

ANTHROPOLOGY
OF
RELIGION

A Handbook

Edited by
Stephen D. Glazier



GREENWOOD PRESS
Westport, Connecticut • London

1997.

HINDUISM IN CONTEXT: APPROACHING A RELIGIOUS TRADITION THROUGH EXTERNAL SOURCES

Cynthia Keppley Mahmood

Anthropologists of late have been rethinking their discipline. One key aspect of this rethinking is a rejection of the "cultures-as-entities" style of research and writing that characterized the field throughout most of its history. Instead, new theorists proclaim the need to recognize the constructedness of the classic notion of "cultures," bringing out the interactive and polyvocal character of cultural relations in our work. Artificially constraining this complexity in a "cookie-cutter" model of cultural units with the ethnographer as the privileged voice was, it is asserted, a rhetorical device with important repercussions for anthropology's claims to "objectivity." It was also inextricably tied to issues of who represents whom—and hence to the politics of domination and repression. (For initial expositions see Marcus and Fischer [1986] and Clifford and Marcus [1986].)

Much experimental ethnographic writing has been inspired by the new critiques, some of it directly challenging the reality of "cultures" as we used to think about them (e.g., Handler 1988; McDonald 1989). Less impact has been felt in the sphere of religion. But issues surrounding the anthropological study of religion are similar. What does it mean to talk about "Hinduism" as a tradition, or to talk about "Hindus" as if they were a definable social group? Does conceptualizing Hinduism as a single phenomenon, despite what we know about the immense diversity of belief and ritual conducted in vaguely Hindu contexts, compromise our academic and political integrity?

Much questioning that might be occasioned by a thoughtful critique of anthropological treatments of religion, has been precluded by the way in which

anthropologists of religion are typically educated. This holds especially for those who focus on literate or text-based religions. Students of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and so on, generally have been kept busy mastering relevant classical texts, philosophical or theological perspectives, basic history, and the range of popular belief and ritual of their chosen tradition. Combine this with a general training in ethnography and anthropological theory, and there is little time left for serious comparative study of two or more of the literate religious systems. Yet this kind of comparative context is just what is necessary to provide the kind of foundation for skeptical criticism that led, in the area of ethnography, to the current challenging innovations.

The case of Hinduism is particularly informative in this light. Hinduism evolved in continual dialogue with other literate religious traditions, particularly Jainism and Buddhism in ancient times and Sikhism and Islam later on. In fact, though India is today a Hindu majority state (of about 83 percent), other "heterodox" or non-Hindu faiths played key roles in the shaping of Indian history and in the shaping of Hinduism itself. So when scholars attempt to understand Hindu India by focusing their study on the Hindu tradition alone, as defined primarily by modern Hindus, they risk missing out on important components of the society's history. More important, they fail to acquire the very different perspective on the Hindu tradition provided by those who either rejected it or were rejected by it. This complementary perspective, which is skeptical of many of the claims of both the classic Hindu texts and many contemporary Hindus, gives a radically different reading of Indian civilization as a whole.

In this chapter I will look at Buddhist interpretations of Hinduism in particular, arguing that the study of Hinduism can benefit dramatically from attention to this key heterodox tradition. In addition, by calling into question some of the traditional Hindu assumptions about Hindu history, alternative readings from Buddhism bring us to a better understanding of the dialectical interplay among various communities that provides much of the dynamism of Indian religious thought. Along the lines of postmodernist critiques of cookie-cutter cultures, it is necessary to transcend the boundaries of what is traditionally considered Hinduism, looking at India in terms of interacting circles of discourse instead of monolithic and relatively separable traditions. This shift of emphasis provides different political insights as well.

THE "ENIGMA" OF BUDDHISM'S DECLINE

While imprisoned by the British, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote an essay about his personal discovery of India and Indian history. In *Discovery of India* (1945), Nehru describes an incident in which Andre Malraux asked him what ever happened to Buddhism in India. Why should a religion enormously popular in every country it touched in Asia have all but disappeared in the land of its birth? (India is no more than 1 to 2 percent Buddhist today, many of them recent converts.) Nehru found himself unable to answer Malraux's query, and most

contemporary Indians are likewise perplexed when this question is put to them. The reason why the conversation with Malraux was something of an epiphany to Nehru, prompting the intellectual search that led to *Discovery of India*, was because Indian Buddhism's decline cannot but be seen as paradoxical or enigmatic within the received historiography. To resolve the puzzle, one has to go outside of the dominant Hindu framework and look at Indian history from another angle.

