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Mapping Hinduism

The process of constructing a general category to represent the religious beliefs and practices of the peoples that European writers encountered in India was underway from at least the start of the seventeenth century and the assigning of the name 'Hinduism' to this category in the 1780s represents neither the start nor the culmination but only one stage of this process, which continued into the nineteenth century. The different stages of this process have been ignored in much recent scholarship which has tended to assimilate the views of Hinduism in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century European works to later or, occasionally, to earlier views. In particular it is often suggested that the conventional fourfold classification of the world's religions meant that Indian religious beliefs and practices were from the outset perceived as a unitary entity, part of a world-wide heathenism, and that this only changed with the invention of the category of Hinduism in the early nineteenth century. Richard King's summary account of the process is, as will be shown, representative of recent scholarship. He writes: "'Hindu' in fact only came into provenance amongst Westerners in the eighteenth century. Previously, the predominant Christian perspective amongst Europeans classified Indian religion under the all-inclusive rubric of Heathenism. On this view there were four major religious groups, Jews, Christians, Mahometans (i. e. Muslims) and Heathens.'[1] King begins his brief account of 'the modern myth of Hinduism'[2] in the late eighteenth century with Halhed:

> The term 'Hinduism' seems first to have made an appearance in the early nineteenth century, and gradually gained provenance in the decades thereafter. Eighteenth-century references to the 'religion of the Gentoos' (e. g. Nathaniel Brassey Halhead [*sic*] (1776), *A Code of Gentoo Laws*) were gradually supplanted in the nineteenth century by references to 'the religion of the Hindoos' – a preference for the Persian as opposed to the Portuguese designation of the Indian people. However, it is not until the nineteenth century proper that the term "Hinduism" became used as a signifier of a unified, all-embracing and independent religious entity in both Western and Indian circles.[3]

King explains that the term 'Hinduism', 'is a Western explanatory construct. As such it reflects the colonial and Judaeo-Christian presuppo-

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[1] King 1999: 99. Cf. Balagangadhara 1994: 111. Other similar accounts will be considered below.

[2] King 1999: Chapter 5 'The modern myth of Hinduism'.

[3] King 1999: 100.

sitions of the Western Orientalists who first coined the term ... the superimposition of the monolithic entity of 'Hinduism' upon Indian religious material has distorted and perhaps irretrievably transformed Indian religiosity in a Westernized direction.'[4] This has happened through 'an implicit (and sometimes explicit) tendency to define Indian religion in terms of a normative paradigm of religion based upon contemporary Western understandings of the Judaeo-Christian traditions' and through what King calls 'the textualization of Indian religion' in which 'the oral and "popular" aspect of Indian religious tradition was either ignored or decried as evidence of the degradation of contemporary Hindu religion into superstitious practices that bore little or no relation to "their own" texts'.[5]

That 'Hinduism' is indeed a Western explanatory construct, the history of the term, examined here, clearly demonstrates. The same history also shows, however, that at least some of the first European authors to use the term recognized this fact.[6] King's further charges, that the concept 'Hinduism' reflected colonial and Judaeo-Christian presuppositions, that it resulted in the superimposition of a monolithic entity and that it distorted Indian religiosity, will be examined after a brief review of some other accounts of the emergence of the concept.

Ronald Inden locates the invention of Hinduism in nineteenth century European works, and his account makes no reference to earlier sources.[7] The English Utilitarians are identified as 'the founders of Indological discourse' and there is no suggestion that earlier writers may have formed an alternative view of Hinduism: 'The predominant construct of Hinduism was the one fashioned by Utilitarians and Christian idealists.'[8] Like King, Inden implicates writers on Hinduism in imperialism:

> British, French and German scholars asserted again and again as they helped draw India into the Anglo-French imperial formation of the nineteenth century that because of its radically otherworldly or spiritual orientation, the key to understanding the thinking of that civilization lay in understanding its religious basis ... they have designated the religion they have invented by the term (from the Persian, as one is always told) Hinduism.[9]

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[4] King 1999: 100.

[5] King 1999: 101.

[6] We have already cited (above, p.50) H. H. Wilson's careful use of 'the Hindu religion' noting that it 'is a term, that has been hitherto employed in a collective sense, to designate a faith and worship of an almost endlessly diversified description' (Wilson 1846: 1).

[7] Inden 1990, Chapter 3, 'Hinduism: the Mind of India'.

[8] Inden 1990: 89.

[9] Inden 1990: 86.

