

Questioning authority: Constructions and deconstructions of Hinduism

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QUESTIONING AUTHORITY

The title of my essay is taken from a well-known bumper sticker, spotted on vehicles throughout North America. The sentiment expressed is one that I find admirable, although it is practiced by most of us mainly in the breach. As scholars, however, questioning authority is one of the principal features of our professional enterprise; and for those of us who are scholars of religion, it is, in my opinion, the *sine qua non* of the discipline.¹

First and foremost, it is necessary for each generation to reevaluate the authoritative pronouncements of our intellectual ancestors. The self-evident truths of the past are perpetually contested and replaced by new 'facts' and 'better' interpretations and theories. This need not necessarily be positivistically envisioned as 'progress' but as an opportunity to reflect upon historical relativity and the interestedness of all knowledge. Our new truths, produced out of the nexus of current assumptions, interests, and concerns, will also inevitably be subjected to the same interrogation, criticism, and overturning by future scholars.

For those of us in the academy who assume personae as nontheological scholars of religion, the mandate to question authority pertains additionally to other sets of discourses. Joined to the work of critically examining the assumptions and conclusions of our intellectual forebears, students of religious traditions are also faced with the task of questioning the bases of authoritative claims put forward by the religious themselves. For religions are characterized—and possibly defined—by the particular kind of authoritative truth claims they make. The sources of authority that religions rely upon are not those of the merely human, the subjective, or the historically and culturally conditioned. Rather, the

appeal is to the supernatural and transcendent, the objectively and absolutely true, the timeless and universal.

Questioning, and indeed countering, such claims to ultimate authority is not only desirable but also inevitable in an academic discipline that regards religion as a product of human beings, adopts the historical method, and recognizes the cultural conditioning and relativity of all religious claims and authorities.² These very methodological principles will entail a description of the object of study at odds with the self-description of religion put forward by the religious. I agree with Claude Lévi-Strauss when he writes that 'No common analysis of religion can be given by a believer and a non-believer' (1972: 188), although I also believe it is possible for a 'believer' to analyze religion from the perspective of a 'non-believer' as part of his or her professional stance.

Things are complicated, however, when scholars of religion ignore or simply dismiss certain claims issuing forth from the religious. It is indeed the case that the bases upon which religions make their authoritative claims to truth—having been acknowledged and described—may and must be challenged by those of us in the academy who make claims to a different sort of truth based on different epistemological grounds. On the other hand, it seems problematic when scholars of religion arrogate to themselves the authority to decide for religions what does and does not count as orthodoxy and religious identity.

The picture is further muddled by the fact that within any religion there will be competing voices, each appealing to supernatural and transcendent sources for its authority, and each with varying notions about what is orthodox and who is 'in' and who is 'out.' Religions are neither monolithic entities, nor are they unchanging over time, despite the claims often made for them by their theologians. They are rather historically variable, culturally figured and reconfigured, and often encompass within themselves a bewildering variety of diverse and divergent doctrines, practices, texts, and leaders. Thus, within any religious tradition, among different sectarian wings, and even within those sectarian wings at any given historical moment, there will be different voices claiming to speak authoritatively for (and to) that religion.

How the scholar of these traditions adjudicates competing claims to authority within what is ostensibly a single religion can be vexing. The scholar of religion, here again, will necessarily oppose some of the religious authorities he or she studies. By privileging one kind of articulation of the religion over others, one will inevitably end up opposing and delegitimizing other authorities.

Such complex issues of authority and the relations between scholars, their discipline, and their objects of study have taken center stage in the contemporary study of Hinduism. The issues raised here have important implications for the

present and future direction of the general field of religious studies. The study of Hinduism has been making significant contributions to the study of religion since at least the nineteenth century, when Friedrich Max Müller and others used Indian data extensively in their formulations of the new disciplines of comparative mythology and comparative religion (*Religionswissenschaft*). Recent trends, both in the academy and in India, make it possible that this subfield will have continuing impact on the larger discipline, if, and only if, both the data of Hinduism and the interpretive thinking issuing forth from Indology can be set in a comparative framework.

In what follows I will attempt to review and evaluate some of the issues surrounding one feature of the contemporary study of Hinduism. I concentrate here on the conflicts in authority that characterize Indology at present and that center around the definitional problem: What is Hinduism? The controversy over the definitional contours of this variegated tradition is one that concerns conflicts (and alliances) between authorities of different sorts, varying interests (sometimes incompatible, sometimes overlapping) driving the different parties, and the different consequences (intellectual and political) each position entails. Most of all, it increasingly involves questions as to the role, if any, of indigenous (that is, 'Hindu') authorities in the constitution of their own religion.

What is at stake in this issue has implications that spill over into the broader field of religious studies. How is a religion conceived and defined, and who is legitimately responsible for doing so? Is the case of the study of that complex entity known as 'Hinduism' unique, or is it comparable to issues in the study of other 'religions'?

WESTERN CONSTRUCTIONS AND DECONSTRUCTIONS OF HINDUISM

Many works have recently been published which are designed to contest, reevaluate, and deny the legitimacy of categories generated by scholars of the past to interpret India. One thinks especially of Ronald Inden's (1990) analysis of various Indological received truths; the rise of 'subaltern studies' and their challenges to histories written by and for the elites; critiques like Gyanendra Pandey's (1992), which argues that communal identities are constructs of British colonialism, or Partha Chatterjee's (1986), which similarly posits that nineteenth- and twentieth-century conceptions of Indian national and cultural identity were foreign in origin and largely imposed on the colonized.

It is in this genre that one can assign a whole spate of recent works contending that modern articulations of a unified 'world religion' called 'Hinduism' are nothing more than imaginary representations issuing forth, originally, from Western intellectual imperialism (for example, Dalmia and von Stietencron 1995; Sontheimer and Kulke 1989; cf. Doniger 1991; Duara 1991; Hawley 1991; Hildebeitel 1991; Larson 1995). In recent years it has thus become an ironic, if not paradoxical, truism among many professional Western experts of Hinduism that the object of their expertise does not really exist. This misleading category of 'Hinduism,' it is argued, must be deconstructed in the interests of truth in advertising and atonement for the sins of our Orientalist forebears. The Indological authorities of the past created 'Hinduism,' and the Indological authorities of the present are now busy disestablishing its conceptual existence.