The common Hindu response to questions regarding the decline of Buddhism (which Nehru, to his credit, did not take at face value) is that Buddhism was essentially a reform movement from within Hinduism that faded as the reform succeeded and Hinduism itself was transformed. The former president of India, Sarvapali Radhakrishnan, expresses this oft-heard point of view clearly when he writes:

The Buddha was born, grew up, and died a Hindu. He was restating with a new emphasis the ancient ideals of the Indo-Aryan civilization. . . .

Buddhism did not start as a new and independent religion. It was an offshoot of the more ancient faith of the Hindus; perhaps a schism or a heresy. . . .

The Buddha utilized the Hindu inheritance to correct some of its expressions. He came to fulfill, not to destroy. For us, in this country, the Buddha is an outstanding representative of our religious tradition. (Radhakrishnan 1956: ix-xv)

The idea of Buddhism as a Hindu reform movement (which then treats Buddhism's decline as a measure of the actual success of the movement) is so common today that many anthropologists have picked it up as well and thereby influenced a generation of Indologists (e.g., Cohn 1971). But we would do well to rethink this acceptance of contemporary ideology as historical truth. The use of the word *Hindu* in the above quote should, first of all, alert us to the lack of historical acumen on the part of the writer. Since the term *Hindu* had no religious meaning until about a thousand years after the time of the Buddha, talking about "Hinduism" as a kind of stock from which Buddhism arose is entirely inappropriate. Religious scholars know that Hinduism as we observe it today is a highly syncretic tradition drawing heavily on Buddhism itself, and the ancestral religion that Radhakrishnan is actually referring to is better termed "Vedicism" or "Brahminism." The fact that Radhakrishnan uses the term *Hindu*, however, should be a flag that draws our attention to the nationalist aims of the author; the quotes above are part of an apologetic genre of writing that took shape in the anticolonial struggle and continues to exalt Hinduism as nearly equivalent to Indianness itself. (They were published by the Indian government in a volume celebrating the 2,500th anniversary of Buddhism.)

More important than this quirk of terminology (okay, then can we say that Buddhism was a reform of Vedicism/Brahminism?) is the fact that paradigms placing Buddhism within some larger Indian religious tradition, which it reformed and then lost its independent *raison d'être*, receive little support from

Buddhist sources themselves. Not only is there intriguing evidence that much of Buddhism may be related to pre-Aryan tradition, antedating the system from which it is supposed to have sprung, but according to the Buddhist sources, it is clear that not all the "Hindus" shared Radhakrishnan's fervent admiration for the Buddhist tradition. If we attend to what these exogenous sources offer (while recognizing their own biases and inaccuracies), light is shed not only on what Buddhism was or wasn't but also on the dynamics of Hinduism's response to heterodoxy—and hence on Hinduism itself.

The most shocking thing about the Buddhist texts is the reporting of extensive persecution meted out by the Brahminic establishment. These reports contradict everything most Hindus believe about the tolerance of their tradition and are virtually ignored in most readings of Indian history. Yuan Chwang (Hiuen Tsang), for example, visited India in the seventh century and reported that King Mihirakula usurped the throne of Kashmir from a Buddhist ruler, destroying Buddhist pagodas and monasteries totaling "one thousand six hundred foundations." Mihirakula is also reported as having killed many thousands of lay followers of Buddhism, threatening "the utter extermination of the Buddhist church throughout the domain" (Watters 1904: 1: 288–289). This account is repeated in the so-called "Chronicle of Kashmir," the *Rajatarangini* by the Kashmir historian Kalhana, who compared Mihirakula with Yama, the god of death, for his atrocities. Remarking that "one's tongue would become polluted if one attempted to record his cruelties and evil deeds in detail," Kalhana reports that Mihirakula killed 300,000 lay Buddhists (I. 304–310). Further evidence for the oppressiveness of Mihirakula's regime comes from the Greek voyager Cosmas Indicopleustes, who as a non-Buddhist could be more easily cleared of the accusation of bias in his observations (Winstedt 1909).

Yuan Chwang also describes the persecution of Buddhists in the region of Kusinagara by Sasanka, who according to this traveler killed monks and broke up existing communities of Buddhists (Watters 1904: 2: 111). Most dramatically, Sasanka is reported to have thrown into the Ganges a stone bearing the footprints of the Buddha at Pataliputra (now Patna) and to have cut down the *bodhi* tree under which the Buddha attained Enlightenment (2: 115). At the holy site of Bodh Gaya, he replaced a statue of the Buddha with one of the Hindu god Siva, still worshipped there today (2: 92). Again, we have a corroboration of this account in the *Manjusrimulakalpa*, which states that "Somakya [Sasanka] of wicked intellect, will destroy the beautiful image of the Buddha; . . . then, that angry and greedy evil-doer of false notions and bad opinion, will bring down all the monasteries gardens and caityas [pagodas]" (LIII. 715–718).

