Independent India (1947–)

R. Guha, in *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy*, offers the following observation about Hindu religion:

> It is possible to view the Hindu faith as a river with many branches, tributaries that feed into the mainstream and distributaries that leave it. But perhaps this image is mistaken, for in many respects there is no main river at all. This is a religion that was decentralized like no other. (Guha, 2007, 578)

If such is the case regarding Hindu traditions before Independence, the situation has become even more complex since Independence in 1947. Modern India – with its 28 states (each having a distinctive linguistic-cultural identity), 600,000 villages, 4,599 distinct communities, 325 languages in 12 separate language families, and 24 different scripts as described in the People of India project of the Anthropological Survey of India (Larson, 1995, 11) – gives a new dimension to the meaning of the word "pluralism." Moreover, since the expression "Hindu religion" and the abstract noun "Hinduism" are both used to describe the religious identity of some 80.5% of this massive conglomeration of around 1.2 billion people (*Census of India*, 2011), it is small wonder that R. Frykenberg has commented in exasperation that the use of the term "Hinduism" in the singular has led most discussions of religion in modern India into "trackless deserts of nonsense" (Frykenberg, 1991, 31–33). Be that as it may, little is to be gained from dwelling on the impossibility of the task at hand except to point out that the present essay seeks only to provide a rough overview of a highly complex subject area. It is to be hoped, however, that even this rough overview may be heuristically instructive in highlighting some of the curious textures and shapes that one encounters as one tries to characterize the dense complexities of Hinduism in post-Independence India since 1947. In attempting this rough overview, seven divisions and/or categories appear to be important by way of determining the range and texture of post-Independence Hinduism:

1. Partition Hinduism – that is, the tragic creation narrative of Independence India, in which a legacy of cataclysmic violence defines the basic identity of the two new nation-states that emerged: India and → Pakistan .

2. "Neo-Hindu" Hinduism – a tripartite set of post-Independence discourses, namely (a) the Gandhian-Nehruvian civil ideology of the secular state, (b) the *hindutva* ideology that tends to identify Hindu and/or Hinduism with Indic culture *tout ensemble* (see → nationalism), and (c) the set of Hindu international missionary movements founded by revered *guru* figures or spiritual teachers with various centers in India and throughout the world.

3. Folk Hinduism, or the set of archaic spiritualities, including local demons and spirits, magico-religious practices, shamanistic traditions, and so forth, that are as widely present in India since Independence as they have been for millennia in the South Asian region.

4. Literate Hinduism, which encompasses the Vedic, Sanskritic, and vernacular traditions of the law books or prescribed codes of conduct (→ Dharmaśāstras), the great epics (→ *Mahābhārata* and → *Rāmāyaṇa*), the → Purāṇas, the → Tantras, the various → *bhakti* theologies (Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta), and the technical philosophies (→ Vedānta, → Nyāya and Navyanyāya, the various → Yogas, and so forth); all of these traditions continue to be maintained in post-Independence India and together can be referred to as behavioral ritual obligations of group rank and stations in life or simply the rules pertaining to → caste and stage of life (*varṇāśramadharma*).

5. Monastic Hinduism, including the → Daśanāmī orders and the various other *sampradāya*s or religious orders in independent India.

6. Pilgrimage Hinduism, including not only the important pilgrimage sites (→ *tīrtha*s) throughout the South Asian region but also the great *melā*s or → festivals that bring massive gatherings of pilgrims together periodically.

7. Finally, diaspora Hinduism – the sizable populations of expatriate Hindus throughout the world struggling to adapt, reshape, and preserve elements of the Hindu heritage in their new national environments. Let me comment on each of these divisions or categories.

Partition Hinduism

Whatever else one might wish to say about Hindu traditions in post-Independence India, in many ways, the most important observation is the basic paradigm shift in religious sensibility among many Hindus since Independence. The achievement of independence, while on one level a celebratory occasion of joy and hope, was on its darker under-side a profoundly negative event replete with some of the worst violence in the entire history of the subcontinent, which involved the displacement of huge populations, the loss of property, sepa-ration of families, and a legacy of suspicion and hostility that continues to the present day. Par-tition was not only an ambivalent political event but also a profound and ambivalent religious event in which masses of Hindus (and Muslims) recognized, many for the first time, that Hindu religious sensibilities could not coexist with Mus-lim sensibilities in a modern, democratic polity. → Gandhi 's argument that Partition was a "patent untruth" (Larson, 1995, 189) was proved wrong, and the Gandhian nonviolent, non-cooperation ideology (satyāgraha), while having been effec-tive as a dissidence strategy against the British Raj, was finally found to be unworkable "on the ground" for any of the other players in the unfold-ing drama of Partition, namely J. Nehru, V. Patel, Jinnah, and, finally, even Lord Mountbatten and the British authorities. J. Nehru's "tryst with des-tiny" (McArthur, 1992, 234–37) was revealed as largely a secular Neo-Hindu destiny that could only be realized by surgically cutting off the far northwest and large portions of the northeast (to become West Pakistan and East Pakistan, now → Bangladesh). Moreover, shortly after Partition, the conundrum of Kashmir would become the exception that would prove the rule. That is, a pre-dominantly Muslim population, under the leader-ship of a Hindu mahārāja, would accede to largely Hindu India thereby creating an anomaly within both India and Pakistan, with Hindus claiming that a majority Muslim state would legitimate the "secular" credentials of the emerging nation-state of India and with Muslims in Pakistan claiming that Kashmir must find its ultimate destiny within the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The conflict over Kashmir is perhaps the most salient symbol of the religious significance of Partition. It is an open sore on the body of independent India that will never heal until a new status for Kashmir is properly renegotiated by India, Pakistan, and the people of the Kashmir region.

What makes Partition an important religious event is the stark antithesis of religious sensibili-ties between Hindus and Muslims, sensibilities that encompass ideology (and theology), histori-cal understanding, basic values, social organiza-tion, and law. Islamic religion, on analogy or in continuity with the older Jewish and Christian religions that arose in the Mediterranean region of Late Antiquity, focuses on an abstract belief system centering on one God (Allāh), a master text (the Qurʾān), a master historical narrative (a "Heilsgeschichte"), a master community (the Dar al-Islam), a specific sacred space (Mecca), and an all-encompassing sacred as well as personal law (šarīʿa). Hindu religion, in contrast, on analogy or in continuity with other "dharma" traditions such as Buddhism and Jainism that stretch back to the 1st millennium BCE, is dramatically different in almost every respect. Instead of one transcen-dent deity, there is a polymorphic set of disparate deities or no deity at all. Instead of a single mas-ter historical narrative or Heilsgeschichte, there is wide-ranging multi-narrativity. Instead of a single authoritative text, there is pervasive multi-textuality, both written and oral. Instead of an abstract set of beliefs or credo (orthodoxy), there is the absence of any sort of cognitive regulation but various traditions, instead, of orthopraxis that differs from one birth group (jāti) to another and from one stage of life to another. And in place of a cohesive believing community, some sort of Dar al-Islam, there are pluralistic sets of mini commu-nities, to some degree normatively hierarchical in an official idiom of varṇa or "caste" but in reality a splintered texture of birth groups (jāti) that vary from region to region on the subcontinent.

