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Robert Eric Frykenberg

Constructions of Hinduism at the Nexus of History and Religion

The term “religion,” with all its variety of meanings, has no exact equivalent in India (South Asia). Moreover, the roles of religion and history in India are almost impossible to disaggregate. Nevertheless, at the heart of virtually all interactions between history and religion during the past century has been one overarching conceptualization. However casually and carelessly used, it has come to dominate discourse, contributing more than any other term to misunderstandings about the nature of important events. As a consequence, claims in its name can also be credited with having added, in some measure, to human misery. This soft concept, this jumble of inner contradictions which has existed at the nexus of history and religion for hardly 200 years, is “Hinduism.”

Hinduism lies at the center of any attempt to understand India today. It not only provided the eventual excuse (if not foundation) for the creation of Pakistan, but has also played a pivotal role within and around all that India has become since the eighteenth century. Yet, all of the elements in that loose and undefined complex of ideologies and institutions, which have been brought together under this name, together with all of the aggregate collage of what has also been “organized” and “syndicated” under its banner, did not just gradually (or naturally) evolve. Nor did Hinduism simply spring, full-blown, into being. Rather, it was *constructed*, piece by piece. At times and, in part, this was done inadvertently; and, at times or, in part, deliberately; out of materials and precedents which had already existed for a long time. As a concept, it is India’s twin.

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In other words, the label *Hinduism* has come to represent, all too simplistically, hosts of phenomena in contexts which often seem either incomprehensible or contradictory. It has been used to refer to structural features which, over the past few centuries, have characterized various cultural, social, political, and religious systems. By focusing attention upon actual events intimately connected to the origins and rise of this term, and upon institutional and ideological components and contexts surrounding those events and their trajectory, one can understand the interaction of history and religion in South Asia in a way that no other heuristic device can match.

For any number of reasons, the concept Hinduism, so bandied about throughout the world in popular parlance, has long suffered from what can only be described as multiple definitions. This multiplicity is itself a consequence of the historical circumstances in which the concept first arose and of the ways in which it has been shaped by historical events. At the very least, the distinction needs to be made between Hindu as a geographical concept designating anything and everything native to India, and Hindu as a category of ideas and phenomena more specifically cultural, social, and religious.

The first definition of this concept—anything native to the entire region of South Asia (or India)—can be characterized as comprehensively describing and encompassing phenomena of extreme complexity, multiplicity, and variety. This usage, begun by the ancient Persians and Greeks, if not earlier, ascribed no necessarily particular cultural, social, political, or other unity to the geographical area whereas, at the same time and in seeming contradiction to this perspective, it ascribed certain common peculiarities to all who lived within the geographical regions beyond the Indus. It is this paradoxically “nativistic” sense of the term which the Muslims acquired (or brought with them) and then applied to peoples whom they found within the continent. They used this term to distinguish between themselves as believers (or “holders of the faith”) and Native (or *Hindavi*) unbelievers (*kafirs*). This term, both in Arabic and in Persian, was also used to distinguish Muslims from India—those who were called *Hindavi*—from Muslims who came from other parts of the Islamic world. Still later, native non-Muslims of India used a similar term, *Hindutva*, to

distinguish between themselves and Muslim peoples or overlords. The regime (and rulers) of Vijayanagara is actually described in Sanskrit inscriptions as *hindurājasurātrana* (or *hindutva sultanat*). When early Europeans came into India—or South Asia—and described what they saw or experienced, they distinguished between peoples and things that were indigenous—labeled *Gentoo* and, later, *Hindoo*—and peoples or things that were not. In the early nineteenth century, long after the East India Company's Raj had established its paramountcy over India, it was still not uncommon for references to be made to “Hindoo Christians” and “Hindoo Muslims” as distinct from those who were not native-born or culturally indigenous to the subcontinent.¹

Even so, if one were to focus attention on separate human (anthropological or sociopolitical) elements alone, the number of distinct and separate ethnic entities—each with its own culture if not language—is enough to baffle and perplex. No one knows exactly how many distinct communities India as a continent contains: there could be 2,000, 3,000, or more separate peoples. Strictly speaking, no two of these groups, on grounds of practical policy, cosmic principle, or ritual purity were ever supposed to intermarry or interdine with each other. Deep convictions about purity of birth (*jāt*) and blood, and about preserving each birth-group or caste (*jāti*) from pollution, have helped to make this so.

1 Herman Kulke, “Maharajas, Mahants, and Historians: Reflections on the Historiography of Early Vijayanagar and Sringeri,” in Ann Libera Dallapiccola with S. Single-Ave. Lallemand (eds.), *Vijayanagar—City and Empire: New Currents in Research* (Wiesbaden, 1985), 125, refers to the Hejje inscription of Marappa (c. A. D. 1347). Joseph T. O’Connell, “The Gaudiya Vaishnava Symbolism of Deliverance From Evil,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, XCII (1973), 340–343, also indicates that the word Hindu appeared in Gaudiya Vaishnava texts of the sixteenth century, but only in texts describing strained relationships between Hindus as natives and Muslims as foreigners (*yavanas* or *mlecchas*). The term was never used by Hindus to describe themselves. *Hindu dharma* occurs seven times—four in Bengali texts—without definition, distinguishing native from nonnative elements. This indigenous usage is the closest earlier approximation to the modern term *Hinduism*.

Tatwa-Bhodachari (Roberto de Nobili) and Viramamuni (Joseph Constantius Beschi) did not write of Hindus, see details in Robert Caldwell, *A Political and General History of Tinnevely* (Madras, 1881), 232–244; John Kaye, *Christianity in India* (London, 1953); Peter J. Marshall (ed.), *The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1970) is a reprinting of such perspectives. For *Gentoo*, see Henry Yule and Arthur Coke Burnell (eds.), *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical, and Discursive* (London, 1886), 367.

Possible dire consequences to security, well-being, wealth, or welfare, as reflected in countless anecdotal narratives about immediate actions of social, political, and ritual stigmatization which have resulted from violation of norms relating to exclusivity of birth, have served to drive home hard lessons about maintaining biological apartheid. The rules of separate genetic identity, on the whole, became a fundamental so stark and so important to life that all other fundamentals paled in significance. Determinants of birth and earth, and of sacred blood and sacred soil, are still so important that no attempts to eradicate or reform caste (or birth-groups) have ever succeeded.²

A second, and much more recent, meaning of Hindu has increasingly come into use, especially during the last 100 years. This definition, no less complex, difficult to define, or more elusive, has become dominant. More a vehicle for conveying abstract ideas about institutions than for describing concrete elements or hard objects, Hindu came to be the concept used by people who have tried to give greater unity to the extreme cultural diversities which are native to the continent. Such efforts, even when they have involved only one way of looking at different kinds of cultural phenomena in India, have almost invariably been part of some institutional, ideological, or political agenda. As instruments for drawing all of India together, the program behind each effort has sometimes been overt and explicit; at other times, covert and hidden; or even, albeit rarely, simultaneously conscious and unconscious (or inadvertent).

