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Imagining Hindus: India and Religion in Nineteenth Century America

By

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Imagining Hindus: India and Religion in Nineteenth Century America

By

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M.A., Duke University, 2008
B.A., College of Charleston, 2006

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies
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Abstract

Imagining Hindus: India and Religion in Nineteenth Century America
By Michael J. Altman

Swami Vivekananda, a Vedanta philosopher from Bengal, stood on stage in Chicago at the 1893 Worlds Parliament of Religion and addressed his "sisters and brothers in America" to a roaring ovation. Vivekananda's speech is the beginning of the standard narrative of Hinduism in America. Yet, Americans had deep and important encounters with India and its religious cultures long before 1893. Merchants, writers, missionaries, metaphysicians, evangelicals, Unitarians, men, women, and children imagined Hindus and their religion prior to any Hindu landing on American soil. More importantly, when imagining Hindus and their religion, Americans also imagined what counted as "religion" and what it meant to be American. This dissertation contributes a new historical narrative to the field of American religious history by accounting for the long history of encounters between Indian and American religious cultures before 1893. Major events, institutions, and movements such as the rise of the American missionary movement, the Unitarian controversy, Transcendentalism, Theosophy, *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, public schools, and the World's Parliament of Religion connect in the story of Hinduism in the American cultural imagination.

In narrating this new history of Hinduism in America, I argue that Americans used representations of Hinduism to fight Protestant theological disputes, critique the Protestant establishment, and construct a white/Protestant/democratic/American identity. The dissertation also uses early American representations of Hinduism to argue that Americans constructed "religion" as a comparative category to give meaning to differences across racial, national, and religious lines. Joining historical narrative with theorizing about the category "religion," this study intervenes in American religious history and religious studies to broaden the history of Asian religions in America, deepen understanding of how American Protestants imagined themselves and others, and complicate the history of comparative religion in America.

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Introduction

On September 11, 1893 a Bengali monk stood before a crowd of Americans inside the Hall of Columbus in Chicago at the World's Parliament of Religions. Swami Vivekananda addressed his "sisters and brothers of America" to a rousing applause that lasted several minutes.[1] A few days later, Vivekananda delivered a lecture titled "Hinduism" in which he introduced Hinduism, a world religion derived from Indian texts and practices, to America. Vivekananda went on to tour the country speaking about Vedanta and yoga and founded the Vedanta Society, which built the first Hindu temple in America.

Most stories of Hinduism in America begin with Vivekananda. In some cases, religious historians will begin with a brief Transcendentalist prologue. Such narratives begin by noting that Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and other New England religious liberals read and were influenced by Hindu texts such as the Bhagavad Gita. But, nonetheless, in most narratives it is the arrival of Vivekananda that signaled the real beginning of Hinduism in America. As the story goes, other gurus such as Yogananda followed Vivekananda and spread yoga and meditation throughout America before World War II. Then, in 1965, changes in immigration laws opened up the United States to South Asian immigrants who came to America; built temples, societies and institutions; and took their place in America's religiously plural society. It is a story of

[1] John Henry Barrows, *The World's Parliament of Religions: An Illustrated and Popular Story of the World's First Parliament of Religions, Held in Chicago in Connection with the Columbian Exposition of 1893* (Chicago: The Parliament Publishing Company, 1893), 1:101.

ever expanding progress, increase in numbers and knowledge, and greater and greater pluralism.[2]

This dissertation asks a simple question in response to such a narrative: what if we make Vivekananda the end of a different narrative of Hinduism in America? Something must have prepared Americans for Vivekananda. Something must have made it possible for him to be understood by the audience in Chicago. For the audience to respond with minutes of applause they must have known something about Hinduism, Hindus, and swamis before Vivekananda opened his mouth. By placing Vivekananda at the end, this dissertation analyzes the construction of Hinduism before 1893 and the variety of ways Americans encountered, represented, and deployed Hindu religions from the end of the eighteenth century through the 1893 World's Parliament. It offers a prehistory for the Vivekananda narrative and uses the history of Hindu religions in American culture as a case study for tracing the construction of religion as a comparative category in America. Vivekananda did not signal the beginning of Hinduism in America; rather, he signaled a transition from an earlier period of Americans imaging Hindus and their religions to an era where Hindus began to represent themselves to an American audience.

Narrating Hinduism in America

The dominance of the Vivekananda narrative in the scholarship on Hinduism in America has meant that recent studies in this small subfield have focused on the period

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[2] For a condensed version of this narrative see Vasudha Narayanan, "Hinduism in America," in *Cambridge History of Religions in America*, ed. Stephen J. Stein, vol. 3 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 331–356.

after 1893, and mostly after 1965. South Asian religions scholar Raymond Williams' 1988 book *Religions of Immigrants from India and Pakistan* opened up the field of Hinduism in America for study.[3] Williams' study was broader than just Hinduism, but nevertheless, his decision to structure his research around immigration, adaptation, and institutions set the form for the work that would follow. Vasudha Narayanan, another specialist in South Asian religion, followed Williams' model in her brief study of a South Indian Hindu community in Pittsburgh.[4] Narayanan's chapter used the Srivaisnava temple near Pittsburgh to explore the ways the community adapted its practices and mythology to the American landscape and culture. For example, the ritual bathing of the deity was moved from its traditional Friday spot to Sundays in the American context. Like Williams, Narayanan's main interest was the ways Hindu immigrant communities adapted to America and the institutions they have built. Yet another South Asianist, Joanne Waghorne, also zeroed in on temples in America as part of her book, *Diaspora of the Gods* (2004), but she expanded her approach to incorporate the global movement of people and goods that went into the construction of temples in America—a process she described as "globalized localism."[5] These studies of immigrant Hinduism and temple building within the discipline of religious studies emphasized movement and institutions. These studies were also written by scholars of South Asia who turned to Hinduism in the U.S. as an immigrant religion transitioning from its home in India to a new place in

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[3] Raymond Brady Williams, *Religions of Immigrants from India and Pakistan: New Threads in the an Tapestry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[4] Vasudha Narayanan, "Creating the South Indian 'Hindu' Experience in the United States," in *The Life of Hinduism*, ed. John Stratton Hawley and Vasudha Narayanan (London: University of California Press, 2006), 231–248.

[5] Joanne Punzo Waghorne, *Diaspora of the Gods: Modern Hindu Temples in an Urban Middle-Class World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), especially see chapter 4.

America. In this view, Hinduism came to America as Hindus themselves arrived and set up institutions.

More recent studies of Hinduism in America have turned their attention to gurus instead of waves of immigrants, but still begin their narratives with Vivekananda. The volume *Gurus in America* (2005), edited by Thomas A. Forsthoefel and Cynthia Ann Humes, contained chapters on various post-1965 gurus in the United States written, again, by specialists in South Asia. As the editors noted in the introduction, the book "marks what might be called the second wave of gurus in America, the first being the seminal transmission that began with Swami Vivekananda at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893."[6] Similarly, Lola Williamson's *Transcendent in America: Hindu-Inspired Meditation Movements as New Religion* (2010) examined three movements led by gurus in America: Self-Realization Fellowship, Transcendental Meditation, and Siddha Yoga.[7] Williamson briefly noted the influence of Transcendentalism, Theosophy, and New Thought on the rise of what she calls "Hindu-inspired meditation movements," or HIMMs.[8] But the real story, for Williamson, began with Vivekananda, who was received "with warm appreciation" by "a mostly American audience of seven thousand" because "Transcendentalism, Theosophy, and New Thought had prepared the minds and hearts of many Americans to hear his message."[9] Once again, these guru focused studies were penned by South Asianists who track the arrival of

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[6] Thomas A. Forsthoefel and Cynthia Anne Humes, eds., *Gurus in America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 4.

[7] Lola Williamson, *Transcendent in America: Hindu-Inspired Meditation Movements as New Religion* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

[8] Ibid., 26–34.

[9] Ibid., 34.

Hinduism to America with the arrival of Hindu bodies. Both the immigrant and guru focused studies, because they come as outgrowths of South Asian religious studies, fail to account for the larger American context into which Hinduism arrived. Taking an approach situated within American religious history, this dissertation digs deep into how the groups Williamson mentioned in passing prepared American "minds and hearts" for Vivekananda's message.

Within the fields of American intellectual and religious history, a handful of scholars have found a history for Asian religions, including Hinduism, before 1893. Carl Jackson's *The Oriental Religions and American Thought* (1981) began with the earliest American encounters with Asia in the eighteenth century and, like this dissertation, ended at the World's Parliament of Religions.[10] Also similar to this dissertation, Jackson presented a variety of perspectives on Asian religions ranging from missionaries to Transcendentalists to Theosophists. However, Jackson dropped his interest in Hinduism halfway through the book and argued that American intellectual interest in Asian religions focused on Buddhism in the latter half of the nineteenth century. This dissertation follows representations of Hindu religions all the way through to the Parliament and pays attention to the popular culture Jackson overlooked. While not a monograph study, the volume of documents edited by Thomas Tweed and Stephen Prothero, *Asian Religions in America: A Documentary History* (1999), began with the late eighteenth century and offered a periodization for the history of Asian religions in America.[11] These periods were "Orientations, 1784 to 1840," "Encounters, 1840 to

[10] Carl T Jackson, *The Oriental Religions and American Thought: Nineteenth-Century Explorations* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1981).

1924," "Exclusion, 1924 to 1965," and "Passages, 1965 to the Present." By presenting documents from a variety of Asian religions and covering over two hundred years, the edited volume offered a broad framework within which this dissertation is situated.[12]

This dissertation is a bridge between the post-1893 emphasis of the South Asianists' "Hinduism in America" studies and the broader history found in Jackson and Tweed and Prothero. To this point, studies that have investigated the pre-1893 history have been broad and moved between mostly Hinduism and Buddhism, while the studies focused on Hinduism have largely ignored or made only brief nods toward the history of Hindu religions in America before 1893. This dissertation adds depth and breadth to these past studies. It adds depth to the history of Asian religions in America by focusing specifically on Hindu religions. It adds breadth to studies of Hinduism in America by presenting a history that goes further back in time and provides the backstory to the current literature in the subfield.