This is not to say that Partition was only a reli-gious event, nor is it to say that even though Hindu and Muslim religious sensibilities are the antith-esis of each other, there were not some important commonalities as well, especially on a popular, everyday level. Politically, both Hindus and Mus-lims disliked and distrusted what they considered to be the "divide and rule" tactics of the British Raj. They were both largely unpersuaded by the proselytizing of the missionaries, who flooded into the subcontinent in significant numbers after gaining permission to enter the country through the Charter Act of 1813. They both detested the arrogance and racism of the Raj. Perhaps most of

all, they were weary of the mindless hypocrisy of the British Raj that espoused the Enlightenment principles of freedom, self-determination, and democracy, while carefully postponing the full implementation of the same principles almost up until the last day of the British presence on the subcontinent. Even when the time for full implementation finally arrived, there was a mad rush for the exit, without adequate preparation or safeguards, which became undoubtedly an important causal factor for the terrible violence that ensued. Both Hindus and Muslims suffered terribly because of the British penchant for all too often operating in a "fit of absent-mindedness," to use Lord Palmerston's famous quip regarding the British Raj as a whole (Larson, 1995, 49).

Likewise, even though their religious sensibilities differed markedly, there were also commonalities between Hindus and Muslims on other cultural (nonreligious) levels, which included – in addition to their joint dislike of the political dominance of the Raj – the cuisines of India; the classical → music traditions of India; pilgrimage traditions in and around the subcontinent; the painting, sculpture, and architecture traditions; linguistic interactions in both the various vernaculars (Hindi, Urdu, etc.) and the classical languages (Sanskrit and Arabic); patterns of everyday interaction in terms of trade, marketing, and local public education; and, perhaps most obviously, the great fondness among all citizens for Bollywood cinema, television programs, popular magazines, and newspapers. These commonalities frequently cross religious boundaries and make up the complex and dense civil society of modern "secular" India (see also → secularism). In addition, there are the significant influence and use of the English language and the legacy of British culture and institutional structures in general in independent India. English, along with Hindi, is one of the two official languages of communication. With regard to this latter point, however, it is important to note that there is no majority language in modern India since Independence. Hindi and English are designated as official languages for governmental communications and publications, but Hindi is spoken by less than half (about 40%) of the population and English by only 3% to 5%.

When using the expression "Partition Hinduism," therefore, the point is to recognize that Hinduism in post-Independence India has a number of new features that taken together suggest a sig-

nificantly different religion from the one that was practiced on the subcontinent before. The most salient of these new features include (a) the recognition that Hinduism itself has now emerged as a distinct cultural phenomenon functioning in a modern democratic polity that requires its practitioners to take account of all sorts of minority religious traditions (Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, Parsi, etc.) as well as socially deprived and underdeveloped minority communities (→ Dalits, tribals, and Other Backward Classes [OBC]); (b) the recognition that the largest minority religious tradition could not be plausibly accommodated within the new independent polity and had to be surgically detached and constituted as a separate modern polity, namely, the sizable pre-Partition Muslim populations primarily in the northwest and northeast of the subcontinent (to become Pakistan and eventually Bangladesh); and, most importantly, (c) the recognition of the need for a new civil discourse that would unite the various regional versions of Hindu belief and practice (both elite and popular) into an all-India ideology that could bring together the vast Hindu majority and the various (religious and social) minority communities.

This latter feature – that is, the need for new all-India ideologies – has generated a profoundly important debate that continues in India up until today and will continue to unfold in the subcontinental region for many years to come.

"Neo-Hindu" Hinduism

That debate has to do with what I have called elsewhere the Neo-Hindu "hybrid discourse of modernity" (Larson, 1995, 178–226). By the expression "neo-Hindu" is meant a general framework of discourse or mind-set, undoubtedly Hindu in inspiration but characterized by a number of distinctive features that clearly separate the manner in which the notion of Hinduism is understood in comparison with older usage. By the expression "hybrid discourse of modernity" is meant the manner in which the language of modernity has a unique inflection in contemporary India.

Like Partition Hinduism, the Neo-Hindu hybrid discourse of modernity is an important dimension of what the term "Hinduism" has come to mean in post-Independence India. These new (neo) features include the following:

- promulgation of a self-conscious national (all-India) awareness over and above regional differences;
- commitment to the reform of outdated religious practices;
- rejection of the inequities of the traditional caste system;
- emancipation of women;
- improvement of social conditions for the poor, including positive discrimination or affirmative-action programs for Dalits (untouchables), tribals, and Other Backward Classes;
- economic progress of the entire nation;
- attitude of appreciation for all religions;
- use of modern educational methods; and, finally,
- use of English (in addition to the regional vernaculars) and modern means of communication (newspapers, pamphlets, tracts, films, television, public broadcasting, etc.).

Within this general Neo-Hindu framework, there are three distinct and sometimes contending interpretations of Neo-Hindu, namely, (a) the Gandhian-Nehruvian civil ideology of India as a secular state, with an institutional base largely in the Indian National Congress; (b) the *hindutva* (lit. Hindu-ness) religious ideology of India as primarily a civilization-based cultural identity, with an institutional base largely in what has come to be called the Sangh Parivar (Family of [Hindu] Associations), including the conservative Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP; Indian People's Party), the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP; World Council of Hindus), the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS; National Assembly of Volunteers), and some other, smaller regional associations; and (c) a set of Neo-Hindu international missionary movements, founded by various Indian *guru*s or spiritual virtuosos who profess one or another type of meditation or → *yoga* together with a belief in the unity of all religions. The institutional base of these movements is not only in India but also throughout the world among Indian diaspora communities as well as among people of diverse nationalities – for example, the → Ramakrishna Math and Mission, the Integral Yoga movement of → Aurobindo, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (→ ISKCON), the Siddha Yoga movement of Swami → Muktananda and Gurumayi, the Spiritual Regeneration Movement or Transcendental Meditation (TM) of → Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the → Sathya Sai Baba Move-

ment in Andhra Pradesh, and many others (see below for details).

