



Re-envisioning Hinduism and Evaluating the Hindutva Movement

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Introduction

James G. Lochtefeld's article, 'New Wine, Old Skins', raises some extremely important issues for the student of Hinduism and India in particular and comparative religion in general. I will address my remarks to two of the issues I see as being most pressing given the recent events in India that Lochtefeld discusses.

First, the rise to prominence over the last decade of the so-called 'Hindutva' movement challenges scholars to think again about what, exactly, is meant by the terms 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism', and what role scholars have played in the ongoing process of defining the religion of more than 800 000 000 of the world's residents. Lochtefeld argues that the Hindutva movement represents, among other things, an attempt to 'recreate and redefine' what the author calls 'traditional Hinduism'. But what, exactly, have we imagined this latter entity from which the Hindutva entity is diverging to be? It is only then, I contend, that we can then pose the question Lochtefeld suggests: what form, precisely, is the new 'Hinduism' being created by the Hindutva movement taking, and why?

Second, given both the often outrageous claims made by Hindutva leaders and the tragic effects this movement has had on Indian religious, communal and political life in recent years, the responses to it by scholars like ourselves have, inevitably, more than just an 'academic' dimension. We are, in my opinion, impelled to go beyond the level of mere 'description' or even Weberian 'understanding' (*verstehen*)—which, without further comment, results in providing scholarly legitimation for distortions of truth and murderous attempts at ethnic or religious cleansing¹—and contradict the false claims (religious, historical, social and political) made by certain members of the Hindutva movement. We are challenged, in other words, to drop the self-deluded facade of 'neutrality' and 'objectivity' and stand up for our own principles (which also happen to be principles many Indians, Hindus and non-Hindus alike, also share).

I. Traditional Hinduism

Let me begin by tackling the first query: If the Hindutva movement is creating a new form of 'Hinduism', what is or was the old or 'traditional' form of that religion—at least as it has been portrayed by Indologists and other experts? Scholars of the entity that has, since the early part of the nineteenth century,² been generally referred to as 'Hinduism' (which in itself problematizes the whole notion of 'traditional Hinduism') have agreed that this religion is notoriously difficult to define.³ According to some, in fact, 'Hinduism' probably does not exist at all. Robert Frykenberg argues in a recent and influential article that

there has never been any such a thing as a single 'Hinduism' or any single 'Hindu community' for all of India. Nor, for that matter, can one find any such thing as a single 'Hinduism' or 'Hindu community' even for any one socio-cultural region of the continent. Furthermore, there has never been any one religion—nor even one system of religions—to which the term 'Hindu' can accurately be applied. No one so-called religion, moreover, can lay exclusive claim to or be defined by the term 'Hinduism'.

'The very notion of the existence of any single religious community by this name', Frykenberg concludes, 'has been falsely conceived'.⁴

Both outsiders and insiders (i.e. 'Hindus') over the past two centuries have found it advantageous (for different reasons) to envision 'traditional Hinduism' as resistant to, if not transcendent of, precise definition. Outsiders found it easier to unfavorably compare such an amorphous entity to the more discriminating and bounded religions of the West. Hinduism, conversely, could capitalize on Hinduism's supposed tolerance and definition-defying all-inclusiveness in order to claim universality; Hinduism was, it could be and is sometimes said, all religions rolled into one and not simply one particular religion among the world's many.⁵

For scholars the assumed indefiniteness of Hinduism has in the past often meant conceiving of the religion in metaphorical terms. Hinduism, as Ron Inden has noted in his recent book *Imagining India*, has been constituted by Westerners as 'a female presence who is able, through her very amorphousness and absorptive powers, to baffle and perhaps even to threaten Western rationality, clearly a male in this encounter'.⁶ Hinduism, according to Monier-Williams, is like an Indian banyan tree whose 'single stem sends out numerous branches destined to send roots to the ground and become trees themselves, till the parent stock is lost in a dense forest of its own offshoots'.⁷ Alternatively, Hinduism is likened to an excessively fecund and chaotic jungle:

Hinduism has often and justly been compared to a jungle. As in the jungle every particle of soil seems to put forth its spirit in vegetable life and plants grown on plants, creepers and parasites on their more stalwart brethren, so in India art, commerce, warfare and crime, every human interest and aspiration seek for a manifestation in religion, and since men and women of all classes and occupations, all stages of education and civilization, have contributed to Hinduism, much of it seems low, foolish and even immoral. The jungle is not a park or garden. Whatever can grow in it, does grow. The Brahmans are not gardeners but forest officers. . . . Here and there in a tropical forest some well-grown tree or brilliant flower attracts attention, but the general impression left on the traveller by the vegetation as he passes through it mile after mile is infinite repetition as well as infinite luxuriance. And so it is in Hinduism.⁸

'Traditional Hinduism' by definition, these scholars claim, cannot be defined. It is too fluid, too all-encompassing, and most of all too 'tolerant' to be subjected to a concept like 'orthodoxy', or even 'orthopraxy'.⁹ The school of non-definition perhaps reached its apex with Percival Spear's remarkable 'sponge theory'. Throwing up one's hands in despair of ever delimiting Hinduism, one returns to the realm of metaphor to characterize a religion this indiscriminate and all-consuming:

Hinduism has been likened to a vast sponge, which absorbs all that enters it without ceasing to be itself. The simile is not quite exact, because Hinduism has shown a remarkable power of assimilating as well as absorbing; the water becomes part of the sponge. Like a sponge it has no very clear outline on its borders and no apparent core at its centre. An approach to Hinduism provides a first lesson in the 'otherness' of Hindu ideas from those of Europe. The Western love of definition and neat pigeon-holing receives its first shock . . .¹⁰

Many Indologists have thus declared Hinduism either too disorganized and exotically other, or too complex and recondite, to be subjected the definitional strictures applicable to other religions and cultures. One wonders if such radical antipathy to definition stems from a kind of paranoid sense of professional self-interest: it is almost as

if Indologists worry that should a definition of their object of study actually be generated, the need for experts in the field would somehow be compromised, or (gasp!) even vanish. This, of course, would be to completely misunderstand the function of definition in the pursuit of knowledge; but the almost pathological aversion to definition (even of the most minimally delimiting sort) in the study of Hinduism seems to call for some explanation.

In any event, Hinduism, we have been and are continually told by the professional experts in the West, can be and is virtually everything. Indeed, it appears difficult *not* to be a Hindu;¹¹ ‘traditional Hinduism’ is an entity so fluid and ‘tolerant’ as to ‘encompass’ a variety of religions and communities under the shade of its ever-spreading banyan tree.¹² This reluctance (one might also call it a failure of will) on the part of the learned to delimit the boundaries of their supposed object of study has had consequences in the real world of religion and politics in India over the past two hundred years.

There are some Hindus, past and present, who find such notions of the indefinable nature of Hinduism quite appealing—and politically expedient. The non-definition of Hinduism has, as mentioned above, often been reworked by Hindu thinkers into the claim that it is all religions in one rather than one religion among all others. Closely aligned with another stereotype issuing forth originally from the outside—the notion that India is essentially ‘spiritual’¹³—neo-Hindus in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who were also involved in the struggle for independence seized upon the ideas that (1) India’s national identity is closely linked with its intrinsic ‘spirituality’, and (2) that Hinduism (under which was usually subsumed Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism and other native Indian religious traditions) is the culmination and supersession of all other religions. Leaders and reformers such as Rammohun Roy, Dayananda Sarasvati, Vivekananda, Aurobindo (and also, to some extent, Mohandas Gandhi) perpetrated these assumptions as part of the ‘first wave’ of the modern ‘revival’ of Hinduism (or what some would call the creation of a ‘Neo-Hinduism’)—a movement whose driving force was the nationalistic independence movement that arose more or less in tandem with this revival.¹⁴

The softer version of the position is that Hinduism, being, again, more or less indefinable and unbounded, is therefore intrinsically tolerant of other religions and communities—and can be safely instituted constitutionally in a modern Indian nation-state in the same kind of way that secularism has been in large portions of the West. The forerunner of this position is Gandhi, whose vision of *rām rājya*, despite his protestations of its non-sectarian generality, was in fact conceived along recognizably Hindu lines (and was perceived as such by many Muslims).