Sankara, today considered one of the great sages of Hinduism, is reported in the *Samara-Digvijaya* to have destroyed Buddhists "from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin" (I. 93), and the *Visvabharati Annals* from Tibet state that at Sankara's approach "the Buddhist monasteries began to tremble" (VI). The scholar-saint Sankara himself, in clear disagreement with President Radhakrish-

nan, called the Buddha "an enemy of the people" in the *Brahmasutra* (2. 2. 32).

Other Hindu texts also in fact convey a clear image of Hindu-Buddhist enmity. The *Brihadaradiya Purana* declares that it is a sin for a Brahmin to enter the house of a Buddhist, even in times of peril (XIV). The *Vayu Purana* says in a clear reference to the noncaste Buddhists, "with white teeth, eyes brought under control, head shaved and red clothes, the Sudras will perform religious deeds" (LXXVIII. 58–59), and the *Visnu Purana* sees Buddha as "the deluder," who came into the world to make the people give up the true religion (III. 17–18). (He is later destroyed by wrathful gods in this text.) The famous epic tale beloved by all Hindus, the *Rāmāyana*, denounces the Buddha as an atheist (CIX. 34).

One could go on and on with this sort of evidence, and the above is just a sampling of some of the material coming out of classic texts that gives a very different picture from that of the Buddha as "an outstanding representative of our religious tradition" upheld by Radhakrishnan and many Hindus today. The fact of persecution of Buddhists by Hindus is simply ignored in most accounts, clashing as it does with the idea of the Buddha as a welcomed reformer and of tolerance as a key characteristic of the Hindu tradition. But recognition of the antagonism between Hindus and Buddhists, with power concentrating in the hands of the former, relieves a great deal of the burden improperly placed on the "enigmatic" quality of Buddhism's decline. The decline of Buddhism is enigmatic only within a system that misrepresents Indian history, privileging one voice over all discordant others.

REDEFINING BUDDHISM

Awareness of the hostility between the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, as brought to light by study of the classical sources, leads to a further rethinking of each of these two religious systems. One has to ask seriously what it was about Buddhism that prompted the vehement reaction against it, and then also ask what it was about Hinduism that demanded such a response. We can then see whether these reconceptualizations of Buddhism and Hinduism offer any insights into the later development of these traditions and into their current identities.

Despite the fact that religious life in India today is obviously highly politicized, many Western scholars continue to exhibit a certain resistance to thinking about Buddhist-Hindu relations in political terms. This is of course a long-standing Orientalist tradition (problematically congruent with the traditions of the Indian upper castes) of overmysticizing Eastern religions. Max Weber's *Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism* (1958) is a key example of this genre. Though Weber is known for his concern with the social context and implications of religion, his approach to Buddhism was virtually devoid of sociology. Writing that Buddhism is "a specifically unpolitical and

anti-political status religion" (206) that "has had no influence whatsoever upon the lay economy" (218), Weber states outright that Buddhism "had no tie with any sort of 'social' movement, nor did it run parallel with such and it has established no 'socio-political' goal" (226). Weber runs into trouble with this completely asocial definition of Buddhism when he considers the fact that Buddhism became one of the great missionary religions, taking its message across an entire continent. It is worth quoting Weber's comments on this in full, as they are quite instructive as we look at "enigmas":

Buddhism became one of the greatest missionary religions on earth. That must seem baffling. Viewed rationally, there is no motive to be discovered which should have destined Buddhism for this. What could cause a monk who was seeking only his own salvation and therefore was utterly self-dependent to trouble himself with saving the souls of others and engaging in missionary work?...

First, presumably, in that psychological circumstance which is not rationally further explainable (perhaps physiologically conditioned circumstance) which we know to be peculiar to the great virtuosi of mystic piety. For the most part there is a compassionate acosmic love which almost always goes with the psychological form of mystical holy state, the peculiar euphoria of god-possessed tranquility. This drove the majority of them ... on the road toward saving souls. (228-229)

Because of the way in which he defined Buddhism, as an inward-looking cult with no social aspirations, Weber was forced to explain an important part of the way Buddhism has functioned historically through an appeal to "not rationally further explainable" circumstances. If we revise our way of thinking about what early Buddhism was, however, both its missionary impulse and the ire it evoked in Vedic/Brahminic/Hindu circles can be readily explained.

