

PART I

Theoretical Issues

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CHAPTER 1

Colonialism and the Construction of Hinduism

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In *The Hill of Devi*, a lyrical collection of essays and letters recounting his travels in India, E. M. Forster describes his visit to a Hindu temple as a tourist's pilgrimage driven by a mixture of curiosity, disinterestedness, loathing, and even fear. Like the Hindu festival scene he paints in *A Passage to India*, the Gokul Ashtami festival he witnesses is characterized as an excess of color, noise, ritual, and devotional fervor. Forcing himself to refrain from passing judgment, Forster finds it impossible to retain his objectivity the closer he approaches the shrine, the cavern encasing the Hindu stone images ("a mess of little objects") which are the object of such frenzied devotion. Encircled by the press of ardent devotees, Forster is increasingly discomfited by their almost unbearable delirium. Surveying the rapt faces around him, he places the raucous scene against the more reassuring memory of the sober, stately, and measured tones of Anglican worship. His revulsion and disgust reach a peak as he advances toward the altar and finds there only mute, gaudy, and grotesque stone where others see transcendent power (Forster 1953: 64).

And then, just as Forster is about to move along in the ritual pilgrims' formation, he turns back and sees the faces of the worshippers, desperate in their faith, hopelessly trusting in a power great enough to raise them from illness, poverty, trouble, and oppression. Transfixed by the scene, Forster sees reflected in their eyes the altered image of the deity before them. As he wends his way through the crowd, he is overwhelmed by the confusion of multiple images of the Hinduism he has just witnessed: of garlanded, ash-smearing, bejeweled stone on one hand, and of the inexpressible power of deepest personal yearnings, desires, and needs on the other. If he is disgusted by the noisy displays of Hindu worship, he is moved beyond words by the eloquent silence of the pain and tribulation from which believers seek deliverance. In their taut, compressed faces he

finds a Hinduism to which he can relate, as surely as he is alienated by the other face of Hinduism blazoned by conch shells, camphor, and cymbals. He can conclude that, though “there is no dignity, no taste, no form. . . . I don’t think one ought to be irritated with Idolatry because one can see from the faces of the people that it touches something very deep in their hearts” (Forster 1953: 64).

Forster’s personal odyssey frames an experience of Hinduism that, in its exquisite detail and ultimate compassion, is far more nuanced than is its portrayal in some of his other better-known works. In *A Passage to India* Hinduism is depicted as a belief system with a “brouhaha” effect, a metaphysically infuriating religion blurring the manichean divisions between good and evil that inform western theology as much as western law, and comprise the dualities that help to define the nature, cause, and agent of crime as well as its punishment. But as Godbole, the novel’s comically inscrutable Brahmin character, avers portentously, how can crime be known so categorically when all participate equally in its commission? If everyone is complicit in acts of evil, would not all have to be punished equally too? It is this jumble of incoherent metaphysical murmurings, apparently sanctioned by Hindu belief, that exasperates Fielding, the English character most sympathetic to India. Unlike the colonial officers ruling the country, Fielding develops an emotional affinity with Indians, particularly the effervescent Muslim doctor Aziz. But even the resilient Fielding is overwhelmed by the bewildering course of events culminating in Aziz’s trial for rape of an English woman and then his subsequent acquittal. The trial turns Aziz into a fiery nationalist, willing to sacrifice even his friendship with Fielding to act upon his newfound political consciousness. An ecstatic scene of Hindu devotion marks the climax of the novel. As the birth of the god Krishna is celebrated, virtually turning princes and paupers alike into frolicking adolescents, the very imagery of Hinduism as an infantilizing religion fuses into the central image of the infant Krishna. It is no wonder that after the explosive confrontation between colonizer and colonized unleashed by Aziz’s wrongful arrest, no one can tell, as the English accuser Adele Quested discovers, whether evil lies in dark, hollow mountain caves or in the cavernous courtrooms of the colonial state. The raucous Hindu festival confirms the indeterminacy of events and their causes. And as the disillusioned Fielding sets sail from India soon after these events, it is only natural that he should feel the return of reassuring order and balance in his life as he passes the stately, proportionate architecture of Venice, described with barely disguised relief as “the civilization that has escaped muddle” (Forster 1970: 275). For Fielding, the decorum and harmony of the Venetian facades restore the principles of perspective and truth that had been entirely lost in the chaos of India, a chaos that is best represented by the metaphysical and aesthetic insufficiency of its religions: “The buildings of Venice, like the mountains of Crete and the fields of Egypt, stood in the right place, whereas in India everything was placed wrong. He had forgotten the beauty of form among idol temples and lumpy hills; indeed, without form, how can there be beauty?” (Forster 1970: 275).

The Modernity of Hinduism

That so sympathetic a figure as Fielding should resort to western aesthetic standards to evaluate Hinduism is a measure of how corrosive was the colonial experience even for those more favorably disposed to India. The western framework was never far from being a point of reference, even when the object was to critique the doctrinaire aspects of Christianity and uphold the east as a spiritual model for the materialistic west. An inability to view Hinduism on its own terms has shaped the study of comparative religion, whether to prove the superiority of Christianity or to show that Hinduism is part of the Christian teleology; to demonstrate, as Antony Copley calls it, a universalist theology that includes Hinduism as much as it does Christianity (Copley 1997: 58). The phase of western scholarly engagement with eastern religions, commonly referred to as the period of Orientalism, is often described as less hostile to Indian culture than the Anglicism that superseded it. Yet colonial perceptions of Hinduism should not be divided along the lines of those who were positively inclined and those who were opposed, since this assumes hostile reactions are produced by the intrusion of a western framework of reference and benevolent ones by its suspension, whereas it is clear the same frame persists regardless of whether the attitude is positive or negative.¹ The comparative perspective reveals that western observers of Hinduism were just as keenly assessing Christianity's place in European world domination as they were looking toward other belief systems to locate the roots of a proto-religion.