Under this second definition, one can identify three main kinds of construction. These separate but interlocking kinds of

² From the standpoint of defining fundamentalism as defending the inerrancy of a sacred or ultimate text as *the* ground of Truth, here is that kind of text printed in the genetic code (DNA or genome) of each genus, which cannot be altered and from which there can be no appeal. See Walter K. Andersen and Sridhar K. Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism* (Boulder, 1987), 76. Efforts to remove this placing of primal and ultimate value in purity of birth ostensibly date back at least to the time of Gautama Siddhartha, the Buddha. Such efforts in this century include recent radical movements launched by non-Brahman or anti-Brahman Adi-Dravida, Adivasi ("Aboriginal People"), Buddhist, Christian, Islamic, Marxist, and tribal auspices under such leaders as "Thanthai Periyar" Erode Viramani Ramaswami Naicke, Bishop Vedanayagam Samuel Azariah, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, Maulana Muhammad Ilyas, and Manabendra Samuel Roy. See Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition* (Chicago, 1967), 36–64, 64–87, 132–154; Harold R. Isaacs, *India's Ex-Untouchables* (New York, 1964); Abdul Malik Mujahid, *Conversion to Islam: Untouchables' Strategy for Protest in India* (Chambersburg, Pa., 1989).

structuring defy easy or simple labels. Yet, for convenience, I call them: (1) the Logic of Brahmanical, or Bio-Social (Purity/Pollution) Separation; (2) the Logic of Regal/Imperial (Non-Brahmanical), or Contractual Integration; and (3) the Logic of Constitutional, or Indo-European (Orientalist) Synthesis. The logic of each structural system can also be seen as a process, sometimes congruent or partially overlapping the others. Separate sequences of events led to the formation of each of these kinds of structural systems. Together, or cumulatively arising from all three, they produced what we now call Hinduism. They, along with their metaphorical representations, serve to help locate and define those often countervailing centripetal and centrifugal forces within the continent which have radically changed social and political realities: they epitomize the interactions of history and religion in India (South Asia).

The first structure was Brahmanical in origin. A highly sophisticated system for categorizing all life; it lumped all mankind into a single category and then subdivided this category into a color-coded system of separate species and subspecies, genres and subgenres; and then ranked these hierarchically according to innate (biological, cultural, and ritual) capacities and qualities. The Brahmanical (Sanskritic) name for this ranked ordering, *varnāsh-rāmadharma*, was devised so long ago that its roots go back to the *Manu Smṛiti* (*Dharma Shastra*) if not to the *Rig Veda* itself. This term described a single and ordered, albeit highly stratified, hierarchical system that genetically accounted for inherent differences within all forms of life. It was an intellectual rationale for explaining inherently different properties (colors: *varnas*), or inequalities. This system of arranging and ranking different birth communities eventually became so dominant, so deeply entrenched, and so pervasive that no force has ever been able to break it. It became so dominant, philosophically and politically, that its rationale and its epistemology came to be regarded as virtually synonymous with Cosmic Law (*Dharma*).³

3 Monier Monier-Williams, *Brahmanism and Hinduism: Buddhism in Its Connexion with Brahmanism and Hinduism and Its Contrast with Christianity* (London, 1889), called this *Brahmanism*. His small book, *Hinduism* (1877; reprint edition, London, 1977), first brought the term into general use in the West. The word *Brahman* is an Indo-European cousin of our term *breath*. The term stood both for the class of priests, ritualists, and scholars who came into India with the Aryans, c. 2000 to 1700 B.C., and for Universal Spirit or Principle

Exactly how far this rationale for structuring all of society evolved and how it then came to be spread beyond the Brahmans themselves has been debated over the centuries. By virtue of extremely attractive, influential, and powerful abilities—clerical, cultural, intellectual, rhetorical, ritual, and political—Brahmans succeeded, long before the coming of Islam into India (c. A.D. 711), in so asserting themselves and insinuating their influence among important communities that their views were, in varying degrees, accepted.

Those whom they influenced (and those who patronized them), conveniently or opportunistically, they obligingly placed within the upper, or “twice-born,” stratas (*varnas*) of their epistemic model, just below themselves. These communities were those deemed as born, destined, and worthy to be rulers and warriors (*kshatriya*); or, communities born with entrepreneurial skills in banking, commerce, and industry (*vaishya*). Especially important was the dual role of the Brahman in relation to any ruler, whether that ruler was a mighty monarch or a petty lord over a tiny village: first, as the ritualist who could certify the legitimacy of rulership and noble status by reference to purity of birth and unbroken descent from either of two hallowed lineages, that of the sun (*suryavamsa*) or that of the moon (*chāndrvamsa*); and second, as the clerical administrator-bureaucrat whose advice and service, record-keeping, and meticulous management of details were deemed to be essential for assuring the security and permanence of any domain.⁴ In short, much of the higher civili-

(or Diety) which encompasses all existence. *Varnāshvāmadharma* means color-class, -category, -code, -order, -place, -ranking, or -status. William T. de Bary et al. (eds.), *Sources of Indian Tradition* (New York, 1958), 218–228; Arthur L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India* (London, 1954), 137–150.

Dharma/Karma, the most important concept in India’s entire high civilization, was developed within the Brahmanical/Sanskritic tradition. *Dharma* comprehends, at once, our words for religion, order, immutable law, duty, and proper conduct. Its twin, *Karma*, like the opposite side of a coin, stands for action and consequence which, when extended, becomes the immutable (cosmic) law of cause and effect.

4 Below these twice-born peoples, in every locality, were a fourth category of peoples (*Sudra*) whose “privilege” it was to serve the three categorical strata above them. A fifth stratum existed, below all else, but was not formally included. It was called *panchama*. People in this category were considered to be so menial and so polluting that they were beyond the pale and beneath notice: they were not only deemed untouchable, but unseen.

In many realms, prior to the Turkish conquests, Buddhist and Jain functionaries had been able to compete with Brahmans for influence in providing local rulers with these

zation, which had slowly emerged over several millennia (roughly between 3,000 B.C. and A.D. 1000), became the special preserve of Brahmanical influence, definition, and censorship. “Brahmans” became dominant in many royal courts and in courts aspiring to royalty.

The second structure, which served to define what it meant to be Hindu, arose from political logic (and necessity). It drew upon political theory, from misty antiquity and from Indo-Islamic or Indo-Mughal, and finally from Indo-British precedents. Due to their limited numbers, when compared to the vast domains which they conquered, Muslims, like all of their predecessors, turned to locally indigenous elites for support. The support that was essential for the stabilization and expansion of their respective regimes required much more skilled manpower than any single alien ethnic community or group—whether Turk, Persian, Arab, or whatever—possessed. Many of those to whom alien rulers turned for assistance, and upon whom they relied for support, came either from indigenous (Brahman and brahmanized) administrative elites or from local warrior elites (for example, Rajputs of Rajasthan, Marathas of Maharashtra, Telega, Velama, Kamma, and Reddi nayakas of Telengana, or Vellalar lords of Tamilaham). These elites, especially those who were bureaucrats and bankers, came from scores of separate castes in various part of the continent. They provided alien rulers with many age-old secrets of statecraft, secrets especially appropriate to local conditions. Such secrets were essential if any single small community or coalition of small communities were to preside, much less rule, over such vast numbers of culturally and ethnically separate peoples: peoples whose basic, if not primary, loyalties were defined by purity of birth. Borrowed from statecraft going all the way back to Chandragupta Maurya (c. 300 B.C.) came the essentially imperial (Kautilian) axiom of the Great (Many-Spoked) Wheel (*Mahāchakra*), or Great Umbrella (*Mahāchhatra*).⁵

Expressed also in the Persianized idiom of the Mughals, leaders of each important Hindu (meaning Native and/or non-

administrative skills. Thereafter, these groups, although still influential wherever they survived, dwindled in number and became increasingly marginalized.

5 Another concept, referring to the relations between unequal and equal entities, was the delicately balanced twin logics: logic of fish (*matsya-nyāya*) and logic of circles, or spheres (*mandala-nyāya*).