That Buddhism was from the beginning, in fact, a social movement is apparent as soon as one examines its central vocabulary. First, the Western neologism "Buddhism" has traditionally had no corresponding term in the Buddhist vocabulary itself, which has more often defined itself by the term *sangha*, community. The word *bikkhu*, most often translated "monk" in Western scholarship, in fact carries the truer connotation of "priest"—a word with very different social implications. Furthermore, the fact that the central vehicle of religious practice in early Buddhism was the *sutta* (*sutra*) or public sermon, spoken in popular dialects, and that the Buddhist religious communities were located near population centers rather than in isolated habitats all speak clearly to the very social nature of the early Buddhist movement. That Buddhism should be regarded as inner-directed and "mystical" by many Westerners comes as a shock to practicing Asian Buddhists, for whom it is entirely intertwined with everyday social life. (The work of Trevor Ling [e.g., 1968, 1980] looks at South Asian religious history from a more pragmatic standpoint and is a useful antidote to

the overly philosophical reading often given. The Indian Marxist R. S. Sharma is another interesting, native source [1983].)

Weber, however, also said of Buddhism that "the concept of neighborly love, at least in the sense of the great Christian virtuosi of brotherliness, is unknown" (Weber 1958: 208), revealing his own ignorance of the concept of *metta*, or compassion (sometimes translated "loving kindness"), which is at the heart of the doctrine. More important than this is his failure to recognize the egalitarian message of early Buddhism, which was probably the key irritant to the power holders of caste-based Hindu society. One of the more famous statements against caste is found in the *Suttānīpāta*, which denies the heritability of inequality by saying, "No brahmin is such by his birth. No outcaste is such by his birth. An outcaste is such by his deeds. A brahman is such by his deeds" (136). The *Majjhima Nikaya* takes this theme further in a sequence of questions and answers regarding caste divisions. Can a Brahmin go to a river and wash away dust, but no other man? No. Is the Brahmin capable of developing a mind without hate, but no other man? No. Does the Brahmin's fire of sandalwood burn higher or brighter than the common man's fire of common wood? No. This dialogue concludes with the Buddha saying to his interlocutor, "Finally you have come round to my way of thinking, that all four classes are equally pure!" (II.147). The most polemic work against caste prerogative is probably the *Vajrasuci* by Asvaghosa, dated at about the first or second century C.E.

Though it would certainly be going too far to say that Buddhism was a revolutionary movement aimed at the virtual overthrow of caste hierarchy (as claimed by some recent Buddhist political thinkers), it is clear that the neglect of caste distinctions in the Buddhist communities presented a direct challenge to Brahminic hierarchy. The idea of a *dhmma*, or law, that would apply indiscriminately to all individuals, as propagated during the famous reign of the Buddhist emperor Ashoka, was likewise threatening to the more particularistic conception of *varna-asrama-dharma*, laws or duties applying to particular caste levels and particular stages of life. Renouncing warfare and coercion as tools of statecraft (*ahimsa*) and looking at political rulers merely as turners of the wheel of cosmic law rather than as its sources or initiators were other ideals of the Ashokan state that, though undoubtedly exaggerated in Buddhist hindsight, nevertheless represented really revolutionary changes.

The last emperor of this dynasty was finally assassinated by his Brahmin commander in chief, ushering in the period of Hindu revitalization now thought of as India's "Golden Age." But it was also a period of crackdown on heterodoxy. The *Divyavadana*, a text of about the second to third century A.D., describes the founder of the new Brahminic dynasty, Pushyamitra Shunga, as marching at the head of an army that destroyed *stupas*, burned monasteries, and killed monks. That Hindu revitalization should be accompanied by mobilization against non-Hindus resonates out of history to the present day, in which new-

found Hindu pride moves hand in hand with agitation against the major challengers today, the Muslims (cf. Mahmood 1994).