Marshall takes a longer and a more cautious view speaking of the 'discovery', rather than the invention, of Hinduism in the eighteenth, rather than the nineteenth, century.[10] However, although he notes that 'English writers in the second half of the eighteenth century were the heirs to over two hundred years of attempts by Europeans to interpret Hinduism',[11] he tends to project later eighteenth-century views of Hinduism onto the earlier accounts. So, for example, he states of the authors[12] of the texts he excerpts: 'As Europeans have always tended to do, they created Hinduism in their own image.'[13] He does not attend to the earlier works, noting that 'published accounts of India [which] appeared in Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries ... do not seem to have received very much public notice.'[14] We have noted above the wide dissemination of at least some of these works; what is true is that in the considerable body of literature which has appeared in the wake of Said's *Orientalism* these early works have received much less attention than have later eighteenth- and nineteenth-century works.

Most other accounts of the foundation of Indological scholarship continue to date it to the late eighteenth century, making only passing references to what went before.[15] One of the few exceptions has been Heinrich von Stietencron.[16] However, if Inden and Marshall tend to

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[10] Marshall 1970.

[11] Marshall 1970: 20.

[12] John Zephaniah Holwell, Alexander Dow, Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, William Hastings, Charles Wilkins and William Jones.

[13] Marshall 1970: 43.

[14] Marshall 1970: 2.

[15] So, for example, Rohit Barot states 'the founding of the Asiatic Society in January 1784 ... marked the birth of indological researches which contributed to a distinctive consciousness of India and Hinduism in the West.' (Barot 1994: 69). Likewise Halbfass notes 'the beginning of modern Indological research ... is usually associated with the foundation of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784 and the work of the British pioneers W. Jones, Ch. Wilkins and H. Th. Colebrooke.' Halbfass does give an extended account of the achievements of earlier writers, especially the Jesuits, noting however, that 'for a variety of reasons these remarkable efforts did not inaugurate the tradition of modern Indological research as such.' (Halbfass 1988: 45) In addition to Marshall (1970), Inden (1990) and King (1999), cited above, see also Dalmia and Stietencron 1995. Of the twenty-one essays in this collection only three discuss representations of Hinduism prior to the nineteenth century and only two of those (Stietencron and Dharampal-Frick) are concerned with European representations. Dharampal-Frick's essay is concerned with caste, rather than Hinduism (Dharampal-Frick 1995). As will be shown, Stietencron's account of early European representations of Hinduism is seriously flawed.

[16] In addition to Dharampal-Frick and Balagangadhara, both discussed above, others include Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat and David Lorenzen. Filliozat, who states that '[t]he birth of Indology as a real science is the result of a collaboration between Indian traditional scholars and French missionaries ... in the first decades of the eighteenth century' (Filliozat 1984: 133), discusses Pons and mentions Cœurdoux, but his article is mainly concerned with later French Indology. Lorenzen discusses, amongst others, the

assimilate seventeenth and early-eighteenth century European accounts of Hinduism to later works, Stietencron comprehensively assimilates their concept of Hinduism to that of earlier centuries.

Stietencron is in broad agreement with King, except that he locates the concept of a unitary Indian religion earlier. He writes that 'the concept of a common Indian religion – whatever its name – did not originate in India. It was introduced from the West, and its history goes back to a period when Western knowledge about distant India was very vague ... although the term 'Hinduism' came into common use as late as the nineteenth century, the underlying concept of a unity of Indian religion was already in existence in the West before that religion was actually encountered by European missionaries and traders ... The concept ... was present in Europe throughout the Middle Ages and it was totally independent of any concrete knowledge about India.'[17] The concept to which Stietencron refers is 'heathenism' in the fourfold classification: 'European missionaries and traders who settled down on the shores of India from 1598 [*sic*] onwards ... knew for certain that the entire population of the world was divided into four major religious systems or laws, namely, *lex christiana, lex iudaica, lex mahometana* and *lex gentilium*, i. e., the religious norms and doctrines of the Christians, the Jews, the Moslem and the heathen.'[18]

Stietencron goes so far as to concede that 'Some of the early missionaries, like Roberto de Nobili, were interested in the language and culture of the Indian heathen.'[19] However, he states confidently that

> It never occurred to them that they might have to do with different faiths because their conceptual framework regarding the religions of this world had no room for any new creed other than the superstitious creed of the followers of Satan; and the apparent contradictions within this world-wide system of the heathen only confirmed their belief that Satan had created the baffling variety of superstitious cults precisely in order to confuse and enslave these poor, ill-guided people in the snares of delusion.[20]

The conceptual framework is the fourfold classification. Elsewhere Stietencron has written that 'striking differences within this heathen religion had to be treated as sectarian differences. There was no other possibility. For that they could be treated as different "religions" was precluded in advance by the general conception of the four religions of

eighteenth-century Italian Franciscans Guiseppe Felice da Morro and Marco della Tomba and argues that 'Hinduism is not a colonial construct or invention, nor even a European one' (Lorenzen 1999: 640).