Both versions—the products of leaders who were interested in uniting Indians in the independence struggle and countering the claims of Western critics that India was hopelessly fragmented and disunited and therefore could not be a real ‘nation’—tended to entail the notion that ‘Hinduism’ serves a cipher for Indian national identity. And, in a more radical way, so too was ‘Hinduism’ (or ‘Hindu-ness’, *hindutva*) conceived by the leaders of the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha as inextricably linked to the developing concept of Indian national identity. All this was made easy (not to say possible) by the body of Western scholarship that insisted upon India’s ‘spiritual’ essence and Hinduism infinitely protean form.

The modern reincarnation of Hindu nationalism (what I would suggest may be the ‘second wave’ of the movement)¹⁵ in the guise of the so-called ‘Sangh Parivār’ activists has also embraced both the non-definition of Hinduism *qua* religion, as well as the conjunction of ‘Hindu-ness’ and Indian national identity. As for the former, despite

Lochtefeld's often persuasive argument that the Hindutva movement is *redefining* Hinduism, in fact the Parivār has studiously avoided definitional statements about what 'Hinduism', *qua* a 'religion', really is.¹⁶ This is obviously a strategic political move. For by actually defining Hinduism in terms, for example, of allegiance to the authority of a 'canon' (e.g. the Veda or any other part of the Sanskritic textual tradition), the authority of the Brahmin class, or the doctrines and practices associated with *varṇāśrama dharma*, the Hindutva movement would lose elements of the mass movement they wish to lead. Many 'Hindus' do not actually pay much attention to the Vedas; southerners resent the imposition from the north of Sanskrit and texts written in that language as definitive of 'Hindu' identity; and the vast numbers of those historically persecuted by the religiously sanctified caste system will balk at any definition of 'Hindu' that relies on Brahmin privilege or its ideological underpinnings, *varṇāśrama dharma*.

'Hindutva' (as opposed to 'Hinduism') is a *political* term, and not a religious one—so the Parivār leaders have consistently insisted.¹⁷ And Lochtefeld indeed sees the infusion of politics into religion as the essence of the 'redefinition' of Hinduism. This position ignores the fact that religion (in India and elsewhere) has *always* had a political dimension, and not just since the 19th century Neo-Hindus linked Indian spirituality and Indian nationalistic aspirations.¹⁸ But Lochtefeld is right when he indicates that religious terminology ('Hindu' and 'Hinduism') and political terminology ('Hindutva is nationalism') are frequently (and, I would add, intentionally) confused.

India, insists the Parivār, is a 'Hindu nation' and always has been, although no one seems willing to say what, exactly, is 'Hindu' (in the religious sense) about it. One of the principal leaders of the BJP, L. K. Advani, has suggested that Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs living in India be referred to as 'Mohammadi Hindus', 'Christian Hindus', and 'Sikh Hindus' in order to emphasize the ancient and persisting Hindu character of the Indian nation-state, again without stating just what is meant by the second term apart from an implicit notion that it is somehow equatable with 'Indians'.

This kind of word-play and sleight-of-hand (mixing and matching 'Hindutva' as a synonym for 'Indian-ness' and 'Hinduism' as a particular religion among many others) is obviously unappreciated by India's 100 000 000 Muslims (and, one would guess, by many of the Christians, Sikhs, and others who find themselves being defined not as Indians but as 'Hindus'). Although Muslims share the same culture and languages with Hindus and have lived in India for centuries, they now find themselves labelled 'foreigners' in so far as they refuse to agree to the equation of 'Indian' and 'Hindu'. Bal Thackeray, the leader of the Shiv Sena which was behind much of the violence directed at Muslims during the Bombay riot of January 1993, has declared that Muslims (those who, presumably, don't agree to calling themselves 'Hindus') must be expelled from the 'Hindu motherland'. In a well-publicized interview, Thackeray, an admirer of Adolph Hitler, compared India's Muslims to the Jews in Nazi Germany: 'Have they behaved like the Jews in Nazi Germany? If so, there is nothing wrong if they are treated as Jews were in Germany'.¹⁹

Even in the light of such ramifications of the Hindutva movement, 'Hinduism' has continued to be portrayed by some as tolerant, universalistic, non-sectarian, and therefore a variable alternative to the 'Western import' that is secularism. Recent critiques of Indian secularism issuing forth from left-leaning intellectuals such as Ashis Nandy and T. N. Madan,²⁰ play into the hands of a movement that simultaneously insists that Muslims and others have nothing to worry about in a proposed 'Hindu India' while simultaneously linking Indian national identity with Hindu religious identity. And they also must fall on deaf Muslim ears after the round of bloody demonstrations of 'Hindu tolerance' in the wake of the events at Ayodhya.