The interest in other religions was inevitably sparked by the need to chart the progress of civilization on scientific principles, which included tracing the evolution of religious consciousness. The search for earlier prototypes of the more evolved religions, of which Christianity was the prime example, led scholars to seek out comparable features, such as monotheism, a salvational scheme, and notions of the afterlife, in other religions. While the earliest travelers recorded their accounts of idolatrous worship by the peoples of India (Embree 1971), later scholars found in Vedic, Sanskrit hymns some indication that the object of Hindu worship was not mere stone but an abstract entity bearing some resemblance to the object of monotheistic worship. For such scholars, "Hinduism" was located in this combination of oral and written texts, and this textualized Hinduism was soon privileged as the religion on which subsequent attention was focused. Though Sanskritic Hinduism was far from representative of the worship of diverse peoples, it was made to define a whole range of heterogeneous practices that were then lumped together to constitute a single religious tradition termed "Hinduism" (Hardy 1995).²

The new textual discoveries of the eighteenth century led British Orientalists like William Jones, Nathaniel Halhed, and Henry Colebrooke to conclude that the religion practiced by Hindus was highly evolved, confounding the colonial assumption that all cultures outside the Christian pale were primitive, tribalistic, and animistic. As a result, in acknowledgement of the religious authority

wielded by Hindu pandits (learned, religious men) who also doubled as native informants and commentators of Sanskrit texts, British authorities scrupulously sought to co-opt them in the colonial enterprise. Rather than alienate them by opposing their practices, administrators found it more strategic to use their knowledge as the basis for codification of Hindu law. Such accommodation of native knowledge and practices was in stark contrast to colonialism's systematic effacement of indigenous practices of religious worship in certain African societies (Hefner 1993).

Whether as rank superstition or sublime philosophy, Hinduism challenged the unimpeded exercise of British rule, especially when it was perceived to be closely associated with the spread of Christianity. Because they feared that the colonial control of India would be regarded entirely as a Christianizing mission, British administrators remained at a distance from Christian missionaries and kept a close eye on their activities to ensure that they did not jeopardize their strategic relations with the comprador classes by provoking conflict with Hindus. To be sure, current scholarship gives much less attention to the colonial engagement with Indian Islam than with Hinduism (although there are notable exceptions: Lelyveld 1978; Metcalf 1982; Gilmartin 1988). The standard rationale is that Islam, like Christianity, was monotheistic, and since Christian missionaries were singularly focused on an anti-idolatry campaign, which Islam also shared, Christianity and Islam would seem to share similar goals, at least with regard to Hinduism. Yet interestingly Christian missionaries never saw themselves in alliance with Muslims in their campaign against Hinduism. In fact, there was a three-way contestation between Hindu pandits, Christian missionaries, and Muslim and Sufi *pirs* whose impact lies in the development of a field of apologetics asserting the claims of the respective religions. In his study of anti-Christian apologetics, Richard Fox Young suggests that "at about the time that Hindu pandits were recovering from their reluctance to counteract the threat posed by an alien and increasingly powerful religion in their midst, scholarly Christian evangelists were engaged in developing specialized terminology in Sanskrit for propagating their message more effectively than had theretofore been possible" (Young 1981: 15; Young's focus is on Hinduism's refutation of Christianity rather than of Islam). In this context Young deems it more appropriate to term the developments in India post-1850 not as renascent but as *resistant* Hinduism.

One of the most striking advances in modern scholarship is the view that there is no such thing as an unbroken tradition of Hinduism, only a set of discrete traditions and practices reorganized into a larger entity called "Hinduism" (Frykenberg 1989; von Stietencron 1989). If there is any disagreement at all in this scholarship, it centers on whether Hinduism is exclusively a construct of western scholars studying India or of anticolonial Hindus looking toward the systematization of disparate practices as a means of recovering a precolonial, national identity. Many will argue that there is in fact a dialectical relation between the two. In this view, as summarized by Richard King in *Orientalism and Religion*, nationalist Hindus appropriated a construct developed by Orientalist scholars and used it for their own purposes, producing the notion of a cultur-

ally superior Hinduism. In turn, nationalist adaptations of Orientalist scholarship formed the basis for contemporary (New Age?) representations of India as the eternal land of spirituality. The important point is that Orientalism remains the point of reference for Hinduism's current identification with mysticism and spirituality. Indeed, the work of King among others suggests that it is often impossible to distinguish western understandings of Hinduism from those of Indian nationalists, since "through the colonially established apparatus of the political, economic, and educational institutions of India, contemporary Indian self-awareness remains deeply influenced by Western presuppositions about the nature of Indian culture" (King 1999: 117). In this view, all notions of Hinduism deployed by Indian nationalists to create an overarching cultural unity have little reference to the lived religious experience of the people but, rather, derive from Western readings of a textualized Hinduism reconfigured to correspond to the compulsions of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

To be sure, British colonialism's relation with Hinduism has long been a fraught one, ranging from antagonism to admiration, with a good measure of sheer indifference thrown in between. Some scholars argue there was no such thing as Hinduism in precolonial India, only a set of traditions and practices reorganized by western scholars to constitute a system then arbitrarily named "Hinduism" (Frykenberg 1989). The most radical position states that Hinduism is not a single religion but rather a group of amorphous Indian religions. Heinrich von Stietencron writes that "Hinduism . . . does not meet the fundamental requirements of a historical religion of being a coherent system; but its distinct religious entities do. They are indeed religions, while Hinduism is not" (von Stietencron 1989: 20). In denying Hinduism the status of a religion because it does not constitute a coherent system, this view considers modern Hinduism to be the product of a sociohistorical process distinct from the evolution of a doctrinal system based on successive accretions of philosophical thought. The formation of modern Hinduism involves Christian missionaries and Hindu revivalist organizations alike, which both contribute to the systematization of disparate traditions for their own purposes.

However, the "construction of Hinduism" theory has several limitations. In an effort to recover a more heterogeneous and diachronically diverse religion, some scholars present modern Hinduism as more unified than it actually is. Richard G. Fox's critique of Ronald Inden's anti-Orientalist approach is relevant in this context. Fox's argument that anti-Orientalism preserves the stereotypes it seeks to demolish can be extended to the field of Hinduism studies (Fox 1993: 144–5). The tendency to interpret modern Hinduism as the unification of a loose conglomeration of different belief systems remains trapped within a monotheistic conception of religion, which constitutes the final reference point for judging whether religions are coherent or not. Nineteenth-century Hindu reformers, seeking to rid religion of the features most attacked by Christian missionaries, are believed to have been driven by a similar will to monotheism in their attempts to make the Hindu religion correspond more rigorously to the Judeo-Christian conceptions of a single, all-powerful deity. Only to the extent

that the western attribution of unity to Hinduism strategically helped anticolonial Indians create a national identity in religion can it be said that western discourses customized indigenous religions for native consumption. The notion that modern Hinduism represents a false unity imposed on diverse traditions replays a western fascination with – and repulsion from – Indian polytheism. In this enduring perception, the existence of many gods must surely indicate they were the basis of many smaller religions and therefore to describe them under the rubric of “Hinduism” as if they constituted a single religious system must be false, a distortion of heterogeneous religious practices. The reluctance of many scholars to call Hinduism a religion because it incorporates many disparate practices suggests that the Judeo-Christian system remains the main reference point for defining religions. Pointing out that “there is no single, privileged narrative of the modern world,” Talal Asad warns against the dangers of writing the history of world religions from the narrow perspective of Judeo-Christian history (Asad 1993: 9).

