RELIGION
in Indian History

Edited with an Introduction by
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Aligarh Historians Society

Tulika Books
‘He [the Mughal Emperor Akbar] cared little that in allowing everyone to follow his own religion he was in reality violating all religions.’

Fr. A. Monserrat, *Commentary on his journey to the Court of Akbar* [1580–82], translated by J.S. Joyland, Cuttack, 1922, p. 142

‘Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people.’

Karl Marx, ‘Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right’ (1844)
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Preface

The Aligarh Historians Society organized, with the assistance of the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi, and the Project of History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture, a panel on Religion and Material Life at Mysore on 29–30 December 2003, alongside the 64th session of the Indian History Congress. Most of the chapters in this volume were, in their initial versions, presented as papers at that panel. I am most grateful to the contributors who came to Mysore and threw open their papers to lively discussions. In addition, I am grateful to Mrs Feroza Athar Ali, who has permitted us to reprint the article on the Islamic Background to Indian History by the late Professor M. Athar Ali, to Professor Osamu Kondo for permission to include his paper on the Theologians’ Declaration of 1579; and to Professor D.N. Jha for permission to reprint a large part of his address to the Indian History Congress (January 2006) on Constructing the Hindu Identity. Professor Kamlesh Mohan let us have her paper on Sikhism and women, after our panel had been held. My own paper on Kabir is a much revised version of what I had earlier published in Social Scientist.

The subject of Religion in Indian History is so vast that a volume like ours can hope to cover only bits and pieces of it, especially when our contributors wish to take up specifically defined themes in order to study them in some depth. The Introduction picks out four themes across our past (including prehistory), but it is intended more to raise questions or offer tentative hypotheses than to present an overarching survey of the field. I should mention that for Section 4 of the introduction I have drawn heavily on certain drafts I had prepared for my chapters in UNESCO History of Humanity, Vol. 4, and History of the Civilizations of Central Asia, Vol. 5.
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Dwijendra Narayan Jha

In this historiographical format India, i.e., Bhārata, is timeless. The first man was born here. Its people were the authors of the first human civilization, the Vedic, which is the same as the ‘Indus–Saraswati’. The authors of this civilization had reached the highest peak of achievement in all arts and sciences, and they were conscious of belonging to the Indian nation, which has existed eternally. This obsession with the antiquity of the Indian identity, civilization and nationalism has justifiably prompted several scholars, in recent years, to study and analyze the development of the idea of India. Most of them have rightly argued that India as a country evolved over a long period, that the formation of its identity had much to do with the perceptions of the people who migrated into the subcontinent at different times, and that Indian nationalism developed mostly as a response to Western imperialism. But not all of them have succeeded in rising above the tendency to trace Indian national identity back to ancient times. For instance, a respected historian of ancient India tells us that ‘the inhabitants of the subcontinent were considered by the Purānic authors as forming a nation’, and ‘could be called by a common name—Bhārati’. Assertions like these are very close to the Hindu jingoism which attributes all major modern cultural, scientific and political developments, including the idea of nationalism, to the ancient Indians. Although their detailed refutation may amount to a réchauffé of what has already been written on the historical development of the idea of India, I propose to argue against the fantastic antiquity assigned to Bhārata and Hinduism, as well as against the historically invalid stereotypes about the latter, and thus to show the lack of substance behind the ideas which have fed the monster of Hindu cultural nationalism in recent years.

II

The geographical horizon of the early Aryans, as we know, was limited to the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent, referred to as Saptasinghavā, and the word Bhārata in the sense of a country is absent from the entire Vedic literature, though the Bharata tribe is mentioned at several places in different contexts. In the Asvadhyayī of Pāṇini (500 BC) we find a reference to Prācyā Bhārata in the sense of a territory (jānapada) which lay between Udīcya (north) and Prācyā (east). It must have been a small region occupied by the Bharatas and cannot be equated with the Akhaṇḍabhārata or Bhārata of the Hinduva
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Dwijendra Narayan Jha

I

The quest for India’s national identity through the route of Hindu religious nationalism began in the nineteenth century and has continued ever since. In recent years, however, it has received an unprecedented boost from those communal forces which have brought a virulent version of Hindu cultural chauvinism to the centre stage of contemporary politics and produced a warped perception of India’s past. This is evident from the indigenist and propagandist writings which support the myth of Aryan autochthony, demonize Muslims and Christians, and propagate the idea that India and Hinduism are eternal. In an effort to prove the indigenous origin of Indian culture and civilization, it has been argued, though vacuously, that the people who composed the Vedas called themselves Aryans and were the original inhabitants of India. They are further described as the authors of the Harappan civilization, which the xenophobes and communalists insist on rechristening after the Vedic Saraswati. Such views have received strong support from archaeologists whose writings abound in paralogisms, and from their followers, whose work is dotted with fakes and frauds. A notable instance was the attempt to convert a Harappan ‘unicorn bull’ into a Vedic horse so as to push the clock back on the date of the Vedas and thereby identify the Vedic people with the authors of the Harappan civilization. This obsession with pushing back the chronology of Indian cultural traits and with denying the elements of change in them has taken the form of a frenzied hunt for antiquity. We see a stubborn determination to ‘prove’ that the Indian (‘Hindu’ is the synonym in the communal lexicon) civilization is older than all others and was, therefore, free from any possible contamination in its formative phase.

II

The geographical horizon of the early Aryans, as we know, was limited to the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent, referred to as Saptasindhava, and the word Bharata in the sense of a country is absent from the entire Vedic literature, though the Bharata tribe is mentioned at several places in different contexts. In the Astadhyayi of Panini (500 BC) we find a reference to Pracya Bharata in the sense of a territory (janapada) which lay between Udycya (north) and Pracya (east). It must have been a small region occupied by the Bharatas and cannot be equated with the Akhandabhārata or Bharata of the Hindutva
camp. The earliest reference to Bhāratavarṣa (Prākrit Bharadhvāsa) is found in the inscription of Kharavela (first century BC), which lists it among the territories he invaded – but it did not include Magadha, which is mentioned separately in the record. The word may refer here in a general way to northern India, but its precise territorial connotation is vague. A much larger geographical region is visualized by the use of the word in the Mahābhārata (composed over the period c. 200 BC to AD 300), which provides a good deal of geographical information about the subcontinent, although a large part of the Deccan and the far south does not find any place in it. Among the five divisions of Bhāratavarṣa named, Madhyadeśa finds frequent mention in ancient Indian texts; in the Amarakosā (also known as the Nāmalingānaśāsana), a work of the fourth–fifth centuries, it is used synonymously with Bhārata and Āryāvarta; the latter, according to its eleventh-century commentator Kṣirasvamin, being the same as Manu’s holy land situated between the Himalayas and the Vindhya range. But in Bāha’s Kādambarī (seventh century), at one place Bhāratavarṣa is said to have been ruled by Tārāpiḍa, who ‘set his seal on the four oceans’ (dattacatuṣāśamudramudraḥ); and at another, Ujjaini is indicated as being outside Bhāratavarṣa, which leaves its location far from clear. Similarly, in the Nītīvyayamāta of Somadeva (tenth century), the word bhāratīyaḥ cannot be taken to mean anything more than the inhabitants of Bhārata, which itself remains undefined.