REDEFINING HINDUISM

We might also ask, however, in looking critically at the notion of Buddhism as "a Hindu reform movement," to what extent the syncretic Hinduism that evolved in the centuries after Buddhism's disappearance actually did reflect Buddhist influences. In fact, although the Buddha was incorporated as an *avatara*, or incarnation, of Vishnu in the *Matsya Purana* (28.5-7), the *Varah Purana* (IV.2), the *Bhagavad Purana* (I.3.24; X.40.22), and the *Vishnu Purana* (III.17-18), the major social aims of the religion (e.g., its rejection of caste) were incorporated into Hinduism not at all. Here is the very clear statement authorizing caste distinctions from the *Bhagavad Gita*, regarded by most Hindus today as an exemplary religious text:

Prescribed duties must never be renounced. If, by illusion, one gives up his prescribed duties, such renunciation is said to be in the mode of ignorance. . . . *Brahmanas*, *kshatriyas*, *vaishyas*, and *shudras* are distinguished by their qualities of work . . . in accord with the modes of nature. . . . It is better to be engaged in one's own occupation, even if one performs it imperfectly, than to accept another's occupation and perform it perfectly. (18.7-27)

Perhaps inspired by Buddhism, religious texts started to be composed in popular languages (the above-mentioned *Puranas* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, for example), but the "revealed" and hence sacred texts in Sanskrit remained the prerogative of the Brahmins. Sankara, the Hindu scholar-saint who "destroyed Buddhists from the Himalayas to Cape Cormorin" (above), did bring some elements of Buddhist philosophy into syncretic Hinduism and even copied its pattern of community retreats (*mathas*) but completely acquiesced in the notion of caste divisions in which some were more and some less capable of striving for *nirvana* (Buddhist *nibbana*). While nonviolence, or *ahimsa*, was absorbed into Hinduism in the form of vegetarianism (for the upper castes), as a tool of statecraft it never made much headway. (Hindu legal writings like the *Gautama Dharmasūtra* [XII.1-15] that recommended pouring molten tin into the ears of a Sudra who overheard the reading of the sacred texts, whether actually put into practice or not, can hardly be read as being in the spirit of *ahimsa*.)

Karma (Buddhist *kamma*), the endless chain of causes and effects that points to an ethical stance of nonattachment or disinterestedness (attention to process rather than outcome), in some Hindu texts took the odd form of being an additional buttress for caste. The *Bhagavad Gita*'s most famous episode is a case in point. When Arjuna hesitates at the thought of killing on the battlefield, he is told by his charioteer Krishna:

Considering your specific duty as a *kshatriya*, you should know that there is no better engagement for you than fighting on religious principles. . . . If, however, you do not fight this religious war, then you will certainly incur sin for neglecting your duties and thus lose your reputation as a fighter. . . . Do thou fight for the sake of fighting, without considering happiness or distress . . . and, by so doing, you shall never incur sin. (2.33-38)

Though this passage is interpreted metaphorically by more thoughtful Hindus, the overt message is clearly very different from that of Buddhism in its encouragement of the performance of duty without noisome second thoughts. And when one is told that "he who dwells in the body is eternal and can never be slain. Therefore you need not grieve for any creature" (*Bhagavad Gita* 2.30), this is about as far from the position of loving kindness toward all that one can imagine.

The mass conversion of several million Untouchables to Buddhism in the recent past should be a strong hint that the picture of the Buddha as an incarnation of Visnu, sent down to reform Hinduism from within, is one that does not resonate with the lived reality of lower-caste and noncaste individuals in Indian society (cf. Contussi 1989). Combine this with the very interesting historical pattern in which the same regions that were once predominately Buddhist are the ones that later went over to other heterodoxies such as Islam, and you get the distinct feeling that what we are seeing is a continuing concert of rebellions against Hindu orthodoxy. (Another recent episode of the mass conversion of Untouchables away from Hinduism was to Islam, in many ways even more threatening than the rejection in favor of Buddhism [Majahid 1989].) Hinduism claims to be the umbrella category that absorbs and incorporates diverse movements, but their ongoing appeal in peripheral regions and to lower castes indicates that the incorporation is not definitive. As David Mandelbaum (1970) notes, "[I]t seems almost to be a property of this social system that such movements well up periodically, develop through the cycle, and then devolve back into the system" (525). To me this is too apolitical a vision. Buddhism did not simply "fall back" into Hinduism because of some kind of structural property of "the system"; its message was consciously appropriated into Hindu texts as part of a reassertion of prerogative by a privileged group.

To understand the Hindu/Buddhist encounter in Indian history, which I believe serves as a kind of template for Hindu/Other interactions up to the present, one has to get beyond Hindu informants and Hindu texts. Hindus are the winners in Indian history; they now dominate India not only numerically but also culturally and politically. To see what this domination means one has to listen to the losers, too. Anthropologists should know this, but sometimes lack of historical depth in their research ends up blurring the key distinction between hegemony and consensus.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

To show how the altered conceptualization of Hinduism prompted by looking seriously at non-Hindu perspectives can subvert the received understanding of Indian civilization today, I will look at some current issues in light of the orthodoxy/heterodoxy dynamic of ancient times. I will conclude by considering how such subversion can contribute to the solution of social problems through providing alternative frames of discourse through which issues can be discussed.