Hindu Religions Before Hinduism: Gentoos, Hindoos, and Brahmanism

Focusing on the period between 1790 and 1893, I pay particular attention to the development of "Hinduism" as a category for religion in American culture. Debates over the term Hinduism, its history, derivation, and politics have been ongoing among scholars of South Asia. Historian of religion Richard King argued that British colonial power in

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[11] Thomas Tweed and Stephen Prothero, eds., *Asian Religions in America: A Documentary History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[12] To some extent Part I of this dissertation matches up to the "Orientations, 1784 to 1840," and Parts II and III correspond with "Encounters, 1840 to 1924," of Tweed and Prothero. Many of the documents extracted by Tweed and Prothero are given a fuller analysis in this study.

India constructed "Hinduism" by locating the core of Indian religion in Sanskrit texts and by defining Indian religion according to Judeo-Christian traditions:

> Consequently, it remains an anachronism to project the notion of 'Hinduism' as it is commonly understood into precolonial Indian history. Before the unification begun under imperial rule and consolidated by the Independence of 1947, it makes no sense to talk of an Indian 'nation,' nor of a religion called 'Hinduism' that might be taken to represent the belief system of the Hindu people.[13]

On the other hand, religion scholar Brian K. Pennington has presented a more nuanced account of the development of Hinduism as a category during the colonial period. Focusing on the years between 1789 and 1832, Pennington argued that "in the shadows and under the auspices of the emerging colonial state, Hindus and non-Hindus alike etched the contours of the modern world religion we now routinely call 'Hinduism' and its attendant identities."[14] Pennington persuasively moved back and forth between British and Indian sources, in both English and Bengali, to trace these contours. As he argued, "the very articulation of the colonial-era concept 'Hindu' was already a collaborative undertaking; discursive interactions between Britons and Indians contributed to the dialogic and heteroglot production known as 'Hinduism.'"[15] Taking the best points of King and Pennington together, Hinduism, as a world religion and pan-Indian system, emerged during the nineteenth century through the conflict and collusion of Indians and Britons and reached its apex with Indian nationalism and eventually the 1947 Independence.

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[13] Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion : Postcolonial Theory, India and "the Mystic East"* (London: Routledge, 1999), 107.

[14] Brian Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?: Britons, Indians, and the Colonial Construction of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3–4.

[15] Ibid., 171.

But these arguments among South Asianists about the construction of Hinduism in colonial India and the British Empire do not shed light on the production of Hinduism as a world religion that appeared in Chicago in 1893. As the following chapters will show, "Hinduism," as a pan-Indian system of religion that could be compared alongside others, emerged in America much later than in India or Britain. Americans did not need "Hinduism" as early as Britons or Indians. Pennington points out that "the expansion of the colonial administration of India in the nineteenth century also demanded a coherent and stable catalog of Hindu laws, sects, ritual practices, and so forth, an end that an essentialized Hinduism certainly furthered."[16] Because the United States did not have a colonial administration in India, Americans did not need an essentialized Hinduism for the same reasons Britons did. In fact, it suited the desires and aims of some Americans to keep Hindu religions incoherent and unsystematic. Americans did use resources produced by colonial administrators and British missionaries to construct their own representations of Hindu religions, but they did not always share the same goals or perspectives as these Britons. Eventually, as American religious liberals began to think of religion as a comparative category and began to isolate a set of religions that could be compared to one another, Hinduism, as religious system and world religion, emerged in their thinking and writing late in the nineteenth century.

In this dissertation I analyze Hinduism before Americans had "Hinduism." Americans used a variety of terms to describe, represent, and imagine the religious culture of India during the nineteenth century: Gentoos, Hindoos, religion of the Hindoos, Hindoo religion, Brahmanism, heathenism, and paganism. Each term meant different

[16] Ibid., 169.

things to different writers at different times. So, throughout this study I use the terms "Hindu religions" or "Hindu religion" to refer to the religious texts, practices, and cultures of India that Americans referenced, alluded to, represented, imagined, and described. I use the term Hindu religions to give myself the space to pay particular attention to the language writers used in their representations of Indian religious cultures.

Representing Hindu Religions: Protestants, Metaphysicals, and National Culture

The history of American representations of Hindu religions until 1893 can be divided into three periods, reflected in the three parts of this dissertation. Part I begins in New England and covers the period from 1790 to 1830. During this period New England Protestants represented Hindu religions according to their own categories of what counted as religion and deployed representations of Hindu religions within their own inter-Protestant theological debates. Chapter one analyzes two of the earliest representations of Hindu religions in America, Hannah Adams' *An Alphabetical Compendium of the Various Sects Which Have Appeared in the World from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Present Day* (1784), which offered a description of the religion of the Gentoos, and Joseph Priestly's *A Comparison of the Institutes of Moses with that of the Hindoos and Other Ancient Nations* (1799). Priestly and Adams turned to British sources on the religions of India in their projects of religious comparison that focused on religious texts, religious beliefs and doctrines, and religion's role in society. Their desire to prove the truth of Protestant Christianity led them to an early Protestant comparative religion.

Chapter two continues to trace representations of Hindu religions in New England but turns to early evangelical print culture and the role of Bengali Hindu reformer Rammohun Roy in the Unitarian controversy. New England evangelical missionary societies emerged during the first decade of the nineteenth century as a product of evangelical revivalist zeal. These missionary societies began to publish accounts of Hindu religions, representing them as violent, lascivious, and noisy idolatry, first from British missionaries and later from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) missionaries stationed at Bombay. Meanwhile, some of these same missionary minded evangelicals engaged in a heated debate with Unitarians over what Protestant theology and religion should be. Through their British colleagues, Unitarians encountered the monotheistic Hindu religion of Roy, who was himself arguing with evangelical British missionaries over the nature of Jesus. Roy became a cobelligerent for the Unitarians fighting against Calvinist Trinitarianism because of his monotheistic Vedanta, and a "heathen" for evangelicals opposed to him and the Unitarians. Part I, then, is an analysis of the earliest representations of Hindu religions in America, representations constructed by and for Protestants.

By 1830, knowledge about Hindu religions had become more widely available and Americans looking for an alternative to Protestantism found resources in Hindu religions. Part II covers the period from 1830 through the end of the century and analyzes the ways Americans involved in liberal and metaphysical religion imagined Hindu religions. Chapter three focuses on Transcendentalist representations of Hindu religions. Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson read Hindu Sanskrit texts such as the Bhagavad Gita and imagined Hindu religions as an Eastern spirituality of contemplation

and unity that balanced out Western action, diversity, and materialism. In their wake, Lydia Maria Child, James Freeman Clarke, and Samuel Johnson wrote works of comparative religion that drew on the image of Hindu religions as being contemplative and spiritual. In their Transcendentalist comparative projects, these writers sought after a universal religion that would unite mankind. They envisioned "Brahmanism" as the religious system of India that would contribute contemplation, asceticism, and unity to the universal religion.

Staying with Americans looking beyond Protestantism, chapter four moves later into the century and analyzes the role of Hindu religions in Theosophy. Madame Helena Blavatsky and her friend and co-founder of the Theosophical Society, Henry Steel Olcott, imagined India as a land of occult power. They also believed in an ancient wisdom religion, within which Hindu texts and concepts played an important role. In Blavatsky's early writing, India and its Vedic texts were the source of the wisdom religion. Later, after their visit to India and encounter with Hindu religions there, Blavatsky and her followers described enlightened Mahatmas of Hindu descent that lived in the Himalayan Mountains and communicated esoteric wisdom to their initiates around the world. After Blavatsky's death, American Theosophist William Quan Judge wrote extensively about yoga, drawing on the work of the ancient Hindu author Patanjali and his Yoga Sutras. For the Theosophists, Hindu religion was the religion of esoteric power, Mahatmas, and yoga. Theosophists and Transcendentalists built alternatives to American Protestantism that critiqued the materialism and hypocrisy they saw in American Protestants. In the process they turned to Hindu religious sources and imagined Hindu religions in metaphysical terms.

Part III runs chronologically parallel to Part II, but focuses on the Protestant cultural establishment in America from the 1830s forward to the end of the century. Protestants built religious and secular institutions during the nineteenth century and a white Protestant identity became central to a national culture in the United States. Using textbooks from common schools and the nationally circulated *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, chapter five argues that writers represented Hindus as dark-skinned/caste/heathen/mystical/violent/uncivilized others in contrast to white/democratic/Protestant/rational/peaceful/civilized Americans. Such representations drew on the missionary accounts from earlier in the century but added racial and national components. The Hindu other reinforced white Protestant American identity during the latter half of the century.

The final chapter of part three, and the dissertation as a whole, analyzes the construction of religion and Hinduism at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago. Here what has been the beginning of Hinduism's story in America becomes the end of a different story of Hinduism in American culture. Building on the previous chapter's argument about Protestant cultural power, chapter six argues that the Parliament was a distinctly Protestant event and the speakers at the Parliament imagined the boundaries of religion according to Protestant assumptions. The Parliament also signaled the first time Hindus appeared in front of an American audience to represent themselves to an American audience. Hindu speakers, most notably Swami Vivekananda, represented Hinduism as a world religion to their Protestant American audience. In doing so, they constructed a monotheistic, rational, scientific, and belief-based Hinduism suited to Protestant American categories, allowing them to be understood and heard by their

audience. When Hinduism finally emerged as a world religion in America, during an event celebrating religious pluralism and diversity, it did so according to Protestant assumptions and expectations.

American Religious History at the Juncture of Protestantism and Pluralism

The World's Parliament of Religions was an event simultaneously Protestant and plural. It was a juncture of Protestant culture and American pluralism. Similarly, this dissertation sits at the juncture of two sorts of narratives in American religious history, those of Protestant church history and those of American religious diversity. Recently, religious studies scholar Tracy Fessenden described the shift in American religious history from "old-school religious studies on the pastoral training model" that wrote histories of "white, northeastern, Protestant men" to a new model that "went forth on the assumption that the Protestant narrative was partisan and parochial, and that a commitment to representing pluralism and diversity is truer to the facts of pluralism and diversity on the ground, in whatever period of American history, within Christianity and beyond it."[17] But this transition was not a clean break. The two histories are tied together and this leaves Fessenden with a question: "At what juncture, in response to what sustaining pressures, in service to what calls for reinforcement have the Protestant narrative and the pluralist narrative—which do, evidently, share a genealogy in the disciplinary formation of American religious studies—been conjoined?"[18] Fessenden

[17] Tracy Fessenden, "The Objects of American Religious Studies," *Religion* 42, no. 3 (July 2012): 374.