It is now averred that, in reality, Hinduism is not one religion but many, and always has been, as this enunciation of the position forcefully argues:

There has never been any such a thing as a single 'Hinduism' or any single 'Hindu community' for all of India. Nor, for that matter, can one find any such thing as a single 'Hinduism' or 'Hindu community' even for any one socio-cultural region of the continent. Furthermore, there has never been any one religion—nor even one system of religions—to which the term 'Hindu' can accurately be applied. No one so-called religion, moreover, can lay exclusive claim to or be defined by the term 'Hinduism.' The very notion of the existence of any single religious community by this name has been falsely conceived (Frykenberg 1989: 29).

The contention here is that 'Hinduism,' as a singular term depicting a monolithic religion, is a false category that elides the many and variegated differences 'on the ground' in South Asia. 'Hinduism' should be pluralized—or even abandoned altogether—as a term with no real referent:

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 (Frykenberg 1993: 526).

Others have taken this line of thought even further. Frits Staal has suggested that employing the label 'religion' to describe Asian traditions like 'Hinduism' is also a category mistake—the result of a misguided and hegemonic move to import another Western classificatory rubric to Eastern data. There are, Staal

argues, no 'religions' in Asia, but only Asian ritual traditions. While the term 'religion' might be appropriate when discussing Western traditions (where orthodoxy is emphasized), it is illegitimate to apply the term to Asian 'orthopraxic' traditions:

The inapplicability of Western notions of religion to the traditions of Asia has not only led to piecemeal errors of labeling, identification and classification, to conceptual confusion and to some name-calling. It is also responsible for something more extraordinary: the *creation* of so-called religions.... Thus there arises a host of religions: Vedic, Brahmanical, Hindu, Buddhist, Bonpo, Tantric, Taoist, Confucian, Shinto, etc. In Asia, such groupings are not only uninteresting and uninformative, but tinged with the unreal. What counts instead are ancestors and teachers—hence lineages, traditions, affiliations, cults, eligibility, and initiation—concepts with ritual rather than truth-functional overtones (Staal 1989: 393; emphasis in original).

Staal therefore concludes, 'The concept of religion is not a coherent concept... and should either be abandoned or confined to Western traditions' (1989: 415).

Thus, according to some scholars, neither a unified religion called 'Hinduism' nor any traditions we can call 'religions' exist in South Asia. Both 'Hinduism' and the notion of a 'Hindu religion' are the category mistakes of Western intellectual imperialism. Questioning the authority of these categories, it is claimed, will retrieve a more authentic view of Hinduism(s) while rectifying the Orientalist errors of the past.

There is certainly a case to be made for this position. As is well known, 'religion' is a term that non-Western traditions did not have before contact with the West. This point is directed not only to state the obvious but also to argue that there are no indigenous terms that can properly be *translated* by the term 'religion.'

This line of argumentation was first taken by Wilfred Cantwell Smith, who demonstrated several decades ago that the names for particular 'religions'—'Buddhism,' 'Hinduism,' 'Taoism'—are, like 'religion,' of foreign origin. 'Hinduism' in particular, argues Smith, 'is a concept certainly [Hindus] did not have before the encounter with the West' (1962: 63). More recently, Heinrich von Stietencron has stated that 'Not only is the term modern...[,] but also the whole concept of the oneness of Hindu religion was introduced by missionaries and scholars from the West' (1995: 51; cf. Frykenberg 1993: 523).

Most non-Western 'religions' such as 'Hinduism'—at least as they are usually understood today—are the conceptual and discursive products of the historical Western encounter with non-Western traditions. As comparative categorical

frameworks emerged in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, what Peter Marshall and Glyndwr Williams call 'systems of belief' were designated 'religions'—analogous to the known 'religion' of Christianity:

When studying other systems of belief eighteenth-century Englishmen applied to them assumptions which they held about Christianity. They believed that Asia was clearly divided between adherents of distinct 'religions,' which in time they were to classify as 'Hinduism,' 'Buddhism,' 'Taoism,' or under some other name. Each 'religion' had, as Christianity was thought to have, a fixed body of doctrine stated in sacred writings....Assumptions that Asian religions had distinct identities, formal structures and historical traditions akin to Christianity, even if there was a huge gulf between them and it in all matters of substance, provided a framework for comparisons. From the sixteenth century more and more books appeared in Europe describing 'new' religions and comparing them with one another and ultimately with Christianity (1982: 98).

The 'religion' dubbed 'Hinduism' was a product of this time. The very name 'Hindu' was invented by outsiders, a label conceived and deployed to classify (and conceptually unify) a wide variety of inhabitants of the Indian sub-continent. The use of the term 'Hinduism' to depict the religion of some of those inhabitants is of more recent vintage and is now said to be the direct product of the Orientalist intellectuals working in the colonial period of British rule.³ Under this reading of recent history, scholars from the West created a religion comparable to the religions of the West—with canonical sacred books (principally the Vedas, but also the *Bhagavad Gītā* and other texts that attracted Western attention), a priesthood (the Brāhmaṇas), a body of orthodox teachings and practices (centering around *varṇāśramadharmā*)—and called it 'Hinduism.'

Given this reconstruction of history, one of the major impulses guiding the move to deconstruct the category of 'Hinduism' comes from the current critique of past wrongs perpetrated by Western colonialism and its intellectual arm ('Orientalism'). From this vantage point, contesting and deconstructing (or at the very least pluralizing) the concept and label 'Hinduism' can be understood as an attempt to right injustices inflicted on India and Indians as well as an intellectual move designed to return a recognition of pluralism and diversity to a tradition (or set of traditions) inaccurately portrayed as unified and monolithic.

It is, from this point of view, an *intracultural* debate, with the Western Indological authorities of the present challenging a category generated by the Western authorities of the past. Furthermore, the deconstructive move can also be represented as restoring to indigenous India a truer and more authentic

version of its own pluralistic and variegated history. Thus the deconstruction of a monolithic category like 'Hinduism' can be portrayed as in the interests not only of 'truth' but also of 'authenticity.' For if 'Hinduism' is a category imposed on India from the outside, deconstructing it can be represented as a restorative move to resurrect indigenous (and multiple) notions of tradition, community, and systems of belief and/or practice.

WESTERN DEFINITIONS OF HINDUISM

One problem with this depiction of Western understandings of 'Hinduism' is that it is difficult to find in the annals of scholarship many conceptualizations of Hinduism that conform to the supposed monolithic and essentialist position being opposed.⁴ Some Orientalists and later Indologists have indeed argued for a definition of Hinduism centering around caste, the *varṇāśramadharmā* system, and the primacy of the Brāhmaṇas⁵ or have identified a set of defining 'orthodox' doctrines;⁶ while others have seen 'Hinduism' as defined, in one way or another, as centering around the authority of the Vedas.⁷ The vast majority of Western experts, however, have envisioned Hinduism in precisely the very fluid, pluralistic terms that contemporary deconstructionists favor.