The Hindutva movement—with its insistence on Ayodhya as a pan-Indian sacred centre,²¹ its creation of media-savvy new rituals, and most of all its identification of Hindu and Indian national identity—is not so much ‘recreating and redefining’ a religion as it is drawing upon and exploiting old notions of ‘traditional Hinduism’. The reluctance of scholars and of ‘Hindus’ themselves, past and present, to provide delimitations of the boundaries of this religion—or even to view it *as* a religion, comparable to the other major religions of the world and separable from entities like national or cultural identity—has allowed the Hindutva movement the possibility of being chauvinistic and exclusive while standing behind the illusion of a Hinduism that, by definition, cannot be chauvinistic and exclusive.

II. Approaches to Hindutva Claims

The second query which I would like to address concerns the way the Hindutva movement has presented its fundamentally religious claims—claims based on scripture, faith and myth—as scientifically and historically valid. The confusion (and again I believe it to be largely intentional) between the claims of faith and the conclusions of reason, between a vision of the past posited by myth and one warranted by historical evidence, presents scholars of religion with a pair of complementary problems: How far should we allow our professional open-mindedness regarding religion and religious claims to extend, especially when we are asked to be open-minded about those who are closed-minded? And, secondly, what allegiance do we as scholars owe to our own intellectual traditions of humanism, rationality, and historical documentation of the events of the past when faced with religious discourse that disguises itself in the garb of secular discourse?

To reinvent the present in ways congenial to one’s own contemporary views one must reinterpret the past, and Hindu activists have been hard at work doing just that. If, for example, Indian Muslims are to be reconstituted as ‘foreigners’ (when they are not being reconstituted as ‘Mohammadi Hindus’) and Hindus are envisioned as the true indigenous Indians, the inconvenient fact that the ancient forebears of Hinduism, the Aryans, originally came as invaders of the subcontinent from a probable homeland in the Russian steppe lands must be altered. At a conference held in January of 1993, right-wing historians introduced a more ‘politically correct’ version of the archaic past. The Aryans, it is now asserted, were native to India all along, and their successors are therefore the rightful inheritors of the land.²²

It was also, of course, the BJP and its affiliated organizations who were responsible for stirring up the religious fervor that resulted in the destruction of the mosque at Ayodhya on 6 December 1992, and the resulting riots that took the lives of thousands. Muslims are not only branded as outsiders in ‘Hindu India’ but are also blamed for the supposed anti-Hindu acts of Mughal emperors who ruled north India some four or five hundred years ago. Ayodhya, it is claimed, is the actual and historical birthplace of a supernatural Hindu deity. The god Rama was born, according to BJP historians, sometime during or before the third millennium B.C. In the sixteenth century, or so the story goes, the Islamic ruler Babur destroyed the Hindu temple dedicated to Rama, which had existed since time immemorial, and erected on its ruins a mosque. It was this structure that was pulled down in six hours, by hand, by thousands of Hindu nationalists at the end of 1992.

The BJP has marched out its own historians and archaeologists to provide official validation of what would seem to be a set of purely religious and mythical claims about Ayodhya. A certain Sudha Malaiya, described in a press release as a ‘young and bright art

historian', was put on display to tell the nation about the remarkable archaeological finds she personally uncovered in the rubble on the day the mosque was destroyed. The evidence—including pillars from the ancient Hindu temple which had, astonishingly, been left wholly intact and a perfectly preserved large buff sandstone slab bearing inscriptions in Sanskrit—unsurprisingly confirmed all the main points of the BJP's version of Ayodhya's past.²³

The miraculous nature of these finds was immediately noted and their authenticity disputed by experts of a more secular bent. Especially critical were those who had worked for years on systematic archaeological excavations which had turned up nothing that remotely suggested that the site held such antiquarian wonders and indisputable proof for religious beliefs. Professor B. B. Lal, the Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India, had conducted one such excavation in the 1970s and found absolutely no evidence of any pre-existing Hindu temple at the site.