[18] Ibid., 375.

believes the answer to her question is to be found at "the mysterious juncture between the Protestant and pluralist narratives" in "studies that would make of this juncture something not to be celebrated, or blandly assumed, or dexterously denied, but instead to be worked through."[19]

It is at this juncture between Protestantism and pluralism where this dissertation finds its foothold in the field. As a work of American religious history, this dissertation moves back and forth between a Protestant story of theological dispute, critique, and cultural establishment and a story of American pluralism, diversity, and encounter with religious difference. From the 1790s through the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions, American Protestants encountered Hindu religions and were forced to make sense of their religious difference. From Cotton Mather to Hannah Adams to Lydia Maria Child to readers of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* to the Parliament itself, nineteenth century Americans found themselves at the juncture of Protestantism and religious diversity. By analyzing the variety of ways Americans represented Hindu religions during the period, this dissertation tracks the construction of comparative systems that allowed Protestants and other Americans to make sense of religious difference. Fessenden's "mysterious juncture" of Protestant church history and American pluralism is not simply a problem of historiography; rather it can be found in the midst of the American nineteenth century as the Protestant cultural establishment encountered, accounted, represented, and imagined religious difference. As a history of American representations of Hindu religions, this dissertation is one step toward a better understanding of the historical juncture of

[19] Ibid., 380–381.

Protestantism and pluralism in the nineteenth century and one example of a study grafted into the spliced historiographies of Protestantism and pluralism in the field.

Part I

Hindu Religions in Protestant New England, 1790-1830

Chapter 1

Heathens and Hindoos in the Early Republic

Cotton Mather believed in a connection between America and Asia. He believed the Native Americans had arrived on the continent from Asia sometime after the biblical flood. He also believed in a world with Christian Europe at its center and the heathen lands of the East Indies and West Indies on the outskirts. Mather's 1721 *India Christiana* reflected the connections Mather saw between East and West Indies on the boundary of Christendom. It contained a sermon Mather gave to the Commissioners for the Propagation of the Gospel Among the American Indians at Samuel Sewell's house followed by two letters, one from Mather to the Dutch Lutheran mission in South India and a response from the Dutch missionary John Ernest Grundler.[1] *India Christiana* highlighted the ways Mather saw the work among the Indian heathens as the same whether it was in America or India. He called his fellow Euro-Americans to "the Promise made unto our SAVIOUR, *I will give the Heathen for thine Inheritance, and the Uttermost of the Earth for thy Possession*."[2] The New England Puritans and the Dutch missionaries both found themselves on the borderlands of European influence and both had been charged with spreading the "joyful sound" of the Gospel in a heathen wilderness. Mather never mentioned Hindus, Hindoos, or Gentoos in his writings about

[1] Cotton Mather, *India Christiana. A Discourse, Delivered Unto the Commissioners, for the Propagation of the Gospel Among the American Indians Which Is Accompanied with Several Instruments Relating to the Glorious Design of Propagating Our Holy Religion, in the Eastern as Well as the Western, Indies. An Entertainment Which They That Are Waiting for the Kingdom of God Will Receive as Good News from a Far Country.* (Boston: Company for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England and the Parts Adjacent in America, 1721).

[2] Ibid., 22 Emphasis in the original.

India's religions. Whether in Martha's Vineyard or on the west coast of India, Indians were Indians, heathens were heathens, and they all needed the Gospel.

By the end of the century Americans would write about Hindus, Hindoos, Gentoos, yogis, and sanyasins. Relying on British Orientalists, East India Company officials, and missionaries, American authors began writing accounts of "the religion of the Hindoos" for an American audience. Mather's category of heathenism took on a new taxonomical status as the genus for various species of false religion. The religion of the "Hindoos" was one such species. This transition occurred as American writers began to think about religion as a comparative category. Cotton Mather saw heathenism as something to be conquered, not compared. However, by the end of the century, through available British books and journals, a handful of more liberal minded Protestants would begin to compare heathenism with Christianity and they would begin to imagine "the religion of the Hindoos."

Liberal Protestants such as Hannah Adams, Joseph Priestly, and John Adams began writing and thinking about religion comparatively. Hindu religions emerged in their writings because they began to see religion as a category wherein different beliefs could be compared and contrasted cross-culturally. Furthermore, they took a particularly American approach to comparative religion. David Chidester has argued that the comparative study of religion "was entangled in the power relations of frontier conflict, military conquest and resistance, and imperial expansion."[3] While American writers relied on knowledge produced by British Orientalists and missionaries, their major concern was not knowledge of the indigenous people for imperial power, but instead,

[3] David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), xiii.

knowledge of foreign religions to support their own Protestant arguments. As Chidester argued European comparative religion emerged from the conflicts of the imperial frontier, I argue American comparative religion during this period emerged from Protestant theological conflict. British colonial officials and missionaries produced comparative knowledge of Hindu religions on the colonial frontier. New England writers deployed this colonial knowledge in Protestant theological controversies at home. British imperial knowledge became American theological evidence.

Heathenism in Mather's Global Vision

In the earliest American writings about religion in India, Cotton Mather did not think about religion comparatively and lumped Hindu religious cultures into the catchall category of heathenism. He presented a global vision where true Christianity triumphs over false heathenism. In Mather's vision, Christians were at work around the world battling Satan and spiritual darkness in a process of Christianization, or, as he would have phrased it, bringing about the Kingdom of God. In his diary he outlined this global vision during a time of personal supplication before God.

> I represented, that there were Servants of His, industriously at work for His Kingdome [sic] in the World. Among these, I particularly mentioned those of the *Frederician* University, and those of the *Malabarian* Mission. But we can do very Little. Our Encumbrances are insuperable; our Difficulties are infinite. If He would please, to fulfill the ancient Prophecy, of *pouring out the Spirit on all Flesh*, and planted His Religion in the primitive Times of Christianity, and order a Descent of His holy *Angels*, and fly thro' the World with the *everlasting Gospel* to preach unto the Nations, wonderful Things would be done immediately.[4]

[4] Cotton Mather, *The Diary of Cotton Mather, II, 1709-1724*, vol. 8, Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society 7 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1912), 365–366. Throughout his writing about the Danish mission Mather refers to the "Malabarian mission" and the native Indians there as

After pleading with God in prayer for an outpouring that would cover the whole world, Mather "concluded with a strong Impression on my Mind; *They are coming! They are coming! They are coming! They will quickly be upon us; and the World shall be shaken wonderfully!*"[5] From his intimate New England devotional space Mather envisioned the entire world on fire for God. Mather showed no interest in comparing differing religious beliefs or practices, rather he imagined the Kingdom of God conquering the world and ridding it of false heathenism.

Transnational Protestant networks made Cotton Mather's global vision possible. He corresponded with various Protestants in England, August Herman Francke at Halle, and the Danish mission on the Coromondel coast of southeast India. While historians disagree about the extent of Mather's correspondence with the European Pietists, there was enough of a connection to excite Mather's passion for a global Christian movement.[6] Even historian Wolfgang Splitter, himself skeptical of the extent of Mather's connections with Halle, has admitted that, in a letter from 1715, Mather's principle motivation was "to link the Protestant reform movements such as Halle Pietism with the goals of Christian mission and ecumenism, and in this regard he mentions the successful missionary work being conducted among Native Americans."[7] Mather had enough

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"Malabarian." This is odd because the Danish mission was in Southeast India, while the Malabar coast is on the southwest side of the peninsula. It is most likely that "Malabarian" was Mather's term for all native peope living in South India.

[5] Ibid., 8:366 Emphasis in original.

[6] Kenneth Silverman, "Cotton Mather's Foreign Correspondence," *Early American Literature* 3, no. 3 (December 1, 1968): 172–185; Wolfgang Splitter, "The Fact and Fiction of Cotton Mather's Correspondence with German Pietist August Hermann Francke," *The New England Quarterly* 83, no. 1 (March 2010).

contact with Halle Pietists, Lutheran missionaries, and English dissenters to imagine an ecumenical Protestant missionary movement emanating outward from Christian Europe to the borderlands of the East and West Indies.

Mather's global vision and Protestant networking divided the world between Christians and heathens. He never used the words Hindu, Hindoo, or Gentoo. Instead, he always referred to the "Malabarians" or the "heathen." He also never mentioned the religion of the Malabarians because, for him, heathens do not have religion. Similarly, in his letter printed in *India Christiana*, Grundler called the Malabarians "deluded Heathen People."[8] Mather described the natives of North America, the heathen Indians he had observed himself, in terms that noted the absence of any religion among them, calling them "the most forlorn *Ruins of Mankind*, and very doleful Objects. Their way of living was lamentably Barbarous. Beyond all Expression Dark were their Notions of a God; and *Chepian*, or the *Evil God*, had as great a share as *Kautantowit*, or the *Good God*, in their Adorations, The *Manicheans* (as great a Tribe of *Hereticks* as ever were in the World) may boast of *these* , as being really *Theirs*."[9] He never used the word religion in reference to the Indians, be they eastern or western. They had "notions of a God," not beliefs in God. They belonged to the heretics. Religion, for Mather, was Christianity, and the Indians of the world had no religion.

The absence of religion Mather observed in Indians, both Eastern and Western, drew on larger tropes in European thought about the humanity of "natives." In his writing

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[7] Splitter, "The Fact and Fiction of Cotton Mather's Correspondence with German Pietist August Hermann Francke," 107.

[8] Mather, *India Christiana*, 85–86.