These varieties of Neo-Hindu religious orientation all have their roots in 19th- and 20th-century pre-Independence movements in India but have emerged since 1947 as salient manifestations of post-Independence Neo-Hinduism. At first glance, it might seem odd to include the Gandhian-Nehruvian civil ideology of the secular state as a Neo-Hindu religious ideology, but there appear to be good reasons for doing so. To be sure, Gandhi's passionate commitment to nonviolent noncooperation (*satyāgraha*) was much more than a political strategy. It was also a profound religious vision that tapped into some of the oldest themes of asceticism and renunciation in the Hindu tradition, and Gandhi himself embodied those themes in his own lifestyle. J. Nehru, to the contrary, was an agnostic, and while he was devoted to Gandhi as a friend and mentor, he had little patience with the religious proclivities of Gandhi. Nehru wanted a modern industrial society fashioned from the "commanding heights" (Larson, 1995, 199) in the manner of many of the ideas of Fabian socialism (Larson, 1995, 194), with a clear separation between religion and the new state of India. Nevertheless, the Gandhian Hindu religiosity hovered over the Indian nationalist movement and convinced many – for example, Sayyid Ahmed Khan, Muhammad Iqbal, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and other important figures in the founding of Pakistan – that, finally, the secular state that Gandhi and Nehru wanted was, in the final analysis, a Neo-Hindu state. W.N. Brown has put it in the following way:

> though Gandhi abhorred Hindu-Muslim communalism and partition, he nevertheless contributed to them. He could not in his time have become the political leader of the majority group in India, fortified by mass support, without being religious, he could not be religious without being Hindu. He could not be Hindu without being suspect to the Muslim community. (Brown, 1963, 104)

The Gandhian-Nehruvian nation-state became a Neo-Hindu secular state, an interesting coalition of forward or high-caste Hindu elites that together with Scheduled Castes, Schedules Tribes, Other Backward Classes, and the Muslim minorities that remained in India after Partition operated as a powerful coalition to rule India for the first half century of its Independence.

In an interview for the magazine *India Today*, V.P. Singh, prime minister of India in 1989–1990, made the same observation in a slightly more caustic manner.

> (V.P. Singh talking) What has been established in the past half a century is the upper caste Hindu raj, depriving the backwards and the minorities…
>
> Q: *But aren't we a secular nation?*
>
> A: That's just gloss. But in various forms the political system has reacted against the upper caste Hindu raj…The reaction arises because they [the backward groups] are not party to the operations of power…
>
> Q: *Is the structure not delivering what Gandhi and Nehru wanted?*
>
> A: An iniquitous social structure has produced an iniquitous power structure. (*India Today*, Oct 31, 1992; cited in Larson, 1995, 178)

What V.P. Singh is noticing in these comments is that the so-called secular state of modern India, or the Gandhian-Nehruvian civil ideology of the secular state, is an "upper caste Hindu raj," or, in other words, a Neo-Hindu ideology. S. →Radhakrishnan makes the point in a more judicious manner as follows:

> It may appear somewhat strange that our government should be a secular one while our culture is rooted in spiritual values. Secularism here does not mean irreligion or atheism or even stress on material comforts. It proclaims that it lays stress on the universality of spiritual values, which may be attained in a variety of ways…This is the meaning of a secular conception of the state though it is not generally understood. (Smith, 1963, 147)

The Sangh Parivar, unlike the Gandian-Nehruvian ideology of the secular state, is quite explicit in its recognition that the nation-state of India is very much a Hindu state. Instead of cloaking its discourse in the progressive modern jargon of "secularism," "pluralism," and "modernity," however, it proclaims that the terms "Hindu" and "Hinduism" are much more than narrow religious notions. They refer to a distinctive civilization that includes all of the indigenous religious traditions of the subcontinent – Hindu (Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, Śākta, Tantra, etc.), Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, and various tribal spiritualities – hence the expression *hindutva* (Hindu-ness), first introduced by V.D. Savarkar, as a way of characterizing Hindu culture as a total civilization. Only Islam and Christian traditions are excluded from the general sense of Hindu civilization, since their origins lie outside the subcontinental region. Islam and Christianity claim to be universal spiritualities, but they need to recognize that they occupy only a secondary place as minorities within the "motherland" of the larger Hindu civilization. They are certainly welcome in India, but they must recognize their proper place within the larger, encompassing Neo-Hindu context.

Followers of the Sangh Parivar criticize the Gandhian-Nehruvian ideology of the secular state as a form of what they call "pseudo secularism" insofar as the Gandhian-Nehruvian "secularists" continually back away from supporting a uniform civil code for India, refuse to challenge the "special status" of Kashmir, and are much too concerned with always giving the minorities what they want in order to maintain their elitist, so-called secular Hindu Raj. The followers of the Gandhian-Nehruvian ideology frequently respond with their own counter-criticism, claiming that the Sangh Parivar is a "communal" set of narrow, right-wing groups that tend toward "fascist"-like behavior.

Both critiques are on occasion true enough but, unfortunately, often descend into little more than mutual name calling. What is closer to the truth is that the Gandhian-Nehruvian Neo-Hindu secular state is a liberal interpretation of the basic Neo-Hindu ideology, whereas the Sangh Parivar is a conservative interpretation of that very same basic ideology. If, as one commentator has put it, the Gandhian-Nehruvian secular state is "Hindu Chauvinism with a Liberal Mask" (Embree, 1987, 74), then one could reasonably suggest that the Sangh Parivar is "Hindu Chauvinism with a Conservative Mask."

Both interpretations grow out of the nationalist freedom struggle in the 20th century, the former associated primarily with the Gandhian nonviolent non-cooperation (*satyāgraha*) political movement from 1915 onward, with its base in the Indian National Congress, and the latter with the founding of the conservative Hindu party – the Mahāsabhā (Great Assembly) – in 1914, followed by the publication of V.D. Savarkar's *Hindutva* tract in 1923, and issuing further in the founding of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in 1925 by K.B. Hedgewar, who led the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the growing Sangh Parivar groups from 1940 to 1973, when he was

succeeded by M.S. Golwakar. The current leader of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is Mohan Madhukar Bhagwat.

For the first 50 years of Independence (the late 1940s through the late 1990s), the dominant interpretation of the Neo-Hindu ideology was the Gandhian-Nehruvian version under the leadership primarily of Nehru and his daughter, Indira Gandhi. Since the mid-1990s (with the prime ministership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 1996 and again from 1999 until 2004), the Gandhian-Nehruvian ideology has been receding in favor of the Sangh Parivar orientation. From the middle of the first decade of the 21st century, the Indian National Congress (in league with various minor parties) has reasserted itself, but overall it appears to be the case that both Neo-Hindu ideologies are equal contenders with respect to the future direction of the Neo-Hindu Indian nation-state.

The third interpretation of Neo-Hindu religious thought has to do with Neo-Hindu international missionary movements. Like the other two types of interpretation of the basic category of Neo-Hindu, the missionary movements derive their inspiration from pre-Independence sources in India from the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. As early as 1828, a reformist group was formed in Bengal – the Brahmo Sabha (The Society of God; later renamed → Brahmo Samaj) – by → Rammohun Roy (1772–1833), a Bengali Brahman who was influenced by Christian ideas regarding one God but who decided to remain a Hindu, having reached the conclusion that vedic and upanishadic ideas were equal or even superior to Christian notions. Some years later (in 1867), a similar reformist Hindu group – known as the Prarthana Sabha (Prayer Society) – was formed in Bombay by Keshub Chandra Sen (1838–1884), again not only under strong Christian influence but also suggesting that Hindu thought was equal or superior to Christian thought. A few years later, yet another group was formed in the Punjab region by Dayananda Saraswati (1827–1883) known as the → Arya Samaj (Aryan Society), a more militant conservative group, openly hostile to both Christian and Islamic missionizing, and arguing for a reconversion to Hindu religion by Christian and Islamic converts through a "purification" ritual. The founders of these three reformist movements planted the seeds for reversing the missionizing impulse of the Christian and Islamic traditions and proclaiming, instead, the superiority of vedic and upanishadic religiosity, although these three movements never developed much of an international constituency.