Bhāratavarṣa figures prominently in the Purāṇas, but they describe its shape variously. In some passages it is likened to a half-moon, in others it is said to resemble a triangle; in yet others, it appears as a rhomboid or an unequal quadrilateral or a drawn bow. The Mārkandeya Purāṇa compares the shape of the country with that of a tortoise floating on water and facing east. Most of the Purāṇas describe Bhāratavarṣa as being divided into nine divas or khandas, which, being separated by seas, are mutually inaccessible. The Purānic conception of Bhāratavarṣa has much correspondence with the ideas of ancient Indian astronomers like Varāhamihira (sixth century AD) and Bhāskaracārya (eleventh century). However, judging from their identifications of the rivers, mountains, regions and places mentioned in the Purāṇas, as well as from their rare references to areas south of the Vindhya, their idea of Bhāratavarṣa does not seem to have included southern India. Although a few inscriptions of the tenth and eleventh centuries indicate that Kuntala (Karnataka) was situated in the land of Bhārata, which is described in a fourteenth-century record as extending from the Himalayas to the southern sea, by and large the available textual and epigraphic references to it do not indicate that the term stood for India as we know it today.

An ambiguous notion of Bhārata is also found in the Abhidhānacintamani of the Jaina scholar Hemacandra (twelfth century), who describes it as the land of karma (karmabhūmi), as opposed to that of phala (phalabhūmi). Although he does not clarify what is meant by the two, his definition āryāvarta (which may correspond with Bhārata) is the same as that found in Manu. In fact, Āryāvarta figures more frequently than Bhārata in the geo-historical discourses found in early Indian texts. It was only from the 1860s that the name Bhāratavarṣa, in the sense of the whole subcontinent, found its way into the popular vocabulary. Its visual evocation came perhaps not earlier than 1905 in a painting by Abanindranath Tagore, who conceived of the image as one of Bangamātā, but later, almost as an act of generosity towards the larger cause of Indian nationalism, decided to title it “Bhāratmātā”. Thus, it was only from the second half of the nineteenth century that the notion of Bhārata was ‘forged by the self-conscious appropriation and transposition of discourse at once British-colonial, historical, geographical and ethnological, as well as received Puranic chronotopes’.

In many texts Bhārata is said to have been a part of Jambudvīpa, which itself had an uncertain geographical connotation. The Vedic texts do not mention it; nor does Pāṇini, though he refers to the jambu (the roseapple tree). The early Buddhist canonical works provide the earliest reference to the continent called Jambudvīpa (Jambudīpa), its name being derived from the jambu tree which grew there, having a height of one hundred yojaras, a trunk fifteen yojaras in girth and outspreading branches fifty yojaras in length, whose shade extended to one hundred yojaras. It was one of the four mahādīpas (mahādīvāpas) ruled by a Cakkavatti. We are told that Buddhhas and Cakkavattas were born only in Jambudīpa, whose people were more courageous, mindful and religious than the inhabitants of Uttarakuru. Going by the descriptions of Jambudīpa and Uttarakuru in the early Buddhist literature, they both appear to be mythical regions. However, juxtaposed with Sihaladīpa (Sīhaladīvāpa or Sī Lanka), Jambudīpa stands for India. Aśoka thus uses the word to mean the whole of his empire, which covered nearly the entire Indian
subcontinent, excluding the far southern part of its peninsula.28

Ambiguity about the territorial connotation of Jambūdvipa continued during subsequent centuries in both epigraphic and literary sources. In a sixth-century inscription of Toramāpa, for instance, Jambūdvipa occurs without any precise territorial connotation.29 Similarly, the identification of Jambūdvipa remains uncertain in the Purānic cosmological schema, where it appears more as a mythical region, than as a geographical entity. The world, according to the Purāgas, ‘consists of seven concentric dvipas or islands, each of which is encircled by a sea, the central island called Jambūdvipa’.30 This is similar to the cosmological imaginings of the Jainas who, however, placed Jambūdvipa at the centre of the central land (mahāloka) of the three-tiered structure of the universe.31 According to another Purānic conception, which is similar to the Buddhist cosmological ideas, the earth is divided into four mahādvipas, Jambūdvipa being larger than the others.32 In both these conceptions of the world, Bhāratavarṣa is at some places said to be a part of Jambūdvipa, but at others the two are treated as identical.33

Since these differently imagined geographical conceptions of Bhārata and Jambūdvipa are factitious and of questionable value, to insist that their inhabitants formed a nation in ancient times is sophistry. It legitimates the Hinduva perception of Indian national identity as located in remote antiquity, accords centrality to the supposed primordiality of Hinduism, and thus spawns Hindu cultural nationalism.34 All this draws sustenance from, among other things, a systematic abuse of archaeology by a number of scholars, notably B.B. Lal. The Pañcatantra stories, Lal tells us, are narrated on the pots found in the digs at Lothal,35 and the people in Kalibangan cooked their food on clay tandurs which anticipated their use in modern times.36 The Harappans, his sciolism goes on, practised the ‘modern Hindu way of greeting’ (namaskaramudrā); their women, like many married ones of our own times, applied vermilion (saumār) in the parting of their hair and wore small and large bangles, identical to those in use nowadays, up to their upper arms. They are said to have practised fire worship (which is attested through the Vedic texts and not by Harappan archaeology!) and to have worshipped the linga and yoni, the later Śaivism being pushed back to Harappan times. An attempt is thus made to bolster an archaic and ill-founded view – supported and recently revived by several scholars37 – that the Harappan religion, which, accord-

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ing to the Hindu cultural nationalists was in fact ‘Vedic-Hindu’, was ‘the linear progenitor’ of modern Hinduism.38