Muslim) elite community entered into a personal bond or familial contract with the ruler, Sultan or *Padshah*. Bonds of mutually beneficial relationships of loyalty and reciprocal obligations between client and patron were forged. Expressed in metaphors of shared salt: one was either salt-worthy (*namak-hallāl*: salt-true and trustworthy), or salt-unworthy (*namak-h arām*: salt-false and disloyal). By a delicate balancing of support from each and every important caste or community within each locality and within the larger realm—like the balancing of many spokes which tightly bound the elements of a distantly surrounding rim to a central hub—an intricate framework of personal bonds and contracts held together the many distant and far-flung elements of a Mughal emperor's realm. By such metaphors was an imperial edifice constructed. This system, however Islamic the exalted throne (*masnad mu'alla*) upon which its high rulers sat and however Islamic their own personal and household institutions, had to be Hindu in the political structuring of the bondings of loyalty. Bonds had, of necessity, to be developed between alien rulers and scores of indigenous communities over whom (and with whom) they ruled. To be Hindu, *Hindavi* or *Hindūtva*, in this sense, was to be part of an eclectic, syncretistic, and tolerant regime. Each elite community's separate identity, as manifested in its own ethnic purity and its own special rituals or symbols, had to be respected. Each group, however high or low, remained confined to its own family/community cantonment. If any regime were to survive and remain strong, given the highly segmented moral, social, and ritual structures which separated peoples from each other, no other political logic would work.⁶

Hindu, in this sense, did not refer to any one particular religion, certainly not to a single Hindu religion. Hindu as part of a political logic required a supporting ideology which attempted to provide an overarching and legitimizing authority for an imperial (or state) structure within which all communities and

6 Allowing a certain license for rituals belonging to a royal family, common, public, or imperial ceremonies acquired a kind of eclectic secularity. The larger the regime was, the more ceremonies were required.

This system of bonding does not mean that there were no tensions between the purely Islamic imperative of *Dar-ul-Islām* and the imperatives of *real politique*. Yet all great rulers in India, from Akbar to Nehru, have understood this tension and worked their magic within its constraints.

religions could coexist. Thus, a devout Muslim could be a reasonably good Hindu (Native, that is, Indian) without ever being obliged to set foot inside a temple or to worship the gods of *kafirs*. By this reckoning, each family/community, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, was Hindu—meaning that it was not only native to some locality within the continent but was subject to some regime within India, or what we now call South Asia.⁷ Each high, or important, family kept its own household religion and household gods—the higher and purer a family, the more it would insist upon having its own household gods and its own household places of worship. Temples, by this reckoning, were essentially the palaces of divine kings (who were, ipso facto, royal gods); and palaces were the temples of royal deities. What was Hindu about them was the fact that they existed within the continent or some region thereof (for example, Hindustan, Assam, Bengal, Gujarat, and Punjab).

But, efforts to construct this kind of Hindu identity (or Hinduism), with its political logic, was the antithesis of doctrinal/ideological exclusivism, or of any textual fundamentalism as we know it. Its purpose was not to *exclude* peoples within the bounds or under the authority of any integrating system; but, rather, to *include* as many peoples as possible. It could not and did not dare to become doctrinaire, in an ideological or religious sense, without running the risk of alienating people and, thereby, of threatening or undermining the structures of the system which it was trying to strengthen.

Thus when the “exclusivistic,” to coin a term, and fundamentalistic *ulema* expressed outrage at Emperor Akbar’s *Dīn Illāhī*—the synthetically fabricated ideology that he invented in order to integrate (and include) all his subjects within one huge “state religion” (if one may dare to employ such a composite metaphor)—they were also resisting an ideology specifically designed to strengthen the logic and authority of Mughal imperialism. Likewise, when the Marathas strove against the logic of Mughal imperialism and/or, conversely, when, as some historiography has continually claimed, they resisted the Emperor Aurangzeb’s centralizing policy with its ostensibly Islamic (or

7 Hinda and India are twins. To be Hindu, in this sense, was comparable to being European (*Farangi*) or American. It was the same as Indian.

fundamentalistic) features—resorting to *fitva* (or *fitna*: resistance) in order to establish their own *Hindutva* (Maratha-native) realm (*svarājya*), they were not doing so in the name of Hinduism as we know it today.⁸ The nativistic revivalism of Ram Das, notwithstanding, no “Hindu Nation” (*Hindu Rashtra*) of the kind now so militantly espoused by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Viswa Hindu Parishad (VHP), or Shiv Sena then existed. Maratha princes, from the Chitpavan (*Konkaneshtha*) Peshwas of Poona to the Chhatrapatis of Satara and the royal families (*rajavamshas*) of Baroda, Gwalior, Indore, and Nagpur, bowed before their own household, local, and native gods and would have fulfilled their own duties (*rajadharmā*). But, except for resisting imperial designs upon their own customs, domains, and traditions, their resistance against Islam would not have been in the name of some vast and all-inclusive Hinduism. Maratha *svarājya*? Certainly! But Hindu Nation in the sense now used? Almost as certainly not.

From another perspective, there *is* no single or *proper* sense of the term Hindu. On one hand, each community’s religion was its “own”: it was “Hindu” in the sense that it was confined to its own people; and each people’s particular religion (its own household gods and secrets) could belong to no other people without being polluted and devalued.⁹ Thus, what one worshiped or did not worship was one’s own or one’s family’s affair. If Muslims, Christians, and Jews, not to mention Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, and others worshiped within their own mosques, churches, synagogues, or temples, so also Brahmans of highest status, not to mention Kayasthas, Rajputs, and Baniyas (Sheths, Komartis, and Chettiars) worshiped in their own family shrines, temples, and puja rooms. In every hamlet and quarter, meanwhile, local goddesses required blood, and poorer, more lowly or backward peoples rendered it. In any case, what one worshiped or how one worshiped, or did not worship, did not make one more or less Hindu. In a communal or doctrinal sense, with each religion confined to its own people, there could be no question of being syncretistic or tolerant of the religions of others, especially since

8 See Andrew Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India: Agrarian Society and Politics under the Eighteenth-Century Maratha Svarajya* (Cambridge, 1986).

9 Even the term *private* is hardly appropriate, since distinctions between *private* and *public* as we think of them today (or as embodied in law), did not exist.

one had nothing to do with their religions. Hinduism was merely a case of mutual coexistence.

The term “Hindu,” in this sense, is confusing. Even more so is the phrase “Hindu religion.” Such confusions have become wonderfully convenient in serving the many kinds of interests and purposes of chauvinisms which have arisen in this century. As a case of synecdoche, such obfuscation, sometimes crude and sometimes insidious and subtle, has been made to serve an imperialistic ideal—giving a common name to everything that exists within *ritual* and *sacred* boundaries of “the Motherland” or “the Nation.” The fact that there is no clear marker between what is religious and what is political (that is, national) has been kept deliberately vague. Present-day movements such as the VHP, RSS, and Shiv Sena could hardly ask for anything better or more convenient.