Two movements that truly can be said to be international missionary movements, however, are, first, the Ramakrishna Mission and Math, inspired by the famed spiritual saint Shri → Ramakrishna (birth name Gadadhar Chatterjee; 1836–1886), a simple Bengali Brahman priest, together with his most famous disciple, Swami → Vivekananda (birth name Narendranath Datta; 1862–1902), and, second, the Integral Yoga movement, founded by philosopher and holy man Shri Aurobindo (birth name Aurobindo Ghose; 1872–1950).

The Ramakrishna Math or monastic movement was organized in 1887, when Swami Vivekananda and some other disciples of Shri Ramakrishna took monastic vows. Ramakrishna himself had spent his entire adult life as a priest in a temple devoted to the goddess → Kālī in the district of Dakshineshwar, near Calcutta. He had had a number of extraordinary mystical experiences over the years and had attracted a small group of followers, one of whom was Narendranath Datta, later to be given the spiritual name Swami Vivekananda. After Ramakrishna's death, Vivekananda made a pilgrimage around India and determined, finally, to propagate the message of his *guru*. Vivekananda developed and taught a simplified version of monistic Vedānta philosophy and a synthesized version of the varieties of *yoga* taught in the → *Bhagavadgītā*, and he combined those ideas with a program for social action and social reform for modern India and a program for missionizing outside of India. He attended the World Parliament of Religions in 1893 in Chicago as a representative of Hinduism, and his considerable oratorical skills made a deep impression on the popular press and on certain liberal religious intellectual circles. He traveled widely in the United States and converted a number of Americans. In 1897, after his return to India, he established the Ramakrishna Mission in India along with a series of Vedanta Societies in the → United States, Europe, and Latin America. The headquarters of the movement was located at Belur Math, in the Howrah district, near Calcutta. Since India's Independence in 1947, the movement has gradually grown in India and around the world. In the United States, there are missionary Vedanta Societies in California, Georgia, Illinois, Massachusetts, New York, Oregon,

Washington, and Washington DC. There are Vedanta Centers as well in Argentina, Canada, France, Japan, and Singapore. It is fair to say that the Ramakrishna Mission and its various Vedanta Societies represent a well-known "face" of Neo-Hindu international missionary work in the world today.

A similar Neo-Hindu international missionary movement is the one founded by the philosopher and holy man mentioned above, Aurobindo Ghose. Aurobindo was educated in England and on his return to India joined the nationalist movement in the early 20th century. At first he was a militant extremist, advocating violence in the freedom struggle against the British. During a period of imprisonment for his radical activities in 1909, however, he underwent a deep conversion experience, and instead of pursuing his political radicalism, he retired to Pondicherry (Puducherry) in South India. He established an *āśram* or monastic-like community there in order to practice and propagate what he called "Integral Yoga," an interesting combination or synthesis of various types of *yoga* together with an evolutionary philosophy that seeks to focus on developing the notion of an emerging supermind, somewhat comparable to the evolutionary ideas of the French Jesuit thinker T. de Chardin. In 1920, a French woman, Mirra Alfassa (whose later married name became Mira Richard), was profoundly impressed by Aurobindo's integral *yoga* and decided to live permanently in the *āśram*. She came to be known as the "Mother." With Aurobindo she developed the Integral Yoga *āśram* in Pondicherry. Aurobindo died in 1950, and Mira Richard as the "Mother" continued to lead the movement until her own death in 1973. She was instrumental in the founding of an experimental city, Auroville, a utopian community experiment in international living, located a few kilometers north of the Aurobindo *āśram*. Since the Independence of India in 1947, the Aurobindo Neo-Hindu international missionary movement has established Study Centers throughout India and many other Study Centers around the world – some 15 throughout the United States, one in Canada (Quebec), and a number of others in western Europe.

Many more recent examples of Neo-Hindu international missionary movements have appeared in the 20th century, especially in the turbulent cultural period of the 1960s, when two parallel social transformations were occurring: on the one hand, radical student political movements in the United States, western Europe, Japan, India, and elsewhere, involving mass attempts to change the political landscape, and, on the other hand, spiritual renewal groups of a Neo-Hindu sort that represented innovative alternatives to conventional religious institutions that were clearly being rejected.

There are numerous such Neo-Hindu missionary groups, but, as mentioned earlier, four are especially well known in as well as outside of India and may be considered typical of these sorts of groups.

1. The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) was founded in New York in 1966 by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupad (birth name Abhay Charan De; 1896–1977). He was a Bengali businessman who became a → Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava monk in 1959 and felt called to carry the message of devotional Vaiṣṇavism to the West. ISKCON is also known as the Hare Krishna Movement. The focus of the movement is on emotional devotion to → Kṛṣṇa. The movement retains a strong base in India in Vrindavan, in the Mathura district of Uttar Pradesh in North India – the sacred grove in which Kṛṣṇa danced with young maiden devotees and a beloved pilgrimage destination in contemporary India.

2. The Siddha Yoga Movement, established as a legal foundation (SYDA; Siddha Yoga Dham of America) in the United States in 1978 by Swami (Baba) Muktananda (birth name Krishna; 1908–1982), is another widely known Neo-Hindu missionary movement. Its headquarters is in an *āśram* at Ganeshpuri, in the state of Maharashtra. The movement has also maintained a major *āśram* in South Fallsburg, New York. The movement is a blend of classical and tantric *yoga* practices, focusing on → *śakti* (power or divine energy). Followers believe that power can descend suddenly onto a devotee by the mere presence or touch of the *guru*. This belief follows some old Śaiva traditions from the region of Kashmir. After the death of Swami Muktananda in 1982, leadership of the movement was taken over by Gurumayi Chidvilasananda.

3. The Spiritual Regeneration Movement or Transcendental Meditation (TM) is yet another Neo-Hindu missionary movement, which was established in the late 1950s in the United States and Europe by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (birth name Mahesh Prasad Varma; 1917–2008). In

1960 it came to be known as the International Meditation Society (IMS) and eventually the Students International Meditation Society (SIMS). The international headquarters was relocated to Switzerland and ultimately (in 1990) to the Netherlands. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi taught a simple technique of sound meditation. The devotee is given a sacred *mantra* or sound and then told to meditate for half an hour or one hour every day. The idea is to bring about a relaxed state of mind and to purify one's awareness.

4. Finally, mention may be made of Sathya Sai Baba (birth name Satya Narayan; 1926–2011), Indian holy man and healer from Puttaparthi in the state of Andhra Pradesh. When he was 14, he had a vision in which he was revealed as being a reincarnation of an older holy man, the → Shirdi Sai Baba, who had lived in Maharashtra and who had died in 1918. Sathya Sai Baba was considered to be a great healer, capable of producing ashes in his hand at will as well as of other miracles, especially miracles of healing. He had several million followers in India and reportedly as many as ten million followers internationally, including a sizable number of Americans.