Indological authorities have not usually, *contra* depictions otherwise, constructed a 'monolithic' Hinduism with clear definitional boundaries. Rather, statements put forward about Hinduism by Western scholars have most often been vague in the extreme. Usually arguing that Hinduism, unlike other world religions, has no founder, no centralized authority, no 'church,' no agreed upon canon comparable to the Bible, Qu'rān, Tōrah, and no doctrinal unity, scholars have found it difficult to compare such an amorphous entity to the more discriminating and bounded religions of the West. 'Hinduism' has most often been represented *not* as a religion comparable to other religions but as a peculiarly unbounded and nondescript entity that resists definition altogether.

The assumed indefiniteness of Hinduism has, in the past, often meant conceiving of the religion in metaphorical terms. Hinduism, as Inden has noted, has been constituted by Westerners as 'a *female* presence who is able, through her very amorphousness and absorptive powers, to baffle and perhaps even threaten Western rationality, clearly a male in this encounter' (1990: 86; emphasis in original). Hinduism, according to the great nineteenth-century Indologist Monier Monier-Williams, is like an Indian banyan tree whose 'single stem sends out numerous branches destined to send roots to the ground and become trees themselves, till the parent stock is lost in a dense forest of its own

offshoots' (1877: 11, cited in Hawley 1991: 22). Alternatively, Hinduism is likened to an excessively fecund and chaotic jungle:

Hinduism has often and justly been compared to a jungle. As in the jungle every particle of soil seems to put forth its spirit in vegetable life and plants grown on plants, creepers and parasites on their more stalwart brethren, so in India art, commerce, warfare and crime, every human interest and aspiration seek for a manifestation in religion, and since men and women of all classes and occupations, all stages of education and civilization, have contributed to Hinduism, much of it seems low, foolish and even immoral. The jungle is not a park or garden. Whatever can grow in it, does grow. The Brahmans are not gardeners but forest officers...Here and there in a tropical forest some well-grown tree or brilliant flower attracts attention, but the general impression left on the traveller by the vegetation as he passes through it mile after mile is infinite repetition as well as infinite luxuriance. And so it is in Hinduism (Eliot 1954, 2: 166–67, cited in Inden 1990: 86–87).

'Hinduism' by definition, these scholars claim, cannot be defined. It is too fluid, too all-encompassing, and, most of all, too 'tolerant' to be subjected to a concept like 'orthodoxy' or even 'orthopraxy,' let alone 'monolithic.' An articulation like the following, written by J. A. B. van Buitenen (in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica's* entry on 'Hinduism,' no less), is not atypical:

As a religion, Hinduism is an utterly diverse conglomerate of doctrines, cults, and ways of life...In principle, Hinduism incorporates all forms of belief and worship without necessitating the selection or elimination of any...A Hindu may embrace a non-Hindu religion without ceasing to be a Hindu (1974: 519).

Note that in this articulation one does not even have to be a 'Hindu' to be a 'Hindu'! Confronted with 'Hinduism,' Western scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have tended to retreat from, rather than insist upon, categorization. It is the other side of the Orientalist heritage—the Romantic vision of the 'mysterious East'—that has been dominant as Indologists describe 'Hinduism.' As one scholar put it, 'Even a superficial acquaintance leaves one with the impression that the religious life of India is fascinating, complex, and mysterious, but, above all, different from the religious traditions of the West' (Younger 1972: 9). Or again, 'An approach to Hinduism provides a first lesson in the "otherness" of Hindu ideas from those of Europe. The Western love of definition and neat pigeon-holing receives its first shock' (Spear 1949: 57).

Thus, despite the revisionist history of modern deconstructionists, most Indologists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have declared Hinduism either too disorganized and exotically other or too complex and recondite to be subjected the definitional strictures applicable to other religions and cultures. 'Hinduism,' we have been informed by the experts in the West, can mean practically anything. Indeed it appears difficult *not* to be a Hindu (see Smith 1993); 'Hinduism' is an entity so fluid and 'tolerant' as to encompass a variety of religions and communities under the shade of its ever-spreading banyan tree.

It turns out that the contemporary deconstructionist model of plural Hinduisms (or no 'Hinduism' at all) is not that far removed from what appears to be the standard received wisdom of Indology. If virtually everything counts as 'Hinduism' (and this, it would seem, is the dominant Indological model), then the term 'Hinduism' means nothing at all (as some of the deconstructionists would have it). Many of the Western authorities of the past and the Western authorities of the postmodern present thus agree: There really is no such thing as *a* Hinduism, with clearly defined boundaries and definitional strictures. 'Hinduism' is constituted, in either case, as *different* from other, more circumscribed religions; it is thus incomparable because it is uniquely unsusceptible to definition. The much maligned Orientalists and their later Indological successors are, on this score at least, mostly straw dogs.

QUESTIONING INDIGENOUS AUTHORITIES: HINDUS AND HINDUISM

The move to deconstruct 'Hinduism' is not, it would seem, principally an intracultural debate between past and present Indological authorities. For these two sets of Western experts tend to be in basic agreement about the entity. If the real target of the deconstructionist agenda to do away with the category of 'Hinduism' is not the mainstream of Western Indological thought, who are the authorities these contemporary scholars are really questioning?

What modern deconstructionists may really be objecting to is the self-identification of many Indians as 'Hindus,' adherents of a 'religion' (comparable to Christianity, for example, and Islam) called 'Hinduism.' The notion that contemporary Western scholars of India are restoring to Hindus some kind of precolonial authenticity that was lost as a result of Western machinations is complicated by the fact that many 'Hindus' now have adopted and utilized the very categories that certain modern Indologists wish to reason away. Challenging the constructions of Hinduism thus entails contesting the authority not only (or

not even primarily) of the Western Indological past but also of indigenous Indian authorities who claim to speak for a unified 'Hindu religion.' It is, then, partly or even primarily an *intercultural* debate between the postmodern West (and some contemporary Indian intellectuals) and Indian religious authorities.

The Hindus who do claim and have claimed to speak for 'Hinduism' are, need it be said, multiple and various; there are many different 'Hindu' voices, with different and various conceptions of the 'Hinduism' they claim to be speaking for. But in all cases, the postmodern critique of *any* monolithic conceptualization of 'Hinduism' has as one of its ramifications to question the authority of anyone who claims to speak for a singular 'Hinduism.'