The third structure that is indicative of what is now meant by the term Hindu is Indo-European. More precisely, it is Orientalist (the old term for structures of knowledge manufactured in India). In its origin, it also is truly Indian in the sense of being an amalgam of Indo-British (Anglo-Indian), Anglo-Brahman, and Anglo-Islamic elements. Both Indian (*Hindu*: indigenous) and European (*Parangi*) in its making, it was never exclusively British. Nor was it colonial, or even “Orientalist” in the dismissive and pejorative sense now in vogue.¹⁰

This construction, resting directly upon the foundations of the earlier two structures, saw the erection of a new kind of

¹⁰ Oriental scholarship, contrary to impressions conveyed in Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978), was never merely, only, or even a purely European construction. Nor, as he suggested, did Orientalism begin in the Middle of Near East with Napoleon. Rather, its origin and its fullest sense was a collaborative enterprise. It began in Persia, Bactria, and Greece: the term and some stereotypes linked to it are found in the work of Herodotus. In India, both native Indians and European Indians (Europeans long resident in India) worked together in producing it. For every European involved, there were hosts of natives/Hindus (whether of Madras, Calcutta, Bombay, or anywhere else) who made some of the most crucial contributions to this scholarship.

Like Hinduism, *India* and *Indian* are modern terms. Coined by the East India Company, they are the direct products of the process being described. John Stratton Hawley, “Naming Hinduism,” *The Wilson Quarterly*, XV (1991), 244, 30–34, traces Orientalism from ancient Persians and Greeks, through Marco Polo and Roberto di Nobili, to John Zephaniah Holwell, Nathaniel Braested Halhed, Horace Hayman Wilson, Rammohan Roy, Henry David Thoreau, Monier Monier-Williams, Max Muller, and Sarvetalli Radhakrishnan. See Frykenberg, review of Gauri Viswanath, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York, 1988), in *American Historical Review*, XCVII (1991), 272–273.

Hinduism and of Hindu self-consciousness as strategies for the careful and deliberate integration of all of India into a single entity. As with all previous regimes, indigenous resources—material, cultural, and intellectual—provided the means. Without Hindu (native Indian) manpower, money, and ideas, the Raj could never have come into existence; nor could it have been so firmly established and maintained. Madras, the first Anglo-Indian city-state, was inspired and supported by the Velugoti lords of Kalahasti and Venkatagiri, sanctioned by a contract (*sāsanam*) of Sri Ranga Ray III, the last scion of Vijayanagar reigning at Vellore. Its gold coin (*hūn*) was ritually minted within the sacred precincts of the Sri Venkateshwara temple-palace at Tirupati; its investments came from Komarti and Chettiar merchant-bankers; its armed forces were professional soldiers recruited from among local Baliga, Kamma, Kapu, and other martial peoples; and its administrative and diplomatic talent came from a mixture of local clerical and literate communities in and around Mylapore, Nungambakkam, and Triplicane. Local peoples, together with their local deities, benefited most from the new wealth that was generated. Such elites filled the armies and the bureaucracies of the East India Company as it constructed a new imperial system. The Raj, in other words, forged its grand all-embracing imperium out of earlier imperial institutions and ideologies that were appropriated and superimposed upon ideological, institutional, and material elements of the still earlier Hindu structures described above. The earlier epistemic, ontological, and ritual traditions of *varnāshramadharmā*, the color-coded and segmented system constructed by Brahmans, and the earlier structural features of *mahāchhakra* (and contractual *sanads* idealized in bonds of *namakhallāl*) as epitomized in various durbars, provided the cultural and imperial (and later, national) foundations for the Raj.

Denigrators of Orientalism give too much credit to Europeans and too little to hosts of Native Indians (mainly Brahmans and others imbued with Brahmanical world views; but also Muslims imbued with Islamic world views) for the cultural constructions (and reconstructions) of India. These Indian elites did as much to inculcate their own views into the administrative machinery and into the cultural framework of the Indian Empire as anything done by the Europeans whom they so outnumbered and with whom they worked so closely. To Europeans they imparted

not only their practical experience and political savvy, but also their prejudices about purity of birth. For this same reason other terms currently in vogue for purposes of denigratory epithet and scorn, like *colonial* or *colonialism*—used simplistically in many anticolonialist theories as pejorative and reductionist synonyms for *alien* (meaning European/Western/Racist) *domination* and *exploitation* of benighted and hapless peoples—tend to give off more heat than light. What went into the making of modern religions in India (South Asia) was much more complicated than the fashionable nostrums that are now so often constructed in the name of supposedly “disinterested” scholars.¹¹

The Indian Empire had already become a de facto Hindu Raj long before the rule by the East India Company ended. It became increasingly more so under the British Crown.¹² This development arose from two parallel and intermingling processes of further construction. Both, officially supported, established the substructures of modern Hinduism and provoked sharply religious, if not fundamentalistic reactions (both in Britain and in India) from communities that felt threatened by the newly rising Hindu Establishment. Together, these official developments—one *institutional* and the other *ideological*—brought into being elements that produced what is now known as “Organized,” or “Syndicated” Hinduism.

The first substructure was institutional, consisting of administrative and political actions or policies. It involved a gradual

11 The overall European-Indian ratio of officials in the civil services (not counting the military services) was over 1:1000. This disparity was greater in *mufassal* stations. Few, if any, European Orientalists or ICS officers in India doing oriental research were surrounded by less than a dozen to twenty high-caste and learned local assistants, consultants, informants, and investigators who did much, if not most, of the actual scholarly work. Peter Schmitthenwer, “Charles Philip Brown: The Legacy of an East India Company Servant and Scholar of South India,” unpub. Ph.D. diss. (Univ. of Wisconsin, 1991). That European servants of the Company gained fame from publishing their Orientalist findings without giving due credit to their Hindu (Native) mentors, and that their mentors did not complain does not alter the evidence of what they did. Jeffrey Russell, “Inventing the Flat Earth,” *History Today*, XLI (1991), 13–19, decries what he calls “chronocentrism—the assumption of the superiority of ‘our’ views to that of older cultures—[a]s the most stubborn remaining variety of ethnocentrism.” Such contempt for the past in relation to the superiority of a “more progressive” present seems as pervasive and subtle today as ever.

12 Frykenberg, “The Emergence of Modern ‘Hinduism’ As a Concept and As an Institution: A Reappraisal With Special Reference to South India,” in Gunther Sontheimer and Hermann Kulke (eds.), *Hinduism Reconsidered* (Heidelberg, 1989), 1–29.

takeover by the new Imperial State of all religious property, together with a systematic extension of State supervision and fiscal management of all charitable and religious institutions. The Company's Raj, through local governments known as presidencies and through a rationalizing system of laws and bureaucratic machinery, gradually established its sway. This sway, rising under the shadow of Mughal legitimacy, grew and spread, first in the Carnatic south and Bengal, and then over the whole continent, until the shadow of its own parasol (*mahachhatra*) covered all of India. The Raj had become *the* paramount power. Yet, the East India Company was aware of the fragility of its manpower resources and of the structures of loyalty undergirding its regimes. Through partnerships with local bankers, merchants, landed magnates, and temples, its city-states of Madras, Calcutta, and Bombay generated great wealth. Indigenous manpower and money provided the means for gradually building a professional army of *sepoys* and *sardars*; they, in turn, helped to conquer the country and to set up governments. Such resources also enabled the employment of an equally large professional service to carry on day-to-day administration under those governments.