[9] Ibid., 28 Emphasis in original.

about South Africa, Chidester described how "the long history of denial in the European comparative religion of maritime and colonial contact produced a multilayered discourse about otherness that identified the absence of religion with images of indigenous people as animals or children, as irrational, capricious, and lazy, as both blankness and barrier to European interests."[10] Mather's view of the American Indians followed this trope and he believed that Christianity could resolve the problems of native otherness. He wrote that the goal of Christian missions was "to *Humanize* these Miserable *Animals*, and in any measure to *Cicurate* them & *Civilize* them" but even more "to Raise these Miserables up, unto an Acquaintance with, and an Experience of, the **Christian Religion**, and bring them not only to *Know* something of their SAVIOUR, but also to *Live unto GOD by Him*."[11] By giving Indians religion qua Christianity they could be humanized and saved.

For Mather, heathenism was meant to be conquered with the light of the Gospel, not researched and compared. That changed a generation later. Religion became something more than Christianity and religious differences became more than Christians and heathens. In the eyes of Europeans, heathens began to have religions of sorts and these religions could be compared. European colonialism began to produce knowledge through comparative religion and American Protestants turned to this knowledge to find evidence supporting their particular theological positions. In America, Hannah Adams and Joseph Priestly drew on European comparative religion in order to prove the superiority and truth of the Protestant faith.

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[10] Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 16.

[11] Mather, *India Christiana*, 29 Emphasis in original.

Hannah Adams and the Birth of American Comparative Religion

Hannah Adams' father never made it as a farmer. He lacked "a suitable knowledge of, or taste for, agricultural pursuits," so he opened up a shop that sold English books. [12] Thus, her father's farming failure launched young Hannah Adams into a lifetime of books. Books defined Hannah Adams' life, and not just because she became the first woman in America to make a living by writing. For example, when asked about Adams' suitability as a wife, one man responded "why I should as soon think of marrying my Greek Grammar."[13] An insatiable thirst for knowledge drove her life as a reader and a writer. As she told it, "the first strong propensity of my mind which I can recollect, was an ardent curiosity, and desire to acquire knowledge. I remember that my idea of the happiness of Heaven was, of a place where we should find our thirst for knowledge fully gratified. From my predominant taste I was induced to apply to reading, and as my father had a considerable library, I was enabled to gratify my inclination. I read with avidity a variety of books."[14] Later, Adams would spend time writing her books inside bookseller's shops, unable to afford the sources she needed on her quest for knowledge.

One book sparked Hannah Adams' interest in religion, Thomas Broughton's *An Historical Dictionary of All Religion s from the Creation of the World to This Present Time* (1756). A gentleman boarding with the Adams family taught her Latin and Greek

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[12] Hannah Adams, *A Memoir of Miss Hannah Adams, Written by Herself with Additional Notices by a Friend* (Boston: Grawy and Bowen, 1832), 1–2.

[13] Cited in Thomas A Tweed, "An American Pioneer in the Study of Religion: Hannah Adams (1755-1831) and Her 'Dictionary of All Religions'," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 60, no. 3 (Autumn 1992): 445.

[14] Adams, *Memoir*, 4.

and brought along with him a portion of Broughton's work dealing with Arminians, Calvinists, and some other denominations. Broughton's treatment of the Protestant sects triggered an interest in religious controversy which left Adams "disgusted with the want of candor in the authors" for their "most unfavorable descriptions of the denominations they disliked, and applying to them the names of heretics, fanatics, enthusiasts, &c."[15] So, Adams decided to compile her own account of the various denominations in the world and she planned to do so according to some rules.

> 1. To avoid giving the least preference of one denomination above another: omitting those passages in the authors cited, where they pass their judgment on the sentiments of which they give an account: consequently the making use of any such appellations as *Hereticks, Schismaticks, Enthusiasts, Fanaticks,* &c. is carefully avoided.
> 2. To give a few arguments of the principal sects, from their own authors, where they could be obtained.
> 3. To endeavor to give the sentiments of every sect in the general collective sense of that denomination.
> 4. To give the whole as much as possible in the words of the authors from which the compilation is made, and where that could not be done without to greet prolixity, to take utmost care not to misrepresent the ideas.[16]

Adams aimed at an impartial and fair account of the world's variety of theological positions throughout history compiled from the best authors she could get in her hands. The result was published in 1784 as *An Alphabetical Compendium of the Various Sects Which Have Appeared in the World from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Present Day* and went through four editions with various titles. Her description of the "Gentoos" in the first edition is the earliest description of Hindu religions published by an American. Over the four editions Adams engaged in a project of comparison built upon

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[15] Ibid., 11.

[16] "Advertisement" in Hannah Adams, *An Alphabetical Compendium of the Various Sects Which Have Appeared in the World from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Present Day* (Boston: B. Edes & Sons, 1784).

ideas of religious difference: differences between Protestants, differences across Christian history, differences between Christians and the rest of the world, and differences between and within religions. She put all of these differences to use as proof that liberal Protestant Christianity stood as the pinnacle of religious truth.

Adams' book was a work of Christian comparative theology. She took account of the various Christian sects that have engaged in theological controversies over the centuries. In the back of the book, however, she added an appendix that took account of the world's non-Christian religions. She never explained why she did this but it is likely linked to the "evidential Christianity" popular among New England Protestants of the period. As church historian E. Brooks Holifield detailed, the majority of Protestant preachers and theologians in early America concerned themselves with proving the reasonableness of Christianity and the rational evidence for its truth. Evidential Christianity emphasized the use of reason and "consisted of the claim that rational evidence confirmed the uniqueness and truth of the biblical revelation." [17] Evidential Christianity carried with it an emphasis on natural theology which claimed "that reason, reflecting on either the visible world or the workings of the human mind, could produce evidence for the existence of a transcendent God apart from the revelation in scripture or the tradition of the church."[18] Natural theology distinguished itself from natural religion because of its claim that it "pointed toward and confirmed truths above the capacity of reason to discover—truths accessible only through special revelation."[19] Furthermore,

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[17] E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America : Christian thought from the age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005), 5.

[18] Ibid.

there was a progression from natural theology to revealed truth. As Charles Chauncy described it in 1785, "it is in consequence of this progressive capacity, that we suppose, and, as I think, upon just and solid grounds, that all intelligent moral beings, in all worlds, are continually going on, while they suitably employ and improve their original faculties, from one degree of attainment to another; and, hereupon, from one degree of happiness to another, without end."[20] As people apply their reason they progress further and further along the road towards happiness and greater knowledge of God through natural theology. Adams' *Compendium* offered empirical evidence of this progression, within Christianity and without. It proved the progression of religion from the irrationality of "heathenism", through the revealed religion of Christianity, to the evidential rationalism of liberal Arminian Protestantism.

Along with natural theology, a new taxonomical view of religions separated Adams from older Christian writers, such as Cotton Mather, and gave her a mode for investigating non-Christian religions. Like Mather, Adams made the distinction between Christianity and non-Christian religions. The separation in the appendix of non-Christian religions from the main section of the book reflected this distinction. However, while Mather stopped there, uninterested in further investigation into heathenism, Adams spent the appendix accounting for myriad non-Christian beliefs because they were part of the progressive history of Christian truth. They also contained examples of natural theology. So, Adams broke non-Christian religions into a five category hierarchical taxonomy, "Pagans, Mahometans, Jews, and Deists." This taxonomy had become common by the

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Charles Chauncy, *Five Dissertations on the Scripture Account of the Fall; and Its Consequences* (London: C. Dilly, 1785), 33.

late eighteenth century and could be found in various encyclopedias and dictionaries of religions in Europe such as Thomas Broughton's. Indeed the split between Christian and non-Christian religions and the taxonomy of religions outside of Christianity in Adams' book reflected European accounts of religions in the world at the time. On the one hand the division between the one true religion (Christianity) and the multitude of false religions that Mather held was still in force, but on the other hand, new divisions emerged within the category of false religions. As historian Tomoko Masuzawa noted of the period, "either there were countless religions or there was only one, yet, somehow both assertions were true."[21] Adams' accounts of "Gentoo" religion fit into the bottom rung of this religious taxonomy as a subcategory of heathenism and filled in the history of Christianity. She took interest in heathens because of their place in the story of human progress toward the Kingdom of God.

Liberal Protestantism not only motivated Adams in her research, it also provided the categories for her understanding of Hindu religions. Her descriptions of Hindu religions focused on texts, beliefs, and sects, all very Protestant categories. She took little interest in reports of temples or rituals because her larger project was an account of the progress of religious beliefs and theological disputes. Over the four editions the material she cited changed but the focus remained on what the Gentoos believed, the texts that supported these beliefs, and the doctrinal differences between sects. Thus, Adams' four editions evidenced two aspects of American representations of Hindu religions in the nineteenth century. On the one hand, they reveal how New England Protestants represented Hindu religions according to their own Protestant categories. But on the other hand, Adams'

[21] Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 60.

method as author-compiler produced texts that relied upon the British sources available to Americans at the time. While Adams may not be the representative reader, nonetheless, the texts in the footnotes of her four editions offered one account of the changing knowledge of Asia available to American readers through British sources. Adams took British knowledge of Hindu religions, meant to assist the imperial project, and repackaged it according to her tolerant rules and liberal Protestant categories to provide evidence for rational Protestant Christianity.

The influence of evidential Christianity was apparent in the first edition of *An Alphabetical Compendium* from 1784. Adams compiled a page and a half section on the Mogul Empire that was almost exclusively focused on the beliefs of the "Gentoos, or as others call them, Hindoos." She began by sketching an outline of Hindu beliefs. "They pretend that *Brumma* [Brahma], who was their legislator both in politics and religion, was inferior only to God; and that he existed many thousands of years before our account of the creation. The *Bramins* [brahmans]—for so the Gentoo Priests are called—pretend, that he bequeathed to them a book, called the *Vidam* [Veda], containing his doctrines and instructions."[22] She also mentioned that the Veda was lost but the brahmans have the "Shastah" [Shastra] which contains commentary in Sanskrit. Brahma served as sort of a Moses figure who dispensed religious and political law. His doctrines included belief in a supreme being who creates a world with "a regular gradation of beings, some superior, and some inferior to man," the immortality of the soul, and a future state of rewards and punishments in the form of "Pathegorian Metampsychosis," or reincarnation.[23] According

[22] Adams, *An Alphabetical Compendium of the Various Sects Which Have Appeared in the World from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Present Day*, xliii.

to Adams, the Hindus had arrived at a notion of God in a way that fit with the claims of natural theology. They also had belief in future rewards and punishments in their natural theology. These beliefs fell into the wrong hands, however. Adams recounted how the brahman priests, in hopes of inculcating the doctrines in the lower classes, took "recourse to sensible representation of the *Deity* and his attributes; so that the original doctrines of Brumma were changed into idolatry."[24] Adams then described three idolatrous sects found in India: "the *Banians*, the *Persees* and the *Faquirs*." Her focus remained on the beliefs of these sects. The Banians believed in "the transmigration of souls" and so they would not harm animals. The Persees, or Parsees, worshiped fire, and the Faquirs, or fakirs, "are a kind of *Monks*, and live very austere, performing many severe acts of mortification."[25] The section closed by noting that all Indians shared a belief in the sacrality of the Ganges and washed in it often.