Whereas the Gandhian-Nehruvian Neo-Hindu civil ideology of the secular state and the Sangh Parivar Neo-Hindu ideology of *hindutva* are both clearly religious-*cum*-political interpretations of post-Independence Hinduism, this third set of Neo-Hindu spiritualities is interestingly different albeit still clearly Neo-Hindu in inspiration. The common features of these post-Independence Neo-Hindu missionary movements include the following (Larson, 1995, 139):

1. devotion to a deified *guru* or teacher,
2. total obedience to the will of the *guru*,
3. the practice of one or another type of *yoga* or disciplined meditation,
4. the claim that all religions are basically true,
5. the claim that one's ethnic identity is not essential in order to be a follower,
6. and, finally, the tendency to deemphasize secular political involvement of any kind.

Folk Hinduism

Thus far the focus has been on attitudes and beliefs of Hinduism that are distinctly different from attitudes and beliefs of Hinduism in the pre-Independence period. The expression "Neo-Hindu" has been one useful way of characterizing this unique paradigm shift in religious understanding that pertains to what has happened both as a result of Partition and with the accompanying ideological (and/or theological) Neo-Hindu interpretations. Now it is important to locate what has been said so far in the broader framework of Hindu spirituality in the subcontinental region since Independence.

The anthropologist A. Bharati, some years back, offered a useful heuristic overview of Hindu traditions in terms of three separate categories: "village Hinduism," literate or scripture-based "Sanskrit, Vedic Hinduism," and, finally, "renaissance Hinduism" or what has been called thus far Neo-Hindu Hinduism (1981, 9ff., 11ff.). A. Bharati has also suggested (again as a rough characterization in the absence of precise demographic data) that approximately two-thirds of practicing Hindus are Vaiṣṇava (followers of Viṣṇu or one of his incarnations, mainly Kṛṣṇa or → Rāma), and one-third are Śaiva (followers of → Śiva) or Śākta (devotees of the Great Goddess [→ Mahādevī]).

If these divisions are reasonably plausible, given the provisional figures of the census of 2011, then altogether there are about 970 million Hindus in present-day India (80.5% of the total population of 1,210,193,422 and counting). This total figure for Hindus is somewhat suspect, since it includes the Scheduled Castes (Dalits or "downtrodden," formerly referred to as untouchables) and Scheduled Tribes, which make up nearly 25% (more precisely 23.5%) of the total population (or approx. 300 million people) and some of whom are unhappy with the label "Hindu" because of long-standing discrimination.

In any case, leaving aside the admittedly interesting political issue of how Hindu and non-Hindu groups might characterize themselves, of the 970 million Hindus in the official 80.5% of the census of 2011, probably only 5% to 10% could plausibly be included within the "renaissance Hinduism" grouping (that is, the Neo-Hindu population) – in other words, no more than perhaps 97 to 100 million people. These are largely the highly educated urban elites of post-Independence India.

A. Bharati's second grouping, "Sanskrit, Vedic Hinduism" – that is, literate, scripture-based believing Hindus, whom A. Bharati estimated at 13% to 15% but who, with the increased

economic prosperity in recent years, have probably grown to as high as 20% to 25% of the population – would include as many as 250 million to 300 million people. This grouping comprises the educated, literate new middle class, again largely urban but including smaller population areas around the subcontinent as well. To some degree, this large grouping would be deeply influenced by Neo-Hindu ideas (especially by the *hindutva* ideology of the Sangh Parivar), but in many respects, they would hold to a premodern traditional Hinduism as well. Many professional religious people (monks, holy men, holy women, and *yogī*s) would be included in this grouping.

A. Bharati's third grouping, or what he calls "village Hinduism," would be the nonurban Hinduism characteristic of the 600 thousand villages scattered throughout India, with a rather massive population of roughly 500 to 600 million – as many as half, in other words, of the total Hindu population and including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes. This third grouping has benefitted considerably from the positive discrimination (affirmative action) policies of the government of India and has made important strides in education and social development generally. These improvements have occurred especially since improved economic policies have been put in place under the prime ministership of Narasimha Rao in 1995, whose economic minister at the time of the economic takeoff was Manmohan Singh, the current prime minister of India since 2004.

Overall, then, even with this cursory overview of the levels of Hindu spirituality in post-Independence India, the complexity of what is meant by the term "Hinduism" becomes increasingly clear. Sociologist S.C. Dube has put the matter in the following way:

> Hinduism, such as it is, is a loosely structured federation of faiths rather than a faith. Hindu civilization represents a pattern of stabilized pluralism with well-developed linkages and patterns of interdependence between its insoluble segments that enjoy varying degrees of autonomy and identity. Birth and minimal cognitive participation are enough to identify one as belonging to the Hindu faith. (Dube & Basilov, 1983, 1)

The label "folk Hinduism" for what A. Bharati has called "village Hinduism" is meant to identify not so much the social-anthropological context of what A. Bharati calls "village" Hinduism but, rather, the distinctive spirituality of this dimension of Hindu practice. B. and R. Allchin's description of this sort of spirituality is nicely encapsulated in the following observation:

> Throughout the length and breadth of India there are found today, at the folk level, rites and festivals which are intimately associated with the changing seasons, the sowing and harvesting of crops and the breeding of cattle and other livestock. There is also a whole pantheon of local gods and goddesses some of whom remain unassimilated while others have been absorbed at different levels into the sanskritized hierarchy of gods of the "great" or classical Indian tradition. There can be no doubt that a very large part of this modern folk religion is extremely ancient and contains traits which originated during the earliest periods of stock raising and agricultural settlement. (Allchin, 1982, 99)

Remembering that this level of Hindu practice occurs in almost every corner of the subcontinent by as many as several hundred million adherents in present-day India, an interesting paradox or conundrum emerges. To write about Hinduism in post-Independence India is in an important sense to write about prehistoric, archaic India as well, since the oldest folk religiosity is as present today on the subcontinent as it was before the beginning of recorded history. W. Faulkner's famous line comes to mind as being particularly significant in understanding this aspect of Hindu spirituality: "The past is never dead. It's not even past" (1951, 92). The tradition's own characterization of itself – namely, Hinduism as the *sanātanadharma* (eternal law or unchanging tradition[s] of conduct) – is more than a little diagnostic in this regard. In other words, in our scholarly efforts to focus on modern historical distinctions, sometimes it may be useful to remember that as many as half of the adherents of what we are studying neither believe in nor value our modern historical distinctions! There is a mind-set of unchanging continuity with India's archaic folk traditions that is still prevalent among millions of Hindus in post-Independence India.

Literate Hinduism

There is no need to comment in detail on the parameters of what is called literate, scripture-

based, or simply classical Hindu spirituality, since this multivolume encyclopedia of Hinduism addresses all of these matters in great detail. What is pertinent for at least some brief comments under this heading, however, is the manner in which the notion of caste has shifted in significance in post-Independence India. The English term "caste" derives from the Latin *castus* (pure or chaste) and then from the Portuguese *casta* (pure breed); it was first used by the Portuguese in the 16th century to describe the peculiar social groupings that they noticed among the people of India.