Across the length and breadth of the empire were many tens of thousands of temples (as well as mosques, even some churches and synagogues in the south). Each of these temples was the royal palace of a local deity; each was supported by its own domains and endowments. Some of these were tiny, local god-houses; others were palace-temples. Some temple endowments and estates were so enormous that they constituted states or standing dominions in their own right. Revenues generated by endowments for such places—*inams* for temples, shrines, schools, and places of pilgrimage—were “alienated,” or tax-exempt. Such tax-exemption removed as much as 10 to 15 percent of all potential land revenues from the imperial treasuries. Yet, at an early stage of its rule, the Company's governments cemented the local loyalties of their imperial servants, soldiers, and supporters by confirming the tax-exempt status of most such endowments, especially those supporting religious establishments.¹³

13 Chandra Y. Mudaliar, *The Secular State and Religious Institutions in India: A Study of the Administration of Hindu Public Trusts in Madras* (Wiesbaden, 1974), was among the first carefully to study the complexities and intricacies of this subject. Her treatment of this development and its consequences is invaluable. See also Ernest John Trevelyan, *Hindu*

Not surprisingly, where amounts of wealth generated by religious institutions were substantial, struggles for control ensued. Such struggles, sometimes erupting into violence, but more often resulting in protracted litigation and controversy, brought pleas for State (imperial) intervention. As early as 1810, Hindu temple properties began to come under the management of local governments. Native (Hindu or Indian) officials took over the day-to-day control of religious and charitable endowments, managing them on behalf of the institutions which they were meant to support, sometimes even supervising daily rituals and calendar ceremonies. In Madras, for example, this process of gradually consolidating State control over Hindu institutions took more than a century (and is still going on). By decisions made in 1817, 1863, 1926, and 1952, for example, the Government of Madras set up its own system of controls: eventuating into the Hindu Religious (and Charitable) Endowments Board. At each stage, whether in courts of law or in legislative chambers, hosts of local functionaries and officials (*pujaris*, *stanikars*, pundits, vakils, judges, scholars, and others) became involved in day-to-day decision-making. In the process, the Government itself constructed a huge informational, institutional, and intellectual infrastructure for an officially supported reification of religion. In institutional terms, a modern and organized Hinduism, intermingling all sorts of previously unconnected elements, became part of the imperial establishment—something which had never before existed.¹⁴

Parallel to this institutional integration and consolidation within the imperial establishment ran a second process that contributed to the *ideological* and *intellectual* structures of this official

Law as Administered in British India (London, 1908), 552–594; Frykenberg, “The Silent Settlement,” in *idem* (ed.), *Land Tenure and Peasant in South Asia* (New Delhi, 1977), 37–53.

14 State-supported Hinduism was designed to be balanced, impartial, and inclusive—not only of existing Buddhist and Jain institutions, but also of Indo-Islamic, Sikh, Christian, Jewish, Zoroastrian, and other establishments. Here was Akbar’s *Din Il-illāhi*, a writ yet undefined, in which the State’s role was as neutral arbitrator and sustainer.

Findings summarized here come out of my own previous research and from many with whom I have been associated over the years. Especially important: Franklin A. Presler, *Religion under Bureaucracy: Policy and Administration for Hindu Temples in South India* (Cambridge, 1987); works by Carol Breckenridge Appadurai, “The Minakshi-Sundaresrarar Temple of Madurai: A History of Mythic Life and Ritual Exchange in South India since 1800,” unpub. Ph.D. diss. (Univ. of Wisconsin, Madison, 1976); Arjun Appadurai, *Worship and Conflict under Colonial Rule: A South Indian Case* (Cambridge, 1981).

kind of Hinduism. Hosts of Native and European scholars (pundits, mullahs, and others collaborating together in Oriental studies) worked for the East India Company from the late eighteenth century onward. Initially patronized privately by Warren Hastings, the first governor-general (1772–1786), and his successors, but later sponsored by private scholars and scholarly institutions throughout the world, detailed information from India's brahmanical and classical (Hindu or pre-Muslim) past came to light.¹⁵ These scholars collected, integrated, preserved, publicized, and continuously, with each successive generation, reconstructed an enormous structure of knowledge. This dynamic and ever-expanding structure conveyed, sometimes with romantic and fanciful embellishment, an image of the past such that had never been so fully known.

The “official” (or establishment) structure, in summary, consisted of at least five elements: (1) Hinduism as a nativistic synonym for all things Indian (or pertaining to India); (2) Hinduism as an ancient civilization, something clearly identifiable before 1800 and going back 5,000 years; (3) Hinduism, as a loosely defined label describing all socioreligious phenomena found or originating in India (comparable to, but less pejorative than, paganism as a label for nonmonotheistic religions in the ancient Graeco-Roman world); (4) Hinduism as an institutional/ideological instrument for the sociocultural and sociopolitical integration of an All-India (imperial or national) sway; and (5) Hinduism as a single religion which, with the coming of Swami Narendrath Datta Vivekananda to the First World Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893, was gradually recognized and then elevated by liberally minded and eclectic Western clerics into the rank of a world religion. A pragmatic, and sometimes, romantic blending of these five representations, as Hawley has argued, helped to reify Hinduism in popular imaginations. With Western impetus, this blending was then projected onto the world.¹⁶

15 Publication and distribution of materials is still patronized by the Government of India and by scholarly institutions the world over.

16 I am grateful to Eric J. Ziolkowski, “Heavenly Visions and Worldly Intentions: Chicago’s Columbian Exposition and World’s Parliament of Religions (1893),” *Journal of American Culture*, XIII (1990), 11–12, for documentation on this discovery and validation which, in fascinating detail, remains within the proceedings of that event: John Henry Barrows, *The World’s Parliament of Religions: An Illustrated and Popular Story of the World’s First Parliament of Religions* (Chicago, 1893), 2 v.; Hawley, “Naming Hinduism,” 30–34.

This codification of an “official” or establishment Hinduism as a conceptual framework is one of the most remarkable legacies of the Old Raj. The idea that “Hinduism” was a *single* and *ancient* religion gradually spread and solidified, becoming dominant and pervasive. In so doing, it created and perpetuated two accompanying myths. Both of these myths were expedient, if not essential, to the continued political integration of India (under the Raj); and both are no less expedient for the same political ends today. First, and above all else, was the belief that Hinduism is a benign, “inclusivistic,” and singular religion, epitomizing all that is eclectic, syncretistic, and tolerant in human behavior, doctrine, and ritual; second was the belief that Hinduism, as *the* religion of India, represents (and hence should command allegiance from) *the* majority of India’s (if not all of South Asia’s) peoples. Together, these two corollary subconstructions served to enfold or incorporate all indigenous peoples of the continent as being elemental parts of Hinduism. Through a process of incorporation by definition, they were implicitly codified and reinforced by a host of homogenizing and synthesizing All-India fiat. These fiats, in one way or another, *marked* the ethnic, linguistic, and religious identity of every person. The most important of these occurred with the Census of India (every decade from 1871); another occurred within the formal reports of the Linguistic Survey of India (from 1902). The detailed implementation of these registration measures was left to a predominantly Brahman and brahmanized (or Hindu) bureaucracy. By the time that these events took place, and as a consequence of electoral impulses set in motion after the great Reform Bills of Britain (1830 and 1870), this same bureaucracy had acquired a vested interest in defining an “organized” Hinduism as India’s “majority community” and majority religion, something quite distinct from various minority communities.¹⁷

This process of “inclusion by definition” embraced all life. As such, it allowed for the inclusion of all of India’s inhabitants,

17 Earlier local census reports of the Company, called *dehezadia*, drew upon precedents going back at least to Mughal times. Over a century ago, Sayyid Ahmad Khan sounded the alarm on the implications for Muslims of the combination of the census and democratic reforms. This fact has been reasserted in Hawley, “Naming Hinduism,” 23, again showing how many communities tried to distance themselves from Hinduism for economic, occupational, and political reasons. Frykenberg, “The Concept of ‘Majority,’ as a Devilish Force in the Politics of Modern Indian History,” *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, XXV (1987), 267–274.

whatever their forms of worship, however crude or sublime, however monotheistic, polytheistic, or nontheistic. At the least, this action included as “Hindu” those who fell outside the pale of purity, hundreds of millions who could never be allowed to defile or pollute the sanctity of proper dwelling-places. These fiats became devices for incorporating all aboriginals or tribals (*adivasis*) and *panchamas* (fifths: so-called outcast or untouchable peoples outside the Four-Color-Code or *Chatur-Varnya*)—peoples who currently account for some 20 percent of India’s population.¹⁸ At the same time, however, by a contradiction of this same logic, only two-thirds of imperial India’s population were defined as Hindus. All other peoples—Jews, Christians, Muslims, and sometimes, even Sikhs—were excluded from this category. (Today, by this same logic, over 80 percent of India’s current population, and all others seen as native to India’s pure and sacred soil, are defined as Hindu, however less than touchable some are deemed.)