Moreover, while conceding the need to examine the Orientalist and colonial contributions to Hinduism’s modern-day form, one would need to be wary of ascribing total hegemony to western discourses, which are given such power in contemporary scholarship – even in work which purports to be anti-Orientalist – that they appear to rob Indians of any agency in redefining Hinduism for their own purposes. The view that Indians’ understanding of Hinduism is primarily drawn from western sources minimizes the significance of local, vernacular traditions for conveying a variety of precepts that are no less “Hindu” than those derived from the neo-Vedānta canon popularized in the west. These often went unnoticed by western commentators, who continued to insist that their “discovery” of Hinduism in such texts as *The Bhagavad Gītā* facilitated Indians’ attempt to find a cohesive unity in disparate branches of indigenous worship. Yet *The Bhagavad Gītā*, which exerted a powerful influence on Mohandas K. Gandhi’s concept of social action and is said to have reached him primarily through Edwin Arnold’s English translation, first affected him through his mother’s daily recitation of it in Gujarati (Gandhi 1957: 4–5). Gandhi attributes his self-consciousness as a believing Hindu to his mother’s influence, to the oral traditions she made available to him lying outside the formal instruction he received in school and elsewhere. Yet he also contrasts instinctive religious devotionism, as derived from his mother, with rational critical reflection, which western commentaries on Hinduism helped him to develop.³

The presence of vernacular traditions of Hinduism reminds one how difficult it is to locate the precise point at which classical Sanskrit texts became synonymous with Hinduism. It is clearly not sufficient to resort to a “colonial invention of tradition” explanation, with its suggestion that Sanskrit had no prior hegemony in Indian societies before the period of British colonialism. No doubt Sanskrit was a dominant discourse in the precolonial period and acknowledged as such by the Orientalists who undertook its study since the eighteenth century. At the same time, Sanskrit literature contains a heterodox tradition that never gets represented in Western discourse.⁴ When its dissenting strains are incorpo-

rated into Hinduism, they contribute to that religion's internal tensions. Thus Sanskrit's identification with Hinduism is itself a fraught one. One of the prime difficulties in determining the origins of Hinduism's interchangeability with the Sanskrit literary tradition is how effortlessly that tradition has been naturalized, so much so that it is no longer possible to distinguish between its precolonial authoritative status and its construction by British Orientalism.

At the same time, the new scholarship reveals as much as about the charged political climate of the 1980s and 1990s in which it was produced as it does about the modern history of Hinduism. After all, the absorption of smaller, local cults into a larger entity is not an unfamiliar one, and anthropological theory has long described the process of Hinduization as involving precisely such amalgamations. To scholars like Heinrich von Stietencron, the earlier anthropological approach is unsatisfactory because it is too rigidly structuralist in its orientation and presumes that Hinduism "naturally" evolves from its absorption of smaller cults (von Stietencron 1989: 71). Yet von Stietencron himself shows that Hinduization occurred in pre-Muslim India, when a competitive religious spirit among various sects – Śaivas, Vaiṣṇavas, Jainas, Bauddhas, Smārtas among others – created a tendency to make one religious view prevail over the others.⁵ Even without the pressure of a foreign religion, which might have brought competing cults closer together if only to present a concerted front against external threat, the rituals and texts of these various sects prescribed ways of inducting believers into a dominant cult and making it prevail. Somaśambhu's manual, the *Somaśambhupaddhati*, written approximately in the second half of the eleventh century, is the best known example of a text that prepared initiates to enter Śaivism. Its procedural rituals laid the foundation for an enhancement of Śaivism's power through mass conversions, one of the key elements in the expansion of religion and as vital to Hinduization as to Christianization or Islamization for the growth of these religions.

What then distinguishes Hinduization in earlier periods of history from the nineteenth-century construction of Hinduism as a national religion? After all, there is no reason why the pre-Muslim integration of other religious groups within a Hindu framework should not be regarded as a "construction," despite supporting evidence that during this time frame there was a superimposition of ritual structures on already existing rituals (von Stietencron 1989: 71). Von Stietencron's analysis offers a clue, for it suggests that ideological, structural, and institutional differences between the Hinduism of pre-sixteenth-century India and that of the nineteenth century make it impossible to describe the latter formation in terms of Hinduization. One crucial difference is the concept of the nation-state that becomes available to Hindus through the impact of British colonialism. Not only was the Hinduism of the earlier period different, because spiritual leadership was centered in the charismatic authority of individual figures (*gurus*) rather than in all-India, institutional bodies. More importantly, Hinduism was also driven by a missionary zeal to strengthen the claims to salvation of one path rather than many paths. This reflects a pattern consistent with the way conversion works to augment the power of one belief system and

gain new adherents by absorbing multiple groups into its fold. After all, early Christianity's growth was precisely through such accretions of smaller cults into a larger institution by means of conversion, and Hinduization in the precolonial period follows a similar pattern of augmentation (Hefner 1993). By contrast, the newly invigorated Hinduism of the nineteenth century is constituted as an exclusive defense against the assault of "foreign" religions, Christianity as much as Islam. This new Hinduism borrows features from European modernity and rational religion; most importantly, it relies on the concept of the nation-state in order to claim a national, all-India character.⁶

The Problem of Historiography

This differential history notwithstanding, the more interesting question to ask concerns the production of knowledge. What developments in history and method have enabled recent scholars to study Hinduism as a relatively modern construction? And to what extent, if at all, are these developments related to studies of the invention of tradition in other disciplines and regions? Since the publication of Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's influential collection of essays *The Invention of Tradition* in 1983, there has been a proliferation of studies drawing upon the insights of Foucault and Gramsci in order to examine the representation of governmental stratagems as eternal verities. The structure of rituals and ceremonials, diverse schools of thought, academic disciplines, and key canonical texts have all come under the steady gaze of historians, anthropologists, and literary critics, who have turned to examining the conditions reorganizing class interests into unbroken, universal traditions. "Invention of tradition" studies are popular in western scholarship because they have allowed a productive application of both Marxist and poststructuralist theories. They have also opened up a new historiography that claims a skepticism towards all forms of positivism and empiricism, just as it also casts suspicion on concepts of origins as privileged sites of authority.