Historians at the prestigious and left-leaning Jawaharlal Nehru University have also joined the fray, publishing pamphlets and newspaper articles in an attempt to discredit the BJP account of Ayodhya's past. In a publication entitled 'The Political Abuse of History', the faculty of JNU's Centre for Historical Studies writes that 'when beliefs claim the legitimacy of history, then the historian has to attempt a demarcation between the limits of belief and historical evidence'. They too conclude that, although it is 'quite plausible that there was a structure somewhere in the vicinity', there is no evidence for a Hindu temple once occupying the controversial spot at Ayodhya.²⁴

Hindu extremists, for their part, have countered by broadening their efforts. They have recently distributed a list of 3000 sites across the country where, they say, Muslim emperors usurped sacred Hindu ground.²⁵ Some of these sites could well become the Ayodhyas of the future. One of the more likely targets for the future is a seventeenth century mosque in the Hindu holy city of Benares. That town's senior police officer has warned that 'This city is sitting on a powder keg'.

Other Hindu revisionists have gone so far as to claim that the Taj Mahal itself was not built by a Mughal emperor to commemorate his wife but was, in fact, a pre-Islamic Hindu monument appropriated later by the insatiable Muslims. Recently 30,000 Hindus burst into the popular tourist attraction with the intent of 'recapturing' and 'converting' it. Priests have taken to chanting Sanskrit verses within the Taj, apparently in the attempt to transform one of the seven wonders of the world into a Hindu temple. Cheap plastic replicas are now for sale with the Islamic crescent moon that adorns the top of the real monument replaced by a Shaivite *trishul*.²⁶

The battle for India's past has also been waged in the classrooms of the elementary and high schools. Textbooks in the states controlled by the BJP (before those governments were dismissed in the wake of Ayodhya) were rewritten so as to glorify the 'Hindu past' and excoriate the policies of the 'Muslim invaders'. In the Indian version of 'linguistic cleansing', cities and other geographical locales with non-Hindu names were given new designations more in keeping with the fundamentalist vision of the country: Delhi became 'Indraprasth', Lucknow was renamed to 'Lakshmanpuri', and the Arabian and Indian Oceans were called 'Sindhu Sagar' and 'Ganga Sagar' respectively.²⁷

'History in South Asia', writes Akbar Ahmed, 'is firmly caught in the web of the recent events and passions; it is either hagiography or polemics but rarely a dispassionate record of the past'.²⁸ Historians and students of religion, both inside and outside of India, have had to choose sides. Either one provides support to the Hindutva movement by lending scholarly legitimacy to their various religious claims, or one challenges those claims as a religiously-inspired manipulation of the facts.

It is, I think, virtually impossible to remain 'neutral' in the face of such religiously motivated challenges to the historical record. Worse yet is the impulse to fall back on trendy and irresponsible conceptions of intellectual and cultural relativism. Scholars of the history of religion in India must, assuredly, attempt to 'understand' the Hindutva movement by accurately describing and creatively interpreting its significance—and Lochtefeld's article goes a good way towards helping us reach this end. But in addition we are compelled, whether we are comfortable about it or not, to stand up for the principles that guide our professional work and that are being appropriated and misused by others—principles like humanism (that necessarily will come into conflict with religion's tendency to anchor its truth claims in the transcendent), historicity (vs. the religious vision of the past we label 'myth'), tolerance and open-mindedness towards the world-views of others (vs. the increasing tendency among religious 'fundamentalisms'²⁹ everywhere toward absolutism, intolerance and militancy), and the protection and assurances that constitutionally guaranteed secularism offers us all for the unencumbered and free pursuit of the non-theological, non-confessional comparative study of religion.

Many in India still hold to these principles. Our voices must join theirs in countering the very real threats the Hindutva movement has represented for the future of free inquiry and the protection of minorities in India. A defence of secularism—for all its many flaws and failures, in India and elsewhere—is incumbent upon us in the face of the alternatives.