Who are these multiple indigenous authorities that modern Western deconstructionists are also implicitly or explicitly contesting—and delegitimizing? One of the principal sets of religious experts that has, for millennia, claimed to speak for 'Hinduism' or 'the Hindu religion'⁸ is the Brāhmaṇa *paṇḍitas*, theologians, and philosophers. Members of this elite class have portrayed themselves as the spokespersons for truth and orthodoxy since at least the middle of the first millennium BCE (the time when competing, 'heretical' traditions first arose).⁹ These Brāhmaṇas, regardless of sectarian affinities, have tended to be fairly clear about what Hinduism is and what a proper Hindu should believe and practice. Their vision of Hindu orthodoxy is of course extremely self-serving: a Hindu is one who accepts the authority of the Vedas (texts composed, preserved, and interpreted by Brāhmaṇas), follows the particular prescriptions for him or her in the *varṇāśramadharmā* scheme (in which the Brāhmaṇa class has placed itself at the top of the hierarchy), and accepts the Brāhmaṇa class as the supreme earthly authorities on 'religion.'¹⁰ While 'not a creedal religion in the same sense as Christianity,' Brāhmaṇa *paṇḍitas* for thousands of years have 'nonetheless understood Hinduism to have a doctrinal core, deviation from which would mean ceasing, at least intellectually, to be a Hindu' (Young 1981: 140).

The authority of the Veda was particularly singled out as the hallmark of orthodoxy in Brāhmaṇical formulations. In Dharma texts the Veda is declared 'unquestionable' (*amīmāṃsā*; *Manusmṛti* 2.10–11), and those who deny its authority are reviled (12.95). Other authorities, from the Mīmāṃsākas to Śāṅkara, have insisted upon acceptance of the authority of the Veda as the defining criterion of orthodoxy, and virtually all sects usually thought to be 'Hindu' have, in one way or another, paid at least lip service to the notion that they are all somehow linked to the Veda and the Vedic past (Smith 1987, 1989: 13–29). Unqualified adherence to the authority of the Veda is 'the thread' that has united Brāhmaṇa polemics and apologetics 'in spite of differences in space and time' (Young 1981: 135).

Insofar as Western Orientalists and Indologists did conceive of a 'Hindu religion' with real definitional contours, it was largely on the basis of what this class of learned Brāhmaṇas told them about the tradition and its unifying principles. Europeans did not invent the notion that the Veda was the 'holy book' of Hindu India, or that caste was the defining religious and social institution, or that Brāhmaṇas were the authoritative leaders of the tradition. They were, at least in part, representing the Smārta Brāhmaṇa view of things. While the exact configuration of 'Hinduism' as a 'religion' was certainly shaped (how could it be otherwise?) by the culturally and historically conditioned expectations of Westerners of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the raw materials for such a reshaping were readily supplied by traditional Brāhmaṇa informants.

Conversely, when confronted with missionaries and Orientalists and made aware of the categorical expectations of these Westerners, Brāhmaṇa *paṇḍitas* had no difficulties in drawing upon traditional discourse and redeploying it in the terms of Western debate (see Dalmia 1995; Young 1981). In this way, Brāhmaṇa authorities, albeit now in a dialogical or dialectical relationship with Westerners, continued to act as spokesmen for a unified 'religion,' now known by the term 'Hinduism' (or its Sanskritized equivalents, for example, *hindū dharmā*).

Deconstructing the concept of 'Hinduism' is thus, in part, a move to delegitimize the authority of certain Brāhmaṇa *paṇḍitas* and theologians to pronounce on what 'Hinduism' is. I myself have argued (Smith 1994: 314–25) that certain claims Brāhmaṇas make for the Veda and for the constitution of the class and caste system in which they have given themselves a privileged position must be contested.¹¹ It is, however, another matter to deny the theologians of a tradition the legitimacy to pronounce on what constitutes 'orthodoxy' and what exactly lends the tradition its conceptual unity.

In fact one could argue it is precisely the theologians of a tradition who construct (and continually reconstruct) the principles that allow for a category of self-identification like 'Hindu.' Jacob Neusner has recently argued that 'the issue of theology bears consequence because upon the result, in the end, rests the question of whether we may speak of a religion, or only of various documents that intersect here and there' (1995: 239). The theologians of a tradition provide the 'glue' to an otherwise disparate set of data, 'facts,' sectarian differences, and all other particularities:

The conception of 'Judaism,' or 'Christianity,' or 'Buddhism,' serves the purpose of holding together in a coherent philosophically harmonious and proportionate construction diverse and otherwise inchoate facts, e.g., writings,

artifacts of material culture, myths and rites, all of them, without distinction as to provenance or origin, deemed to contribute to an account of one and the same systematic composition, an -ity or -ism; and, further, all of them—beliefs, rites, attitudes and actions alike—are assumed to animate each (Neusner 1995: 239).

Questioning the authority of theologians to do what theologians do—create a doctrinal umbrella underneath which the particularities of any religious tradition are organized—seems a bit presumptuous. One may nevertheless wish to do so in order to decenter traditional sources of authority, to represent the interests of competing voices within the tradition that have been disregarded or silenced (discontents or ‘heretics’). But there is certainly no reason to single out the theologians of Hinduism. Such an enterprise, if set into motion, should be directed equally at *all* of the ‘religions.’ ‘Buddhism,’ ‘Christianity,’ ‘Islam,’ and ‘Judaism’ are all, at least in part, the conceptual products of their theologians.¹² ‘Hinduism,’ from this point of view, is hardly a unique case, a point to which I will return below. For now I would argue, however, that if we as students of religion decide it is incumbent upon us to decenter the theological authorities of the religions we study, we should be mindful of the ethical and intellectual consequences of such interventions. We should carry out this self-appointed task in our study of all religions and not just a selected few.

Religions do of course change over time; and the conceptualizations of any particular religion will inevitably be altered by history. The contours of modern indigenous (that is, ‘Hindu’) views of ‘Hinduism’ have also undergone such change, especially in light of the interactions Hindus have had with the West. Traditional Brāhmanical views of Hinduism have themselves been adapted to the new conditions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and, more importantly, have been joined by other modernized (and, to some extent, ‘Westernized’) indigenous visions. It is with two other sets of Hindu authorities that have arisen in the wake of this intercultural encounter over the past two centuries where this kind of adaptation to modernity is most visible: the so-called ‘Neo-Hindu’ reformers, and the Hindu nationalists.