17 Stietencron 1995: 72.

18 Stietencron 1995: 73–4.

19 Stietencron 1995: 74.

20 Stietencron 1995: 75.

mankind.'[21] Stietencron mentions the 'two important Latin treatises of Roberto de Nobili' edited by Rajamanickam, but in the light of the sections of these treatises quoted above it appears that Stietencron has drawn his conclusion concerning Nobili without reading them. Likewise he mentions the title of Lord's work, but appears to know only the brief mention of it in Marshall.[22] His account continues: 'As late as the first quarter of the eighteenth century when Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg wrote his famous book on the Malabarian heathendom this was still the world-view of European missionaries.' From here, Stietencron moves directly to 'the end of the eighteenth century [which] saw a change in this state of affairs':

> Now, finally, the Indian heathen were considered to have a distinct religion of their own. That religion had to be given a name. The name originally used to denote it was 'Brahmanism', and from the 1820s onwards it was 'Hinduism' (originally spelt Hindooism). For a while, scholars used the two terms side by side in order to distinguish Vedic 'Brahmanism' from later 'Hinduism'. In the long run the term Hinduism triumphed. Historical developments were specified by qualifications like 'Older', 'Younger', and 'Neo'-Hinduism. That this Hinduism was a culture or civilization rather than a religion, and that it contained several distinct religions within itself could not yet be perceived at the time.[23]

In his review of the 'fundamental premisses of India-orientated Religionswissenschaft' Stietencron notes that the 'most important premiss was the idea that it was *a single* Hindu religion with which one had to do. This, which was taken over from the early missionaries' view of the religion of Indian heathens, was never sufficiently questioned.'[24] This had dire consequences:

> As the Indian independence movement and the struggle for a national Indian unity was supported by neither a linguistic, nor a racial, nor, before the start of foreign rule, a political unity, the *religious* unity invented by Western scholars represented the only element of the independence-struggle, which could legitimate the desired national unity. That this legitimation led to conflict with the Muslims, and

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[21] 'mußte man auffallende Unterschiede innerhalb dieser heidnischen Religion als "sektarische" Unterschiede betrachten. Eine andere Möglichkeit gab es nicht. Denn daß es sich um verschiedene "Religionen" handeln könne, war von vorherein durch das Gesamtkonzept der vier Religionen der Menschheit ausgeschlossen.' Stietencron 1988: 127–128.

[22] Stietencron 1995: 74.

[23] Stietencron 1995: 75.

[24] 'grundsätzlichen Prämissen indien-orientierter Religionswissenschaft ... Wichtigste Prämisse war die Vorstellung, man habe es mit *einer* Hindu-Religion zu tun. Diese, von den frühen Missionaren übernommene Sicht von der Religion der indischen Heiden wurde nie ausreichend hinterfragt.' Stietencron 1988: 149.

eventually to the partition of India and Pakistan, is a tragic result of the taking over of the western misinterpretations by the Indians themselves.[25]

Thus, although Stietencron, unlike Inden or King, discusses earlier writers, in essence his account moves directly from a view of Indian religion as a single entity within the fourfold classification (which must precede Nobili's account of Indian religious plurality), to the nineteenth century when, he argues, 'the new concept "Hinduism" in the sense of "the religion of the Hindus" was formed', and hence to the 'tragic result of the taking over of the western misinterpretations' by the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century independence movement.[26] The result of the elision in Stietencron's account of the recognition of the plurality of Indian religious adherence and the process which resulted in the formation of the concept 'Hinduism' is that he is unable to recognize the degree to which the study of Indian religions has shaped the concept 'religion' itself. Hence, like other writers discussed above, Stietencron remains in thrall to the Christian theological preconceptions about religion which he criticizes in early European writers on Hinduism.[27]

We have seen above that Nobili explicitly denies, as part of his argument for his missionary method of adaptation, that the Hindus may be said to form a single religion.[28] He denies that there is a single unified religious entity which could be signified by the common use of the symbol of the thread and tuft. The two other outstanding European writers on Hinduism of the seventeenth century, Lord and Roger, both offer detailed accounts of specific local or regional religious groups. Lord exploits the semantic ambiguity of the term 'Banian' to claim a wider application for his work, but even in its broader sense, 'Banian' was from its first use in English taken to be a regional term, and not equivalent to 'Indian'.[29] Roger's account emphasizes the ritual practices or 'divine service' (Godsdienst) of the Brahmans, and he does not attempt to give an explicit account of a 'religion of the Brahmans' not least because he