Yet for all the parallels between the new historiography and contemporary scholarship on the colonial construction of Hinduism, poststructuralism is not the immediate context for studies of Hinduism as a modern construction, though its insights have certainly been important in developing new approaches to the study of Hinduism. Rather, recognition of Hinduism's modernity is possible because of (1) the recent rise of political parties claiming Hindu nationalism as their main election platform (Jaffrelot 1996; Hansen 1999); (2) the important contributions of feminist scholarship to a reexamination of Hinduism and patriarchy (Sangari and Vaid 1998; Mani 1998; Viswanathan 1998); and (3) the growing power of formerly "untouchable" groups in both changing the political equations and challenging the cultural history of India as a history written by the upper castes. These developments in Indian politics, feminism, and caste structures resist any attempts to write off the new scholarship as

merely derivative of western academic trends. Indeed, just as much as the subaltern studies collective may be said to have inspired a wave of studies “from below,” so too the urgency of the challenges before the Indian electorate has given a new political edge to the study of the “invention of tradition.” The point of reference for much of this scholarship is the present struggle for power between so-called secular and religious forces in India. Critical work is motivated by the perception that contemporary electoral politics is caught up in a web of (mis)perceptions of Hinduism that stretch as far back as the first missions to India and the period of British colonialism. One of the key concepts introduced by democracy and the nation-state is numerical representativeness. “Majority” and “minority” are equally legitimate categories organizing the electorate. The need to prove the claims of belonging to a majority group is a powerful one, so powerful that it contributes to a mythology of a coherent religious tradition sanctioned by scripture, confirmed by ritual, and perpetuated by daily practice. “This, indeed, is a case where nationalist politics in a democratic setting succeeded in propagating Hindu religious unity in order to obtain an impressive statistical majority when compared with other religious communities” (von Stietencron 1989: 52).

Likewise, feminist scholarship has had a powerful effect on the deconstruction of Hinduism as a patriarchal religion. Some of the most powerful insights into the colonial construction of Hinduism have come from the perspective of gender studies. Studies of *satī* (Mani 1998), female conversions (Viswanathan 1998), and prepubertal marriages and the age of consent (Chakravarty 1998; Sinha 1995; Chandra 1998) show the extent to which Hindu law was reorganized in British courts to affirm the values and goals of the Hindu elite, the uppercaste Brahmans. Far from applying legal insights based on local practices, as urged by a few exceptional British voices such as James Nelson, British judges relied on the textual interpretations offered by Hindu pandits. Nelson, registering his vehement disapproval of such excessive reliance on elite Hindu interpreters, urged that colonial administrators attend to the nuances of local custom and practice to decide points of law, rather than force Sanskrit-based law upon non-Hindu peoples.⁷

And finally, the political rise of *dalits*, or noncaste groups known also as “untouchables,” put a dent into Hinduism as an expression of brahmanism. The writings of dalit leader Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar punctured the logic of caste hegemony and retold the history of India as a struggle between a power-hungry but stagnant Hinduism and a flourishing Buddhism. In Ambedkar’s retelling of Hinduism’s conquest of Buddhism, those Buddhists who refused to convert to Hinduism or adopt its non-meat-eating practices were turned into chattel labor. Thus, according to Ambedkar, untouchability was a result of the *refusal* of Buddhists to reconvert to Hinduism, not of their social inferiority. In historicizing untouchability, Ambedkar restored a sense of agency to *dalits*.

As some scholars have noted, one of the pitfalls in challenging the nationalist, exclusivist evocation of an ancient religion, existing uninterruptedly for five thousand years, is that its opposite is asserted more as a matter of counter-

argument than historicity. In the attempt to disparage the contemporary Hindu ideologues, Hinduism is also being rewritten as a religion that “originally” had multiple differentiations that have now been lost under the umbrella term “Hinduism.” To some extent, this has involved rewriting the very category of religion. If we can assume that most religions have sects, would the presence of Śaivas, Vaiṣṇavas, Jainas, and other groups, though many in number, necessarily invalidate the existence of a loose confederation of religions called Hinduism? After all, the early history of Christianity is no less divided along sectarian lines (some with hairsplitting differences), yet few would deny calling it by the name of Christianity. In the case of Hinduism’s history, is the motivation to debunk the claims of Hindu ideologues driving the writing of another history, which involves the separation of “religion” from “sect” and a view of each sect as constituting a separate religion? Indeed, Śaivism is now considered as different from Vaiṣṇavism as it is from, say, Buddhism, yet Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism have traditionally been described as two competing sects of Hinduism. The important contribution of the new scholarship is that, by questioning whether even rival sects can be regarded as part of one religion, it disaggregates religion from territoriality. After all, if Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism have different forms of worship, different scriptures, and different concepts of the godhead, one must confront the question whether they are regarded as part of Hinduism solely because they are confined to the specific geography of the subcontinent. Such questions force a critical distance from conventional notions of religion and nationality, and prohibit a discourse of origins based on geography and territory from taking root. History as contested ground is equally evident in what Partha Chatterjee describes as Hindu nationalism’s “consciousness of a solidarity that is supposed to act itself out in history,” as much as in the secularist attempt to deconstruct that unity as a contrived one (Chatterjee 1993: 110).

Secondly, in seeking to critique Hindu nationalism without rejecting Hinduism *in toto*, some scholars have felt the need to assert a preexisting Hindu–Muslim harmony that had subsequently been disrupted by the policies of a divisive colonial government. Ashis Nandy, for instance, distinguishes Hinduism as a way of life from religious ideology, and argues that as a daily practice Hinduism has traditionally observed religious tolerance, but that subsequent manipulations by state and local political forces disrupted the amity between Muslims and Hindus (Nandy 1993). Drawing upon such data as the 1911 Census, he points out that in some parts of Gujarat individuals identified themselves as “Mohammedan Hindus,” and he concludes that these overlapping identities serve to question the arbitrary categories imposed by the British administration for its own bureaucratic purposes. No doubt observations of this kind are occasioned by a strategic necessity to recuperate some aspect of indigenous life not wholly overtaken by colonial power. If Hinduism as a way of life is asked to serve this role, it is offered as an acknowledgement that the social practices of people, as well as their ways of relating and cohabiting with members of other communities, are organized around religion. Religion as social organization and relationality need not necessarily be equivalent to religious ideology, as

Nandy argues, and such distinctions would have to be made to do justice to religion's instrumental value in allowing communities to develop. It is certainly true that on the many occasions when communal violence has broken out in India, activist groups (like Sahmat, for instance) are prone to evoking an earlier spirit of precolonial Hindu–Muslim harmony, tragically marred by the destructive and divisive legacies of the colonial state which persist into the structures of post-colonial India. In fiction Amitav Ghosh evokes memories of a similar fraternal spirit as a counterpoint to the unbearable horror of religious violence between Hindus and Muslims in the aftermath of partition (Ghosh 1992; Viswanathan 1995: 19–34).