III

Those, including some supposed scholars, with an idée fixe about the incredible antiquity of the Indian nation and Hinduism have created several stereotypes about Hinduism over the years, especially recently, and these have percolated down to textbooks. A few sample statements from two books randomly chosen adequately illustrate the point: ‘Hinduism [is] a very old religion . . . Sanatana dharma i.e. the Eternal Spiritual Tradition of India. 39 The Vedas are . . . recognized . . . as the most ancient literature in the world. The term ‘sanatana’ is often used to highlight this quality . . . freedom of thought and form of worship is unique to Hinduism . . . In Hindu history no example of coercion or conversion can be found . . . there is no conflict [in Hinduism] between science and religion.43

The above passage contains several cliches which lend support to militant Hindu cultural nationalism. One of these – the imagined ‘oldness’ of what has come to be known as Hinduism – has been an obsession with Hindu rightist groups, and needs to be examined in the light of historical evidence. It is not necessary to go into the etymological peregrinations of the word ‘Hindu’, derived from ‘Sindhu’, on which much has been written. It would suffice here to state that the earliest use of the word, as is well known, can be traced back to the Zend Avesta, which speaks of Hapta Hindu (identical with the Rigvedic Saptasindhuva) as one of the 16 regions created by Ahur Mazda. The word retained its territorial connotation for a long time and did not acquire any religious dimensions. According to one scholar,44 the earliest use of the word ‘Hindu’ in a religious sense is found in the account of Hsuan Tsang, who tells us that the bright light of ‘holy men and sages, guiding the world as the shining of the moon, have made this country eminent and so it is called In-tu’ (the Chinese name for India being Indu, moon).45 But the religious affiliation, if any, of these ‘holy men and sages’ remains unknown, which hardly supports the view that Hsuan Tsang used the word In-tu (Hindu) in a specifically religious sense – indeed, the later Chinese pilgrim I-tsing questioned the veracity of the statement that it was a common name for the country.46

Similarly, the suggestion that the use of the word ‘Hindu’ in a religious sense began immediately after the conquest of Sind by
Muhammad ibn Qāsim in 712 is hardly tenable. It has been asserted that the ‘Hindu’ was ‘now identified on a religious basis’ and that ‘conversion from this Hindu religion’ was now possible. The sources bearing on eighth-century Sind indicate the existence of several non-Islamic religions and sects of Brāhmaṇism and Buddhism, denoted by the Arabic compound barhīmah-samāniyyah used by the classical Muslim writers. But the word ‘Hindu’ in their writings had a geographic, linguistic, or ethnic connotation. In the Chachnāma, for example, hinduvān means Indians in general and hindavī stands for the Indian language. The first use of ‘Hindu’ in the religious sense is found in the Kīab-ul-Hind of Alberuni (AD 1030), who at one place distinguishes Hindus from Buddhists, but at another holds the distinction to be between śramanas (Buddhists) and brāhmaṇas. He states that ‘they [Hindus] totally differ from us in religion’. Alberuni’s understanding was limited to Brāhmaṇical religious beliefs and practices, and his use of the word ‘Hindu’ was far from clear and coherent. It is, therefore, not possible to credit him with any definite or essentialist view of a Hindu religion, much less treat his perception as a landmark in the development of Hindu religious identity. The ambivalence surrounding the word ‘Hindu’ continued for a long time, so that even three centuries after Alberuni we find Ziyāuddin Barani, the first Muslim to write the history of India (known as the Tarikh-i-Firūzshāhī), making frequent references to Hindus (Humīd and Hindu’ān), either as a religious category or as a political one and sometimes as both. In the sixteenth century, despite Akbar’s familiarity with and patronage of non-Islamic religions of India, Abū-‘l-Faḍl could do no better than ‘merely give resumes of Brāhmaṇism . . . presumably because this was the most prestigious’, and these are nowhere near the notion of a Hindu religion. Half a century after his death, the anonymous author of the Dabistān-i-Mazāhib, who claimed to present a survey of all religions and sects, devoted one full chapter to the religion of the Hindus and other Indian sects, but failed to provide a clear understanding of what was intended by the use of the term ‘Hindu’. In his work, the word means the orthodox Brāhmaṇical groups (smartians) as well as the non-Islamic belief systems of various schools, sects, castes and religions of India. At some places, the rubric ‘Hindu’ includes Jainas and at others it excludes them, along with the Yogis, Sanyāsīs, Tapasīs and Chārvakas. A similar vagueness in the connotation of the word is seen more than a hundred years later in the history of Gujarat called the Mirat-i-Ahmadī, authored by ‘Ali Muhammad Khan (1761), who uses it ‘as a term of reference for people of all religions, castes, sub-castes, and professions who can be classified as a group different from the Muslims’ and ‘reckons the Jain clergy (Shevra) and the laity (Shrvakas) as Hindus even though he is aware of the difference in the religious persuasions of, as well as the antagonism between, the Jains and the Vaishnavites (Maishris)’. The fuzziness of definitions of ‘Hindu’ and ‘Hinduism’ is thus unquestionable. This is rooted, to a large extent, in the fact that Arabic and Persian scholarship describes all non-Muslim Indians as ‘Hindus’.

What possibly added to the ambiguity surrounding the word is the fact that Indians did not describe themselves as Hindus before the fourteenth century. The earliest use of the word in the Sanskrit language occurs in a 1352 inscription of Bukka, the second ruler of Vijayanagara’s first dynasty, who described himself with a series of titles, one of them being hinduvara suratāra (Sultan among Hindu kings). His successors continued to use this title for 250 years, ‘until as late as the opening years of the seventeenth century’. In North India, Rāṇā Kumbha was the first to style himself as hindusuratāra, in an inscription dated 1439. Despite the use of the title by royalty, the word ‘Hindu’ does not occur in the mainstream Sanskrit literature until the early nineteenth century, with the rare exceptions of Jonarāja’s Rājatarangini (1455–59), which uses the word as part of the compound hindugaṇa, and Śrīvāsa’s Jain Rājatarangini (1459–77), which refers to the social customs of the Hindus (hindukasamācāra) and their language (hindsthānavāra), as distinct from the Persian language (pāraśīhāsaya) and also mentions a place called Hinduvādā (modern Hindubata, 15 miles north of Sopore). The three Sanskrit texts of the Gaudīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, ranging from the early sixteenth to the late eighteenth centuries, do not mention the word ‘Hindu’ at all, nor does it occur in the Brāhmaṇa Utpala commentary written by the famous Gaudīya Vaiṣṇava Ādīra Baladeva Vidyābhūṣāṇa (1750), who tried to ‘affiliate the Krishna Chaitanya tradition with “official” Advaita Vedanta’. It was not before the first half of the nineteenth century that the word ‘Hindu’ begins to appear in the Sanskrit texts produced as a result of Christianity’s encounters with Brāhmaṇical religion. Among the religious debates and disputations of the early nineteenth century, centring round the alleged superiority of Christianity vis-à-vis Brāhmaṇism, an important controversy was generated
by John Muir's evangelist critique published as Mataparāksā (in Sanskrit) in 1839, which provoked three Indian pandits to defend their religion.67 One of them, Haracandra Tarkapancānana, in his reply to Muir, impugned him as hindudhamāvin (Hinduism's great foe)68 and laid down conditions for becoming eligible [adhikārīn] for [Vedic] dharma,69 having become Hindus [hindutvam prāpya] in a subsequent birth.69 But the occurrence of the word 'Hindu' in Sanskrit texts remained rare, and the two nineteenth-century Bengali encyclopedists, Rādhākānta Deb (1783–1867)70 and Tārānātha Tarkavācaspati (1811–1885)71 could not cite any text other than the obscure and very late Merutatrata (eighteenth century),72 providing an extremely specious etymology of the word based on it.73

