seen several renovations in its long history, the most noteworthy among these being the Burmese interventions of the 11th and late-13th centuries.¹⁴



Bodhgaya's rising fame in premodern Asian Buddhist pilgrim circuits encouraged the production of miniature models of the Mahabodhi temple. About 15-20 centimetres tall, these temple models were portable and could be carried across long distances. John Guy has recorded at least 20 such miniature Mahabodhi replicas from the 10th-11th to the 15th centuries that survive to this day and belong to various parts of the Asian Buddhist world – a majority from eastern India, but also from Nepal, Tibet and Myanmar.¹⁵ Most of these tiny temple models are carved in dark grey schist stone typical of sculpture from Bihar in eastern India, most likely prepared in a stone carver's workshop near Bodhgaya. These miniature Mahabodhi replicas appear to have served multiple functions and carried multiple meanings – as pilgrim mementoes upon return from Bodhgaya, as meditational aids or three-dimensional *mandalas*, and as a token or gift for those who aspired to but could not undertake arduous pilgrimages from distant lands. The Mahabodhi replicas also served an important architectural role, inspiring the making of at least seven full-sized actual Mahabodhi temples in various parts of Asia, built in the near-likeness of the Mahabodhi prototype at Bodhgaya. These pan-Asian constructions of Mahabodhi temples include the Mahabodhi at Pagan in Myanmar (early 13th), which is the closest in form to the Bodhgaya Mahabodhi.¹⁶ Another copy of the Mahabodhi temple, the Shwegugyi pagoda, was built under the patronage of the Mon king Dhammaceti (c. 15th century) in lower Burma. Two Mahabodhi replicas – the 15th-century Wat Chet Yot (Chiang Mai) and at Chiangrai – are in northern Thailand, while another 16th-century Mahabodhi is located in Patan in Nepal and was built after a Buddhist priest, Abhayaraj, returned to Nepal after several years in Bodhgaya. And two Mahabodhi-inspired temples are known from the region of Peking, China, built during the 15th and 18th



centuries respectively, and resulting from the transmission of architectural models from India and Tibet.

The Mahavir Mandir Trust's mega-initiative to replicate Angkor Wat in India perceives the Cambodian temple as a monumental symbol of a glorious period of Hinduism, especially Vaishnavism, beyond the borders of India that also serves to reiterate India's cultural power in 'Greater India'. The replica built at a grander scale would be reinterpreted to reinforce special devotion towards Ram (as an avatar of Vishnu) at a site already held sacred by the visit of the Ramayana's hero in a remote past. What is more, the positive participation of the Muslim community of Bihar who donated and sold land belonging to them and thus helped in the actualization of a mega project of Hindu temple building in Bihar adds value to this initiative of the Mahavir Mandir Trust as it reflects well on the important social issue of communal harmony—much-needed in the present climate of communal strife in India.¹⁷ Cambodia's ire and objection towards the replication of Angkor Wat in India, on the other hand, does not perceive this imitation as a tribute to their monumental masterpiece or as an act of cultural diplomacy. In a historical context, the replication of an Cambodian Indic-inspired monument in India could be seen as a reciprocation of millennia-old practice of transfers of artistic ideas and forms across India and Southeast Asia. The Cambodian objection perhaps is best understood primarily as a perceived threat to its revenue-generating tourism industry and only secondarily as an affront to the nation's emblematic monument through the creation of a clone of grander dimensions in India.

Angkor as a Fifth *Dham* of the Hindus: A more recent news about the making of a fifth Hindu *dham* (sacred abode for pilgrims) in Cambodia, home to the world-renowned temple of

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Angkor Wat offers another perspective.¹⁸The chosen site was formally inaugurated on the 30th of May in Cambodia with a *bhumipujan* (ritual worship of the site) in the presence of Hindu followers from different parts of the world. According to Shri Indresh Kumar, Member, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), “Adorned with Angkor Vat temple, Cambodia should be given the status and pride of becoming the fifth pilgrim place of Hindus.”¹⁹The chief rationale for this project appears to be the grand Vaishnava temple of Angkor Wat in Cambodia. Five hundred acres of land has been acquired and 1008 *Shivalingas* established to mark the creation of a fifth *dham* for Hindus. The project is evidently well-funded. Its chief proponents perceive this enterprise as a ‘cultural investment’, an apt way to promote Hinduism beyond India, to revitalise historical links between South and Southeast Asian nations, to encourage trans-Asian pilgrim networks, and also to generate additional revenue through increased tourism in Cambodia.