Adams account of Hindu beliefs narrated a story of declension told according to Protestant categories and highlighted the role of natural theology in Hindu beliefs. Adams took her account of Brahma and the Veda directly from William Guthrie's popular *A New System of Modern Geography*, first published in 1770. Guthrie included a description of the caste system, sati (the practice of widow immolation), and temples in his text but Adams chose to leave them out of her account. While practical reasons such as space and cost could account for leaving out these sections, Hannah Adams was most interested in Protestant categories of belief, text, and church. She included Guthrie's account where it

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[23] Ibid., xliii–xliv.

[24] Ibid., xliv.

[25] Ibid.

discussed what Hindus believed, the books they got these beliefs from, and the priests and sects around which they were organized. Adams also took a declension narrative from Guthrie. Adams, via Guthrie, narrated the declension of Hindu belief from the monotheism of the Veda to idolatry. The declension narrative stood out in the context of Adams' own progressive view of Christian history. Humans were supposed to use their reason to progress toward ever more perfect ideas about God but something went wrong in India. The brahmans led the people astray. In Adams' telling, rather than bring the "lower classes" up to their level by educating them with the proper beliefs, as a good New England Protestant minister does with his flock, the brahmans took the easy way out and appealed to irrational senses instead of reason. Irrational idolatry displaced rational religion. Adams thus represented India as an upside down place where religion declined away from truth instead of progressing toward it. In the first section of the book Christianity is slowly refined and purified through doctrinal dispute that always edges closer towards the truth of the deity. In the appendix, in the Mogul Empire, in the land of heathens, religious belief moved backwards.

Despite the declension narrative, Adams tried to present a neutral portrayal of Hindu belief organized around Protestant categories of what counted as religion. Even with the idolatry of the lower classes, Hindus had a holy book and the basic doctrines of natural theology, two properties shared with Christianity. Furthermore, by emphasizing the theology of the Vedas and the figure of Brahma while excluding content on caste and sati, Adams offered a representation of Hindus that would have been accessible to most Protestant New England readers: they have Brahma, we have Moses; they have the Vedas and the Shastras, we have the Old and New Testaments; they have reincarnation, we have

heaven. While not explicit in the text, Adams' Protestant sensibilities and categories implied these sorts of comparisons.

In the 1791 edition of her work, renamed *A View of Religions,* Adams continued with a neutral representation of Hindus mapped onto Christian categories. She shifted to a new source, however, John Zephaniah Holwell's 1767 *Interesting Historical Events, Relative to the Provinces of Bengal, and the Empire of Indostan*. Holwell, described by one historian as having "strong and increasingly eccentric opinions, a ready pen, and an alert if disorderly mind," maintained the declension narrative of earlier writers and his idiosyncratic Deism influenced his representation of Hindu religion.[26] While he detested the "degenerate, crafty, superstitious, litigious and wicked" Hindus of his own time, he viewed the ancient teachings as "rational and sublime" and the brahmans that lived by the ancient "Shastah" as "the purest models of genuine piety that now exist, or can be found on the face of the earth."[27] For Holwell, as for others who admired ancient Indian religion, Hindus began with a rational religion and a natural theology of a creator God.

Adams turned to Holwell for a meandering summary of Hindu cosmogony, what she described as the "fundamental doctrines of the Bramins, as they are taught in Shastah," that shared much with the Protestant reading of Genesis. According to Adams, as taken from Holwell, brahmans believed in one omnipotent God who created three lesser divinities, Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu, and a host of angelic beings. These angelic beings, at the instigation of "Moisasoor," rebelled. God threw the rebellious beings out of

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[26] P. J Marshall, *The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 5.

[27] Ibid., 27.

heaven to "languish forever in sorrow and darkness." The three lesser divinities interceded on behalf of the rebels and convinced God to create a new world where the rebels may live out their punishment in mortal bodies and work for redemption and entrance back into heaven and God's presence. "Consequently, the sprits which animate every mortal form, are delinquent angels in a state of punishment, for a lapse from innocence, in a pre-existent state."[28] Again, Adams focused on beliefs and doctrines and in her extract from Holwell. She presented Hindus as believing in a story of a fall from innocence, a monotheistic supreme God, rebellion by God's creatures, and a search for redemption and future reward. These "doctrines of the Bramins" shared affinities with Adams' Protestant Christianity and understandings of natural theology.

The neutral tone continued when Adams extracted Holwell's account of sati in India. Via Holwell, Adams recounted "a *voluntary sacrifice,* of too singular a nature to pass unnoticed; which is that *of the Gentoos wives burning themselves with the bodies of their deceased husbands*."[29] The extract emphasized the voluntary nature of sati and attempted to explain the doctrine behind it. Women are "nurtured and instructed in the firm faith that this *voluntary sacrifice* is the most glorious period of their lives" and afterward their "celestial spirit…flies to join the spirit of their deceased husbands, in a state of purification" while their children are "raised in dignity and honor."[30] In Holwell's full text he prefaced the section Adams extracted by saying "if we view these women in a just light, we shall think more candidly of them and confess they act upon heroic, as well as

[28] Hannah Adams, *A View of Religions, in Two Parts*, 2nd ed. (Boston: John West Folsom, 1791), 346.

[29] Ibid., 346.

[30] Ibid., 346–347.

rational and pious principles."[31] While Adams muted Holwell's admiration for the women in the name of neutrality, she nonetheless kept the overall tolerant tone of his account. In later depictions by other American writers sati exemplified the irrational violence of Hindu religions, but Adams allowed it to remain voluntary and rational in her text.

Adams added one more extract to her 1791 edition, this time taken from Nathaniel Brassey Halhead's preface to his 1776 *A Code of Gentoo Laws*. Commissioned by Warrant Hastings, the *Code* was meant to serve as a resource for British East India officials attempting to administer civil justice for Hindu plaintiffs according to Hindu law. Eleven pandits were instructed to set down, in Sanskrit, the final answer of disputed points of law based upon the authoritative texts. The Sanskrit was translated to Persian and then Halhead translated it from Persian to English. It failed as a legal source but succeeded as a piece of Oriental literature.

Adams extracted a section of Halhead's preface where he remarked on the need to recognize the goodness in every religion. It was Halhead's plea for religious tolerance. He wrote, "the diversities of belief among mankind, are a manifest demonstration of the power of the Supreme Being…Having introduced a numerous variety of crafts, and a multiplicity of different customs, he views in each particular place, the mode of worship which he has appointed."[32] God took pleasure in "attendants at the mosque," and "the adoration of idols" because he is "the intimate of the Mussulmen, the friend of the

[31] John Zephaniah Holwell, *Interesting Historical Events, Relative to the Provinces and the Empire of Indostan*, vol. 2 (London: T. Becket and P. A. De Hondt, 1767), 97.

[32] Adams, *A View of Religions*, 1791, 349.

Hindoos, the companion of the Christians, and the confident of the Jews."[33] What Halhead wrote as an argument for finding value in the Hindu law he translated, Adams shifted to a statement about sectarian tolerance within Hindu religion. She prefaced Halhead with her own words. "There are among the Gentoos, upward of thirty sects. Theirs is the most tolerant of all religions."[34] Halhead was not discussing the tolerance of Hindus, but rather the tolerance required of the reader approaching their religious law. Adams shifted the subject of Halhead's text to the exemplary tolerance of the Hindus themselves. They are tolerant of one another's sectarian differences unlike the various Christian disputes she recorded earlier in the book. This call for tolerance was driven home in the appendix of Adams work where she listed five beliefs shared by all Christians and argued that the diversity of religious opinions beyond these five are "under the direction of an all-perfect Being, who governs in infinite wisdom."[35] Thus, in Adams hands, Halhead's statement supported Adams' belief about the limits of Christian sectarianism.

When she published the third edition of *A View of Religions* in 1801, Adams had an even more unified message about the state of religion in the world. In the newly expanded introduction, Adams offered a series of historical narratives accounting for the state of religion in the world at the time of Jesus' birth. The introduction narrated how the pure religion of Jesus Christ had slowly accrued outside influences and diversified into various sects. The central theme of her work, then, was an exploration of these sects and

[33] Ibid., 349.

[34] Ibid., 349.

[35] Ibid., "Appendix."

this diversity. As her biographer Gary Schmidt recently put it, "she painted a disarrayed world searching for the Deity—sometimes rationally and philosophically, sometimes desperately, sometimes enthusiastically."[36] The third edition was the most cohesive version of the text yet, using the introduction to set up the problem of religious diversity, exploring that diversity in parts I and II, and then concluding at the end of her appendix that there would be a time "when the knowledge of the truth [Christianity] shall be universally extended; when all superstition shall be abolished; the Jews and Gentiles unitedly become the subjects of Christ's universal empire; and the *knowledge of the Lord fill the earth, as the waters cover the sea.*"[37] Neutral description gave way to theological explanation. The world was full of human strivings for God and those strivings would eventually culminate in a global moment of Christian unity. Though she saw a more diverse world than Mather, Adams still saw a world destined for Christian victory.

This vision shaped the changes Adams made in her section on religion in India. By the 1801 edition of her book, Adams had expanded the section on religion in India to twelve pages and added a large chunk of information from two major new sources, Thomas Maurice's *Indian Antiquities* (1793-1800) and the reports of the British Baptist missionaries stationed at Serampore. By replacing Holwell's theological account with Maurice's, keeping the section from Halhed's *Gentoo Code*, and adding accounts from the Baptist mission, Adams' third edition gave readers a presentation of a "Hindoo system" built from the most recent British sources. Adams argued for an original

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[36] Gary D. Schmidt, *A Passionate Usefulness: The Life and Literary Labors of Hannah Adams* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 116.