The Impetus for Reform in Hinduism

The colonial policy of “divide and rule” has had some of its deepest consequences for Hinduism, its relation to Indian Islam not being the least of them. British colonialism's attitude to Hinduism has long been a fraught one, ranging from antagonism to admiration, but never complete indifference. The existence of a highly evolved religious system practiced by the Hindus confounded the colonial assumption that all cultures outside the Christian pale were primitive, tribalistic, and animistic. Confronting the religious authority wielded by Hindu pandits, British authorities scrupulously sought to win their allegiance rather than alienate them by opposing their practices. This led to strategies of co-optation, which was in stark contrast to colonialism's systematic effacement of indigenous practices of religious worship in other colonized societies, particularly in Africa and the Caribbean. Because of the colonial state's complex negotiation of Hinduism, conversion, as well as colonial governance and educational policy, followed a different course in India than in other colonized societies. The prominence of education in the preoccupations of administrators and missionaries alike can be attributed to the recognition that the exercise of military strength – in the case of administrators – or the practice of itinerating – in the case of missionaries – was not sufficient to securing the consent of the colonized. Subjects had to be persuaded about the intrinsic merits of English culture and Christianity if they were to cooperate willingly in the colonial project (Viswanathan 1989; Copley 1997). The Gramscian theory of hegemony by consent has one of its strongest proofs in the Indian case, as colonial administrators sought to win the consent of Indians. Modifying Indian attitudes to Hinduism was central to the project. One result was the creation of a whole class of Indians alienated from their own culture and religion, even as they were systematically excluded from full participation in the structures of self-governance. It was this class that was later to initiate a series of reforms of Hinduism and establish its modern identity. While some prominent Hindus converted to Christianity, their conversions did not necessarily signify a pro-colonial stance, contrary to what many of their countrymen believed. In fact, many converts were

also part of the momentum to reform Hinduism. Pandita Ramabai, Cornelia Sorabjee, Krupabai Saththianadhan, and Narayan Viman Tilak, who all converted to Christianity, were also central figures in the major social reform movements of the nineteenth century. Keshab Chander Sen was one of the founders of the Brahmo Samaj, a reform movement intended to make Hinduism less caste-based and less focused on idol worship and rituals. Tilak turned to vernacular sources to find a meeting point between Hinduism and Christianity, which he wanted to make a national rather than foreign religion. Ramabai, Sorabjee, and Saththianadhan were all involved with women's reform: Ramabai established a home for widows in Pune; Sorabjee was trained as an advocate in England and was keenly involved with issues of property reform, as well as the professional education of women; and Saththianadhan, trained as a medical doctor, took up the cause of education for women (Kosambi 1999; Saththianadhan 1998).

One reason why Indian converts to Christianity were able to maintain a distance from the colonial state was that the history of Christian missions in India was never identical with British colonialism, though this is not to say the missions opposed the colonization of India. Until the passing of the Charter Act of 1813 there were numerous curbs on missionary activity in India because of the apprehension that it jeopardized the Company's relations with a primarily Hindu population. An insurrection at Vellore, near Madras, in 1806 was blamed on missionary proselytization, and the Company feared that Hindu resentment would soon spread and threaten the delicate relationship it had established with Indian merchants. In the name of protecting the Company's commercial interests, a policy of religious neutrality was encouraged, whereby the Company refrained from interfering in indigenous religions. This did not imply that the Company approved of Hinduism, but merely that they considered their own mercantile interests more important. So scrupulous were Company officials in giving no offense that they were even willing to provide funds for religious schools and employ *pandits* and *shastris* as local informants, a practice that appalled Macaulay and James Mill who denounced such funding as a violation of religious neutrality.⁸ Missionaries too used this as an opportunity to expose the inconsistencies of the Company, which put restrictions on the work of Christian missionaries but gave grants to Hindu and Muslim schools. Missionaries raised a fierce uproar, organizing the Anti-Idolatry Connexion League in response, and were so vociferous in their protests that in 1833 the government was forced to withdraw its funding and leave the religious endowments in the hands of Hindu religious bodies. Though it was not until 1863 that a law was passed that officially mandated noninterference, Robert Frykenberg argues that by this time a new Hindu public had begun to emerge, which drew upon the "structure of legal precedents for the rise of an entirely new religion" (Frykenberg 1989: 37).

Whether it was perceived negatively or positively, Hinduism posed an effective challenge to the unalloyed exertion of British rule, especially considered interchangeably with the spread of Christianity. The colonial engagement with Indian Islam was never as intense as it was with Hinduism. The conventional

explanation is that Islam, like Christianity, was monotheistic, and Christian missionaries were far more focused on an anti-idolatry campaign that Islam, to some extent, also shared. Yet Christian missionaries never saw themselves in alliance with Muslim *pirs*, and there was indeed a three-way contestation between Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam revealing that the tensions between religions have as much to do with historical rivalries between them as with whether they are monotheistic or polytheistic. James Mill regarded Islam more favorably than Hinduism, yet attributed the decline of the Indian polity in the eighteenth century to effete Islamic rule (Mill 1858). The relationship of religion to effective governance, rather than the merits of doctrine, emerges in such accounts as the yardstick for evaluating the quality of religion. A civilizational theory of religion, akin to Hegel's schematization of phases of religious development, gained ground as the post-Enlightenment rationale for religion in culture. Under these conditions, both Hinduism and Islam came under sharp attack for their role in the decline and stagnation of material growth. Christianity's identification with the ascendancy of western civilization was the *sine qua non* of such attacks.