Notes

- 1 I do not here wish to suggest that accurately describing and attempting to explain or 'understand' the data themselves on their own terms are steps that should be abandoned or skipped over. They are, indeed, the sine qua non of scholarship. My point here is that they are necessary but not sufficient. The second step, which too often is not taken (especially in Religious Studies) out of misplaced (and, in my opinion, self-deluded) visions of 'empathy', 'relativity' and/or objectivity is to critique discourse in terms of the effects it has, the practices it legitimates, the interests it represents and its implications for the international academic community (whose interests academics like ourselves represent). For a discussion of this problem as it pertains specifically to the study of religion (where truth claims are often, even necessarily, in variance with the standards followed in academic discourse), see Brian K. Smith, *Classifying the Universe: The Ancient Indian Varṇa System and the Origins of Caste*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, 322–325.
- 2 For the history of the 'construction' of a unified 'religion' called 'Hinduism', see the discussion in Wilfred Cantwell Smith's *The Meaning and End of Religion* San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978, pp. 63ff.; and Gerald Larson, *India's Agony Over Religion*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995.
- 3 For recent discussions of the definitional problems, see Gunther D. Sontheimer and Hermann Kulke (eds.), *Hinduism Reconsidered* New Delhi: Monohar Publications, 1989; and the symposium, with articles by John Stratton Hawley, Alf Hiltebeitel, Wendy Doniger, Prasenjit Duara, et al., entitled 'Hinduism and the Fate of India', *The Wilson Quarterly*, Summer, 1991: 20–52. For my own attempt at a working definition of Hinduism (which I still believe, even in light of recent events in India, to be a scholarly desideratum—and now perhaps also a political one as well) in terms of the allegiance to the authority of the Veda, see Brian K. Smith, *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual, and Religion*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- 4 Robert E. Frykenberg, 'The Emergence of Modern 'Hinduism' as a Concept and as an Institution: a Reappraisal with Special Reference to South India', in Sontheimer and Kulke (eds.), *Hinduism Reconsidered*, 29.
- 5 This is a ploy especially favored over the years by the Vedantins, who for many centuries have tended to regard all other competitors, both inside and outside of 'Hinduism', as versions of themselves—perhaps slightly off-base, certainly focused on the part rather than the whole, incomplete in their vision, but nevertheless all somehow 'saying the same thing' and therefore really Vedantins after all. 'All is One', as the slogan goes. (Certain ecumenically-minded