In strictly utilitarian terms, any definition of Hinduism that allowed for the representation of ideologies/institutions/rituals that were essentially agnostic, benign, eclectic, and integrative of the whole continent and that drew all peoples toward each other or toward a central authority, served an “official” and politically acceptable purpose. In a continent so highly pluralistic, such a Hinduism helped to reinforce the construction of any single huge overarching political order, an order possessing a single all-embracing ideology or religion.

As noted earlier, a Hindu symbol for this all-embracing construction of a Hindu Imperium, was the Great Wheel (*Mahāchakra*). It is reemphasized because it has served every astute ruler from Ashoka (c. 300 B.C.E.) to the present. Akbar’s *Dīn Illāhī*

18 The Sanskritic concept of *Brahma/n*, the Supreme Divinity or Cosmic Principle, was a sublime synonym for All Existence and, in its Indo-European roots, for “all breath” or “all that breathed.” It was by this fiat of “inclusion by definition” that Gandhi was able to incorporate all of these same “polluting” peoples into Hinduism: he simply called them *Harijans* or “Children of Hari,” another name for Krishna, the avatar of the Vishnu. This ambiguity of definition resulted, in part, from questions of identity put into the Census of India and, in part, from such a large part of the population being deemed so polluting that they were denied access to proper or purified houses and temples. Much is known about Gandhi’s historic encounter with Ambedkar and other Untouchable leaders on this issue. Less is known about Gandhi’s encounter with Bishop Vedanayagam Samuel Azariah. See Susan Billington Harper, “Azariah and Indian Christianity in the Late Years of the Raj,” unpub. D.Phil. thesis (Univ. of Oxford, 1991), 277–317.

reconstituted the stone representation of the symbol (found in the temple at Konarak) at Fatehpur Sikri. He placed himself at the wheel's hub, surrounded by spokes representing every important ethnic or sectarian elite. By cementing personal, face-to-face bonds (*namak-hallāl*) with each community in turn, he sought to make himself Lord of all. The same special logic, with its essential blend of eclecticism, syncretism, and tolerance, characterized the Indo-British constructions of Orientalism. No ideology better served the structural strength and security of the Government of India. Later, when such Hindu norms were violated by arrivals from Britain who were ignorant of Hindu customs and the foundations of imperial rule, the Native Hindu gentry reminded them of such verities. In massive petition drives—for example, 30,000 signatures gathered in Calcutta (1827) to defend *Sati* (*Suttee*); 70,000 (1839) and 12,000 (1846) in Madras to demand better education and protection from unfair religious interference by missionaries—they vaunted their long proved attachment to the Raj and reminded British overlords that Hindoo blood freely flowed to establish an essentially Hindu (Indian) empire.¹⁹

The same kind of official orthodoxy was codified in scholarship from John Zephaniah Holwell and Nathaniel Braested Halhed to Monier Monier-Williams and Max Müller. The fifty-volume *Sacred Books of the East* from its publication until now has also served as a textual foundation for the construction of Hindu Nationalism. This particular Hinduism, constructed by the Company's Orientalist pundits and read in English and Indian-English texts, which translated and interpreted India's hallowed past, instructed and inspired nationalist leaders from Mohandas K. Gandhi to Jawaharlal Nehru. This perspective found its nationalist apotheosis (and *avatār*), if not its ultimate ideological reaffirmation, in the life, scholarship, and political career of Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan (president of India from 1962 to 1967).²⁰

19 Great Britain, *Parliamentary Proceedings*, "Sacred Petition of Calcutta (1827);" Great Britain, *Parliamentary Proceedings*, "Proceedings at the Public Meetings of the Hindu Community, Held in the Rooms of Patcheapah's Institution, On Wednesday, 7 Oct. 1846," Madras, 1846; George Norton, *Native Education in India* (Madras, 1848).

20 Max Muller (ed.), *Sacred Books of the East* (1894; New Delhi, 1965; reprint ed.), 50 v. See Sarvepalli Gopal, *Radhakrishnan* (New Delhi, 1989); Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (eds.), *A Sourcebook of Indian Philosophy* (Princeton, 1957), is still the standard work for the "Establishment" or "Secular Nationalist" Hinduism of the ruling Indian National Congress (and its later incarnations), as also, in some measure, for some rank-and-file members of communist, socialist, and other movements in India.

A special kind of official Hinduism evolved: this development served first, to integrate all Hindu (meaning, native Indian) agencies and institutions, most notably all temples, under the protective administration of one great single institutional umbrella (*māhāchhatra*) provided by the State; second, to provide an ideological cover for all Hindu (meaning, native Indian) religions, sects, and scholarly traditions under a benignly eclectic, syncretistic, and tolerant—officially neutral (under the British) and secular (under the Congress of Nehru)—umbrella. In other words, integrative doctrines, furnished by the axis of Brahmanical-European Orientalism, nourished and strengthened the foundations not only for the praxis of the empire but also for the nation which superseded it.

But circumstances arose whereby this officially supported Hinduism eventually aroused fires of opposition. More abrasive, more exclusivist, and less tolerant forces of religion arose that rubbed each other the wrong way and brought about violent conflict. This happened both within India and within Britain. Akbar and his successors had to face rebellion from Islamic extremists, insomuch that Mughals of Aurangzeb's regime have ever since remained infamous for anti-Hindu intolerance and repression (justifying reactions by Marathas, Sikhs, and others). Certain groups, by giving offense or perceiving offense, either could not or would not allow such policies to stand unchallenged. Similarly, under the Company, from the 1790s but especially from the 1830s onward, there were reactions to this Hinduism from Christians, Muslims, and Sikhs (and, in this century, from various sets of Untouchable communities).

Christian protests against “unfair” advantages accorded to institutional and ideological forces of “heathenism” arose both locally and from overseas. Christians in India (both Native and European), especially those who were of a more evangelical, exclusivistic and, sometimes, even fundamentalistic outlook, became outraged at what they saw as favoritism. Word reached Christians in Britain that officials of the Indian Empire were actually administering temple endowments, making renovations, and overseeing rituals; receiving public recognition and titles for upholding order or proper religious homage of one deity or another; and some, even Europeans, were not only making personal

endowments to temple deities but were contributing funds to support ritual observances, doing so with ostentatious munificence.²¹

Since, by decree, ceremonies conducted within temples had come, in one way or another, under either direct or indirect supervision of the Government, this involvement of officials was hardly surprising. Ceremonies in South Indian temples, from the largest and oldest temples of Kanchipuram, Madurai, Srirangam, and Tirupati to the smallest, meanest, and newest shrines springing up beside busy thoroughfares or in remote villages, involved participation by minions of the Madras Government. Officials of the government not only took control of temple revenues and repairs, but stood watch over its ritual practices. Sepoys and sawars, some of them Christian but many more Muslim (and, later, Sikh), were required to stand on parade and salute local deities, or to attend blood sacrifices, remaining prominently visible at important religious ceremonies; Company functionaries collected tolls from pilgrims and taxes at fairs and festivals. Government officials, both military and civilian, were required to attend celebrations (regardless of private convictions, or violations of private conscience among Christian or Muslim officers), and government officials commandeered huge drafts of involuntary labor from hundreds of thousands of menials who were annually required to pull enormous temple cars (*ratha*-s), many falling and being propitiously crushed under the giant wheels.²² Even temple dancing, music, and prostitution, involving hundreds of thousands of *devadasis*, came under the tolerant jurisdiction of the State.