The word 'Hindu' is rarely seen in the medieval vernacular bhakti literature as well. Ten Gaudia Vaiśāyī texts in Bengali, their dates ranging from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, were examined. The word 'Hindu' was found 41 times, and Hindudharma 7 times, in the 80,000 couplets of only 5 of the 10 texts. Apart from the small number of occurrences, the interesting aspect of the evidence is that there is no explicit discussion of what 'Hindu' or Hindudharma means.74 The word 'Hindu' is also used in different contexts by Vidyāpati (early fifteenth century), Kabir (1450–1520), Ekanāth (1533–1599) and Anantadāś (sixteenth century). On this basis a scholar has argued that a Hindu religious identity defined itself primarily in opposition to Muslims and Islam and had a continuous existence through the medieval period.75 This argument is seriously flawed because it is based on the patently wrong assumption that all non-Muslims were part of the postulated Hindu identity, and ignores the basic fact that the medieval saṃsāra and bhakti poets used the term 'Hindu' with reference to adherents of the caste-centric Brahmānical religion, against which they raised their voices.76 The general absence of the words 'Hindu' and 'Hindudharma' in the precolonial Sanskrit texts and their limited connotation in the not-too-frequent occurrences in the bhakti literature clearly indicate that Indians did not create a Hindu religious identity for themselves, as is argued by some. Of course the word was in use in precolonial India, but it was not before the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries that it was appropriated by Western, especially British, scholars,77 whose writings helped the imperial administration to formulate and create the notion of Hinduism in the sense in which we understand it today. The British borrowed the word

'Hindu' from India, gave it a new meaning and significance, reimported it into India as a reified phenomenon called Hinduism. They used it in censuses and gazetteers as a category in their classification of the Indian people, paving the way for the global Hindu religious identity—a process perceptively equated with the 'pizza effect', based on how the Neapolitan hot baked bread exported to America returned with all its embellishments to become Italy's national dish.79 Given this background, Hinduism was a creation of the colonial period and cannot lay claim to any great antiquity.80 Although some echo the views of B.B. Lal and his followers to proclaim that its origins lay in the Indus valley civilization and in what they call Aryan culture,81 Hinduism may yet be held the youngest of all religions, a nineteenth-century neologism popularized by the British.82 That it has come to stay, despite the endless ambiguities of connotation in it, is a different matter.83

IV

Just as Hinduism as a religious category acquired much visibility in Christian missionary writings and in British administrative records,84 so also it was not until the nineteenth century did it come to be labelled sanātanadharma. The term can be translated in a variety of ways: 'eternal religion' or 'eternal law',85 'unshakable, venerable order',86 'ancient and continuing guideline'87 or 'the eternal order or way of life'.88 It has been used by a variety of representatives of modern Hinduism, ranging from neo-Hindus like Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan to the leaders and followers of reform movements as well as their opponents. Although some scholars have tried to project it as having a 'dynamic character', sanātanadharma was basically an orthodox resistance to reform movements89 and drew on references to itself in ancient Indian literature. The earliest occurrence of the term is found in the Buddhist canonical work Dhammapada, according to which the eternal law (esa dharmam sarātana)90 is that hatred and enmities cease through love alone; but it is mentioned frequently in the Brahmānical texts as well. The Mahābhārata often uses the expression esa dharmah sarātanah 'as a sanctioning formula intended to emphasize the obligatory nature of social and religious rules',91 but its use to justify Svētaketu's mother's being snatched away by a Brahmān would be far from palatable to modern sanātanists.92 The Gāṇḍā uses the term in the plural to mean the 'venerable norms for the families'
(kuladharmaḥ sanatanaḥ), and describes Kṛṣṇa as ‘protector of the established norms’ (śaśvatadharmagopāṇa sanatanaḥ). Similarly, in the law book of Manu, sanatana dharma stands for established ‘customs and statutes of the countries, castes and families’, though the Purāṇas use the term in various senses. According to the Matsya purāṇa, it is rooted in virtues like the absence of greed and attachment, the practice of celibacy, forgiveness, compassion for living beings, etc. The Varaha purāṇa at one place refers to the eternal dharma promulgated by Varaha, and at another, states that according to the eternal law one should not sink into grief on seeing the fortunes of others and one’s own distress (esa dharmah sanatanaḥ). In another Purāṇa, Śiva defines his eternal dharma (dharmah sanatanaḥ) as consisting of jñāna, kriyā and yoga, though in several epic and Purāṇic passages sanatana is used as an epithet for divinities like Kṛṣṇa, or for Dharma, who himself is thought of as a deity. The Uttararāmacarita of Bhavabhuti (eighth century), the earliest secular work to refer to sanatana dharma, mentions it in the sense of fixed laws and customs, and the Kāparukta plates (sixth century), which contain the earliest epigraphic reference to it, use it in speaking of rites and rituals prescribed by śruti and smṛti (śrutsimśtvihitasanātanadharmakaranarātya). Although these textual references provide different connotations of the term sanatana dharma, it has generally been understood in the sense of traditionally established customs and duties of countries, castes and families, in texts as late as the Mahābhārata (eighth century), by an unknown author, and the Śrīsūtra-tattva-vivāda (1844) of Nilakantha (Nehemia) Gorch.

It was in the nineteenth century, that sanatana dharma emerged as a key concept in traditionalist self-assertion against Christianity, as well as in the reform movements (Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj), it came to be stereotyped as a venerable, ‘eternal’, ‘all-encompassing’ and ‘inclusive’ (sarvāyapaka) religion, with ‘no temporal beginning, no historical founding figure’, one which needed no innovations or reforms. This added to the conceptual opacity and vagueness of the ‘timeless religion’, which had to wait for its first codification by the Englishwoman Annie Besant who, in collaboration with Indian scholars like Bhagwan Das, drew up a textbook on sanatana dharma for use at the Central Hindu College, Benares, whose establishment in 1898 owed much to her initiative.