[25] 'Da sich die indische Unabhängigkeitsbewegung und der Kampf um nationale Einheit Indiens weder auf eine sprachliche noch auf eine rassische Einheit und auch nicht auf eine politische Einheit vor Beginn der Fremdherrschaft stützen konnte, bildete die von westlichen Wissenschaftlern erfundene *religiöse* Einheit das einzige Element des Freiheitskampfes, welches die erstrebte nationale Einheit legitimieren konnte. Daß diese Legitimation zum Konflikt mit den Muslimen und schließlich zur Teilung von Indien und Pakistan führte, ist ein tragisches Ergebnis der Übernahme westlicher Fehlinterpretationen durch die Inder selbst.' Stietencron 1988: 150.

[26] 'im 19. Jahrhundert der neue Begriff "Hinduismus" im Sinne von "Religion der Hindus" geprägt wurde'. Stietencron 1988: 131.

[27] See above, p.35.

[28] See above, p.62.

[29] Hakluyt, cited above, p.64. *Oxford English Dictionary* (1971), *s. v.* 'Banian'. The concept of 'India' itself had yet to gain its modern sense. See below, p.162.

makes little use of a reified concept of a religion at all. Nevertheless Roger's selection of religious beliefs and practices in the second part of his work was influential in subsequent works which did take such a religion as their object: 'Roger invented the classic plan for a treatise on the Indians, and it is this classic plan which is to be found in the vectors of [Cœurdoux's] *Mœurs et Coutumes*'.[30] Neither Lord nor Roger offers a monolithic account of Hinduism as a single pan-Indian religion, or of a worldwide 'heathenism' within the fourfold classification. Lord, like Nobili, recognizes a plurality of religious adherence among the Indians, and Roger discusses the different ritual practices of several Hindu groups without subsuming them under a single religious entity.

The object of Ziegenbalg's first major work on Indian religion is the 'Malabarian Heathenism' which 'is spread far and wide in India'.[31] Ziegenbalg's sense of the connection between the 'heathenism' practised in Bengal, in the Mogul realm, on the Malabar coast and in Ceylon, is clearly a step in the direction of a conception of 'Hinduism' as what King calls 'a unified, all-embracing and independent religious entity'. We have shown, however, that far from being monolithic, his account treats Hinduism as a plural phenomenon, susceptible to analysis as a religion on various levels. It shows, as Dharampal-Frick suggests 'astonishing affinity to "new" positions in the conception of Hinduism.'[32] Despite Ziegenbalg's sense of the relatedness of the religious beliefs and practices of the inhabitants of different parts of India, his primary concern remains with 'Malabarian', that is, South Indian, Hinduism. It is not until the Jesuit missionaries in different parts of India begin exchanging detailed information about Indian religious beliefs and practices in the first decades of the eighteenth century that a clear concept of a unified Hinduism begins to be used routinely and with confidence. Nevertheless, the Jesuit accounts are not without concern for plurality and diversity and, like those of the other writers examine here, do not present Hinduism as a monolithic entity.

Nor may these accounts be explained as adjuncts of imperialism. The East India Companies served by Lord and Roger had yet to entertain imperial ambitions.[33] Although Ziegenbalg was commissioned by the

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[30] 'Roger avait inventé le plan-type du traité sur les Indiens et c'est ce plan-type dont on retrouve les lignes de force dans *Mœurs et Coutumes*'. Murr 1987, II: 73.

[31] 'Das malabarische Heidenthum erstrecket sich in Indien sehr weit und breit'. Ziegenbalg 1926: 23.

[32] Dharampal-Frick 1994: 359.