- dialogical Christians, perennial philosophers and crypto-theologians in Religious Studies Departments, have more recently reinvented this polemical wheel with the notion that all religions share some sort of underlying unity or essence.) For a discussion of the claim of 'universality' in Hinduism (and now also in the newly created religion called 'Ramakrishnaism') see Brian K. Smith, 'How Not to be a Hindu: the Case of the Ramakrishna Mission Society', in Robert Baird (ed.), *Religion and Law in Independent India*, New Delhi: Manohar Books, 1993, 333–350. Some of the discussion in this section is borrowed and modified from that article.
- 6 Ronald Inden, *Imagining India*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990, 86.
 - 7 Monier-Williams, cited in John Stratton Hawley, 'Naming Hinduism', *Wilson Quarterly*, 15, 3 (Summer 1991): 22.
 - 8 Charles Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism: an Historical Sketch*, 3 vols., New York: Barnes and Noble, 1954, cited in Inden, *Imagining India*, 86–87.
 - 9 Among the very few people who find it difficult to maintain the stereotype of Hinduism as 'tolerant' in light of past, recent, and ongoing daily evidence to the contrary, is Nirad C. Chaudhuri: 'If the familiar words about tolerance and capacity for synthesis of the Hindus were true, one would be hard put to explain why there are endemic outbursts of murderous ferocity'. *The Continent of Circe*, Bombay: Jaico Publishing House, 1965, 33. A study of what factors contributed to the generation of this supposedly essential feature of Hinduism in both Western constructions of Indian religion and in South Asian political and religious discourse remains a desideratum. For the present, the best works are those of Paul Hacker, 'Inklusivismus', in G. Oberhammer (ed.), *Inklusivismus: Eine indische Denkform*, Vienna, 1983, 11–28; and Wilhelm Halbfass, 'Inclusivism' and 'Tolerance' in the Encounter Between India and the West', 403–418 in Halbfass's *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1988. Other and less penetrating studies include Arvind Sharma, 'Some Misunderstandings of the Hindu Approach to Religious Plurality', *Religion*, 8, Autumn 1978: 133–154; and Kaisa Puhakka, 'The Roots of Religious Tolerance in Hinduism', *Temenos*, 12, 1976: 50–61.
 - 10 Percival Spear, *India, Pakistan and the West*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958, 57.
 - 11 For legal arguments for why members of the Ramakrishna Mission are, at least according to their lawyers, not Hindus, see Smith, 'How Not to be a Hindu'.
 - 12 The term 'encompassment' obviously calls up Louis Dumont's *magnum opus*, *Homo Hierarchicus: the Caste System and its Implications*, complete rev. English ed., trans. by Mark Sainsbury, Louis Dumont, and Basia Gulati, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980. As Dumont teaches us, Hindu 'tolerance' is not toothless; encompassment of others entails hierarchical ranking. Those who create the auspices under which such tolerance, inclusiveness, and universalism may proceed—and I speak here not only of certain Hindus but all such universalists—also create an oftentimes unacknowledged hierarchical scale whereby some truths (i.e. the creator's own) are truer than other truths. Those, for example, who *do not* espouse the values of tolerance, inclusiveness, unity and so forth will not be accorded the same status as those who do. Hinduism's superiority is implicitly but nevertheless emphatically asserted through the very notion that Hinduism is, by definition, infinitely tolerant. The proclamation of the all-encompassing nature of Hinduism might also very well function as a subtle, perhaps wishful, but nevertheless ideologically potent strategy of hegemonic expansion, comparable to somewhat cruder strategies practised by other religions—missionary ventures, the holy war or *jihad*, imperialism and colonialism, foreign trade and commerce, *et al.*
 - 13 The history of the concept of 'spiritual India' can be traced all the way back to the classical Greeks and is preserved in the Western imagination—with a continuity modern historians abhor—right up to the present. See, for example, Wilhelm Halbfass's *India and Europe*. Given the endurance and persuasiveness of this notion in the West, it should come as no big surprise to us that Indian nationalists, past and present, have conjoined the realms of religion and national identity. They are, in a certain sense, simply taking seriously and implementing in modern ways what Westerners have said for millennia.
 - 14 Consult Paul Hacker's article, 'Aspects of the Non-Hinduism as Contrasted with Surviving Traditional Hinduism', Lambert Schmithausen (ed.), *Kleine Schriften*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1978, especially p. 584: ' . . . nationalism is the chief impulse of typical Neo-Hindu thinking'.
 - 15 The contention that the 19th century 'Hindu Renaissance' movement was in fact a foreshadowing of the late 20th century 'Hindutva' movement is based on similar conjoinings, in both cases, of Hindu religious identity and Indian nationalism. The comparison is debatable, however, and deserves more attention.