The Sauria Paharia of Bihar are one of India's "Scheduled Tribes," accorded special benefits and slated for development under the 6th Schedule of the Indian Constitution. In the spring of 1992 I visited five Sauria Paharia villages as part of an assessment of development needs in cooperation with Dr. Sachindra Narayan of the A. N. Sinha Institute in Patna, the Sauria Paharia's main ethnographer thus far (Narayan 1986a, 1986b, 1988).

Among many interesting things about this expedition was the religious status of the Sauria Paharia. Though they were until recently isolated foragers in the hilltop forests of Santal Parganas district (one of the remoter areas of India and still requiring special permits to visit), the Sauria Paharia are classed as "Hindus" by Narayan. Interviews with Sauria Paharia as well as Narayan's own published work revealed that the Sauria Paharia are essentially animists, venerating a range of nature spirits whom they placate and appeal to through offerings and rituals. Though they have come to look down upon the Mal Paharia and Santals, other tribal groups with whom they are in contact, the Sauria Paharia exhibit no caste or castelike divisions within their own society. The consumption of native alcoholic beverages, anathema to Hindus, forms a central part of their social life. Despite these indications, however, and despite the absence of key Hindu deities like Shiva, Vishnu, and so on, Narayan calls them "Hindus."

I pursued this issue with Sachindra Narayan because I think the labeling of the Sauria Paharia as "Hindus" is instructive for our understanding of just what is meant when Indians assert that their nation is 83 percent Hindu. When pressed, Narayan ventured that since the Sauria Paharia venerate nature, and since the Hindus venerate nature, the Sauria Paharia are Hindus. I inquired as to whether, then, Native American groups that venerate nature could be called Hindus as well. At this suggestion, clearly ludicrous except perhaps to the most diehard mystics of the Hindu tradition, Narayan changed his argument and claimed that since the Sauria Paharia had not converted to Islam or Christianity, they must be Hindus. Hinduism, that is, is seen by him as a kind of default category for people of the subcontinent. Whether the Sauria Paharia themselves, if asked, would identify themselves as Hindus is a moot point for Narayan.

This encounter is an instructive one in light of the "Buddhism as a kind of Hinduism" conception discussed above. The long-standing tendency of the Hindu tradition is to embrace others within its rhetorical fold. While most Hindus view this embrace as a positive part of the tolerant inclusiveness of the

religion, many non-Hindus view it as a particularly intolerant attempt at spiritual hegemony. Coupled with the equation of Hinduism with Indianness generally (the "default category" idea), this leads to a vision in which refusal to acquiesce to the Hindu embrace can be read as a nearly treasonous posture (cf. Embree 1990).

This is, in fact, exactly how the assertiveness of India's Muslim minority is interpreted by extreme Hindu nationalist groups today. Rejecting the secular state model developed by Nehru, Hindu nationalists hope to define India as a Hindu nation—leaving room, however, for the inclusion of Muslims and others as special kinds of Hindus. If the Muslims are truly loyal to India, they should take Hindu names, celebrate Hindu festivals, and so on. The refusal to do these things, and the corresponding refusal to construe Islam as just one path among many equally viable paths to spiritual truth, is taken as a slap in the face by militant Hindus. Despite the fact that the bulk of India's Muslim population comes from people who converted away from Hinduism, the Muslims are often perceived as a foreign element "contaminating" the Indian (Hindu) nation. So the drive to replace a mosque at Ayodhya with a Hindu temple (Van der Veer 1985, 1994) has the ring of nationalist fervor to it, and the most extreme rhetoric envisions those Muslims insistent on a separate (non-Hindu) identity thrown out of India altogether. Insofar as they continue to maintain a religious identity distinct from Hinduism, the Muslims are not quite trustworthy as Indians, in this perspective. As an anthropologist delving into the question of whether the Sauria Paharia actually want to be considered as Hindus, I was also personally perceived as politically questionable, a perception made especially problematic by my (Muslim origin) last name.