[37] Hannah Adams, *A View of Religions, in Two Parts*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Manning & Loring, 1801), 504.

monotheism buried deep in the history of India, described the Hindu search for salvation, and hoped for the spread of the Gospel message among Indians.

Drawing on Maurice, who himself relied heavily on the Orientalist Sir William Jones, Adams fashioned a much more cohesive description of Hindu beliefs that she dubbed "the Hindoo system" and centered around the earlier declension narrative. Adams began by accounting for the origins of the "Hindoo nation" through the Biblical narrative. The Hindus descended from either Noah or his son Shem and traveled from the site of the ark at Ararat to the western edge of India where they flourished and "practiced the purest rites of the patriarchal religion, without images and temples."[38] This pure "primitive theology" consisted of two primary ideas. "That God vouchsafed a revelation to man in a state of innocence, concerning the divine nature, will, and mode of worship; that the Deity is not a solitary occult, inaccessible being, but perpetually present with all his creatures and works."[39] The pure ancient monotheism quickly eroded, however, when "the descendants of Ham invaded and conquered India and corrupted their ancient religion."[40] However, there were remnants of the original monotheism in the Vedas. The Vedas shared a common ancestry with Christianity in the primeval monotheism of Noetic natural theology.

Adams never explicitly compared Christianity with Hindu beliefs beyond connecting the two through the Noetic history. However, the theological doctrines of the Hindu system that she emphasized carry with them implications of a comparison with

[38] Ibid., 406.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid., 406.

Christianity. Again drawing from Jones and Maurice, Adams described Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva as representing the creative, sustaining, and destroying powers of divinity, respectively, and that "this threefold divinity, armed with the terrors of almighty power, pursue, through the whole extent of creation, the rebellious Dentah, headed by Mahasoor, the great malignant spirit."[41] While she never used the term "trinity" the threefold divinity could likely have instigated comparisons with the Christian trinity in both her own mind and the mind of the reader. Similarly, she described the nine incarnations of Vishnu as a "the Deity descending in an human shape to accomplish certain awful and important events, as in the three first; to confound blaspheming vice, to subvert gigantic tyranny, and to avenge oppressed innocence, as in the five following; or finally, as in the ninth, to abolish a gloomy and sanguinary superstition."[42] Again, the incarnation of the deity to accomplish great things could have reminded Christian readers in New England of the incarnation of Jesus. Adams never made explicit note of these similarities between her description of the Hindu system and Christianity. Nonetheless, she selected material from Jones and Maurice that were most similar to Christian doctrines.

The sanyasin, or Hindu holy ascetic, made his debut in the 1801 edition and took a prominent place in Adams' description of Hindu religion, becoming the figure that best represented the Hindu struggle toward salvation. The sanyasin believed his spiritual discipline can "unbar the gates of eternity, and procure an immediate entrance into paradise."[43] Adams explained how the sanyasin vowed to conquer his body and his

[41] Ibid., 407.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid., 409.

passions, left his family and friends, and headed to the desert where "famine and misery are the companions of his solitude."[44] There he was "absorbed in profound meditations on the Deity" that unites him with the Deity and gives him special powers to "call down the stars from heaven," "bring up demons from the lowest bobun of Naraka," and "disembody the soul, which, for a while, leaves its earthly mansion in utter insensibility, and after taking a wide ethereal flight, returns to animate the breathless clay."[45] Eventually, the sanyasin's austerities led his soul to permanent liberation and he achieved disembodied paradise.

Adams connected the figure of the sanyasin,—a figure that seems at first glance the farthest from Adams own Protestant sensibilities—to the Christian God. In describing the final destination of the sanyasin's soul she copied from Maurice the description of the soul that "finally mingles with, and is absorbed in the essence of the supreme Brahme [sic], who, the veil of mythology laid aside, is no other than the *ineffable, infinite,* and *eternal God*."[46] Adams allowed the broad and liberal Christianity of William Jones and Thomas Maurice to bleed through into her text. Maurice's narrative, taken from Jones, of an ancient monotheism shared by Hindus and Christians that slowly degraded in India paralleled Adams' own narrative of the diversification of Christianity along sectarian lines after Christ. Putting these two narratives alongside one another, Vedic monotheism became a long lost cousin of true Christianity that carried the marks of natural religion

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., 409–410.

[46] Ibid., 412.

and the sanyasin became absorbed into a God that is bigger than the sectarian claims of either Hindus or Protestants.

Though Adams connected the Hindu system and Christianity throughout her description of religion in India, she does not equate them. To be sure, Adams believed Christianity to be the most excellent religion, as her 1804 book *The Truth and Excellence of the Christian Religion Exhibited* reflects. Though it had various schisms and sects, Christianity still held universal truth found in the common doctrines Adams outlined in the appendix. However, this did not mean that truth was exclusive to Christianity. For Adams, as for Maurice and Jones, elements of universal truth could be found buried in the ancient religion of the Hindus, in the text of the Vedas, and in the soteriological desires of the sanyasin insofar as they fit within natural theology. Furthermore, these truths of natural theology found in Hindu beliefs served as evidence for the universal truth of Christianity. The places where Hindu religions and Christianity aligned evidenced the rational and universal truths of monotheism and where the two religions departed testified to the uniqueness of the Christian revelation.

Though Hindu texts and beliefs contained some truths via natural theology, Adams still believed it was necessary for Indians to accept Christianity. She closed her section on Hindu religion by describing the work of the Baptist missionaries at Serampore, led by the indefatigable William Carey. Drawing on a series of reports from 1795-1800, Adams noted the missionaries had assembled a congregation of 200 to 600 people, they had learned Bengali and Hindustani, the New Testament had been translated into Bengali, a press had been set up for printing scriptures and tracts, and soon the entire Bible would be translated and printed. Adams began her description of Hindu religion

with the Vedas and she ended it with the translation of the Bible. The ancient truth of Hindu monotheism had degraded and been buried in the Vedas but could be restored through the work of Christian missionaries and the divine revelation of the Bible in an Indian tongue. With the arrival of the missionaries, the declension narrative of Adams' accounts of religion in India could be reversed. No longer left with only the natural theology of the Vedas, the missionaries would bring India the unique revelation of the Bible necessary for true religion. The missionaries brought Christianity and with it, the promise of Christian progress.

In 1815, Thomas Williams of London, who had published the first British edition of Adams' *A View of All Religions,* decided it was time for a second edition. Williams took the 1801 edition of Adams' text and repurposed it. While he added and subtracted some of the content, the most important change Williams made involved rearranging the contents into an alphabetical dictionary. Williams removed the division between Christian and non-Christian sects that had organized the previous editions and arranged everything into briefer alphabetically organized entries. Williams titled the new edition *A Dictionary of All Religions and Religious Denominations*. While Adams did not like much of the substantive changes Williams made to the tone and content of the second edition, she did approve of the new organization. In 1817, she published her own edition titled *A Dictionary of All Religions and Religious Denominations: Jewish, Heathen, Mahometan, Christian, Ancient and Modern* which took Williams' edition, kept some of his additional content, edited it some, and, most importantly, kept the dictionary style of organization.[47] The new edition, as Thomas A. Tweed noted in his updated introduction,

[47] Schmidt, *A Passionate Usefulness,* 290ff.

"avoided a bivalent classification that undercut all subsequent distinctions and overvalued one tradition."[48] The resultant text "added to the reader's sense of vastness and variability of the [religious] terrain."[49] The fourth edition contained only a small amount of new material about Hindu religion but the new dictionary style opened up a view of Hindu religion as part of a religious world of many diverse sects across time and space grasping for truth.

The content of *Dictionary,* like the previous edition, relied on British sources for its content but, because it blended Adams' and Williams' research, the text spoke in conflicting voices. The article under "Hindoos" was similar to the section on religion in India in the third edition but with a few extra details about the spread of missions work. It maintained a tolerant and Orientalist tone and content. There was, however, a new entry for "Yogeys" taken from Williams' edition that drew on evangelical missionary apologists Claudius Buchanan and William Ward and focused on the physical disciplines of the yogi such as "casting themselves down on spikes" or hook-swinging.[50] In this way, the fourth edition spoke with two voices about Indian religion. A rupture existed within the text between the sympathetic Orientalism of Maurice and Jones that focused on texts and beliefs in the "Hindoos" article and the zealous missionary evangelicalism of Buchanan and Ward that only saw violent pagan blood rituals in the "Yogeys". This rupture in the text and this difference between the British sources prefigured a larger rupture in American discourse on Hindu religions between liberal and evangelical

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[48] Hannah Adams, *A Dictionary of All Religions and Religious Denominations: Jewish, Heathen, Mahometan, Christian, Ancient and Modern*, ed. Thomas A. Tweed, 4th ed. (Atlanta Ga.: Scholars Press, 1992), xv.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid., 322.

Protestants that would widen in the 1820s and 1830s. Liberals would focus on the wisdom and truth in ancient Hindu texts and practices such as yoga and meditation while evangelicals would rail against the idolatry, violence, and the barbarism of the benighted Hindu heathens. From Adams' *Dictionary* forward Americans articulated multivocal and conflicting representations of Hindu religions.

By the time she published the fourth edition of her work Hannah Adams had secured herself a place as an influential writer among the New England intelligentsia and opened up the field of comparative religion in America. As the reviewer of *Dictionary* wrote in the *North American Review*, Adams was "in such full possession of publick regard, from the benefit conferred by her writings, and the merits of her several productions are so generally known, that we do not deem it necessary to enter into an elaborate investigation of the manner in which she has executed this new edition of a very useful book."[51] Adams' books were useful resources for the New England reading public to investigate the variety of religious beliefs throughout history and across geography. In the history of Hindu religions in American culture, Adams quilted various British sources together to construct a representation of Hindus as having a religious system with sacred texts, doctrines, and sects analogous to Christianity. Adams' comparative approach, reaching its pinnacle in the organization of her fourth edition, allowed her to see Hindus (as well as other "heathens") where Cotton Mather could not. By viewing religion taxonomically she opened up the possibility that there could be more to heathenism than mere false idolatry. Yet Adams never used the term Hinduism or even Hindooism. At times she wrote of a "Hindoo system" or "religion of the Hindoos" but "Hindoo" was either a noun,

[51] "A Dictionary of All Religions and Religious Denominations," *The North American Review and Miscellaneous Journal* 7, no. 19 (May 1818): 86.

as in "a Hindoo," or an adjective for something else—"Hindoo law" and "Hindoo religion." Her description of Hindu religions imagined a religious system that stretched across the Indian continent, but it was not yet a religion in its own right. It was still another example of heathenism. So, while her four editions opened up the boundaries of "religion," Hindus only began to appear within the marginal and diverse category of heathens.