[33] For the English East India Company see Roe's comments, cited above p.87. For both the English and the Dutch companies, see Holden Furber's comments that at this period 'the men who directed and served them hardly knew what imperialism was ... Even toward the end of the eighteenth century when the rule of the English and Dutch companies over large populations was becoming clearly apparent, contemporaries were not

Danish king, he was viewed with suspicion by the Danish authorities in Tranquebar and imprisoned by them for intervening in the case of an Indian widow he thought to have been defrauded by a Danish trader.[34] The Jesuits did have close links with the French authorities in Pondicherry. Nevertheless, as Rosane Rocher notes, for the eighteenth century in general, 'the prevailing ethos was not yet imperialist.'[35]

Above all it must be stressed that the concept of a unified Hindu religion in these works was not derived from theological preconceptions of a fourth world-religion. Nobili states that 'these people follow one common way of life, but many *religions*';[36] Lord not only distinguishes 'the Banian religion' from 'the religion of the Parsees', but recognizes differences of religious affiliation among both groups. Ziegenbalg writes that the Malabarians 'have forged many different religions, among which there are in particular two main religions, the first called Śivamatam, the second Viṣṇumatam.[37] While not historically accurate, Cœurdoux's account of the violent displacement of the 'Boudistes' by the 'new religion' of the Brahmans around 1300 BCE shows a recognition of religious plurality which could not be accommodated in the fourfold classification. It was precisely the recognition of a plurality of Indian religious beliefs and practices susceptible to analysis as 'religions', which forced the abandonment of the fourfold classification, *before* the emergence of the concept of Hinduism as a unitary religious entity in the works of the French Jesuits in the first decades of the eighteenth century. That other European authors continue to use the fourfold classification into the nineteenth century only underlines the need for synchronic as well as diachronic nuance in our understanding of these authors.[38]

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thinking in terms of Kipling's "White Man's Burden"' ('The History of East India Companies: General Problems' in Michel Mollat, ed., *Sociétés et Compagnies de Commerce en Orient et dans l'Océan Indien*, Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1970: 415–18 cited in Rocher 1993: 216).

[34] For details of this episode see Sandgren 1991.

[35] Rocher 1993: 216.

[36] 'hi populi unum habeant civilem cultum, religionem vero multiplicem' Nobili 1971: 112/113, emphasis added. See above, p.62 for discussion of a possible alternative sense of this phrase.

[37] '... haben mancherley Religionen geschmiedet, unter welchen sonderlich 2. Haupt-Religionen sind, die eine Tschiwamadam, und die andere Wischtmadam gennant.' Ziegenbalg 1713: 28r–28v.

[38] The need to take account of the different degrees of sophistication in European texts on India has been noted by Bayly, who points out that 'Formal orientalist texts, particularly those of a popular nature, quite often failed to transmit the relatively complex understanding of men actually involved in the governance of India, and cultural historians should beware of reading too much into them.' Bayly 1996: 326.

'Hinduism', 'Religion' and 'India'

It may appear trite to state that the concept of Hinduism as a pan-Indian religion depends upon the concepts 'India' and 'religion', but it should not be taken for granted that the earliest authors on Indian religions had either concept in their modern sense. Roger's work provides evidence to suggest that the shift to the modern sense of 'religion', discussed above in chapter one, was still underway at the time of the emergence of the concept of 'Hinduism'. Regarding the European conception of India as a geographical entity, Edney notes that prior to the eighteenth century, European maps framed India in three distinct ways:

> Beginning in the early 1500s, general maps showed the traditional region of the Indies, from the Indus to Indochina. The subcontinent was, of course, a prominent feature of those maps, but it was not their focus. Later, in the sixteenth century, Europeans began to produce maps that framed only the peninsula south of the river Krishna, the area of their principal involvement. The third framing developed early in the seventeenth century and focused on the polity of the Mughal empire. These maps emphasized the seat of Mughal power in the northern plains. They also included the Mughal territories west of the Indus: the Punjab, the Hindu Kush, and on occasion Afghanistan. They omitted the peninsula.[39]

Maps which merged the two regional framings to produce a map of 'the entire region usually considered to be India *per se*' began to appear in the first decades of the eighteenth century.[40] Edney argues, however, that it was only 'during the 1760s and the 1770s that the two regional framings completely merged to create a conception of India as a region'.[41] 'The new conception of the subcontinent as an actual region in and of itself was most apparent in, and most effectively disseminated by, James Rennell's maps of India and their accompanying geographical memoirs ... It is in his highly influential maps that we find the establishment of India as a meaningful, if still ambiguous, geographical entity.'[42] The parallel with the development of the concept 'Hinduism' is striking.[43] The Jesuit letters from the second and third decades of the eighteenth century begin to refer to 'the system of religion recognized among the Indians', the 'religion of the Indians' and 'Gentilism', while at the same time the first maps of India as a coherent geographical entity are beginning to appear.

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[39] Edney 1997: 4–5.

[40] Edney reproduces 'one of the first maps to show all of South Asia in its modern conception', which was published in 1717. (Edney 1997: 7–8).

[41] Edney 1997: 9.