James Mill marked a disruptive moment in the European perception of Hinduism. After a long period of opprobrium, when Hinduism was considered akin to Catholicism in its "paganism" and rank superstition, Hinduism came to be discovered as a highly sophisticated philosophical system. The discovery went in tandem with a progressive, cosmopolitan Enlightenment project that sought out natural reason in religion as the feature that distinguished it from supernaturalism. In India, one consequence of the progressive, cosmopolitan Enlightenment project is to argue that only those elements of native culture that accord with natural reason are authentically Indian and hence that all other native South Asian cultural practices are monstrous and inappropriate for a modern civil society. A Vedāntic concept of Hinduism was already in the making, as an abstract, theistic philosophical system came to represent Hinduism, while all other popular practices were denounced as idolatrous. The splitting of Hinduism into popular and intellectual systems contributed to a parallel splitting of anti-colonial responses into those for whom popular beliefs and "superstitions" were an essential part of Hindu identity and those for whom Hinduism was purged of some of its casteist, polytheistic, and ritualistic features. Dipesh Chakrabarty has shown how popular beliefs confounded both colonizers and Indian intellectuals alike and came to be identified with a sinister, subversive underside of subaltern opposition (Chakrabarty 2000: 72–113). Increasingly, there is more interest in these subaltern expressions of Hinduism as the site of an anticolonial, anticasteist resistance that rewrites the very categories of "natural reason" and "supernaturalism." Looking at peasant "superstitions" and animistic beliefs also offers alternative views of Hinduism obscured by the elitist monopoly of theistic religion.

But for Indian intellectuals intent on purifying Hinduism of its popular, idolatrous associations, a newly defined religion could give them an identity compatible with the modernity they craved, while retaining their roots in indigenous

traditions. The Hinduism of Vedānta perfectly fit their needs. A rational religion consisting of intellectual systems and critical epistemologies, modern Hinduism made Christianity appear nonrational, intuitive, and idiosyncratic, a religion riddled with inconsistencies and confusing dogmas. To Hindus seeking rational bases in religion, the concept of the Trinity was one of Christianity's most vexing puzzles. The Christian convert Pandita Ramabai's main quarrel with Trinitarianism was that its concepts of God, the Son, and the Holy Spirit dispersed deity in three different figures, and confounded the promise of monotheism that led her to leave Hinduism in the first place. By contrast, Vedāntic Hinduism possessed almost a cold logic that the Hindu elite could proudly display as a sign of their own cultural superiority. Moreover, its severe intellectualism was compatible with the scientific temperament, unlike in the west where religion and science were virtually opposed terms. This was a religion Hindus could be proud of: instead of gaudily decorated stone, theirs was a Hinduism of the mind, that faculty praised by the colonizers as the index of civilization.

On the other hand, the push toward a monotheistic version of Hinduism was intended to contest Christianity on its own ground and win back converts to the Hindu fold by offering the same egalitarian promises as Christianity. The Ārya Samāj, to name one of the most successful of these movements, eliminated many of the cumbersome rituals of Hinduism and loosened caste strictures. It was especially attractive to those who were neither keen on converting to Christianity nor content to remain in a past-oriented Hinduism, out of touch with the compulsions of modernity. Although Hinduism traditionally claimed that, unlike Christianity and Islam, it was not a proselytizing religion and that Hindus were born not made, the Ārya Samāj introduced practices that unsettled those claims. A practice akin to the baptismal rites of conversion, the ritual purificatory act of *śuddhi* initiated non-Hindus to the religion (Seunarine 1977). Though claiming earlier scriptural antecedents, *śuddhi* was intended to help Hindus reclaim converts to Christianity. The ritual is an example of how Hinduism adapted to the new challenges set by colonialism by borrowing some of the very features – such as conversion – that it had earlier repudiated, claiming Hinduism's privileged status on the basis of birth. Reconversion rituals have been a fundamental part of modern Hinduism's attempt to reclaim and sustain its majoritarian status.

Orientalism and reformism thus often went together in the nineteenth-century construction of Hinduism. If the Hinduism approved by Orientalism reflected a European view of natural religion, reform movements were a double reflection of that view. Orientalism and reform enter a dialectic that kept Hinduism bolted within the vise of European perceptions – as if in an interlocking set of infinite mirrors – regardless of whether the intent of Hindu reformers was to break free of them or not. The texts that reformers consulted were often based on translations authorized by western scholars, such as William Jones, Charles Wilkins, Nathaniel Halhed, Henry Colebrooke, and Henry Prinsep. Rarely did reformers turn to oral traditions or local practices for alternative understandings of Hinduism. Rosane Rocher's argument that the privileging of Vedānta by

the British and by reform movements within Hinduism was an “accident of intellectual history” fails to account for why reformism was so restricted in its range of textual sources (Rocher 1993). Jadunath Sarkar, a Bengali reformer, reveals how narrow was this range:

In the nineteenth century we recovered our long lost ancient literatures, Vedic and Buddhist, as well as the buried architectural monuments of Hindu days. The Vedas and their commentaries had almost totally disappeared from the plains of Aryavarta where none could interpret them; none had even a complete manuscript of the texts. The English printed these ancient scriptures of the Indo-Aryans and brought them to our doors. (Sarkar 1979: 84 in Chakravarty 1998)

The core of Hindu tradition was located in the Vedas and the Upaniṣads, the time of whose composition marked the golden age of India’s civilization. The wondrous past unearthed by Orientalist scholars became all the more valuable to the indigenous literati as they faced a present denounced by missionaries and utilitarian reformers alike for its benightedness and social inequalities.

However, drawing upon Orientalist scholarship does not mean that Hindu reformers were passive recipients of knowledge about their glorious past. As Uma Chakravarty points out, the indigenous elite were “active agents in constructing the past and were consciously engaged in choosing particular elements from the embryonic body of knowledge flowing from their own current social and political concerns” (Chakravarty 1998: 32). These concerns interacted with the texts made available by Orientalist scholars through translations and new critical editions, which enabled a reinterpretation of the past as a vital period of Indian history from which a more positive Hinduism could be reconstructed from its now fallen state.