Pilgrimage to sites rendered sacred by the visit of an exalted being, a holy event, a miraculous occurrence, a wondrous natural phenomenon, a sacred mountain-summit, or a meeting of rivers has been an established practice in India since ancient times. These sacred landscapes may also be energized by mythological associations, astronomical symbolisms, or other associated perceptions of the sacral. Historical records inform us about pilgrims who travelled long distances across Asia to such sacred places in India. In Buddhist practice, for example, by the early to mid-centuries of the first millennium CE, eight places visited by the Buddha came to be associated with the *ashta-mahapratiharyas* (eight great phenomena) and evolved as important Asian Buddhist pilgrim networks—Lumbini in Nepal, and Bodhgaya, Sarnath, Kushinagara, Sankissa, Shravasti, Rajgriha and Vaishali in north-eastern India. Buddhist belief in a cult of the relics meant that beyond these eight great places of pilgrimage



that the Buddha had visited, more *stupas* and pilgrim centres emerged across Asia. Hindu pilgrimage centres known variously as *tirthas*, *sthanas*, or *dhaams* also proliferated and became important foci for the devout to congregate, offer prayers and earn merit in this life and beyond—Kailash, Gangotri-Jamunotri, Sabarimalai, Badrinath-Kedarnath, Kashi, Chidambaram, Tirupati-Tirumala, and Kamakhya to mention a few. Among these are also the Vaishnava ‘Char Dham’ (Badrinath, Dwarka, Puri and Rameshwaram) and their corresponding Shaiva *tirthas* envisioned by the eighth-century Advaita theologian-scholar Adi Shankaracharya.

Pilgrim centres in all these cases, and in other belief systems such as the sacred Dargah Sharif of the revered Sufi saint Moinuddin Chishti at Ajmer in Rajasthan, however, have never been associated with the commemoration of royalty, or the establishment of earthly power, or the celebration of a political victory. To the contrary, these *tirthas*, *sthanas*, *dargahs* and *dham* have been perceived as places of extraordinary spiritual power and beauty where the mind and spirit could aspire to transcend the realm of earthly power and human attachments. Temples built to consolidate political authority through the medium of religion are on the other hand a distinct category, often known as state temples of kings. The Great temple of Tanjore (Thanjavur Brihadishvara) of Rajaraja Chola, the Gangaikonda-cholapuram of Rajendra Chola, and the Kailashanatha of Rajasimha Pallava at Kanchipuram in South India are a few among the well-known state temples in which the *lingas* enshrined in the temples’ sancta bear names of the respective kings suffixed with *ishvara* (Rajarajeshvara, Rajasimheshvara, and so forth) to establish a direct link between the deity and the king.

The chief focus around which the idea of a Cambodian *dham* for Hindu pilgrims is currently being imagined is the magnificent Angkor Wat with Vishnu as the patron deity. As



mentioned at the beginning of this article, the temple's architectonics symbolize the cosmic mountain Meru of Indic affiliation. But Angkor Wat is not just a sacred summit where Vishnu as the patron deity resides: It is a masterly embodiment of the residence of the king (Suryavarman II) in the likeness of god on earth, who is the invincible world-ruler (*chakravartin*) and eventually identifies with Vishnu to dwell as Paramavishnuloka after his death.

The long-spanning visual narratives in the sculpture gallery of the third enclosure of Angkor Wat are, again, not just simple visual translations of Hindu epic and puranic mythologies.²⁰ Each of the episodes—from the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, and *Bhagavata*—has been carefully chosen to become a powerful visual metaphor of the king's political power, administration, and expanding empire. The finely carved scenes portray scenes of punishments and rewards, and epic and puranic contestations and battle-scenes, alluding at the same time to Suryavarman-II in the likeness of Vishnu, who emerges as the undisputed victor. Amid these is a splendidly elaborate and inscribed visual narrative of a grand historical procession of the great king Suryavarman II himself, drawing divine authority from the lord of Mount Shivapada and assuming complete control over his vassal-chieftains.

Angkor Wat, the grand state temple of King Suryavarman II and the chief inspiration for building a fifth *dham* in Cambodia, it follows, does not fit the requisites for a *tirtha* or *dham*! It is, in fact, a magnificent celebration of earthly power. Angkor (derived from Nakor/Nagar) means city or state, and Angkor Wat translates quite literally as 'city-temple' or 'state-temple'. In fact, the sprawling Angkor as an expansive region in the heart of Cambodia harbours the successive state-temples of medieval Cambodian kings. The idea of 'Angkor as *dham*' suggests an ignorance of Cambodian history as well as the idea of a *dham*. What is

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more, in the nine centuries between the making of Angkor Wat and its present life, perceptions of the temple in a predominantly Buddhist Cambodian population have changed significantly. At Angkor Wat, imposing statues of Vishnu are lovingly dressed in yellow silk-satin and revered as forms of Buddha or as *Ta Reach*, and revered by Buddhists and Hindus alike, despite a general awareness that this was a Vishnu temple built by Suryavarman II and is carved with Hindu mythologies and narratives.



Fig. 5: Giant Vishnu sculpture worshipped by Hindus and Buddhists alike as *Ta Reach*, representing the king of ancestors and spirits, Angkor Wat. Image: Wikimedia Commons (Mark J. Sebastian)

Yet, contrary to the strong objection raised by the Cambodian government to the replication of Angkor in India, their reaction to the foundation-laying ceremony for building a Hindu



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dham near Angkor by a section of Indian and international believers is benevolent! This may be assessed from the encouraging participation and remarks of the Cambodian Minister for Information, Mr. Khieu Kanharith, at a function to celebrate the foundation-laying ceremony at Angkor in March 2018.²¹ Although difficult to comment with finality, this could perhaps also be in part because the making of such a Hindu international *dhamin* Cambodia funded by international patrons is also expected to substantially increase the already considerable tourist footfall in Cambodia.