[42] Edney 1997: 9. Rennell's first general map *Hindoostan* was first published in 1782, his *Memoir of a Map of Hindoostan* appeared first in 1783, and in subsequent editions in 1785, 1788, 1792 and 1793. See Edney 1997: 99.

[43] It is not necessary to claim a causal connection between these developments for their coincidence to be significant.

The concept of a unified pan-Indian religion is firmly established by the 1770s, when 'Holwell's Gentooism' appeared, and 'Hindooism' itself appears in 1787. It was reading Rennell's *Memoir of a Map of Hindoostan* which prompted William Robertson to write his *Historical Disquisition concerning the Knowledge which the Ancients had of India* (London, 1791) in which he gave, in a thirty-page appendix[44] a summary account of Europe's knowledge of Hinduism. Robertson, who never visited India, sought to make up for his lack of personal knowledge through extensive reading: 'fully aware of the disadvantage under which I laboured in undertaking to describe countries of which I had not any local knowledge ... I consulted, with persevering industry, the works of all the authors I could procure, who have given any account of India.'[45] The works cited throughout the *Disquisition* indicate that Robertson knew virtually all the significant works on India published in English and French from Roger to the most recent editions of *Asiatick Researches* and the translations from Sanskrit of Jones and Wilkins.[46] Robertson's appendix therefore represents what it was possible to know of Indian religions at the start of the last decade of the eighteenth century from reading European works on India alone.[47] Although Robertson, reflecting his sources, mentions the difficulties of enumerating 'the multitude of deities which are the objects of adoration in India' he nonetheless understands 'the religious tenets and practices' of the Indians to form 'a regular and complete system of superstition', which he describes as 'the national religion' of India:[48] 'the institutions of [this] religion', are 'publicly established in all the extensive countries stretching from the Banks of the Indus to Cape Comorin'.[49] The concept of 'Hinduism' and the concept of 'India' in its modern sense, are coeval.

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[44] Geoffrey Carnall suggests that 'Judging from the manuscript of the *Disquisition*, the appendix may have been written first, with the narrative as an afterthought'. Carnall 1997: 211.

[45] Robertson 1791: iv.

[46] As Principal of Edinburgh University Robertson would have been in a better position than most regarding access to learned works.

[47] Robertson's only other source of information on India resulted from his having 'the good fortune to reckon among my friends some Gentlemen who have filled important stations, civil and military, in India, and who have visited many parts of it.' These may have included Robertson's two younger sons, both of whom were officers in the armies of the East India Company. Of these friends he states: 'I had recourse frequently to them, and from their conversation learned many things which I could not have found in books.' (Robertson 1791: iv–v). Given the small number of Europeans in India who had any detailed understanding of Hinduism it is unlikely that Robertson learnt much of significance concerning Hinduism from those with whom he spoke beyond what he already knew from the works of European writers on Hinduism.

[48] Robertson 1791: 301, 321. Cf. "this vast and complicated system of superstition" (302), and "the received mythology, or system of superstitious belief" (303).

[49] Robertson 1791: 302.

Representation and distortion

Having shown that the construct of Hinduism in the works of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century writers was not monolithic and ought not to be understood simply as the projection of Christian or imperialist preconceptions, we are now able to consider a charge which is made by several authors and which is expressed by King as the claim that the superimposition of the concept '"Hinduism" upon Indian religious material has distorted and perhaps irretrievably transformed Indian religiosity in a Westernized direction.'[50] It is arguable that much of what has been shown here for seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century writers on Hinduism is also true of many later eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century European writers, in particular, that their view of Hinduism is not monolithic. The limits of this work do not allow such an assessment to be made. However, the theoretical foundation established in the first two chapters above is relevant to the question of distortion not only in nineteenth century works but also in contemporary representations of Hinduism.

The claim that the concept 'Hinduism' has distorted Western perceptions of Indian religious material can and should be separated from the claim that Indian religiosity has been irretrievably transformed in a Westernized direction. The claim that the changes undergone by Hinduism in the last two centuries were influenced *in part* by its encounter with those who have studied it has been made by many scholars and will not be disputed here.[51] Romila Thapar has argued that the attempt, beginning in the nineteenth century and accelerated for political ends in the twentieth century, 'to defend, redefine and create Hinduism on the model of Christianity', has resulted in a 'uniform, monolithic, Hinduism' which she calls 'Syndicated Hinduism'.[52] She writes that 'Syndicated Hinduism claims to be re-establishing the Hinduism of pre-modern times: in fact it is only establishing itself and in the process *distorting* the historical and cultural dimensions of the indigenous religions and divesting them of nuances and variety which were major sources of their enrichment.'[53] Whether the changes in Hinduism over the last two centuries are best described as a distortion or a transformation of what went

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[50] King 1999: 100.