Of particular interest in the return to the golden past was a search for a time when women held a more exalted position than at present or under Muslim rule. Instead of denouncing Hinduism for perpetuating degrading practices like *satī* and infant marriage, as Christian missionaries did, Hindu reformers resolved the problem of seeming to approve a religion they themselves felt some distance from, by claiming that the earlier history of Hinduism showed a much more positive attitude to women. This move consisted of evoking heroic women figures in Hindu narratives, like Savitrī, Gargī, and Maitreyī, whose devotion to their husbands not only earned them the exalted title of *pativrata*, but whose learning, resilience, courage, and assertiveness also made them particularly worthy of general emulation, particularly in a colonial setting where the emasculation of men threatened to rob people of strong role models. Such an exalted view of women in Indian history was in stark contrast to the general portrayal of women as victims, which missionaries were fond of depicting when they alluded to the practices of widow burning, female infanticide, and child marriage. Early Hinduism’s capacity to give women a place in society beyond their subordination to men was an underlying refrain in the writings of reformers, who remained dependent on Orientalist presentations of their own texts to them. That these

presentations drew upon some of the west's own romantic longings for some essential spiritual unity was not lost on the Hindu elite, whose spiritualization of women, as Partha Chatterjee points out, compensated for their emasculation by colonial control (Chatterjee 1993).

Significantly, the impetus to look for alternative traditions often came from Christian converts who, imbued with a desire to address Hinduism's shortcomings, turned to folk traditions to locate other ways of finding a synthesis of Hinduism and Christianity that could truly be called indigenous. For instance, the Marathi poet Narayan Viman Tilak, who converted to Christianity, was a major Indian nationalist figure who used his conversion as a standpoint from which to offer proposals for a revitalized India. He believed Christianity could help rid Hinduism of its casteist features, yet at the same time he wanted to indigenize Christianity to make it more adaptable to the needs and emotions of the people, as well as to critique the alienating effects of British colonialism. Dissatisfied with Sanskrit texts because they excluded the mass of people, he turned to the older Marathi devotional poetry of Jñāneśvar, Nāmdev, and Tukārām (through whom he claimed he reached Jesus Christ), and sought to adapt the *bhajan* form to Christian hymns (Viswanathan 1998: 40). The result was a unique synthesis of Hindu and Christian cultural forms, largely made possible by mining the folk traditions ignored by Hindu reformers.

Hinduism and Colonial Law

It was in the arena of law that Hinduism received its most definitive colonial reworking. This is one of the most complicated and dense aspects of Britain's involvement with Indian traditions, yet it is also the most far-reaching, as the texts that constituted the basis of legal decisions achieved a canonical power as religious rather than legal texts. This had a great deal to do with the consolidation of patriarchal power over practices involving women, such as *sati*, prepubertal marriage, and conversion to other religions. Each of these had a significant role in the construction of Hinduism. If modern Hinduism's practice is theoretically based on law, it is to that law that one must turn to examine how it was yoked to the interests of both colonizers and the indigenous elite, even as it showed the wide gap between them.

Instead of rehearsing a linear chronology of the laws of India, we would do well to begin with a pivotal act that reveals as much about what preceded it as how it affected (or did not affect) the course of subsequent Indian legal history. The Caste Disabilities Removal Act was passed in 1850, and it was intended to protect converts from disenfranchisement of their rights, including rights to property, maintenance, and guardianship. But its immediate precursor was the Lex Loci Act, which was drafted in 1845 (as the name suggests) to constitute the law of the land, irrespective of individual differences between the various personal, customary, and statutory laws of Hindus and Muslims. The preservation

of these laws goes back to Warren Hastings' Judicial Plan of 1772, which provided for the application of different traditional laws for Hindus and Muslims – a decision that, Dieter Conrad argues, was instrumental in introducing a two-nation theory in India: “One has to date from that decision the establishment of personal laws on the plane of state legality in India: laws administered by ordinary courts, yet applying not as the common law of the land on a territorial basis (*lex loci*) but on account of personal status by membership in a social group defined by its religion.” Conrad is careful to point out that this was not necessarily a “divide and rule” strategy, but that it was “largely a ratification of existing practices” (Conrad 1995: 306). Even this last statement is only partially correct, as these practices did not have a history that stretched back indefinitely. Indeed, many of them were no more basic to Indian society than the amalgamation of Indian and English law that superseded them. The laws had been carefully developed through translations undertaken by prominent British Orientalist scholars, including William Jones, Nathaniel Halhed, Henry Colebrooke, and William Grady. The application of laws derived from Sanskrit classical texts leveled the community of Hindus to include all those who were not Muslims or Christians, and it absorbed under the category of “Hindu” both outcasts and members of religions as diverse as Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism. Only Islam was considered separate from Hinduism. Christianity suffered a more ambivalent fate. Though there were separate laws for Christians, these depended on what category of Christian one was. British residents, of course, had their own laws; East Indians (Anglo-Indians) too were governed by English law; native Christians claimed English law, but court rulings were inconsistent in this regard, at times deciding that they came under the administration of Hindu law.⁹ And finally, from a legal viewpoint, Christian converts were in the most liminal position. One of the paradoxical effects of Christian conversions was a tendency in colonial courts to regard the conversions as not having occurred at all, with the result that Christian converts were still placed as Hindus for purposes of law (Viswanathan 1998: 75–117).

So much has been written about *satī* in recent scholarship that it has come to stand for a pivotal moment in nineteenth-century reform legislation, as well as the culmination of a crisis involving women's subjectivity. Partly because of its sensationalism, and partly because of its romantic representation in both Indian and European texts, *satī* has overshadowed (not always justifiably) other crucial issues involving women, such as education, early marriages, and the effects of conversion. This is not the place to go into the vast literature on *satī*, but several observations are in order for understanding why *satī* has engaged scholarly attention to the extent that it has, and how that attention is now focused on the emergence of Hinduism in its present form. Colonial discourse studies have illuminated the connections between *satī* and the colonial construction of Hinduism in powerful ways. The work of Lata Mani emerges from this approach, though it has been taken to task for attributing too much power to colonial knowledge and not enough to other indigenous sources comprising both textual and oral traditions. Nonetheless, Mani's work is a useful starting point for

analyzing the relations of Hinduism and colonial law. Mani's principal argument is that "tradition" is reconstituted under colonial rule and that woman and brahmanic scripture become "interlocking grounds for this rearticulation" (Mani 1998: 90). Drawing from the colonial archive, she shows how women were the ground for defining what constituted authentic cultural tradition. If there was a privileging of brahmanic scripture, and tradition was equated with scripture, Mani suggests that this was the effect of the power of colonial discourse on India, which rewrote woman *as* tradition. Less convincing is Mani's explanation that such representations were forged out of a colonial need for systematic governance. It is more likely that colonial administrators were attempting to find a coherent point in Hindu law on which they could peg certain existing assumptions in British culture about women, tradition, and the domestic sphere, thus achieving a manufactured version of Hinduism suitable for their own purposes.