Scholars who contest the monolithic conceptualization of ‘Hinduism’ regard the Neo-Hindu movement as something like the native shadow of the Orientalist project. For it is in the formulations of ‘Hinduism’ issuing forth from such various nineteenth- and twentieth-century reformers like Aurobindo, Dayānanda Sarasvatī, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Rammohun Roy, and Vivekānanda that the impact of the Western ideas is most obvious.¹³

The Neo-Hindu indigenous authorities are often dismissed as ‘inauthentic,’ their claims to legitimacy compromised by their encounters with modernity and

Western social, political, and intellectual trends. Their representations of 'Hinduism' are delegitimized as merely the native restatement of ideas originating in the West. As Paul Hacker writes:

Neo-Hinduism is not a unified system of ideas. In fact it is chiefly because of one common trait that I classify religious thinkers as Neo-Hindus. Their intellectual formation is primarily or predominantly Western. It is European culture, and in several cases even the Christian religion, which has led them to embrace certain religious, ethical, social, and political values. But afterwards they connect these values with, and claim them as, part of the Hindu tradition (1978: 582).

More recently, Gerald Larson has listed the Neo-Hindus as the only indigenous source for contemporary Indian ideas about Hinduism and religion, but he also characterizes the movement they led as a 'defensive reaction' to outside forces:

Modern Indian notions of religion derive from a mixture of Christian (and mainly Protestant) models, Orientalist and largely Western reconstructions of India's religious past, and nineteenth century indigenous reform movements most of which were defensive reactions against the onslaught of Westernization and Christian missionizing (1995: 5).

Questioning the authority of the Neo-Hindu version(s) of 'Hinduism' seems to presuppose precisely what it also wants to argue against: that there is indeed some kind of 'authentic' or 'genuine' tradition or group of traditions (called Hinduism?) that has been compromised by those who have adapted to new historical, cultural, social, and political circumstances. The 'syncretism' attributed to Neo-Hindu formulations of 'Hinduism' assumes its opposite—a 'real' and 'unadulterated' Hinduism (or a variety of 'real Hinduisms') that existed before the encounter with the West and was previously unaffected by historical change and intercultural and interreligious forces.

All religions, at various points in recent history and under varying circumstances, have adapted to the modern world and the accompanying intellectual trends of modernity. 'Hinduism' (or 'Neo-Hinduism') is not unique in this regard either; the Neo-Hindu movement shares many commonalities with developments in other religious traditions around the world over the past several hundred years. The study of religion is the study of traditions in constant change. The reforms of the nineteenth and twentieth century in Indian religion are no different in principle than the transformations that have occurred

throughout the history of 'the tradition.' While it is necessary to the scholarly task to attempt to track such historical change and also to contest the claims of ahistorical continuity put forward by the religious, another form of 'essentialism' occurs when one period of change is somehow constituted as a deviation or inauthentic swerve from some supposedly more or less timeless norm.

The specific contours of the 'Hinduism' put forward by the Neo-Hindu movement are indeed attributable to the historical, cultural, and political circumstances of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century India (including the presence of Western colonialism and intellectual imperialism). And while one can argue that a 'monolithic' vision of newly conceptualized 'Hinduism' arose out of these circumstances, it is important to note that the Neo-Hindus, by and large,¹⁴ constructed a vision of their religion no less open-ended than the definitions put forth by the mainstream of Indology.

The 'Hinduism' portrayed by Neo-Hindus—tolerant, universalistic, all-encompassing, and nonsectarian—was created in part to represent it as the unifying agent in the nationalistic struggle. Confronted with both the reality of diversity and the British political critique of Indians as hopelessly divided,¹⁵ 'Hinduism' (or its essential core, Vedānta) was conceived and put forward as an all-encompassing mechanism of spiritual, cultural, and national unity. In fact many Neo-Hindus went even further, declaring that Vedāntic philosophy was not part of a religion or even a religion in and of itself but 'religion' in general; all religions could be incorporated under the umbrella of Vedānta. Thus, Vivekānanda would assert that

Ours is the universal religion. It is inclusive enough, it is broad enough to include all the ideals. All the ideals of religion that already exist in the world can be immediately included, and we can patiently wait for all the ideals that are to come in the future to be taken in the same fashion, embraced in the infinite arms of the religion of the Vedanta (1970–73, 3: 251, cited in Halbfass 1988: 238).

Somewhat later, Radhakrishnan would similarly write (again using the term 'Vedānta' for the essential heart of 'our religion'): 'The Vedanta is not a religion, but religion itself in its most universal and deepest significances' (1968: 18, cited in Halbfass 1988: 409).

While traditional Brāhmaṇa authorities were the sources for one kind of Western definition of Hinduism, the Neo-Hindus—acting out of their own interests and propagating their own agenda—were dialectically creating another version of 'Hinduism' with another, and much more dominant, branch of Indology. *Neo-Hindu articulations of Hinduism provide us with the Indian side*

of the same coin, stamped with the mainstream of Indological views of the tradition. Hinduism, in both cases, is not a religion comparable to others. The all-encompassing, pluralistic nature of the beast defies definition—it either is incomparable to other religions or was ‘religion’ itself, the summary and supersession of all ‘religions.’

Hinduism, it is claimed by both Neo-Hindus and Indologists, can be and is virtually everything. But for the Neo-Hindus, this nondefinition of Hinduism has played a different role than it has for Western scholars. The latter have, it would seem, resisted definition out of befuddlement, atavistic notions of a ‘mysterious East’ that defies rational categories, or simply failure of will; the former have done so largely out of concerns revolving around cultural pride and nationalistic aspirations. And, in either case, the end result is not dissimilar to the recent deconstructionist critique: There really is no such thing as ‘Hinduism,’ if by that term we mean a tradition that is both unified and bounded.¹⁶

The third set of native authorities that is challenged by contemporary deconstructionists is comprised of the Hindu nationalists, commonly called the Hindutva movement. Originating at about the turn of the twentieth century, this movement has recently undergone quite a revival and has become a major factor in modern Indian politics. Perhaps even more than traditional Brāhmaṇas and Neo-Hindus, it is the Hindu nationalist authorities and their pronouncements about Hinduism that many contemporary scholars have challenged by denying the existence of either a ‘Hinduism’ or a ‘Hindu community.’

Romila Thapar, in a widely cited article (1985), has argued that the Hindutva movement is creating a new form of ‘Hinduism’ out of the pluralistic and variegated realities of the Indic subcontinent. She has labeled this monolith ‘syndicated Hinduism,’ formulated in reaction to the historical encounter with Semitic religions:

The new Hinduism which is being currently propagated by the Sanghs, Parishads and Samajs is an attempt to restructure the indigenous religions as a monolithic, uniform religion, rather paralleling some of the features of Semitic religions. This seems to be a fundamental departure from the essentials of what may be called the indigenous ‘Hindu’ religions (Thapar 1985: 15).