V

Hinduism has often been viewed not only as eternal (sanatana dharma), but also as a monolithic religion in which there is ‘agreement about some static universal doctrine’. This stereotype has received support not only from Hindu right-wing political groups, but also from serious scholars of religion who define Hinduism as ‘the religion of those humans who create, perpetuate, and transform traditions with legitimizing reference to the authority of the Vedas’. An early, though indirect, endorsement of the legitimizing authority of the Vedas comes from Yāśka (fifth century BC), who describes Vedic ‘seers’ as ‘having attained a direct experience of dharma’ (sākṣaṭkārtṛadharna). Later, Manu categorically states that ‘the root of religion is the entire Veda’ (vedo’khilo dharmamīlam), and that the authority of the śruti and the smṛti is not to be questioned or reasoned about (aṁmānasya). His assertion has received much support over time from the different philosophical systems, though their apologetic patterns have varied considerably. Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika, though not affiliated to the Veda, recognized it as a ‘source of knowledge’ (pramāṇa), and their leading early medieval thinkers (Uddotakara, Vācaspatimisra and Udayana) defended it, sometimes even by developing new arguments. Much stronger support for the Vedic texts, however, came from the Mimāṃsā, whose ‘genuine affiliation with, and commitment to, the Veda are generally accepted’. Mimāṃsā thinkers like Kumārāla, Prabhākara and Maṇḍanaśīra (all of the eighth century) laid great emphasis on the principle that dharma is justified by the Veda alone (vedavidhata). Similarly, Śaṅkara (eighth century) treated all the declarations of the Veda as authoritative, and defiance of it (vedavirodha) as heresy. Indeed, the acceptance of the authority of the Vedas is an important feature of Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy, but their number being only four, an amorphous category of the ‘fifth Veda’ came into being as early as the later Vedic period. This led to an open-endedness in the Vedic corpus, a phenomenon also in keeping with the general absence of and aversion to writing and the Brāhmaṇical preference for the oral transmission of all knowledge. The Mahābhārata, the Purāṇas and the Tantras are called the ‘fifth Veda’, just as the large body of Tamil devotional hymns in the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava traditions, ranging in date from the sixth to the ninth centuries AD, claimed Vedic status. Many religious teachers holding different opinions sought to
legitimize their teachings with reference to the Vedas during the medieval period. Acceptance of the authority of the Vedas is, in fact, an important feature even of modern Hindu revivast movements like the Arya Samaj of Dayananda, who is sometimes called the Luther of India. But all this cannot be construed to mean that Hinduism acquired a monolithic character, for it has rightly been pointed out that allegiance to the Vedas was very often a fiction, nothing more than a 'raising of the hat, in passing, to an idol by which one no longer intends to be encumbered later on'.

There is substantial evidence to show that the Vedas did not always enjoy a pre-eminent position even in Brāhmaṇical Hinduism. Anti-Vedic ideas, in fact, began to find expression in the Rgveda itself. The famous Rgvedic passage which equated Brāhmaṇas with croaking frogs was an early attempt to ridicule the Vedas and their reciters. In addition to the satirization of the Brāhmaṇas, there is also evidence of the questioning of Vedic knowledge: 'Whence this creation developed is known only by him who witnesses this world in the highest heaven—or perhaps even he does not know.' At several places in the Rgveda, Indra is abused and his very existence is questioned. Thus, in a hymn to Indra it is said: 'To Indra, if Indra exists' (RV, VIII.100.3), and in another the question is asked (RV, II.12.5): 'about whom they ask, where is he? . . . And they say about him, “he is not” . . . ' Scepticism about the Vedic sacrifice was expressed by reviling it at the end of the mahāvratas Soma festival, as is evident from several Rgvedic passages. The sanctity of the Vedas was questioned soon after their composition. The Upaniṣads contain several passages which deprecate the Vedas. The Mūṇḍaka Upaniṣad, for example, regards the four Vedas as ‘lower knowledge’ ( Aprāvidyā). Similarly, in the Nirukta, Yāska (sixth–fifth centuries BC) describes Kautsa as saying that ‘the Vedic stanzas have no meaning’ and that ‘their meaning is contradictory’. Indications of the undermining of Vedic rituals are also found in the Dharmashāstra texts, which have been the main vehicle of Vedic thought. Baudhāyana, for instance, cites the view that non-Vedic local practices may be allowed in their own territory, though his own opinion is that ‘one must never follow practices opposed to the tradition of learned authorities’. An unwillingness to concede a legitimizing role to the Veda manifested itself in many texts representing the various strands of Brāhmaṇical thought. For example, in the Bṛhadārgaṇī, which has been the most popular Hindu religious text through the centuries, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna in unambiguous terms that those who delight in the eulogistic statements of the Vedas (vedāvādāratā) are full of worldly desires (kāmātmānāḥ), and that the desire-ridden followers (kāmakāmānāḥ) of the Vedic sacrificial rites stagnate in the world. The Purāṇas often undermine the supremacy of the Vedas despite their general allegiance to them. While one Purānic text tells us that God thought of the Purāṇas before he spoke the Vedas, others state that the Vedas are ‘established’ on the Purāṇas. ‘There is no higher essence or truth than this’, the Agnipurāṇa tells us, and ‘there is no better book, . . . there is no better śastra, or śrutī or śveti . . . for this Purāṇa is supreme.’ The Bhāgavatapurāṇa was similarly said to have superseded and transcended the Vedas, and Jīva Goswāmi (sixteenth century) of the Gauḍya Vaśānava school vehemently denied that this text was based on the Vedas at all. Despite the fact that the authors of the Tantric texts tried to base their doctrines on the Vedas, they also undermined their authority. For example, the Mahānirvāṇatantra, an eighteenth-century work, states that the Vedas, Purāṇas and Śāstras are of no use in the kālīyuga and declares that all of the other religious traditions are encompassed by and disappear within the Tantric kuladharma, just as the tracks of all other animals disappear within the tracks of the elephant. All this may not amount to a repudiation of the Vedas, but it certainly indicates that all post-Vedic Brāhmaṇical religious traditions did not look to them for legitimacy.