Though it would be seriously misrepresenting the state of affairs in India today to overemphasize the degree of support for so-called Hindu fundamentalism, it is nevertheless clear that a renaissance Hindu pride is on the rise and that this revitalization is moving in parallel with increasing discrimination against non-Hindu minorities. The current respectability of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its successes at the polls is accompanied by a widespread tolerance for communalist rhetoric in the public domain that would have been greeted with outrage a mere decade ago (Malik and Vajpeyi 1989; Duara 1991; Gold 1991). Even more intriguing is the continuing presence and influence of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a militant brotherhood of Hindu extremists whose organization, training, activities, and public pronouncements make it, as Nehru is reputed to have said, "the Indian version of fascism" (cf. Andersen and Damle 1987). The oceans of orange-robed Hindus photographed at Ayodhya, shouting anti-Muslim slogans with raised fists and angry faces, strikes most Westerners as paradoxical, given the image of Hinduism as all tolerant that we have learned from upper-caste interpretations of Hindu texts. But these phenomena are only enigmatic in the way that Buddhism's decline in India is also enigmatic—through the distorted lens of Brahmin historiography. Looking at the Hindu traditions from other perspectives makes the periodic

appearances of fundamentalist retrenchments quite understandable and even predictable.

Although some recent analyses of Hindu revitalization have emphasized the recency of this phenomenon (e.g., Hawley 1991), even a cursory examination of the Vedic texts shows an us-them distinction extending far back into antiquity. The early contrast between pure and impure (*arya* and *anarya*) is the most obvious assertion of exclusivism, with the latter category most frequently associated with *mleccha*, or barbarians (cf. Thapar 1989). Combine this vocabulary with such traditions as the restriction of sacred knowledge to the priestly circle, the closure of Hindu temples to any but "twice-born" Hindus, and the impossibility or difficulty of converting to Hinduism, and a picture emerges of a highly exclusive, rather than inclusive, religious tradition.

The situation involving the Sikhs of Punjab is another that appears problematic in light of the received history of India and the received image of Hinduism. Hindus have long considered Sikhism as a sect or branch, or even a caste, within the Hindu tradition. While it is true that there are key elements of Hinduism in the Sikh faith (and that they are historically intertwined), many aspects of Sikhism involve the outright rejection of Hindu tradition. Two of the especially definitive rejections involve multiple deities (Sikhism is firmly monotheistic) and caste hierarchy (it is ideally at least committed to equality). Yet Sikhs have at one time or another felt compelled to write essays called *We Are Not Hindu*, to demand from a heavily armed encampment at the Golden Temple in Amritsar that Sikhism be recognized as a separate faith, and eventually to launch a guerrilla insurgency partly based on the theme of religious sovereignty (cf. Mahmood 1996). Has any group attempting to split away from Catholicism, Protestantism, or any other religious system experienced such difficulty in seceding?

We are into shaky ground here, and the labyrinthine morass of modern Indian politics shouldn't be simplified as crassly as I have just done. But my point here is to simply point to the connections between the study of ancient religious history and modern ethnographic understanding of India. It should be clear that the skepticism toward Hindu claims provoked by looking at classic Buddhist texts opens up new interpretations of contemporary Hindu interactions with non-Hindus. The fact that these interactions have serious political implications that should give pause to those who are tempted to take modern Hindu ideology—which glosses over the actual religious pluralism of India—at face value. Recent scholarship focused on the deconstruction of ideologies (e.g., Breckenridge and van der Veer 1993; Chatterjee 1993; Ludden 1996) is radically changing the face of academic Indology, but its repercussions have yet to be fully felt in politics.

India cannot be understood by a focus on Hinduism alone. Even the understanding of Hinduism is not best served by a focus on Hinduism alone. Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Sikhism, Christianity, Islam, and tribal beliefs are all components of Indian civilization and its dominant religious system. They are all players in the forum in which India's very serious problems and conflicts

must be resolved. In addition, the mosaic of Indian religion with its shifting identities and counteridentities offers a most fertile ground for explorations of theoretical frameworks that do not rest on primordial assumptions but on the constructedness and dynamism of social categories. In the study of religions in India, a broader holism is methodologically mandated, theoretically promising, and politically responsible.