In classical Sanskrit, there are two terms for the notion of caste, *varṇa* and *jāti*, and the difference between the two terms is diagnostic for understanding the shifts in the interpretation of the meaning of caste in the modern and post-Independence period. The term *varṇa*, meaning color or form in Sanskrit, is the official "Brahmanical" or normative notion for caste in Indian intellectual history, and it refers to the well-known hierarchical ordering of four social groupings: priests, rulers, merchants/traders, and servants. The hierarchy is determined or defined largely on the basis of ritual purity or obligation, which in turn is based on a combination of factors involving heredity, endogamy, occupation, and commensality. Caste in this sense is profoundly linked to what it is to be a Hindu, and it is this religious view of caste that is presupposed in the elite literature (sacred and popular) of India, including the → Vedas and → Upaniṣads, the law books, the epics, the → Purāṇas, and so forth. Those who are completely impure or polluted in this ritual sense fall outside the system and are sometimes referred to as very low or outcast (Caṇḍāla) or not to be touched (*aspṛśya*), from which the modern terms "untouchable" and the official government of India designation "Scheduled Caste" are derived. These groups are impure or polluted due to the polluting tasks that they have been assigned to perform – handling the dead (both animal and human), cleaning latrines, removing refuse, and so forth. More recently, the term for the "not to be touched" is "Dalit," meaning downtrodden or oppressed.

The system as a whole is an ideal construct and is often referred to as the system of behavioral ritual obligations of group rank and stages in life or simply the rules pertaining to caste and stage of life (*varṇāśramadharma*), an expression that itself is often taken as synonymous with the term "Hindu." It is difficult to know if this normative construct with its apparent rigidity and obviously discriminative intent was in fact ever of any great importance in actual social life throughout the history of the subcontinent, although it certainly appears to have been the case in what has been called the "Brahmin imaginary" – that is, the elite Brahmanical ideology/theology widely prevalent in the sacerdotal literature (Doniger, 2009, 29). In any case, during much of the period of British hegemony on the subcontinent, this basically normative and religious interpretation in terms of *varṇa* was emphasized (and frequently overemphasized). As has been noted by many researchers, the British census itself proved to be a mechanism not only for maintaining but also for inflating the salience of this older hieratic and religious significance of caste.

The other term for caste – *jāti*, which means in Sanskrit birth group, genus, kind, or subcaste – is an empirical "on-the-ground" understanding of caste and refers to the thousands of social groups in the various regions of the subcontinent that are interrelated in terms of kinship, occupation, social interaction, and ritual obligations. These *jāti*s are, to be sure, likewise hierarchical and involve ritual obligations of one kind or another, but they represent overall a much more fluid and changing social reality. The hierarchies vary from region to region or even village to village, and the hierarchical interactions appear to change over time. Such a view of caste is likely a more accurate reflection of actual social reality than the "official" *varṇa* system of the "Brahmin imaginary." One can see the difficulties to some extent already in the elite religious literature (e.g. law books such as the *Mānavadharmaśāstra*), wherein the compilers struggle mightily to weave many of the empirical *jāti* or subcaste groups into one of the "official" four normative groups. Even a casual reading, however, reveals that the attempted conflations are hopeless compromises.

This process of caste mobility has been studied extensively in recent research, beginning already with the groundbreaking work of M.N. Srinivas (1969) and his theory of Sanskritization, whereby lower-ranking groups in a particular area begin to imitate the values of higher-ranking groups and thereby improve their social status within a given geographical area. The theory holds that Sanskritization can be considered a first step toward a kind of secularization – that is, attempts by social groups to begin a process of separating ritual purity from social status and power by using strat-

egies of religious mimesis as a device for changing their social status.

When such strategies for social change are combined with Neo-Hindu calls for caste reform, one begins to see a direct attack on the older hierarchical religious system of *varṇāśramadharma* as a religious construct of what it means to be a Hindu. A process of de-sacralization – or, if you will, de-religionization – begins to appear, which in many ways becomes India's theory of secularization. Whereas secularization is usually understood as the separation of religious institutions such as a church from the institutions of the state, in India, where there is an absence of religious institutions such as a church, the admittedly odd functional equivalent becomes something like the sacerdotal caste system. When separated from their religious roots, castes begin to function as independent social groups with specific interests. This is exactly what started to happen already in the 19th and early 20th centuries and became even more prominent in post-Independence India. Traditional castes often become "caste associations." As a recent study put it,

> "caste spirit" took the form of "caste associations," organizations that aimed to define the unity and promote the social and political interests of their respective castes as defined in the census. Caste associations made ample use of new publishing technologies to create and disseminate caste directories, caste histories, and other kinds of informational pamphlets that aided the construction of these identities across a wider region. As a result of these kinds of efforts…caste increasingly became a basis for collective identity at a regional and even national level. These organizations effectively transformed what had previously been a fairly localized phenomenon…into political and social units operating in relation to the nation as a whole, crafting new histories and identities, lobbying for their group interests and forming political parties…Caste was becoming the language of political organization. (Mines, 2009, 42–43)

Secularization of the caste system has been a fundamental component of the development of the democratic polity of the Indian nation-state since Independence. Political parties and their platforms; positive discrimination policies (affirmative action programs); human rights campaigns; the system of "reservations" (especially designated seats) for Dalits, tribals, or Other Backward Classes in education, legislative bodies, and government jobs; and much more are all based on the secularization of caste. In every region of the modern Indian nation-state (the Hindi heartland, West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Jammu and Kashmir, etc.), the democratic politics of post-Independence India is unintelligible apart from the continuing significance of caste.

One final observation should be made. The secularization of caste also relates to the issue of a uniform civil code for India. Shortly after Independence, B.R. → Ambedkar, India's distinguished first law minister (and also a Dalit), led the political struggle to establish for the first time a uniform civil code for all the people of the new state (Larson, 2001, 1–11). He argued that the de-sacralization of caste now made it possible for groups that had maintained their personal community law on the grounds of religious legitimation to move in the direction of a uniform civil code regardless of religious identity.

B.R. Ambedkar had also been arguing earlier (in the 1930s) that the time had come for abolishing caste in India or at least providing separate voting status for untouchables, who were now recognized as an independent minority group. Regarding this latter issue, Gandhi vigorously opposed B.R. Ambedkar and argued instead for the older religious view of caste. Gandhi was against the secularization of caste and wanted to restore the "Brahmin imaginary" of caste as a harmonious system of reciprocal obligation with untouchables to be thought of as "Children of God" (Harijans) who are humble servants of the nation. Gandhi, of course, also said many times that caste has nothing to do with religion, but most observers, and especially Muslims, recognized that Gandhi's reformed vision of caste was very much a Neo-Hindu vision and had a great deal to do with religion. In 1932 Gandhi undertook a "fast unto death" to stop the establishment of a separate voting status for untouchables. He was successful in thwarting separate voting status, but ultimately his paternalistic view of untouchables or Harijans was not accepted. Quite to the contrary, the secularization of caste continued to move even more rapidly into the language of political organization (Larson, 1995, 187).