It is important to note that Adams' project was always first and foremost a Protestant one. As James Turner has argued, "to class Adams as a 'prophet and pioneer' of the academic discipline of religious studies…is seriously to overestimate her competence and underestimate the extent to which the internal quarrels of Christianity motivated her."[52] But Turner's assessment misses that the Christianity of her project is part of her "prophet and pioneer" status. The study of comparative religion in America following Adams would be a Protestant project. It would be characterized by many of the same Protestant categories of belief, text, and sect that she used. Furthermore, in the nineteenth century the Americans who engaged with non-European religions, especially Hindu religions, often came from Protestant or post-Protestant religious backgrounds and encountered Hindu religions with religious, and often Protestant, motivations. Comparing religions was often the Protestant thing to do.

Joseph Priestley's Defense of Moses

[52] James Turner, *Religion Enters the Academy: The Origins of the Scholarly Study of Religion in America* (Athens Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 31.

While Hannah Adams was in the midst of her various editions in Boston, out in Pennsylvania an English immigrant worked on his own Protestant comparative religion project. Joseph Priestley published *A Comparison of the Institutes of Moses with that of the Hindoos and Other Ancient Nations* in 1799. Adams concerned herself with accounting for the diversity of human religions. Priestly, however, concerned himself with questions of origin and truth. Adams was interested in breadth, Priestly in depth. The question of "whence the law of Moses?" drove the arguments of Priestley's book and his representation of Hindus. He argued against the claim by French Orientalist Louis-Mathieu Langlès that the Pentateuch derived from the older text of the Hindu Vedas. So, while *Comparison* was the first in-depth study of Hindu religions published in America, it was also a work in Christian apologetics and a defense of the unique revelation found in the Old Testament. Furthermore, it was a work within the tradition of evidential Christianity current at the time and was part of larger Protestant theological conflicts over the nature and relationship of revelation and human reason. Like Adams, Priestley found a narrative of declension in Indian religious history, depended upon British sources, and focused on Brahmanical and Vedic texts for his representation of "the religion of Hindoos," but, unlike Adams, he also spent a good deal of time describing Hindu religions as superstitious, violent, and lascivious. In the end, Priestley deployed Hindu religions in *Comparison* to prove the superiority of the biblical revelation over the vagaries of heathen imagination. For Priestly, the violence and superstition of the heathen Hindus evidenced the limits of natural theology and the necessity of the unique revelation of the Christian scriptures. As one historian wrote, "he wrote not to praise but to diminish the Oriental religions, and he sought to reassert the claim of Christianity as the one true

faith."[53] At first blush Priestly appears to be "a rather narrow-minded bigot."[54] He was that, but he was also a theological controversialist and the first intellectual in America to think Hindu religions merited a thorough understanding.

Priestley's description of Hindu religions followed a declension narrative that begins with an ancient monotheism and ends with contemporary superstition. The text consisted of twenty-four sections that can be grouped together around four themes that follow the declension narrative. The first sections concerned themselves with the antiquity of Hindu religions and Hindu texts, the second group focused on cosmology and theology, the third with the role of religion in social organization, and the fourth dealt with religious customs and practices. In this way the topics Priestly covered moved from monotheism in ancient times to "licentious superstition" in contemporary reports. Priestley pinpointed the beginning of Hindu culture in the wake of the biblical flood. He wrote, "the oldest accounts of the Hindoo nation do not in reality go any farther back than to the deluge mentioned in the books of Moses, and that their religious institutions were consequently posterior to that event."[55] In these early times the Hindus were able to hold onto the belief of a singular supreme being but that belief quickly faded. "That there is one God, the original author of all things, was retained in the East, and especially by the Hindoos; but they thought there were many inferior deities presiding over different parts of the system."[56] For Priestly, the various deities found in Hindu scriptures doomed the

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[53] Jackson, *The Oriental Religions and American Thought*, 29.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Joseph Priestley, *A Comparison of the Institutions of Moses with Those of the Hindoos and Other Ancient Nations* (Northumberland, Pa.: A. Kennedy, 1799), 8.

[56] Ibid., 87.

Hindu system. "If this be not a system of polytheism, leading to every evil arising from polytheism elsewhere, I do not know how to define the word."[57] These "evils" included the caste system, oppression of women, sati, superstition, and "licentious rites." Lacking revelation, the Hindus fell into a religious system of imagination that led into the darkness of superstitious heathenism.

Like Hannah Adams, Priestley built his representation of Hindu religions from European sources. Priestley believed that the Vedas were the most important text for understanding the religious law and beliefs of the Hindus. Since the Vedas had yet to be translated, however, Priestley believed he could rely on the words of the brahmans and the few sources that had been translated, such as Halhead's *Code of Gentoo Laws* and Sir William Jones's *Institutes of Hindu Law: Or, the Ordinances of Menu* (1794). He showed no awareness of Charles Wilkins' 1785 translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* which would be so important to Americans after the turn of the century. Priestley supported these translated sources with other British sources such as Holwell's *Interesting Historical Events* and Alexander Dow's *History of Hindostan* (1768). Much like Adams, Priestley patched together these various British sources into an American publication that carried a Vedic and brahmanical bias. Through the Orientalist texts at his disposal, Priestley represented the Hindu system as Vedic texts and brahman practice.

While Priestly emphasized the role of the Vedas and Manu in his representation of Hindu religions, he also spent a large amount of space, roughly five chapters of the text, examining various Hindu practices and devotions. Aside from a handful of references to Jones's *Institutes of Hindu Law*, the vast majority of his examples came

[57] Ibid., 84.

from the writings of British officials and European travelers. For Priestley, the theological errors of polytheism and idolatry led directly to superstition and dark practices. Similar to the rupture between the "Hindoo" and "Yogeye" article in Adams' text, there was a tension in Priestly's text between two Hindu systems in Priestley's sources. On one hand, his Orientalist sources presented the Hindu texts of the Vedas and Manu, and on the other, missionaries and travel sources described "superstitious" practices.

Priestley bridged the Orientalist and traveler representations of Hindu religions by arguing that the theology of the Hindus was not sublime, as the Orientalist might think, but was in fact flawed and these flaws manifested in contemporary practices decried by travelers and missionaries. For example, Priestley derided Hindu prayer as "no proper address to the Supreme Being, expressive of the sentiments of humility, veneration, and sublimation, but the mere repetition of certain words, the pronunciation of which can only be supposed to operate like a charm."[58] Priestley also described Hindu veneration of the cow, water, and fire as superstition. He linked veneration of fire and water to other ancient religions' similar veneration and credited it to the great power of the elements; however, he was flummoxed by the sacrality of the cow. "There are many other useful animals, at least nearly, as useful, the sheep for instance, for which the Hindoos profess no particular regard…the origin of this superstition is so remote, that we have no means of tracing it."[59] Along with superstitious beliefs, Priestley devoted an entire chapter to "the licentious rites of the Hindoo" wherein he noted that "the serious consequences of

[58] Ibid., 157.

[59] Ibid., 208.

adopting erroneous principles, even such are commonly called metaphysical ones" and pointed to temple prostitutes as the greatest example of wrong belief leading to wrong practice.[60] Though he could not always explain how, Priestley was convinced the inferior theology found in the Vedas led to the benighted superstition of Hindu practice. The relationship between superstition and inferior theology proved the necessity of biblical revelation for morality and truth.

For Priestly, the difference between Hindu religion and biblical religion hinged on the superiority of revelation over imagination. God revealed the biblical text to Moses, but the Vedas and Manu originated in the human imagination. Priestly denied natural theology's ability to aid in the human discovery of truth. Left to their own devices humans used their imagination, not their reason, to invent religious systems. The Vedas may happen upon truth here or there, but they were cut from a wholly different cloth than the Hebrew texts. In his conclusion he wrote:

> The absurdity of the Hindoo system is as apparent as the superior wisdom of Moses…And yet while the Hebrews made no discoveries in science, they had a religion perfectly rational, and that of the Hindoos was absurd in the extreme. This surely, is an argument of internal kind in favour of the divine origin of the Hebrew religion.[61]

Or as he summed it up a bit later, true religion "must necessarily have derived from revelation."[62] In *Comparison,* Priestley wrapped Cotton Mather's distinction between true and false religion in the Orientalist resources of Hannah Adams. Priestly engaged in a theological debate, defending Moses against unbelieving European intellectuals and

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[60] Ibid., 223.

[61] Ibid., 279.

[62] Ibid., 284.

liberal Orientalists. Where Adams invested in bringing the heathen into the Christian story of progress, Priestley kept them out from the very beginning. Natural theology was not enough and imagination could not compare with revelation.

Priestley's text had little of the publishing success that Adams' four editions enjoyed, perhaps because he published in the backwoods of Pennsylvania and not among the intellectuals of Boston. At least one influential American took interest in his comparative investigation of Hindu religions, however. John Adams had a rocky up and down relationship with Priestley in the 1790s, one that almost got the Englishman deported, but by the early nineteenth century Adams had taken an interest in Asian religions that led him back to Priestley's works. [63] In a December 1813 letter to Thomas Jefferson, Adams offered a critical reading of Priestley's later work *The Doctrines of Heathen Philosophers Compared with that of Revelation* (1804). A few months later he told Jefferson, "I have been looking into Oriental History and Hindoo religion" and had gathered together whatever sources he could find including Priestley's *Comparison*.[64] Adams complained to Jefferson that Priestley's text did not fulfill his curiosity about Hindu religions. He was frustrated that "the original Shasta, and the original Vedams are not obtained, or if obtained not yet translated into any European Language."[65] He also thought Priestley tipped the scales in favor of the Hebrew text by not finding texts "more

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[63] For more on Priestley's relationship with Adams and Thomas Jefferson see Jenny Graham, "Joseph Priestley in America," in *Joseph Priestley, Scientist, Philosopher, and Theologian*, ed. Isabel Rivers and David L. Wykes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 203–230.