[51] Although the claim should not be exaggerated. A host of other factors were at work, and the attention paid to 'reformed' Hinduism should not lead us to ignore the fact that the movement was largely restricted to high-caste, urban Hindus. See also Richard Young's study of 'Resistant Hinduism' (Young 1981).

[52] Thapar 1997: 65, 75.

[53] Thapar 1997: 79, emphasis added.

before[54] is a different issue from the claim that the concept of Hinduism in the works of seventeenth- and early-eighteenth century writers produced a distorted view of Indian religious material, or the claim that the late twentieth-century political ideologues have promoted a distorted concept of Hinduism.

Thapar writes that '[t]he term Hinduism as we understand it today to describe a particular religion is modern, as also is the concept which it presupposes, both resulting from a series of choices made from range of belief, ritual and practice which were collated into the creation of this religion.'[55] The review of the critiques of 'religion' and of 'Hinduism' was undertaken in order to show that the fact that they are modern, Western concepts is in itself no objection to their use. As Ninian Smart writes 'The non-traditional nature of western terms does not *by itself* mean that there is a distorting reification. "Gamesmanship" is of fairly recent coinage, but gamesmanship preceded the coinage (hence the success of the coinage).'[56] It remains to been shown that the fact that the use of the term 'Hinduism' inevitably imposes a partial view of its intended object, a selection of a potentially limitless range of human beliefs and practices, is not a reason to dismiss the concept as a 'distortion'.

It is arguable that to describe Hinduism as a religion at all is itself a distortion. We have seen that Lach and van Kley state that the division, in Roger's work, 'of life into secular and religious spheres, so natural to Western ways of thinking, does violence to the unity of Hinduism and imposes upon it a separation foreign to its doctrine and practices.'[57] This may be admitted (it has been argued above that 'religion' is not a natural kind, but an artificial concept, 'a conceptual tool [which] ought not to be confused with an ontological category'[58]), but only with the recognition that *any* application of *any* concept at all to the world is, in the same sense, a 'distortion'. The primary problem is not that the concepts we apply to the world shape our view of the world but that we forget that this is inevitably the case.

This is not to say that all representations are equally distorting. As suggested by Brian K. Smith, one way of evaluating representations is whether they are 'sufficiently nuanced to allow for the representational capabilities of the others whom one, inevitably, is in the process of

[54] This is hardly the first time that a religion has been influenced by political factors. Thapar's own article refers to earlier changes in Hinduism prompted by political factors such as patronage.

[55] Thapar 1997: 54.

[56] Smart 1974: 46.

[57] Lach and Van Kley 1993: 1029, cited above p.92.

[58] McCutcheon 1997: viii.

representing.'[59] It has been suggested that, for example, the works of Ziegenbalg show considerable capacity to reflect the self-representations of those he represents. We cannot, however, evaluate representations by how far they match up to 'undistorted' reality, that is, a reality to which we have immediate, non-conceptual, access. All of our representations are mediated through our concepts. The recognition of this fact itself provides another criterion for evaluating particular representations, that is, how far the author of a particular representation is aware of the inevitable partiality of that representation itself.

On this criterion, our judgement on the seventeenth- and early-eighteenth century authors we have discussed is mixed. While they aspire to an 'undistorted' view of Hinduism, they were mostly aware that their circumstances have prevented such a view. Lord, Roger, Ziegenbalg and Cœurdoux claim only limited applicability for their work. Pons writes that his own work 'is not to be regarded as more than a draft, to which the most able hand will certainly have much to add, and perhaps much to retract.'[60] Anquetil's realization of these limitations inspired his proposed 'Académies ambulantes'.

The ideal of an undistorted view of Hinduism returns us to the parallel with the cartographic ideal which drove the processes described by Edney in his account of 'the geographical construction of British India'.[61] Edney writes:

> The formation of this cartographic ideal had two stages. First, the Enlightenment philosophes developed an epistemological ideal: correct and certain archives of knowledge could be constructed, they believed, by following rational processes epitomized by mapmaking. In the case of mapmaking, however, the epistemological ideal was undermined by recognized flaws in cartographic technologies. The second stage in the formulation of the cartographic ideal accordingly came with the widespread promulgation of a technological solution – "triangulation" – which promised to perfect geographical knowledge.[62]

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59 Smith 1996b: 366, cited above, p.52.