Several religious movements, within the fold of what is now known as Hinduism, in fact, rejected the authority both of the Brāhmaṇas and that of the Vedas. Vīraśaivism, a Śāivate sect whose followers are also called Lingāyats and which gained prominence in Karnataka in the twelfth century, is a case in point. Its hagiographical texts bear ample testimony to the fact that, at least in the early phase, the Vīraśaivas ridiculed the Vedas and unequivocally rejected them. The Bāsavaṇḍaṇa speaks of a Vēdāntist who was humiliatingly by Bāsava at the court of Bijjala, and the Cennabāsavapurāṇa narrates how a Vedic scholar was ridiculed by the Lingāyats, who had the Vedas recited by dogs. Similarly, the adherents of the south Indian Śrāvānava sect of Tenkalai rejected the Vedas and composed their own Veda, called the Nālayiṣvaprabandham. This rejection of Vedic authority seems to have been a feature of other medieval religious movements as well. The Mahānubhāvas in Maharashtra and the Sahajiyās in
Bengal also renounced the Vedas. So did individual medieval bhakti saints like Kabir (fifteenth-sixteenth centuries) and Tukaram (seventeenth century). As recently as the nineteenth century, precisely at the time when Dayananda Saraswati was busy spreading the word that the Vedas are the repository of all knowledge, they were rejected by Ramakrishna, who said: 'the truth is not in the Vedas; one should act according to the Tantras, not according to the Vedas, the latter are impure from the very fact of their being pronounced.' Evidently, thus, different religious sects have not had the same attitude towards the Vedic corpus, and even the texts of specific sectarian affiliations often express contradictory views about it. This being so, the stereotype of a monolithic Hinduism based on the Vedas must be seen as a myth deliberately propagated both by some scholars as well as by right-wing Hindu groups, all of whom not only ignore the plurality of religious beliefs and practices covered by the umbrella term 'Hinduism', invented in the colonial period, but who also deny the centuries-long process of their evolution.

VI

The stereotyping of Hinduism as eternal, monolithic, tolerant and non-proselytizing began soon after its invention in the nineteenth century, and the effort to present it as different from all the other religions of the world has gathered momentum over the years. Not content with imagining their religion to be unique, the Hindu cultural nationalists persist in noisily proclaiming its imagined uniqueness. The clichés about it receive inspiration and support from the writings of scholars of religion based at universities in the West, where departments of religious studies or comparative religion have mushroomed after the Second World War, their number having come to exceed 1,200 in the United States alone.

Most of the scholars affiliated to these departments and a few of their Indian disciples are inspired by Joachim Wach and Mircea Eliade, and speak of the science of religion (religionswissenschaft); but, in reality, they study Hinduism as a socio-historically autonomous phenomenon, thus supporting the claim that religion is sui generis. Opposed to the scientific analysis of religious data and to any kind of reductionism, they have studied religion by prioritizing 'interior and generally inaccessible personal experiences and religious convictions at the expense of observable and documentable data', focusing on the 'transhistorical religious meaning of any given hierophany'. The influence of these scholars is reflected in the anti-historical attitude of the bulk of writing on Hinduism produced by Western scholars and their Indian followers. For example, one of the leading Western scholars of religion, and possibly the most influential, Wendy Doniger, has studied many neglected aspects of Hinduism (e.g., myths, symbols, metaphors) on the basis of an extensive use of Sanskrit texts, and has provided interesting and provocative interpretations of the early Indian myths and religions, often rousing the Hindu diaspora's ire. But she has generally shied away from examining their changing social contexts. The same may be said of several recent publications on Hinduism which do not view religion as a multifactorial historical and cultural process, but as a decontextualized phenomenon, not linked to material realities on the ground.

There are a few exceptions from India, but most Western scholars writing on various aspects of early Indian religions, especially Hinduism, describe them merely as systems of faith and salvation and 'prioritize their abstract essences and homogeneity over their sociopolitical context'. In their works, phenomenology takes precedence over rational historical enquiry and a subtle defence of Hinduism masquerades as serious academic enterprise. Naturally, stereotypes about it tend to become deep-rooted and their grip on the masses strong.

The study of religion in academia needs to be rescued from those 'scholars of religion', who accept premises that strengthen the stereotypes which feed religious fundamentalism and who unnecessarily take upon themselves the task of defending 'the religiosity of religion', a task which the sybaritic sadhus, despite their questionable personal track records, can discharge with greater efficiency. Historians cannot be the custodians of religion; their task is to critically examine it.

Notes and References

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For detailed comments on the views of Lā and his followers, see Sudeshna Guha, op. cit., pp. 399–426. In keeping with his indulgent approach, B.B. Lā speaks of the resemblance between the graffiti on megalithic and chalcolithic pottery on the one hand, and Harappan script characters and Brāhmī letters on the other, in 'From the Megalithic to the Harappan: Tracing Back the Graffiti on the Pottery', Ancient India, 16, 1960, pp. 4–24. More recently he has made a tongue-in-cheek endorsement of the view that the Harappan script was the precursor of the later Brāhmī (The Saraswati Flows On, Delhi, 2002, pp. 132–35), though not long ago he was of the view that the Harappan script was read from right to left. The most recent view, however, is that the Harappans may not have been a literate people at all (Steve Farmer and Michael Witzel, 'The Collapse of the Indus-Script Thesis: The Myth of a Literate Harappan Civilization', Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2004, pp. 19–57).


B.N. Mukherjee, op. cit., p. 6; Rajat Kant Ray, op. cit., pp. 49, 55; and p. 189, notes 33, 34.

Rgveda, VIII, 24, 27. This is the only Rgvedic passage where the word 'vivasvanah' is used in the sense of territory; at all other places in the Rgveda it is used to mean the seven rivers (Vedic Index, II, p. 324).

Aṣṭādhyāyī, IV, 2, 113.

D.C. Sircar, Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization, I, no. 91, line 10.


Manusmṛtyu, II, 22. According to the Kaśītikā Upaniṣad (II, 13), Āryavarta was bounded on the west by Adrarasa near Kuṇḍakṣetra, and on the east by Kālikavana near Allahabad.

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12 Kādambarī, edited and translated by M.R. Kale, Delhi, 1968, p. 290; V. S. Agrawal, Kādambarī: Ek Sāṃskṛtik Adhyayana, Varanasi, 1958, p. 188.


14 Nārāyanaḥpurāṇam of Somadeva Śuri, Prakāśaka, 78.


16 Ibid.

17 For references, see Ishrat Alam, 'Names for India in Ancient Indian Texts and Inscriptions', in Irfan Habib, ed., India: Studies in the History of an Idea, p. 43.

18 EI, XIV, nos. 3, lines 5–6.

19 V. 12, Abhinandana-cintāmaṇi, edited with an introduction by Nemichandra Sastri, with the Hindi commentary Manjāpbhā by Haragovind Sastri, Varanasi, 1964, p. 235.