Angkor Wat, a masterful embodiment of cross-cultural aesthetic, religious and political imagination, has lived many lives since the time of its making in the 12th century to the present, its monumentality assimilating the many accretions and layers of interpretations and reinventions over time. The connected cultural imaginations of a pre-modern world that created this iconic monument continue to live on in our cultural consciousness even as the monument is cloaked in renewed modern and contemporary visions of nation-states and of their people. Ironically, in both the recent interventions discussed here, the deeper histories of Angkor Wat's creative processes and impulses seem to be at odds with its contemporary imaginings.

Notes and References

Note: All web links included here have been re-accessed for confirmation on August 16, 2018 by the author.

¹See, I.W. Mabbett, "The Symbolism of Mount Meru," in *History of Religions*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (August 1983), pp. 64-83.



² Ancient Indian literature abounds in descriptive references to the Meru. For an eloquent poetic rendition of this theme, see “Raghuvamśam” (of Kālidāsa), vv. I.5—I.14 in *Works of Kālidāsa, Volume II: Poetry*, edited by C.R. Devadhar, Delhi: Motilal Banarasi Dass, 5th edition.

³ See, Parul Pandya Dhar, “Monuments, Motifs, Myths: Architecture and its Transformations in Early India and Southeast Asia,” in *Cultural and Civilizational Links Between India and Southeast Asia*, edited by Shyam Saran, pp. 325-345, Palgrave-MacMillan, 2018.

⁴ See, Richard H. Davis,

⁵ Vishnu, Shiva and Buddha were worshipped in ancient Cambodia from about the 5th-6th century CE. However, Angkorian kingdoms predominantly had Shiva as the patron deity prior to the making of Angkor Wat.

⁶ In between, there was a two-year interregnum when the United Nations transitional authority used a sky-blue flag with a white map of the Cambodian nation. For the various Cambodian flag designs, see <https://www.flagmakers.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Flag-of-Cambodia-A-Brief-History-Download.pdf>.

⁷ See, *Early Southeast Asia Viewed from India: An Anthology from the Journal of Greater India Society*, edited by Kwa Chong-Guan, Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2013, for a selection of articles conveying similar views.

⁸ See, for example, the report in Times of India dated March 5, 2012:

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/patna/Angkor-Wat-temple-Bhumi-pujan-today/articleshow/12141459.cms?referral=PM>. For similar coverage by CNN, Huffington Post, Gopal Post, see the following links: <https://www.pri.org/stories/2012-03-05/angkor-wat-temple-replicas-foundation-laying-begins-india>; https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/05/india-angkor-wat-replica_n_1322346.html; For a collection of several news reports spanning the period from 2012 to 2017, see the following link on the Southeast Asian archaeology website: <https://www.southeastasianarchaeology.com/tag/bihar/>

⁹ Angkor/Nokor means city or *nagar*, so ‘Angkor Nagar’ is actually a repetition of the same term rendered in Cambodian and Indian languages.

¹⁰ See, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/angkors-away-india-plans-larger-than-life-copy-of-cambodias-iconic-temple-7544677.html>. Several other local and international newspapers reported Cambodia’s misgivings on this issue. See, for example, <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/angkor-wat-is-no-1-landmark-but-indian-copy-inspires-fear-85053/>.

¹¹ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world/cambodia-lodges-protest-with-india-over-angkor-wat-replica/story-uabUo6a63Zf8d2DImW7AaP.html>.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ https://www.telegraphindia.com/1150915/jsp/frontpage/story_42742.jsp#.VgPy4suqqko.

¹⁴ See, John Guy, “The *Mahābodhi* Temple: Pilgrim Souvenirs of Buddhist India,” in *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 133, No. 1059 (June 1991), pp.356-367, for a detailed discussion.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Interestingly, the period of construction of the Pagan Mahabodhi coincides with the influx of refugee Buddhist populations from India into neighbouring regions and is within 20 years of the Burmese missions to Bodhgaya to conduct repairs.

¹⁷ See, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/patna/muslims-donate-land-for-world-s-largest-temple-in-bihar/story-AjT02wAJKzILThRe4drzcM.html>.

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¹⁸ This section of the article includes some parts of a piece first discussed by the present author in *The Wire*. See, <https://thewire.in/religion/hindu-dham-cambodia-rss-southeast-asia>. For the news report about the making of a Hindu *dham* in Cambodia, see, <https://www.oneindia.com/india/rss-to-provide-a-road-map-for-fifth-dham-in-cambodia-report-be-given-to-senior-leaders-2712907.html>.

¹⁹ <http://www.abplive.in/business/cambodia-the-home-of-angkor-vat-has-potential-to-be-the-fifth-hindu-dhaam-707735>.

²⁰ For a detailed account of the visual narratives of Angkor Wat, see, Vittorio Roveda, *Sacred Angkor: Carved Reliefs of Angkor Wat* (with photographs by JaroPoncar), Bangkok: River Books (n.d.).

²¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6sZ9Xg_Vfjs.

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