Returning to the issue of a uniform civil code just after Independence, B.R. Ambedkar introduced the Hindu Code Bill in 1948 as a first step toward the development of a uniform civil code. There was a great deal of opposition in

parliament, and the bill was set aside unpassed in 1951. This defeat for B.R. Ambedkar triggered his resignation as law minister as well as his conversion to Buddhism. However, in the mid-1950s, the Hindu Code Bill was reintroduced piecemeal, resulting in the passage of the Hindu Marriage Act (1955), the Hindu Succession Act (1956), the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act (1956), and the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act (1956; Larson, 2001, 5–6). Unfortunately, a uniform civil code for all the people of India has not yet been achieved, and over these intervening years, sentiments regarding the need for a uniform civil code have dramatically shifted. As I have written in "Secularism in Indian Law,"

> For many years, especially during Nehru's leadership, a uniform civil code was favored as a tool to develop India as a secular state. In recent years, this has been reversed. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, those who want a more Hindu-oriented India favor a uniform civil code as a way of eliminating the personal law of the Muslim community, but this is hardly a realistic endeavor. Secularists, by contrast, are now learning that maintaining the system of personal laws is a way of preserving minority rights and maintaining a culture-specific secular cultural pluralism. (Larson, 2009, www.oxford-legalhistory.com/entry?entry=+77.e717)

Monastic Hinduism

It suffices to say under this heading that monastic traditions in post-Independence India are alive and thriving. Estimates for the number of "professional religious," or monastics, in India range anywhere from 8 million to 15 million (Klostermaier, 1989, 329). The precise number is nearly impossible to determine, because many independent holy men (→ *sādhu*s) or *yogī*s are itinerant ascetics and are only loosely related to an established order. The most well-known religious order is the Daśanāmī ("Ten-Named"; nonsectarian but predominantly Śaiva and Śākta in orientation), established, according to tradition, by the great Indian thinker and religious reformer → Śaṅkara (c. 700 CE), whose philosophy of Advaita Vedānta (monist or nondualist Vedānta) is to a large degree the basic intellectual orientation for the various orders. The Daśanāmī order has a fourfold institutional structure (based on different geographical regions) located at

1. the Śṛṅgeri Maṭh (monastery) in the state of Karnataka (the south);
2. the Govardhan Maṭh in Puri in the state of Orissa (the east);
3. the Śārada Maṭh in Dwarka in the state of Gujarat (the west); and
4. the Jyotir Maṭh in Badrinath in the state of Uttar Pradesh (the north).

In the first center are the Bhāratī, Purī, and Sarasvatī orders. In the second center are the Āraṇya and Vāna orders. In the third are the Tīrtha and Āśrama orders, and in the fourth are the Giri, Pārvata, and Sāgara orders. The leaders of each of these centers are considered to be in a direct *guruparamparā* (*guru* lineage) with the great Śaṅkara.

Also, there are four Vaiṣṇava *sampradāya*s:

1. the Rāmānuja Sampradāya (see → Śrīvaiṣṇavism), sometimes called the Śrī or Lakṣmī tradition, based on the philosophy of Viśiṣṭādvaita (the nondualism of modified → *brahman*) of → Rāmānuja (c. 1017–1137) – a form of Vedānta philosophy that has a strong theistic component, in contrast with the pure monistic thought of Śaṅkara;
2. the → Mādhva Sampradāya, a dualist tradition of Vedānta (Dvaita), founded by Madhva (c. 1197–1276);
3. the → Nimbārka Sampradāya, a dualist-*cum*-nondualist interpretation of Vedānta (Bhedābheda), founded by Nimbārka (c. 12th cent.); and
4. the → Vallabha Sampradāya, a purified nondualist tradition (Śuddhādvaita) but "purified" in the sense that the highest form of nondualism is Lord Kṛṣṇa himself, founded by → Vallabha (c. 16th cent).

These Vaiṣṇava traditions are for the most part to be found in South India, but there are northern Vaiṣṇava monastic traditions in the Hindi heartland as well. There are the → Rāmānandī *vairāgī*s (renouncers) in locations such as Varanasi, Ayodhya, and elsewhere, who are said to have been founded, according to tradition, by a certain → Rāmānanda, an ascetic from the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition who worked in the 14th or 15th century in the northern city of Varanasi. Also, there is the untouchable community known as Ramnamis, located primarily in and around Chhattisgarh in central India (see → Madhya

Pradesh and Chhatisgarh). In addition to the Rāmānandīs and the Ramnamis, there are numerous Śaiva monastic lineages – for example, the Śaiva *nāga* ascetics, naked ascetics whose bodies are smeared with ashes and who usually belong to militant or martial-art groups known as → *ākhāḍa*s (lit. wrestling arena or training center). These militant groups can be traced back many centuries (some even to the time of the great Śaṅkara) and were originally formed for purposes of defense and protection. Likewise, there are the Śaiva Nāth *yogī*s or Gorakhnāthīs (see → Nāth Sampradāya), the → Aghorīs, the Udāsīs (see → *sādhu*s), and so forth (Hartsuiker, 1993, 30–59; Bedi & Bedi, 1991, 49–96).

There is no institutional central authority for these monastic traditions in Hinduism. Even the *śaṅkarācārya*s (the heads of each of the four Daśanāmi Maṭhs) have no jurisdiction beyond the confines of their own monastery. Authority rests, rather, with the charismatic power of the particular *guru* or holy person, and followers or devotees receive blessings simply by taking *darśana* (the simple act of direct seeing; see → *pūjā* and darśan) of the *sādhu* or *guru*. Religious authority, both spiritual and institutional, is widely diffused throughout the countless millions of practicing Hindus in post-Independence India, ranging from the authority of the magician or shaman in countless ongoing folk rituals throughout the subcontinent, on the one hand, to the sophisticated instructions of the most highly accomplished spiritual virtuoso and scholar, on the other.

Pilgrimage Hinduism

A fascinating component of Hinduism in post-Independence India is the widespread practice of pilgrimage. Religious journeys to sacred places (*tīrthayātrā*) have been common in India for centuries for purposes of fulfilling vows, seeing holy temples and shrines, making a particular wish such as for the birth of a child, overcoming disease, doing penance, or offering thanksgiving for blessings. The practice is not noticed in the older vedic and upanishadic literature, but it becomes prominent in epic and puranic texts in the last few centuries before the Common Era and the first centuries of the Common Era and thereafter. The first clear textual references to pilgrimage are found in Buddhist and Jain sources, and it could

well be the case that Hindus borrowed the practice from the Buddhists and Jains.