Pointing to its modern origins in the Neo-Hindu movement and to the important contributions made to it by Indians of the Hindu diaspora, Thapar characterizes this new form of Semiticized and synthesized Hinduism as a movement that

draws largely on Brahmanical texts, the *Gītā* and Vedantic thought, accepts some aspects of the *Dharmashāstras* and attempts to present a modern, reformed religion. It ends up inevitably as a garbled form of Brahmanism with a motley of 'values' drawn from other sources, such as bringing in elements of individual salvation from the Bhakti tradition, and some Puranic rituals. Its contradictions are many. The call to unite under Hinduism as a political entity is anachronistic (1985: 22).

Finally, concludes Thapar, this new 'Hinduism' was created 'for purposes more political than religious, and mainly supportive of the ambitions of a new social class' (1985: 22).

Others have also criticized the Hindu nationalist movement on both these scores; that it is replacing pluralism and diversity with a monolithic ('syndicated,' 'organized,' 'Semiticized') form of Hinduism, and that it is not really a religious movement at all but, in essence, a political one (see, for example, Duara 1991; Jaffrelot 1993; Lochtefeld 1996). The academic effort to deconstruct this monolithic and politicized version of Hinduism has often been portrayed as in the interests of protecting those who have been victimized by the Hindu nationalist movement:

It appears to me that by rediscovering and accepting Hindu religious plurality as one of the characteristic features of Indian culture, the tensions which at present cause conflicts between the so-called Hindus and the so-called non-Hindus could be reduced considerably (von Stietencron 1995: 79–80).

But, as with the early Neo-Hindu movement, the Hindu nationalists do not seem to be constructing a new 'monolithic' form of the Hindu religion which is, as one critic puts it, 'contrary to the pluralistic and hierarchical essence of Hinduism' (Jaffrelot 1993: 522). Rather, driven by aspirations to spearhead a mass movement among India's diverse 'Hindu' population, the Hindutva leaders have been concerned to formulate a version of 'Hinduism' that is as inclusive, and vague, as possible.

Hindutva authorities have studiously avoided definitional statements about what 'Hinduism' *qua* a 'religion' really is. 'Hindutva' itself is an intentionally ambiguous term, implicitly referring to the religion of Hinduism while explicitly constituted as having only a 'cultural' referent. This ambiguity is obviously a strategic political move. For by actually defining Hinduism in terms of, for instance, allegiance to the authority of a 'canon,' the authority of the Brāhmaṇa class, or the doctrines and practices associated with *varṇāśramadharmā*, Hindu nationalists would lose elements of the mass movement they wish to lead.

Many 'Hindus' do not actually pay much attention to the Vedas; southerners resent the imposition from the North of Sanskrit and texts written in that language as definitive of 'Hindu' identity; and, the vast numbers of those historically persecuted by the religiously sanctified caste system will balk at any definition of 'Hindu' that relies on Brāhmaṇa privilege or its ideological underpinnings, *varṇāśramadharmā*. Both 'Hindutva' and 'Hinduism' have been deployed by Hindu nationalists as mobilizing slogans (and have been effective as such) and not as clearly defined religious terms.

While the movement has certainly drawn upon the religious sentiments and resentments of many sectors of the 'Hindu' populace, their definitional statements have thus tended to be as religiously vague as they are politically charged. 'A Hindu,' proclaimed Hindu nationalist Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in the 1920s, 'means a person who regards this land of Bharat Varsha [that is, India], from the Indus to the Seas, as his Father-Land as well as his Holy-Land, that is the cradle of his religion' (1942: 1). Those who do not consider India as their 'Holy-Land' (for example, Muslims and Christians) are regarded as 'guests' by some Hindu nationalists. 'The non-Hindu people in Hindustan,' wrote Rāṣṭrīya Svayamsevak Saṅgh leader Madhavrao Golwalkar,

must learn to respect and revere Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but that they must cease to be foreigners, or may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment, not even citizen's rights (1939: 47–48).

The Hindutva movement is not so much constructing a new 'syndicated Hinduism' as it is drawing upon and exploiting old notions of Hinduism as indefinable *qua* a religion and redeploying such notions to reposition Hinduism as the defining cultural and political ideology of India. It is, arguably, the *absence* of clear scholarly definitions of what constitutes Hinduism—as one religion among others in the subcontinent—that has made possible the discourse of Hindutva. Both Neo-Hindu and Indological traditions that have represented Hinduism as fundamentally *different* from other religions—in its infinite capacity to subsume all other religions within it—have left a legacy with new and perhaps unexpected consequences in the rise of Hindu nationalism.

The Hindu nationalist movement has also been criticized for being not 'religious' at all but a purely political movement that merely exploits religious sentiment for political ends. Delegitimizing Hindutva authorities thus also entails representing them not as religious leaders but as misguided and dangerous politicians. The assumption here seems to be that there is an essential 'religious' or 'spiritual' dimension of religions like Hinduism and that

introducing a political dimension somehow sullies that essence. This portrait ignores the fact that religion has *always* had a political dimension. While the nationalistic form this political element within religions has taken in recent times is, of course, historically and culturally conditioned, challenging the Hindutva authorities because their version of Hinduism has a political component is not persuasive. Criticizing the Hindutva movement for being 'too political,' and therefore not inclusive of genuine 'religious' spokespersons, can carry with it assumptions about religion that are idealized and decontextualized from the historical and cultural realities in which religions always function. It may also have unfortunate resonances with Orientalist presuppositions regarding a 'spiritual India' that is, in essence, apolitical and ahistorical.

Scholars have obligations, in my opinion, to contest some of the claims put forward by the Hindutva movement, especially when such claims appropriate the language of science, archaeology, and history (Smith 1996). Scholars of Hinduism might also object to the kind of representations Hindutva authorities are putting forward as to what constitutes 'Hinduism.' Doing so effectively, however, will involve providing alternative definitions of Hinduism as a religion that cease to imagine it as uniquely incapable of definition and therefore incomparable to religions elsewhere.

The history of modern 'constructions' (and 'deconstructions') of Hinduism, both in India and in the West, seems to demonstrate that all such representations have had a stake in portraying this religion as more or less indeterminate, unbounded, pluralistic to the point of all-embracing—as, in other words, distinct and different from other religions. The indigenous authorities who have been seriously challenged are not the Neo-Hindus or even the Hindu nationalists, both of whom tend to rework basic Indological assumptions about Hinduism. Rather, it has been the traditional Brāhmaṇas and their authoritative pronouncements—in which one finds clear statements of definition regarding Hinduism as a religion, which also provide the means for constituting Hinduism in a way comparable to other religions—who have been the losers over the past several centuries of Western and Indian interaction.