- 16 I must take issue here also with the sophisticated arguments that the Hindutva movement has created a new 'syndicated Hinduism' as put forward by Romila Thapar. See her 'Syndicated Moksha?', *Seminar*, **313**, 1985: 14–22; cf. Lochtefeld's reference to Jaffrelot's phrase, 'un syncretisme strategique'. Others have referred to the movement's attempt to create a 'Semiticized' Hinduism. All of these terms (and the arguments that lie behind them) fail to recognize the intentional ambiguity in which the Hindutva movement couch much of their discourse.
- 17 As Mark Juergensmeyer notes in his 'The Debate Over Hindutva', published in this volume, the term has also sometimes been used as shorthand for 'indigenous Indian culture'. Given the confusion between 'Indian' and 'Hindu' inherent in this conception of Hindutva, however, Juergensmeyer's lack of further comment elides the political ramifications (e.g. of implying the Muslims are and always have been 'foreigners') of constituting 'indigenous Indian culture' as being more or less 'Hindu'.
- 18 Thus, I would argue, Juergensmeyer's query 'Are Religious Politics Native to India?' is naive.
- 19 'Kick Them Out', interview with Bal Thackeray by Anita Pratap, *Time (International Edition)*, 25 January 1993, 31. In fairness, it must be pointed out that Thackeray now denies that he made the comments attributed to him at the interview. Juergensmeyer, for apparently polemical reasons, seems to think that by citing Thackeray's remarks I have 'accepted the parallels between Nazism and the Hindutva movement without any hesitation'. I do not, although Thackeray seemingly does. For a reasoned and learned discussion on why the Hindutva movement might be labelled 'fascist', however, see Tapan Raychaudhuri, 'Shadows of the Swastika: Historical Reflections on the Politics of Hindu Communalism', *Contention*, **5**, Fall 1995, 141–162.
- 20 Ashis Nandy, 'An anti-secularist manifesto', *Seminar*, **314**, October 1985: 14–24; T. N. Madan, 'Secularism in its Place', *Journal of Asian Studies*, **46**, November 1987: 747–758; and *idem.*, 'Whither Indian Secularism?' *Modern Asian Studies*, **27**, 1993: 667–697. For a defense of secularism and a critique of the above articles, see Andre Beteille, 'Secularism and Intellectuals', *Economic and Political Weekly*, **24**, 5 March 1994: 559–566. The continuing search for authenticity and self-identity among Indian intellectuals in the postcolonial era has sometimes returned to the notion that Hinduism is, or should be, infinitely encompassing. See, for example, T. N. Madan's, 'The Quest for Hinduism', in *Non-Renunciation: Themes and Interpretations of Hindu Culture*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987; and especially Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983. Many such ponderings are sophisticated efforts to romanticize traditional Hinduism, recapture the fluidity the concept of Hinduism supposedly once had, and (not unlike certain members of the Hindutva movement) suggest that 'Hinduism' and 'Indian culture' are more or less synonymous terms. As Nandy writes, 'The alternative to Hindu nationalism is the peculiar mix of classical and folk Hinduism and the unselfconscious Hinduism by which most Indians, Hindus as well as non-Hindus, live' (p. 104). Note here the contention that it is in fact 'Hinduism' ('unselfconscious' though it might be) that guides the lives even of 'non-Hindu' Indians. How most Indian Muslims would feel about such a contention, especially now that the Hindutva movement has come into being, can be surmised.
- 21 Ayodhya is not the only 'sacred center' that the Hindutva movement has targeted for action. For lists of hundreds of Hindu spots supposedly desecrated by Muslims, see Arun Shourie, Harsh Narain, Jay Dubashi, *et al.*, *Hindu Temples: What Happened to Them (A Preliminary Survey)*, New Delhi: Voice of India, 1990, and Sita Ram Goel, *Hindu Temples: What Happened to Them. Volume II: The Islamic Evidence*, New Delhi: Voice of India, 1991.
- 22 'RSS Leader Reiterates Theory on Aryans', *Times of India*, 29 January 1993. An earlier version of this thesis was put forward by RSS leader M. S. Golwalker in his *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, Bharat Publications, 1939, 8–9: 'Hypothesis is not truth. Out of the heap of hypotheses we reject all and positively maintain that we Hindus came into this land from nowhere, but are indigenous children of the soil always, from times immemorial and are natural masters of the country. Here we compiled our inimitable Vedas, reasoned out our Philosophy of the Absolute—the last word on the subject . . .' The 'Aryan' and the 'Hindu' are, therefore, coequivalent terms. For a review and critique of such claims, see Romila Thapar, 'The Perennial Aryans', *Seminar*, **400**, December 1992.
- 23 See Sukumar Muralidharan, 'Scientific Fraud: The 'Kar Sevak' Archeology', *Frontline*, 15 January 1993: 120–122. The Hindutva side of the archeological dispute is summarized in a

- publication entitled 'Ramajanma Bhumi: Ayodhya. New Archeological Discoveries', published and distributed by the 'Historians' Forum' in New Delhi.
- 24 'The Political Abuse of History: Babri Masjid—Rama Janmabhumi Dispute', published by the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University.
- 25 See above, footnote 21.
- 26 Akbar Ahmed, 'The History-Thieves: Stealing the Muslim Past?', *History Today*, **43**, January 1993: 11–13.
- 27 'Distorted History Still Taught in MP Schools', *The Deccan Herald*, 3 February 1993.
- 28 Ahmed, 'The History Thieves', 13.
- 29 As Juergensmeyer points out in his 'The Debate Over Hindutva', the term 'fundamentalism' is highly controversial when applied to non-Protestant forms of modern religion. While there are indeed reasons to reject the label in the case of the nineteenth and twentieth century versions of Hinduism (especially in light of the fact that any statement of what Hindu 'fundamentals' might be is studiously avoided by 'fundamentalists' themselves), substitutes such as 'religious nationalism' have their own problems (not excluding the fact that 'nationalism'—not to mention religion—no less than 'fundamentalism' has specific and culturally bounded origins and meanings in the history of the modern West).

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