20 Ibid., IV, 14.


22 Manu Goswami, op. cit., chapters 5 and 6.

23 Aṣṭādhyāyī, IV, 3.165.


25 Malalasekera, op. cit., p. 941.

26 Ibid., p. 942.

27 Mahāvamsa, V, 13, Cālavamsa, XXXVII, 216, 246; Malalasekera, op. cit., p. 942.


29 Ibid., no. 56, line 9.

30 D.C. Sircar, Studies in the Geography of Ancient and Medieval India, Delhi, 1960, pp. 8–9.

31 Pravin Chandra Jain and Darbarial Kotha, eds, Jaina Purāṇa Kaśin (in Hindi), Jain Vidya Samsthan, Srimalavijri, Rajasthan, 1993, pp. 256, 259. Haritavamsa Purāṇa, 5.2–13. According to some, it is divided into six parts (khanda), of which one is āryakhaṇḍa and is the same as Bhubārata, the remaining five being mlecchakhanda. Among the Jaina texts, the Jambudvīpa-purāṇa provides the most detailed account of Jambudvīpa and Bhubārata. See Jambudvīpa-purāṇa-tattvadarśa, edited by Kantaillal Kanal et al., Shri Agam Prakashan Samiti, Vyavara, Rajasthan, 1986. The Jaina texts had several geographical categories in common with the Purāṇic ones, but they had many unique spatio-temporal conceptions too.

32 Ibid., p. 9, note 1.

33 D.C. Sircar, Studies in the Geography of Ancient and Medieval India, pp. 6, 8.
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Arvind Sharma, op. cit., p. 6, points out that Muhammad Ibrāhīm Qāsim appointed his adversary Dāhir's minister Siakar as his advisor after the latter's acceptance of Islam. Since conversion from what he calls 'Hindu religion' became possible, he implies that a Hindu identity had already emerged. Similarly, the Brahmans princes of Sīnd, Jāysirah (b. Dāhir) and his brother Sāsah, converted to Islam at the invitation of the Caliph 'Umar b. 'Abd al-Asīz (Derry N. Maclean, *Religion and Society in Arab Sīnd*, Leiden, 1989, pp. 33, 48). But mere acceptance of Islam by certain Sīndis does not justify a reified perception of Hinduism as early as the eighth century.


Alberuni's reference to Hindu religion has been treated as a landmark in the 'religious semantic journey' of the word 'Hindu', just as the raid on Somnath by Mahamad has been blown out of proportion by some scholars, e.g. Arvind Sharma, op. cit., pp. 6–7. Cf. Narayani Gupia's statement that 'it is fashionable to criticize Mill, but to most Indians precolonial India has two pasts (Mill's "Hindu" and "Islamic" civilizations), and the attack on Somnath by Mahmad in 1025 has the same emotive significance as the Turks' conquest of Constantinople in 1453 had for conventional European history' (*Stereotypes versus History*, *India International Centre Quarterly*, Summer, 1999, p. 169).


*Alberuni's India*, p. 19.

For a detailed, though biased, view of Alberuni's perception of Brahmanical religion, see Arvind Sharma, *Studies in 'Alberuni's India*', Wiesbaden, 1983.

The general absence of an essentialist view of the religion of the Hindus may be inferred from the many inscriptions, including the one from Veraval, discussed by Anwar Hussein ('The "Foreigners" and the Indian Society: c. Eighth Century to Thirteenth Century'), unpublished MPhil dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1993, chapter IV). B.D. Chattopadhyaya (*Representing the Other: Sanskrit Sources and the Muslims*, Delhi, 1998, p. 78) rightly points out that whatever essentialism may be there in Alberuni's description is contradicted by many records including the Veraval inscription, which speaks of the reconstruction of a demolished mosque by Jayasimha Siddharaaj.
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Barani mentions Hindus 40 times in his Tārīkh-i-Firuzshāhī. See Oeyamaeddin Ahmad, Barani’s References to the Hindus in the Tārīkh-i-Firuzshāhī – Territorial and Other Dimensions, Islamic Culture, 56, 1982, pp. 293–302. The Moroccan traveller Ibn Batūtah, a contemporary of Barānī, interpreted the name Hindu Kush as ‘Hindu killer’ because the Indian slaves passing through its mountainous terrain perished in the snows. This has been given a communal slant (Arvind Sharma, op. cit., p. 9), but see footnote 61.


The author of the Dabistān has been variously identified, e.g., as ‘Mobad’, Mulsim Fani, Mirza Zulfikar Beg and Kaikhusrucoin Isfandiar.


B.D. Chattopadhyaya, op. cit., p. 54.

Hindughsun may be taken to mean the Hindukush mountain (Rājatarangīni) of Jonaraja, edited and translated by Raghunath Singh, Chowkamba, Varanasi, 1972, verse 381. See also footnote 54 above.


Ibid., 2.215.

Ibid., 2.51.


The pandits were Somānātha (Subājī Bāpu), Haracandra Tarkapancānana and Nilkantha Gore, the last of whom ultimately converted to Christiani ty and was baptized as Nehemiah Goreh. For a discussion of the material produced in the context of the controversy, see Richard Fox Young, Resistant Hinduism: Sanskrit Sources on Anti-Christian Apologetics in Early Nineteenth Century India, Vienna, 1981.

Haracandra Tarkapancānana, Matapārīkṣottaram, Calcutta, 1940, p. 1; cited in Richard Fox Young, op. cit., p. 95.

Richard Fox Young, op. cit., p. 150.

The multi-volume lexicon Sabdekalpadhriema appeared between 1819 and 1858.

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Vācasyapāyan.

The crucial passage is given by V.S. Apte (Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary, s.v. hindu); hindudharmapradopāyaṃ jayante kakavrthaṁhindan ca dīśayate kānaḥ hinduristhitṣaṁ priyaḥ. Apte dates the text to the eighteenth century, but one is intrigued by its reference to Tunrisk born in London who will become lord of the earth!

Hinam dīśayati iti hindu: the Hindu ‘spoils’ (dīśayati) what is ‘inferior’ (hinam); Halftass, India and Europe, p. 515, note 96. The twentieth-century text Dharmaprapita, written by three leading pandits in the 1930s (Calcutta, 1937), discusses in detail the rules laid down for the purification of those Hindus who joined or were forced to join other religions: atma kevalan balād eva mlecchadharman svakāśānam hindunām... vividhāḥ pribhavācavādhyayo nirdeśa dīśayante, p. 219; cited in Halfass, India and Europe, p. 534, note 66. The word also occurs in the Dharmatattvavivimānya by Vasudeva Sāstrīn Abhisarkara, Poona, 1929.