THE STUDY OF 'HINDUISM' AND THE STUDY OF RELIGION

The issues surrounding the current debate over the definitional contours of Hinduism could have important ramifications for the study of religion in general. But if they are to do so, scholars of Hinduism must relinquish the

time-honored notion in this field that our subject matter is, for whatever reason, exceptional. The definitional problem in the study of Hinduism is, I would argue, comparable to similar problems confronted by scholars of other religions.

The set of concerns I have concentrated upon here—those surrounding ‘Hinduism’ as a descriptive and/or interpretive term, competing sources of authority for depicting this religion, and the relationship of religious self-identification to categories used in the academic study of religion—is by no means confined to the Indian situation. While there are obviously specific circumstances that surround these problems in terms of the study of Hinduism, the issues are similar to those faced elsewhere.

That ‘Hinduism’ was ‘constructed’—by Orientalists, Neo-Hindus, Hindu nationalists, separately or in concert—is not some kind of epistemological revelation, nor is it a historical anomaly, nor is it a feature common only to this entity. One might equally, and with as much validity, argue that *all* such designations for world religions are ‘constructs.’ As Larson notes, ‘These designations are for the most part little more than conventional labels....Each is a singular label disguising what is in reality a pluralist array of cultural traditions’ (1995: 31).

The postmodern effort to destabilize the essentialistic dimensions of various terms and concepts (for example, ‘Hinduism’) can easily end up in a logical regress *ad infinitum*, ending in pure atomism. Swamped by the recognition of historical, cultural, social, and even individual particularities, one can eschew general categories, throw up one’s hands, and declare that a label like ‘Hinduism’ is nothing more than an artificial construct with no referent and no ‘hard’ or ‘concrete’ reality. Other traditions too—even those with more obvious traditional authoritative sources of self-definition than in the case of Hinduism—are, as Larson points out, ‘pluralistic arrays of cultural traditions’; and concepts like ‘Hinduism’ are after all concepts.

Recognizing such pluralism and the conceptual nature of such labels, however, does not necessitate the abandonment of scholarly general categories that lend meaning to ‘naturally’ disparate data. Other scholars of other traditions have also faced this problem; one of them concludes, after consideration of whether one can speak of ‘Judaism’ or only of ‘Judaisms,’ that the road to unbridled pluralism leads to a philosophical dead end:

So there is no possibility of claiming there never was, nor is there now, such a thing as ‘Judaism,’ but only ‘Judaisms.’ For once we take that route, there will be no ‘Judaisms’ either, but only this one and that one, and how we feel from day to day, and this morning’s immutable truth and newly fabricated four-thousand-year-old tradition (Neusner 1983: 235).

Description of particularities logically entails and is followed by acts of interpretation, of 'making sense' of the data; and this latter inevitably involves comparison, that is, the deployment of general categories and classificatory schemes of similarities and differences. General categories provide, as Marshall and Williams noted for previous constructions in the age of 'discovery' (and colonialism), a 'framework for comparisons' (see above, p.318). Such classifications that are 'constructed' and used by scholars, like 'Hinduism,' are themselves comparable to the genus of which they are species. 'Religion,' as Jonathan Smith has noted, is a category produced by an 'act of second-order, reflexive imagination which must be the central preoccupation of religious studies' (1983: 217). What Smith writes about 'religion' can easily be applied to the even more specific category of 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism':

That is to say, while there is a staggering amount of data, of phenomena, of human experiences and expressions that might be characterized, by one criterion or another, as religious—*there are no data for religion*. Religion is a creation of the scholar's study. It is created by the scholar's imaginative acts of comparison and generalization. *Religion has no independent existence apart from the academy* (1983: 217; emphasis in original).

It is important—and in the nature of things—for scholars to continually debate, challenge, and revise the 'imaginative acts of comparison and generalization' that spring forth from our studies; it is crucial that we continually question the authority of our predecessors in the effort to refine our categories. In the Indian case we may well decide that, upon reflection, 'Hinduism' is a category in need of revision, replacement, or dispersion into other categories. But if the study of Hinduism is to contribute to the study of religion, the grounds on which we make such determinations should be applicable elsewhere; and if we abandon the category of 'Hinduism,' on what new grounds can we compare that which was formerly known as Hinduism to other 'religions'?

As the material presented above demonstrates quite clearly, however, scholars of religion do not exercise their authority to write about religion(s) in a vacuum. Indeed, the case of Hinduism points to the quandaries we face as scholars when confronted with the claims of those who act as representatives of the religion we are describing, interpreting, and comparing. While it is certainly not appropriate simply to reproduce the religious discourse of religious people, can the authorities and adherents of a religion be disregarded in the scholarly enterprise of description, interpretation, comparison, and generalization?

One of the principal ramifications of the trend in Indology to deny the existence of a unified religion called 'Hinduism' is to delegitimize those in

India who, in varying ways, have represented themselves as 'Hindus' and their religion as 'Hinduism.' Such indigenous representations are, in the extreme forms the deconstructionist effort has sometimes taken, cavalierly dismissed out of hand. Von Stietencron, for example, has recently declared that it really does not matter if 'Hindus' today claim to be followers of a 'religion' called 'Hinduism': 'The Indian acceptance of the term "Hinduism" cannot serve to prove the existence of a "religion" called Hinduism' (1989: 15).

This kind of indifference to indigenous conceptualizations of self-identity is one unfortunate end result of the argument that Indology and Orientalist concerns singlehandedly 'constructed,' 'invented,' or 'imagined' a unified religion called Hinduism. This position is especially problematic in an age where Western scholars often claim to be concerned to allow the 'natives to speak' and 'assume agency' over representational discourse. Since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1979), it is usually not regarded as advisable to blithely ignore or overrule the self-portraits of those 'others' under study. In a post-Saidian era, we claim to take seriously native voices and thus counter Karl Marx's pronouncement (reproduced as one of the epigrams of *Orientalism*): 'They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented.'

Excluding indigenous representations of Hinduism is, ironically enough, one implication to be drawn from Said's postmodern master narrative itself. For, in that work, Said overstated the hegemonic power attributed to the discourse of Orientalism: 'Knowledge of the Orient, because generated out of strength, in a sense *creates* the Orient, the Oriental, and his world' (1979: 40; emphasis in original). The overweening power and dominance granted to the West and its discourses reappear in many critiques of Indian nationalism, communalism, and religion (for criticisms of this tendency and alternative views, see Irschick 1994; van der Veer 1994). Here, as in the prototype, the argument fundamentally comes down to this: The West invented such notions as 'the Orient,' 'India' *qua* modern nation-state, 'Hindus' *qua* a communal group, and 'Hinduism' *qua* world religion; the East subsequently passively accepted these false notions; and, now we (often, but not always) Westerners need to deconstruct them for you Easterners (and for ourselves). This vision of the relationship between West and East, and between modern scholarship and its object of study, is unfortunately reduplicative of such relations in the past.