60 'ce que je vous marque ici, ne doit même être regardé que comme une ébauche à laquelle une main plus habile auroit bien des traits à ajoûter, & peut-être plusieurs à retrancher.' XXVI: 256.

61 Edney 1997.

62 Edney 1997: 17. The flaws in existing cartographic technology arose from the difficulties in quantifying degrees of error in the different methods of determining latitude and longitude. 'What triangulation offered was a systematic technology whereby geographic information could be made truly certain and comprehensive. Its principles were relatively simple. The surveyor first imagines a series of straight lines joining the tops of hills or tall buildings. The hilltops are selected so that the lines form either a long chain of triangles or a network of interlocking triangles spread out across the landscape ... The result is a rigorous mathematical framework in which all points are defined with respect to each other ... The net result of the greater accuracy of triangulation, of its greater degree of congruence with the land, of its greater degree of control, and of its use

Anquetil's travelling academicians represent an equivalent technological solution to the problems in obtaining 'an entirely satisfactory notion'[63] of countries such as India. In our own time, when there are professional scholars of the sort Anquetil thought necessary, the barrier to obtaining an accurate view of Hinduism has been seen to lie in the category 'Hinduism' itself.[64] The critique of 'Hinduism' as 'a concept so *soft* and *slippery*, so opaque and vague, that its use all but brings critical analysis to a halt and intellectual discourse to the verge of paralysis (if not futility)'[65] suggests that what is needed is a new technological solution, in this case better categories. However, as Edney points out, the epistemological ideal which has inspired these technological solutions, 'is itself open to an extensive critique ... such perfection and total comprehensiveness is impossible *in practice*.'[66] Moreover the '"technological fix" offered by triangulation has served to intensify the Enlightenment's "cartographic illusion" of the "mimetic map."'[67] The illusion of such a map, 'ignores the reasons why specific institutions make maps in the first place: to stand in for, to represent, the territories they depict in a wide variety of personal, social and cultural exchanges.'[68] The same impossible ideal of a perfect and comprehensive account of Indian religious beliefs and practices, a view not 'distorted' by the use of conceptual tools such as 'Hinduism', is implied in the critiques of Hinduism discussed in chapter two above. Friedhelm Hardy writes that in describing Hinduism:

> we are dealing with a jungle. The ideal would be to describe it as a total ecosystem, but this will never be achieved. But it is still possible to do more than just pluck a few flowers. There are elements of an order here; it is just extremely important to know whose order or 'map' one is using.[69]

Whether referring to the concept in the writers we have discussed, or in contemporary academic studies of Hinduism, or even politicized reformulations of the concept, criticism of *any* construction of

in measuring the figure of the earth is that triangulation is held to offer the potential perfection of the map's relationship with the territory mapped. Triangulation defines an exact equivalence between the geographic archive and the world. Triangulation makes it possible to conceive of a map constructed at a scale of 1:1.' (Edney 1997: 19–21).

63 'd'avoir sur ces contrées des notion entierement satisfaisantes' Anquetil 1771: x–xi.

64 Inden argues that 'precisely because we have not made ourselves aware of the major assumptions and presuppositions built into Indology, we continue to produce and validate studies of Hinduism that have failed to struggle free of the construct' he critiques (Inden 1990: 129–130).

65 Frykenberg 1997: 87.

66 Edney 1997: 17.

67 Edney 1997: 21.

68 Edney 1997: 25.

69 Hardy 1990: 145–6. It is not clear to what extent Hardy realizes the theoretical and not just the practical impossibility of realising this ideal. Earlier uses of the jungle metaphor are discussed by Inden (Inden 1990: 86–7).

'Hinduism' as a distortion is, insofar as it depends upon the ideal of a perfect and comprehensive account of Indian religious beliefs and practices, unsustainable. Thapar's critique of 'Syndicated Hinduism' depends upon her claim to be able 'to comprehend the *real* religious expression of Indian civilization'.[70] The claim that 'Syndicated Hinduism' is somehow less real than other expressions of Indian religiosity cannot be sustained. It is precisely the claim to have privileged access to what Hinduism 'really is' that underlies the politicized projection of *Hindutva*. Rather than offering a competing view of what Hinduism 'really' is which, for example, emphasizes not 'the exclusiveness of the Vedic religion' but 'that attitude of religious liberality which is truly admirable in Hindu culture',[71] we should refuse all essentialist claims to a supposed 'real' nature of Hinduism.

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70 Thapar 1997: 79, emphasis added.
71 Stietencron 1997: 48–49.