REFERENCES

- Andersen, Walter K., and Shridhar D. Damle. 1987. *The Brotherhood in Saffron*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Breckenridge, Carol, and Peter van der Veer, editors. 1993. *Orientalism and the Post-colonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Chatterjee, Partha. 1993. *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post-Colonial Histories*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Clifford, James, and George Marcus, editors. 1986. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Cohn, Bernard S. 1971. *India: The Social Anthropology of a Civilization*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Contursi, Janet A. 1989. "Militant Hinduism and the Buddhist Dalits." *American Ethnologist* 16 (3): 441-457.
- Duara, Prasenjit. 1991. "The New Politics of Hinduism." *Wilson Quarterly* 15: 42-45. (summer).
- Embree, Ainslie. 1990. *Utopias in Conflict: Religion and Nationalism in Modern India*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gold, Daniel. 1991. "Organized Hinduisms: From Vedic Tradition to Hindu Nation." *Fundamentalisms Observed*. M. E. Marty and R. S. Appleby, editors. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 531-593.
- Handler, Richard. 1988. *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Hawley, John Stratton. 1991. "Naming Hinduism." *Wilson Quarterly* (summer).
- Kalhana. 1979. *Rajatarangini*. Translated by M. A. Stein. Delhi: Montilal Banarsidass.
- Ling, Trevor. 1968. *A History of Religion East and West*. New York: Torchbook Library.
- Ling, Trevor. 1980. *Karl Marx and Religion in Europe and India*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Ludden, David, editor. 1996. *Contesting the Nation: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- McDonald, Maryon. 1989. "We Are Not French!" *Language, Culture and Identity in Brittany*. London: Routledge.
- Mahmood, Cynthia Keppley. 1994. "Ayodhya and the Hindu Resurgence." *Religion* 24: 73-80.
- Mahmood, Cynthia Keppley. 1996. *Fighting for Faith and Nation: Dialogues with Sikh Militants*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Majahid, Abdul Malik. 1989. *Conversion to Islam: Untouchables' Strategy for Protest in India*. Chambersburg: Anima Press.

- Malik, Yogendra, and Dharendra Vajpeyi. 1989. "The Rise of Hindu Militancy: India's Secular Democracy at Risk." *Asian Survey* 29 (3): 308-325.
- Mandelbaum, David G. 1970. *Society in India: Change and Continuity*. Vols. 1-2. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Marcus, George and Michael M. J. Fischer. 1986. *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Narayan, Sachindra. 1986a. *Dimensions of Development in Tribal Bihar*. Delhi: Inter-India Publications.
- Narayan, Sachindra. 1986b. *Tribe in Transition*. Delhi: Inter-India Publications.
- Narayan, Sachindra. 1988. *A Dwindling Hill Tribe of Bihar*. Calcutta: Naya Prakash.
- Nehru, Jawaharlal. 1945. *Discovery of India*. New York: John Day Company.
- Radhakrishnan, S. 1956. Foreword to *2500 Years of Buddhism*. Edited. By P. V. Bapat. Delhi: Indian Ministry of Information.
- Sharma, R. S. 1983. *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India*. New Delhi: Macmillan.
- Thapar, Romila. 1989. "Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity." *Modern Asian Studies* 23 (2): 209-231.
- Van der Veer, Peter. 1985. "God Must Be Liberated! A Hindu Liberation Movement in Ayodhya." *Modern Asian Studies* 21 (2): 283-301.
- Van der Veer, Peter. 1994. *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Watters, Thomas, editor. 1904. *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India*. Vols. 1-2. London: Royal Asiatic Society.
- Weber, Max. 1958. *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*. Translated by H. Gerth and D. Martindale. New York: Macmillan, Free Press.
- Winstedt, E. O., editor. 1909. *The Christian Topography of Cosmas Indicopleustes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

BUDDHIST COMMUNITIES: HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS AND ETHNOGRAPHIC PARADIGMS

Todd T. Lewis

Buddhism has been transplanted to diverse ecological, linguistic, and cultural contexts across Asia and, in recent centuries, globally. Inclusive and practical, and guided by a missionary ethos, renunciant and lay traditions have been effectively adapted to settings as diverse as settled farming villages, pastoral grasslands, and urban communities. Among missionary religions, Buddhist tradition (*śāsana*) is distinctive in its accommodation of myriad texts, doctrinal formulations, spiritual disciplines, and devotional practices, yet still (where vibrant) retaining a strong monastic center that asserts Buddhism's primacy over indigenous ancestral religions and other world faiths. Since exchange is the basis of social life (Murphy 1971; Harris 1989), anthropological studies of Buddhist communities can account for the tradition's maintenance, specifying how institutions and cultural performances have secured the survival of fundamental relationships.

The presence of a textual canon and devotional art is a universal feature of Buddhist contexts, although contents vary among Buddhist culture regions.¹ Lack of grounding in the textual tradition, especially the oft-neglected ritual and popular discourses, has been a weakness in anthropological studies of Buddhism: Future research should be informed by an understanding of the textual-historical precedents for modern practice (Buswell 1990: 1; Strong 1992). Given the vast textual corpus and the lack of any overarching panregional institutional authority that ever dictated (or enforced) doctrinal orthodoxy, command over the historical sources and precedents for modern practices is a complicated assignment. This chapter, in part, is addressed to this desideratum.²

Section I provides an introduction to the classical precepts that defined early