Denying the legitimacy of any and all 'Hindu' representations of Hinduism can easily crossover into a Neo-Orientalism, whereby indigenous discourse is once again silenced or ignored as the product of a false consciousness delivered to it by outside forces or as simply irrelevant to the authoritative deliberations of Western Indologists. While there are many reasons for scholars to feel uncomfortable with the claims some Indians have and are making regarding

'Hinduism,' it is perhaps equally dangerous to deny them the legitimacy to declare what, for them, is 'Hinduism.'

Hinduism, construct or no, does indeed exist now, if not in the 'scholar's study' then certainly in India and elsewhere where 'Hindus' reside, albeit in varying configurations. Trying to deconstruct it in learned books and articles is very likely a rear-guard activity, with little chance of success and questionable purpose (compare the conclusions of Hildebeitel 1991). We ignore the 'Hinduisms' that do now exist at our own peril; in the absence of scholarly definitions and constructs, members of the real world will and have filled the vacuum. Perhaps the time has finally come in Indological circles not to abandon the concept of 'Hinduism' but to refine and define it as a religion among and comparable to others and to do so in consort with selected traditions and authorities within Hinduism that have also represented it in such a manner.

Notes

1. I am indebted to Bruce Lincoln for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

2. For a concise statement of method in the study of religion, see Lincoln 1996.

3. 'Hinduism' is also the byproduct of a British colonial administrative decision to divide up the populace into various 'communities' defined by religion—Christian, Hindu, Muslim, and so on (see Frykenberg 1987; Pandey 1992; Thapar 1989).

4. I leave aside consideration of early missionary accounts of 'Hinduism' that often did indeed tend to portray it as a 'religion,' albeit a 'false' one. The general category, 'heathen,' for all 'false religions' was eventually specified to 'Brāhmaṇism' or 'Hinduism' to depict the principal 'false religion' of the Indic subcontinent (see von Stietencron 1995: 73–77). For a survey of the definitional problem, see Sharma 1986.

5. For example, 'The acceptance of the caste system was considered by the orthodox to be the sole effective criterion of whether one was or was not a Hindu' (Zaehner 1966: 8; cf. Dharampal-Frick 1995; Inden 1990: 49–84).

6. For example, *saṃsāra*, *karma*, *mokṣa*.

7. See, for example, Renou's declaration that the Veda 'is precisely the sign, perhaps the only one, of Indian orthodoxy' (1965: 2). I have also argued for such a definition of 'Hinduism,' although the definition put forward is relational rather than essentialistic: 'Hinduism is the religion of those humans who create, perpetuate, and transform traditions with legitimizing reference to the authority of the Veda' (Smith 1989: 13–14, see also 1987). For the importance of the Veda in self-definitions of Hinduism among Brāhmaṇa apologists of the early nineteenth century (and the traditions they stood on), consult Young 1981: 131–35, 140, 152.

8. It may be granted that in traditional and largely Sanskritic texts these are not the terms used. It is, however, debatable at the very least as to whether Sanskritic terms like '*sanātana dharma*' and '*vaidika dharma*' cannot, with the proper concessions to historical, cultural, and ideological specificity, be comparable to and translated as 'Hinduism' or 'the Hindu religion.' Conversely, terms like '*bauddha dharma*,' found already in 'Hindu' texts dating from before the Common Era, might very well be adequately translated as 'the Buddhist religion.'

9. As noted above, many modern scholars of 'Hinduism' deny that the tradition has, or ever had, a sense of either 'orthodoxy' or 'heresy' (see also Rudolph and Rudolph 1987: 37). For medieval material concerning one sect's distinctions between itself as 'Hindu' and others who were not in the fold, see O'Connell 1973.

10. Such definitional criteria have also entered into modern Indian law, where many cases have arisen that require the court to make judgments about who is and is not a member of 'Hinduism' (see Baird 1993; Smith 1993).

11. On the grounds that such claims, like others made in religious discourse, depend on acceptance of superhuman, transhistorical, and universalist arguments that contravene the methodological principles we must follow as nontheological scholars of religion

12. They are also, of course, the conceptual and discursive products of outsiders who have (as in the case of Hinduism) likewise constructed a unity out of religious diversity and given it a unified label. These two types of unifying projects—theologians working from within; and scholars, administrators, missionaries, and other agents working from without—often have significant overlaps. In the Indian case, as we have seen above, Orientalist scholars and others built their constructions of largely following the same lines used for millennia by the 'orthodox' Brāhmaṇa *paṇḍitas*.

13. Their emphasis on a 'golden age' of the Vedic past and the degenerate state of the Hindu present; a 'return to the Vedas' movement, accompanied by a shift from traditional notions of what Daniel Gold (1991) has called 'scriptural authority' to a more circumscribed vision of 'scriptural canon' as a way to recover pristine 'Hinduism'; the abolition of image worship and various socioreligious practices (caste abuses, child marriage, *sati*) as 'non-Vedic'; the reinterpretation of traditional concepts and practices to accommodate modern, Western notions of individualism and social service; the organization of the group along Western lines; and, most of all, the nationalistically driven agenda to unite 'Hindus' under the banner (usually) of Neo-Vedāntic philosophy—all of these reforms, innovations, and adjustments are seen as driven by and derivative of the West.

14. Exceptions can be made for groups like the Ārya Samāj who tended to eschew the all-inclusive universalism of other Neo-Hindu groups and can be seen as the direct precursors to the Hindu nationalist movement of the twentieth century. For a comparison of Dayānanda Sarasvatī and the Ārya Samāj, on the one hand, and the Rāṣṭriya Svayamsevak Saṅgh, on the other, consult Gold 1991.

15. And therefore not a 'nation' and in need of foreign rule.

16. Neo-Hindu nationalistically driven universalistic claims for 'Hinduism' (as all religions in one) have had interesting reflexes among modern Indologists. Critical of attempts, indigenous or foreign, to conceptualize Hinduism as a religion with clear boundaries (that is, as exclusive), some of the latter have found themselves saying things like 'There is no religion in South Asia which is not, in some sense, Hindu' (Frykenberg 1993: 549) or 'The alternative to Hindu nationalism is the peculiar mix of classical and folk Hinduism and the unselfconscious Hinduism by which most Indians, Hindus as well as non-Hindus, live' (Nandy 1983: 104).

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