There are hundreds of pilgrimage sites in and around the subcontinent, and they have continued to be prominent in post-Independence India. Some pilgrimage sites have an all-India importance or scope, and seven main locations (*saptamahātīrtha*s) are usually mentioned in this regard: Allahabad (or Prayag), Ayodhya, Mathura, and Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, and Haridwar in Uttarakhand; Dwarka in Gujarat; and Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh. Many other pilgrimage sites are only regional or specifically sectarian locations. In some lists, Nasik (Maharashtra) appears in place of one of the above-mentioned seven (Bharati, 1970, 94–100).

Pilgrimage in India is not simply a matter of journeying to a specific place. It has, usually, a threefold referent. The first are the specific location, time, and place for a given festival or gathering (*melā*), which may be said to be the external social (*ādhibhautika*) context of the pilgrimage. The second referent is the internal spiritual journey of the pilgrim, which is in India the symbolic devotional and/or yogic (*ādhyātmika*) journey through the body and mind. The third, and to some degree the most important, referent is the celestial, cosmic, or astrological journey (*ādhidaivika*).

The best example of this threefold referent is the massive *kumbhamelā* pilgrimage that occurs in 12-year cycles and involves four of the principal pilgrimage sites – Allahabad, Nasik, Ujjain, and Haridwar. The sites were chosen on the basis of an old story of a cosmic struggle for a pot of celestial nectar that resulted in four drops being spilled that landed on each of the four sacred sites. The 12-year cycle or "full" *kumbhamelā* traces the movement of the planet Jupiter as it traverses the signs of the zodiac. The half *kumbhamelā* is when Jupiter is directly opposite Aquarius, the sixth year of the cycle. The most important sacred gathering is the one at Allahabad every 12th year, when millions of Hindus (with estimates in recent years of up to 30 million and more) gather to take their sacred bath at prescribed astrological moments. Allahabad or Prayāga is especially sacred because it marks the confluence of three great rivers (*triveṇī*) – the → Gaṅgā, the → Yamunā, and the legendary Sarasvatī. The time for the holy gathering is when the royal planet, Jupiter (Graharāja ["King among Planets"], sometimes called Bṛhaspati), enters

the asterism Aquarius (*kumbha* or waterpot) of the zodiac (hence the name *kumbhamelā*) around Jan 20. The specific sacred bathing moments are based on the actual appearance on the horizon of the main planet (Jupiter) and two minor planets. The most recent *kumbhamelā* was held in 2001, and the next one to occur, auspiciously enough, will be at about the same time as the publication of this volume of *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, January–February 2013. The seven special bathing times in 2013 will be on Jan 27 and Feb 6, 10, 15, 17, 18, and 25.

Diaspora Hinduism

In the mid-1990s, estimates of the number of Hindus outside of India were roughly between 40 and 50 million, and the ten largest populations of Hindus outside of India were and are in Nepal, Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Gulf states, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Malaysia, the United States, South Africa, and Mauritius. Countries with more than a hundred thousand Asian Indians include the United Kingdom, Bhutan, Myanmar, Trinidad, Fiji, Guyana, Singapore, Kenya, Canada, and Surinam. Altogether there are approximately 32 countries in the world with Asian Indian populations of more than one thousand (Vertovec, 2000, 14; Rukmani, 2001). It must be emphasized that these numbers are only rough estimates. Accurate and precise statistics are impossible to find.

In the United States, people from India are found in all 50 states. According to the US census of 2000, there were over two million "Asian Indians" – people from India or people of Asian Indian descent – living in the United States. That number has increased considerably since 2000, but since not all Asian Indians are Hindu, a reasonable estimate would be that roughly 80% of Asian Indians are Hindu. An estimate of more than two million Hindus is, thus, probably reasonable for the present time. The largest concentrations of Asian Indians are in the states of New York and California and in such urban areas as New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, Houston, Philadelphia, and the San Francisco Bay area. Hindus residing in the United States are for the most part highly educated and prosperous and have become prominent in such areas as medicine, law, engineering, aerospace, business, and the arts. The high education levels and overall prosperity of Asian Indians in the United States are not typical of other Asian diaspora populations around the world, however, since US immigration policies are considerably more restrictive than those of most other countries in the world. There are, therefore, important differences in the Hindu diasporas around the world, and it is difficult and unfair to generalize about the diasporas overall.

One thoughtful typology regarding the Hindu diasporas was put forth some years back in S. Vertovec's book *The Hindu Diaspora: Comparative Patterns* (2000, 162–163). S. Vertovec identifies, first, what he calls a "trend for caste, sectarian and linguistic/regional traditions and communities to remain more or less intact," and he cites Great Britain and East Africa as Hindu diasporas that have pursued this trend. Second, he identifies a trend that presents "a kind of universal Hinduism," a "unitary" Hinduism in diaspora that is, oddly enough, a "transnational nationalism," which is the sort of universal, unitary Hinduism embodied by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and its *hindutva* universalism. All varieties of Hinduism are welcome into such a religious nationalism, but there is a stress on a substantive unitary core. Third, he identifies a trend toward what he calls an "ecumenical" Hinduism, which recognizes the great variety of Hinduisms and combines and brings together the varieties side by side in temples, community centers, and other Hindu organizations. Distinctions of community, region, and caste are allowed to interact freely. The "ecumenical" mind-set has been typical of the Hindu diaspora in the United States. In Europe and elsewhere, the first two types are perhaps more prevalent.

A somewhat different typology was proposed many years ago by the distinguished historian P. Spear, who was attempting to identify the types of behavioral responses that appeared among the people of India with the coming of the British. His typology is to some degree still relevant for understanding the contemporary Hindu diasporas (1958, 177–191). He identifies five types of distinctive responses:

1. a "military" or openly hostile response or taking up arms against the intruders;
2. a "reactionary" response or the attempt to reconstitute the older political order, for example, the North Indian Rebellion (formerly called "The Mutiny") in 1857–1858;

3. a "westernizing" response or assimilating to the new values;

4. an "orthodox" response or maintenance of the older religion with appropriate reform; and

5. the "solution of synthesis" or an effort to adapt to the newcomers in which innovation and assimilation gradually occur together with an ongoing agenda of preserving the unique values of the many traditions of Hinduism (and those of other religious traditions, too).

P. Spear goes on to argue that the first four responses all eventually failed. In skirmish after skirmish, the "military" or hostile and aggressive responses were defeated. Likewise, the "reactionary" attempt to reconstitute the old political order proved to be a disaster. The "westernizing" response led to confusion and disorientation for generations of Indian intellectuals. Only the "solution of synthesis" was able to prevail in the work of such figures as Rammohun Roy, Sayyid Ahmed Khan, Swami Vivekananda, V.D. Savarkar, Muhammad Iqbal, R. Tagore, M.K. Gandhi, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and J. Nehru. All pursed the "solution of synthesis" in their own unique ways, sometimes generating intense conflict with others and at other times accomplishing incredibly important goals for the future. P. Spear concludes that such a willingness to attain a synthesis that is neither fearful of the new nor dismissive of the old is "the ideological secret of modern India" (Spear, 1958, 187).

The Hindus of post-Independence India together with the Hindu diasporas throughout the world would do well to remember this ideological secret as they struggle to shape the Hinduisms of the future.

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