Several scholars have argued that Hinduism was a colonial construct which finally took shape when the imperial administration engaged in the classification into categories of the Indian people through the mechanism of the census. Important among them are: Vasudha Dalmine (The Only Real

The only clarity about Hinduism is that it is used as a catch-all category for

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all non-Abrahamic religions (Islam, Judaism, Christianity), and is thus a negative appellation. In the Hindu Marriage Act (1955), 'Hindu' includes not only Buddhists, Jainas and Sikhs, but also all those who are not Muslims, Christians, Parsis or Jews. There is, therefore, much substance in Frits Staal's view that no meaningful notion of Hinduism can be obtained except by exclusion, and in his argument, it fails to qualify both as a religion and as 'a meaningful unit of discourse' (Rules Without Meaning: Ritual, Mantras and the Human Sciences, New York, 1989, p. 397).


Hallow, India and Europe, p. 344.


It is not surprising that early twentieth-century pandits like V.S. Abhyankar, Anantakrishna Sastri, Sriyujaya Bhattacharya were against the introduction of 'new sectarian traditions' (mītānasampradāya, Dharmapradipa, p. 64) and described themselves as 'followers of eternal religion' (saṅkara-saṅkara, saṅkara-dharmarājvalambin, Dharmapradipa, pp. 207, 219; Dharmaratnavinnyaya, pp. 39ff).

Dharmapada, 1.5. It has been suggested the word saṅkara may have some connection with saṅkū, which occurs in the Vedas literature only twice. At one place it occurs along with dharmas (RV 3.3.1.d) and at another, without it (RV 2.6.6ab). In both cases, the word saṅkūrās "from old times" or "always". I am thankful to Professor Shingo Inoo, who drew my attention to these references.

Mahābhārata, xii.96.13; 128.30; 131.2; xiiii.44.32; 96.46; xiv.50.37; cited in Hallow, India and Europe, p. 358, note 56.

According to the story, when his mother was being led away by a Brahmana, he flew into a rage and was calmed down by his father, who told him not to get angry because this was the eternal law (gā dharmā saṅkūrā), Mahābhārata, I.115, verses 11–14.

Gītā, I.40.

Ibid., XI.18.

Mama, I.118; VII.98; IX.64, 325.


Varahapuranā, 126.7.

Ibid., 126.43.
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Dravida-Saivism. It was in keeping with this old practice that the 'Transquebar Bible' was entitled Veḍapustakam and B. Ziegenbalg described the Bible and the Christian religion as saivadrum or 'the true Veda' (Halbfass, India and Europe, p. 340).


Louis Renou, The Destiny of the Veda in India, p. 2.

Although this is not a discussion of the various forms and levels of atheism and heresies in India, it is necessary to recall that among those who repudiated the authority of the Vedas outside the Brahmanical fold and earned the epithets pāṣandas [heretics] and nāsikas [non-believers in the Vedas], the important ones are the Jains, the Buddhists and the Čārvakas, the followers of Čārvaka also being known as lohajātikas. The Vedas, according to the Jains, were avaiyavedas, which they replaced with their own scriptures, calling them āryavedas. They also describe the Vedas as mithyāyāsa (micchāśya) (Renou, op. cit., p. 87). Gautama Buddha is equally unsparing in his denunciation of the Vedas and says that '...the talk of the Brahmanas versed in the three Vedas turns out to be ridiculous, mere words, a vain and empty thing' (Dighenikāya, London, 1967, Vol. I, p. 240, Tenyusutsa 15). Further, he describes the three Vedas as 'foolish talk', 'a waterless desert', and their threefold wisdom as 'a pathless jungle' and 'a perdition' (ibid., p. 248, Tenyusutsa). The strongest condemnation of the Vedic texts, however, came from the Čārvakas. According to them, the Veda is tainted with the three faults of untruth, self-contradiction, and tautology...the incoherent rhapsodies of knaves (dharmapakrāśa), Sarva-darśana-sangraha, translated by B.B. Cowell and A.E. Gough, London, 1914, p. 4.

Rgveda, VII. 103.

Rgveda, I.12.97.

J.C. Heesterman, The Inner Conflict of Tradition, Delhi, 1985, p. 77.


Lakshman Sarup, op. cit., I.15.


Bhagavadgīti, II.41–46.


Matsyapurāṇa, 53.3.20, 5.3.1.20; Nārādyapurāṇa, 2.24.16; cited in Brian K. Smith, op. cit., p. 26.
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Unlike most scholars of religion, there are a few who have looked at early Indian religious developments against the backdrop of social change. Examples are Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya (Lokaśruta), D.D. Kosambi (Myth and Reality), Suvarna Jaiswal (Origin and Development of Vaishnavism), R.S. Sharma (Tantricism), R.N. Nandi (Social Roots of Religion in Ancient India). For comments on their relevant writings, see Kunal Chakrabarti, op. cit., pp. 182-89.

Russell T. McCutcheon, op. cit., p. 3.

133 Halflas, *India and Europe*, p. 366.
136 R.N. Nandi, 'Origin of the Vrajaśāiva Movement', in D.N. Jha, ed., *The Pandit Order*, Delhi, 2000, p. 485, note 47. The smārtas, who joined the Vrajaśāiva movement in large numbers, retained their superiority, undermined its fraternalism and paved the way for the growth of the Brahmans in caste system among its followers. Not surprisingly, the Vrajaśāivas, in the later phase of their movement, preached loyalty to the varṇaśrama-dharma, as is evident from the works of Bhimakavi and Sripari Panḍita (both of the fourteenth century). The latter even said that only the performance of caste duties and Vedic rites could purify a person and prepare him for final liberation (ibid., p. 477; Suvarna Jaiswal, 'Semiotising Hinduism: Changing Paradigms of Brahmanical Integration', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 19, No. 12, 1991, p. 22.). The Vrajaśāiva emphasis on the observance of caste duties, as well as on the necessity of seeking legitimation from the Vedas is evident from one of their basic texts, the *Lagadāramacandrikā*, Louis Renou, op. cit., p. 61, note 1.
137 Louis Renou, op. cit., p. 2.
138 Ibid., p. 2.
139 Cited in ibid., p. 3.
141 Among the younger Indian scholars advocating the idea of sūri generis religion, mention may be made of Kunal Chakrabarti, according to whom, 'religion as man's response to the ultimate reality has an autonomy and a dynamic of its own,' Recent Approaches to the Study of Religion in Ancient India, in Romita Thapar, ed., *Recent Perspectives on Early Indian History*, Bombay, 1995, p. 189.
142 Kwangs Lee, op. cit., p. 28.
145 Constraints of space do not permit us to list and discuss all the recent writings on Hinduism, but a few of the most recent ones may be men-