Considered the bane of Hindu society, child or prepubertal marriages were vehemently opposed by Christian missionaries, who objected on the grounds of both health and morality. Child brides were perceived to be so ill trained in hygiene and well-being that the children they gave birth to were believed to suffer from congenital disorders and not destined to live long. The longer a woman married, the longer her children were expected to live. Even Hindu men could not find much to dispute in this argument. However, the issue of morality put them fiercely on the defensive. The right to repudiate an early marriage, especially when there was neither consummation nor formal cohabitation, threatened to destroy the idea of marriage as a sacrament, which none of the male Hindu reformers were willing to do. Nor were they keen to raise the age of consent for females. The infamous Rakhmabai case, involving a woman's right to repudiate a forced marriage, resulted in the woman being returned to her husband. At stake was the sanctity of Hindu marriages: if the verdict had gone in the woman's favor, marriage would be turned from a sacrament to a contract issue, which the Hindu elite resisted fiercely (Chandra 1998).

Finally, colonial conversions reveal the reach of colonial law to fix religious identity, especially in the face of challenges by converts to subvert assigned identities. That the British administration was involved at all was solely due to the fact that missionaries helped in bringing to court the cases of converts denied certain rights upon conversion. Subject to forfeiting their rights to property, conjugality, guardianship and maintenance, converts from Hinduism suffered "civil death," a state of excommunication. Realizing that they could turn their failures in the mission field to good account by becoming legal advocates, Christian missionaries urged the colonial courts to protect the rights of converts on principles dear to English political thought, the right to property being a key one. Of course, the missionaries were primarily interested in removing the obstacles against conversion, since the dreaded prospect of civil death made Hindus more reluctant to convert. But the British judicial decisions reveal a curious feature: while they remained true to form by asserting the right to property by individuals, they did so by denying the subjectivity of converts. That is, the solution to protecting converts' rights was by regarding them as still Hindu under the law. The rationale

for this move was the belief that customs and usages (often deferred to in civil suits as a last resort) were slower to change than beliefs. British judges resolved the dilemma of applying English liberal principle that might be offensive to Hindu patriarchy by declaring that converts to Christianity could remain Hindus for purposes of law, especially if their habits and manners remained essentially undifferentiated from so-called Hindu customs. The rationale for this solution was simple: If Christian converts were really Hindus, they could not be treated as civilly dead and their civil rights could not justifiably be revoked under Hindu law. The net result of such judicial rulings was the creation of a homogeneous Hindu community, impervious to the discrepant articulations of individual members claiming fealty to other faiths.

Notes

- 1 Richard G. Fox's proposal that we distinguish Orientalism between two forms – affirmative and negative – fails to acknowledge that even affirmative Orientalism was deeply embedded in structures of domination. See Fox 1993: 152.
- 2 Many of the contributors, as well as the editors, of *Representating Hinduism* emphasize Hinduism as a nineteenth-century construct, forged largely as a nationalist response to British colonialism. Of particular interest for this argument are the essays by Friedhelm Hardy and Heinrich von Stietencron.
- 3 For instance, Gandhi maintained that though he had read *The Bhagavad Gītā* in his native Gujarati, it was only when he read it in an English translation that he was able to make the philosophical connections between such key concepts as *dharma*, *satyā-graha*, and *ahimsā* from which he was then able to develop an activist program of civil resistance (Gandhi 1957: 67–8).
- 4 It is equally important to note, as Amartya Sen does, that Sanskrit literature has a long history of heterodoxy, yet this tradition of writing does not get as much attention in Western discourses as does a representative “Hindu” text like *The Bhagavad Gītā*. Sen observes that “Sanskrit and Pali have a larger atheistic and agnostic literature than exists in any other classical tradition. . . . Through selective emphases that point up differences with the West, other civilizations can, in this way, be redefined in alien terms, which can be exotic and charming, or else bizarre and terrifying, or simply strange and engaging. When identity is thus defined by contrast, divergence with the West becomes central” (Sen 2000: 36).
- 5 I use the phrase “pre-Muslim India” with some reservations, even though it is part of von Stietencron's description. As Romila Thapar among other scholars has argued in numerous writings, dividing India into “Hindu India,” “Muslim India,” “British India” is too neat a formula, since it reintroduces James Mill's language (as present in his *History of British India*) of considering Indian history within this tripartite division. Such a historiography, Thapar argues, has been instrumental in fueling the passions of Hindu nationalists to recover a Hinduism compromised or threatened by Islamic conversions and the destruction of Hindu temples.
- 6 Von Stietencron observes that Hinduism in pre-Muslim India did not have all-India religious bodies invested with the power to authorize official religious interpretations, and hence heterodox readings could not be banned entirely (von Stietencron 1989: 71).

- 7 James Nelson, *A View of the Hindu Law as Administered by the High Court of Judicature at Madras* (1877). Nelson noted that the usages and customs of inhabitants of his district in Madurai were altogether different from the practices associated with Hindus and that were “judicially recognized” by the High Court of Judicature at Madras. He concluded from this observation that, far from being Hindu in faith and thought, Tamil people “believe, think, and act in modes entirely opposed to and incompatible with real, modern Hinduism” (p. ii). Lashing out at the “grotesque absurdity” of applying the strictest Sanskrit law to tribals, Nelson argued that no such thing as Hindu law ever existed. The artifact of Sanskritists, Hindu law came into being as a result of the ignorance of the actual history and circumstances of the vast majority of social groups in India, maintained Nelson, one of the few voices in the British judicial administration who dared to take this position.
- 8 Macaulay’s infamous “Minute on Indian Education” is partly inspired by his outrage at the British government’s subsidies to indigenous schools, which taught what he described as wildly extravagant fairy tales masquerading as religious truth. His plea for the study of English literature was the culmination of a long argument that originated in an Orientalist policy encouraging indigenous learning. See “Minute on Indian Education,” in G. M. Young, ed., *Macaulay: Prose and Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957).
- 9 *Abraham v. Abraham* was one of the most prominent cases involving East Indians. In this case a widow of a native Indian Christian contested her brother-in-law’s claim that, as native Christians who were formerly Hindus, even several generations ago, Hindu law was applicable in cases of joint property and coparcenerships. The widow protested that as Christians they were governed by English law. The ruling went in the brother-in-law’s favor.

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