From one end of the Empire to the other, heaven-born and twice-born (*dvija*) officials of the Company sat like deities. Each district office (*kachhari* or *cutcherry*) was itself like a temple—with circles within circles of functionaries, standing attention like priests to make sure that only the cleanest and worthiest could penetrate into the innermost sanctum. There, in dark and mysterious seclusion, like a graven image, sat the *Huzur* (or Divine

21 Appadurai, *Worship and Conflict*, deals with the involvements of the Parthāsārathi Svami Temple of Triplicane. I do not concur with many of its arguments or its perspectives, but it provides data that is useful to the argument here.

22 The term *jugger*, coming from Jagannath, Lord of the Universe and avatar of Vishnu, entered the English vocabulary with the meaning: any relentless destroying force or object that crushes whatever is in its path.

Presence)—the term by which each such deity was actually addressed. Few could approach the hallowed presence, and then, only through ranks of properly qualified intermediaries. To make petitions or prayers without propitiatory offerings was futile: gatekeepers and doorkeepers had to be properly propitiated by agents or brokers (*vakils*) who were employed. These, like priests entering a temple, understood the proper protocol and the appropriate offerings. If petitioners were polluting, access could be all but impossible. Untouchables sometimes had to lie face down in the dirt, some thirty or fifty yards away, begging for someone to notice them and to take up their cases. Proper (*pukka*) buildings, rooms, bridges, and roads were too pure to be defiled by such creatures.²³

Exactly how each separate religious or sectarian community in South Asia came to terms with this official kind of Hinduism and how each reacted to situations of momentous consequence for their future survival are questions having relevance for any consideration of later relationships between a recent, reified, communal Hinduism, which also emerged, and many communities in India.

Christian interactions with the new Hinduism were mixed. Initially, Christians in India received little help or comfort from the Company. Most of India's Christians, even those converted in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century mass movements, lived in areas far from the Company's direct control (Tanjore, 1731–1799; Tinnevely, 1786–1801; and Travancore, 1799–1840). Long opposed to European missionaries within its domains, although occasionally exploiting a few who worked outside its own domains, the Company remained aloof to petitions. Native Christians begged in vain for redress from persecution. Only the gradual rise of an Evangelical lobby among the Company's European servants within the Court of Directors and their forging of a strong coalition of merchant and missionary interests in Parliament forced grudging concessions from the Company, in the Charter Renewal Act of 1813.²⁴

23 See Paunchkouree Khan, *The Revelations of an Orderly* (Benares, 1848); Frykenberg, "On Roads and Riots in Tinnevely: Radical Change and Ideology in Madras Presidency During the Nineteenth Century," *South Asia*, IV, (1982), 34–52.

24 Ainslie T. Embree, *Charles Grant and the East India Company* (New York, 1964) remains the classic work on this issue.

Yet, even after English missionaries began to enter into Company territories, and bishops established ecclesiastical structures in India, they encountered increasing resistance. Hindu establishments—with State participation in Hindu ceremonials and rituals—were already too deeply entrenched. Despite all of their powers as Lords Spiritual in Parliament, the Church of England in India remained subject to the Company's governments. These could and did overrule decisions of Church clergy and prelates (and unhappy relations with the Government of India were to continue to 1947). In shock and consternation, as the full implications of the situation began to dawn upon them, European Christians in India tried to take action. Hundreds, official and non-official alike, instigated by the Bishop of Madras, signed petitions (in 1835). Their plea was for all official connections with "heathen" institutions and practices to cease. But hope for relief from governments in India was soon dissipated. Their "conspiracy" was not appreciated: many of the disillusioned, including the bishop, were sternly reprimanded; and not a few, including General Peregrine Maitland, were forced to resign. Those who left India joined the Anti-Idolatry Connexion League in Britain, launching a pamphlet campaign against policies of the Company's "Hindu" governments.²⁵ Yet, after all such efforts, despite years of lobbying by missionary societies against violations in India of self-proclaimed government neutrality in matters of religion, little of substance was altered. Concessions that were made turned out, in the long run, to be more cosmetic than real.

On another plane, intellectual and ideological encounters between persons of particular and different religious persuasions entered a new phase with the advent of modern scholarship and translation. European and Indian scholars, in collaboration with each other, translated biblical texts from Hebrew and Greek into Sanskrit and Arabic, and into the many regional and local languages; and translated classical Indian (Sanskrit, Tamil, Arabic,

25 For a good treatment of frictions between the Church of England and the governments of India, see Harper, "Azariah and Indian Christianity."

Among a dozen Anti-Idolatry Connexion League pamphlets in the British Library, see No. VI: *A View of the British Connexion with Idolatry in the Madras Presidency* (London, 1841). See, for context, Frykenberg, "Conversion and Crises of Conscience Under Company Raj in South India," in Marc Gaborieau and Alice Thorner (eds.), *Asie du Sud, Traditions et changements* (Paris, 1979), 311–321.

and Persian) texts into European languages. In the process of employing the classical and other languages of India for purposes of religious and philosophical discourse, European scholars also engaged pundits and mullahs in serious debate (without insult, invective or slur).²⁶

Resistance to radical changes, especially to conversion, was another matter. Not surprisingly, cultural, institutional, religious, or social changes—especially radical conversion (to Christianity) or reform touching long entrenched domestic customs—were profoundly disturbing. The roots of religious extremism and revivalism, if not of fundamentalisms, whether from Hindu (non-Muslim: Buddhist, Christian, Jain, Jewish, Sikh, or Parsee) or Muslim (Hindu-Muslim or native Muslim) communities, can be seen as coming out of reactions to radical changes and to perceived threats against basic elements of “the old order.” Established customs and traditions which had long existed within each birth group (*jāti*) or domestic or sectarian community, especially those held by families of the entrenched elites, were too sacred and too sensitive.

But here was an irony. Despite the many changes which had enhanced the influence of Brahman and other high-caste (Hindu) elites within governments of the Indian Empire and changes which had brought about, however implicitly to the rulers and ruled alike, a massive “Hinduization” of the continent—and, perhaps because of such changes—there never was a time, from the late eighteenth century onward, when nativist reactions to radical changes in matters of religious or social consequence did not occur somewhere. Sometimes these were fierce, sometimes massive, and sometimes both fierce and massive. Often these were provoked by some perceived violation of custom or some perceived threat to purity. Institutions such as birth, caste, custom, duty, place, rank, or status were matters so hallowed that they, in themselves, constituted the most sacred fundamentals of religion. Where threats against sacred institutions came from attacks against doctrines and ideologies underpinning those institutions, whether against scriptural sources of authority or against philosophical foundations of authority, reactions became intellectual or polem-

26 Richard Fox Young, *Resistant Hinduism: Sanskrit Sources on Anti-Christian Apologetics in Early Nineteenth Century India* (Vienna, 1981), 173

ical. Whatever their character, whether institutional or ideological, such threats were seen as actions designed to undermine traditions, established order, and religion: the *dharm* and *sanathana dharm* of high-born non-Muslims (and the *dar-ūl-Islam* of Muslims).²⁷ As often as not, non-Muslim reactions also came from Brahman and brahmanically cultured individuals and groups who were not officials employed within the Empire.

Thus, by the nineteenth century, even while a New (All-India) Hinduism was in the process of being formed within and around official establishments, there were those, both inside and outside these establishments, who somehow felt threatened by rapid changes and who reacted against these changes. Among such changes, perhaps none was more disrupting than that initiated outside official control or sanction by increasing numbers of Christians from Europe, especially newcomers fired by the revivalistic fires of Evangelicalism and Pietism. Some of these European Christians, officials and missionaries alike, directly challenged the old ways and the old religions. They did so by not only launching frontal attacks upon existing heathen beliefs, customs, and practices, but by also conducting massive conversion campaigns and by establishing attractive educational programs. Such attacks, especially when they were insensitive or insulting and, worse yet, if they were threatening or seemed threatening, triggered responses in defense of *dar-ūl-Islām* and *sanathana dharm*. The cumulative effects of such reactions, if and when they ever combined, could be deadly. Indeed, having already helped to provoke the Vellore Mutiny of 1806 in South India, the same kinds of cumulative reactions were eventually to spark that much more serious conflagration in North India commonly known as the Great Rebellion (or Great Mutiny) of 1857.²⁸

On a more down-to-earth or popular level, incipient progenitors of modern movements also organized. As institutional

27 "Hinduization" means both a sociopolitical and a cultural-technical integration (especially in communication and transport) within the continent, and a religious-institutional and religious-ideological integration of many peoples throughout India—processes that, as shown here, intermingled in complex ways. Muslim heart-searchings and reactions to change were as traumatic as those suffered by Hindus. See Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (Cambridge, 1972); Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India* (Princeton, 1982); David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation* (Princeton, 1978).

28 Frykenberg, "New Light on the Vellore Mutiny," in Kenneth Ballhatchet and John Harrison (eds.), *East India Company Studies: Papers Presented to Professor Sir Cyril Philips* (London, 1986), 207–231.

efforts to defend the old order, or to reform it, albeit it reluctantly when or where unavoidable, many of these movements became radically and self-consciously “Hindu.” Defensive, exclusivist, fundamentalistic, militant, or revivalist, their purpose was to “purify” the “sacred soil” from pollution and to do so by means of radical “reconversion” (*shūddi*: purification). Attitudes toward any ethnic or religious community not deemed to be properly Hindu, meaning not legitimately indigenous or *native* to Mother India (*Bharat Mata*), became increasingly hostile and intolerant, if not violent. Radical conversion movements were, in effect, modeled after comparable movements coming out of the Abrahamic traditions. Quite explicitly labeling themselves Hindu, they saw themselves as defenders of Hinduism (*Hindutva Dharm*). These “Hindu” movements, in varying degrees, blended together nativist elements which are peculiar to many, if not all, radical conversion movements (especially those which are fundamentalistic); and they did this with a particular kind of nationalistic fervor.²⁹

As seen in South India, for example, such movements made their initial appearance in reaction to earlier mass movements of conversion to Christianity (among Shanars and Vellalars for example). The Vibuthi Sangam, the Dharma Sabha, and the Chatur Veda Siddhantha Sabha (known in Madras as the Salay Street Society) arose during the 1820s to the 1840s. In aggressive exclusiveness and fundamentalism, they were forerunners of the Arya Samaj, the Nagari Pracharini Sabha, the Hindu Mahasabha, and the RSS, which later grew up in the north and west of India. These movements, in turn, led to others even more extremist and revivalist. Chief among the most militantly revivalistic groups which, in this century, have recently followed paths begun by earlier movements are *jagarans* of the Dharma Sansad, the VHP, the Virat Hindu Sammelan, Hindu Samajotsav, Bajrang Dal, and the Shiv Sena.³⁰

29 One of the best overviews of these developments is Embree, *Utopias in Conflict: Religion and Nationalism in Modern India* (Berkeley, 1990).

30 Less strident and more open to others were some members of the Hindu Literary Society, the Madras Hindoo Association, the Madras Native Association, and even the Madras Mahajana Sabha. These groups can be compared with such Bengali institutions as the Hindu College or Brahma Samaj.

Christopher King, “The Nagari Pracharini Sabha (Society for the Promotion of the Nagari Language and Script) of Benares, 1893–1950: A Study in the Social and Political History of the Hindi Language,” unpub. paper (Univ. of Wisconsin, Madison, 1974).

All such radical movements in the post-Independence period have either appropriated or absorbed the institutional trappings of the official Hinduism that developed under imperial auspices during the nineteenth century. What has been constructed out of this blending of earlier elements is a culminating manifestation of Hinduism which, whatever its historical roots, is different from anything India has previously known. Often referred to as “organized” or “syndicated” Hinduism, it now possesses a much more discrete and reified form, and has acquired a denomination-alistic or world-religion character. A modern phenomena, this Hinduism is not only proselytizing in its aims, but chauvinistic, exclusivistic, fundamentalistic, and even imperialistic, in its demands. It aims, in its most extreme form, to represent *all* the pure peoples of India (and, by inference, claims authority also over *all* other peoples, if not over all life). Its protagonists insist that, as “*the majority community*” in and of India, they both represent and speak for all (perhaps by divine fiat). Hinduism thus claims rightful dominance as *the* religion (*dharma*) for all peoples in South Asia.³¹

Constructions of Hinduism are related to all religions in South Asia, including those which deem themselves to be non-Hindu religions. There is no religion in South Asia which is not, in some sense, Hindu. All religions have had to come to grips, in one way or another, with the overwhelming presence of one or more of the many constructions of Hinduism. Without discussing how each particular religious system has been influenced by one feature of Hinduism or another and how deeply penetrating or widely pervasive that influence has been, it is possible to pinpoint the indicators that illustrate the incredibly pervasive strengths of Hindu structures.

First, there is no religious community in India which has not been profoundly influenced by Hindu notions of pollution/purity, insomuch that careful regard and scruples about birth and contact are ubiquitous, along with ideas about social ranking and cultural

showed how defensive many Hindus in North India were becoming by the end of the nineteenth century. *India Today*, 11 May 1986, 30–39.

31 The concept of *Syndicated Hinduism* comes from Romila Thapar, “Syndicated Moksha?” *Seminar*, CCCXIII (1985), 14–22; Frykenberg, “The Concept of ‘Majority,’” 267–274.

status. What and how one drinks, eats, avoids bodily products (fluids, excrement, and so forth), and mixes with other living beings (family, other people, and animals) are matters of no small concern. The range of sensitivities to slights is enormous. Second, arising from this fact, is the distinctive character of both the structures and strengths of families in South Asia. The sense that many institutions come and go but that families are forever is all-pervasive. Third, as a further consequence, whether in ideas or customs and rituals, there are few in India (South Asia)—Muslims, Jews, Christians, as well as Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, and Animists—who have escaped attitudes and notions which arise out of one or more of the constructions of Hinduism which we have examined. In some degree, all religious groups and communities in South Asia are Hindu or “Hinduized”: even those which deny and negate their “Hindu-ness” tend, by such strivings, to demonstrate how profoundly they have been touched by the presence of Hinduism.