[64] John Adams, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters; the Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams*, ed. Lester Jesse Cappon, vol. 2 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 427.

[65] Ibid., 2:428.

honourable to the original Hindo [sic] Religion than anything he has quoted."[66] Looking at the marginalia of Adams' copy of Priestley's *Comparison* reveals his shock at the "Ridiculous Observances" of the Hindus as well as his interest in comparing Hindu religions with Catholic Christianity. Adams' notes are heaviest in the early sections where Priestley discusses Hindu texts and theology and then later in the section on Hindu devotions. Adams' interest, then, follows that of European Orientalists who took interest in texts, philosophies, and theologies, and then expressed horror at ritual practices and customs that seemed eerily popish. [67]

By 1817 Adams had gotten hold of the works of William Jones from Europe. Adams wondered to Jefferson in May of that year, "is it necessary to Salvation to investigate all these Cosmogonies and Mytholigies? Is Bryant, Gebelin, Dupuis, or Sir William Jones, right?"[68] By July Adams was convinced of the importance of the search for comparative religious knowledge.

> Let me go back to twenty. Give me a million of Revenue, a Library of a Million of Volumes, and as many more as I should want. I would devote my Life to such an Oeuvre as Condorcet tells us, that Turgot had in contemplation, all his Lifetime. I would digest Bryant, Gebelin, Dupuis, Sir William Jones and above all the Acta Sanctorum of the Bolandists.[69]

Insofar as his search for religious and philosophical knowledge drew him toward William Jones and an attempt at a fair inquiry into Hindu religions for their own sake, John Adams was America's first Orientalist. Unlike Priestly or Hannah Adams, John Adams

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[66] Ibid.

[67] Adams copy of *Comparison* is available in a digital format through the John Adams Library and the Internet Archive at http://www.archive.org/details/comparisonofinst00prie (Accessed November 5, 2011).

[68] Adams, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters; the Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams*, 2:515.

[69] Ibid., 2:518–519.

compared religions to find truth outside of Protestant Christianity. Writing to Jefferson from Quincy, Massachusetts, a retired president in his eighties, he had no interest in a Protestant apologetic project. John Adams began the line of Americans who delved into Hindu religions in search of something more, bigger, older, wiser, or different than American Protestantism.

Hindus and Protestant Comparative Religion in America

David Chidester outlined three chronological epistemes in the history of comparative religion in his study of colonial South Africa: frontier, imperial, and apartheid. His work focused mainly on frontier comparative religion, the practices and discourses of comparative religion at the level of local colonial systems and government. As he put it, "frontier comparative religions was a human science that advanced regional domination…[it] produced a knowledge that was always embedded in local colonial situations." The localness of frontier comparison contrasted with the globalism of imperial comparison which "arranged disparate evidence from all over the world into a single, uniform temporal sequence, from primitive to civilized, that claimed to represent the universal history of humanity." Chidester cited the rise of imperial comparative religion as beginning in European metropolises during the 1850s. While very useful for understanding the role of European colonialisms in the birth of the comparative study of religion, the work of Hannah Adams and Joseph Priestly does not fit well within Chidester's history. Writing as Protestant apologists for a Protestant audience with the aim of defending their own brands of Protestantism, Adams and Priestly used knowledge

produced by frontier comparativists in India, such as Jones and Holwell, to produce a uniquely Protestant comparative religion. This episteme, to follow Chidester, compared religions according to the categories of natural theology and Protestantism in order to find evidences that proved the superiority of Christian revelation. While colonial officials engaged in comparative religion that furthered colonial expansion, Americans like Adams and Priestly compared religions as part of theological debate.

Hindu religion or "the religion of the Hindoos", as the distinct religious system of India, emerged in American culture through Protestant comparative religion. With the work of Hannah Adams, Hindu religion took a place in the encyclopedic view of world religions. It had a place in the taxonomy of religions within the category of heathenism as the religion of India. Priestly, prompted by the work of European Orientalists and skeptics, took Hindu religion out of its taxonomic context and compared it alongside Christianity. Natural theology and Protestant sensibilities organized the practice of Protestant comparative religion and produced a representation of Hindu religion as a religion with ancient roots in the truth of a monotheistic God, ancient texts carrying the marks of natural theology, and a story of declension from ancient monotheism into contemporary irrational idolatry and superstition. But Hindu religion was not yet Hinduism. The system of Hindu religion outlined by Adams and Priestly was a regional variant of the larger religious phenomenon of heathenism. Nonetheless, Adams and Priestly imagined that India had a religious system with texts, beliefs, and rituals and they imagined this religious system through their own taxonomy of comparative religion.

Despite its difference from frontier comparative religion, Protestant comparative religion depended upon British colonial sources and forms of knowledge. William Jones,

Thomas Maurice, Nathaniel Halhead, and Jonathan Z. Holwell provided the materials from which Hannah Adams and Joseph Priestly could build their representations. As such, the representations published in America included some of the same tropes as those in England. The tropes of a declension narrative of a golden monotheism in India that degenerated into polytheistic idolatry, the gap between contemporary Hindu rituals and ancient Vedic texts, and the belief that there was a systematic "religion of the Hindoos" that could be found through the study of a set of authorized texts controlled by a priestly class of brahmans originated in the British representations of Hindus. Hanna Adams and Joseph Priestly imported these British tropes into their American publications. Eventually, Americans would build their own representations of Hindu religions from American sources that challenged British interpretations, but that time was still a ways off.[70]

Additionally, transnational networks made these colonial sources accessible and Protestant comparative religion possible in America. From Cotton Mather to John Adams, Americans in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century depended upon transatlantic networks for their knowledge of India and its religions. As Hannah Adams' popular second British edition shows, this movement went both ways so that this early period of American thought about Hindu religions is most appropriately labeled "Anglo-American." Hannah Adams' sources came from Britain and her own text found its final dictionary form through a British publisher. Priestly, an English immigrant, wrote the first book length study of Hindu religions in America. Even John Adams waited for

[70] For more on these European tropes in representations of Hinduism see Marshall, *The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century*; Geoffrey A Oddie, *Imagined Hinduism: British Protestant Missionary Constructions of Hinduism, 1793-1900* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006).

European shipments to bring him the works of European Orientalists. As the century wore on these transatlantic connections would strengthen. A transatlantic evangelical missionary movement would unite Britons and Americans in a project of saving Hindu souls and religious liberals on both sides of the Atlantic would take shared interest in figures like Rammohun Roy and movements such as Theosophy. Beginning with Protestant comparative religion, American representations of Hindu religions would emerge through transnational relationships and exchanges.

Finally, Americans would imagine and reimagine Hindu religions to suit their own needs, be it Priestly's defense of Protestant revelation, Hannah Adams' progressive view of humanity, or John Adams' search for truth. Though both Hannah Adams and Joseph Priestly engaged in Protestant comparative religion, their representations of Hindu religions diverged at certain points. Hannah Adams sought to make sense of religious diversity throughout the world and found a place for Hindus in the narrative of human progress toward Protestant truth. Joseph Priestly, however, defended Christian revelation against unbelieving intellectuals and Orientalists, who sought to prove the Bible derived from ancient Indian texts, by denying that any truth could be found in Hindu religious thought. This difference between Priestly, the inland, middle-class, defender of revelation, and Adams, the elite, Federalist, merchant-minded, progressive, encyclopedia writer, would continue throughout nineteenth century American representations of Hindu religions. Evangelicals and liberals would consistently present opposed images of Hindu religions during the nineteenth century, with each side imaging Hindu religions to suit their own social, cultural, and religious needs.

Chapter 2

Licentious Idolatry or Unitarian Religion?

Jedidiah Morse pulled Hannah Adams into New England's conflicts over Unitarian clergy. In his aptly titled 1814 publication, *An Appeal to the Public on the Controversy Respecting the Revolution in Harvard College, and the Events Which Have Followed It; Occasioned By the Use Which Has Been Made of Certain Complaints and Accusations of Miss Hannah Adams, Against the Author*, Morse connected two debates that had been going on for the past decade: his fight with Hannah Adams over a school book in New England history and the rise of Unitarian theology at Harvard and beyond. In his mind, a liberal conspiracy was afoot, attacking him personally from all sides. He saw his theological opponents using the argument with Adams and her liberal friends over a New England history book as an excuse to impugn his character and attack his orthodox theology.

It all began in 1804 when Morse and Elijah Parish published their *Compendious History of New England.* The book was aimed "to reduce [New England history] to a form order, and size, adapted to the use of the higher classes in schools and to families."[1] The Morse and Parish publication troubled Adams because she had published the larger *A Summary History of New-England* in 1799 and aimed to publish an abridgment for the same family and school market. She saw the publication of *Compendious History* as an infringement on her publication plans and a detriment to her income. In 1805 she published *Abridgement of the History of New England for the Use of Young Persons*,

[1] Jedidiah Morse and Elijah Parish, *Compendious History of New England Designed for Schools and Private Families* (Charleston, Mass.: Samuel Ethridge, 1804), iv.

putting her work in direct competition with Morse. Morse claimed that both authors were acting as competitors in the free market while Adams argued that it was immoral for Morse to impinge upon the income of a poor widow trying to make ends meet. Liberal clergy, opponents of Morse's strict Calvinism, came to Adams' aid.

The same year Adams published her history book, the selection of Henry Ware as the Hollis Chair of Divinity at Harvard ignited another dispute with Morse at its center. Ware was a Unitarian and Morse, a strict Calvinist orthodox and an Overseer on the college board, loudly disapproved of the appointment. He saw it as part of a larger liberal conspiracy to take control of the Massachusetts clergy. Morse published his opposition to the appointment in March 1805 as a pamphlet titled *The True Reasons On Which the Election of a Hollis Professor of Divinity in Harvard College, Was Opposed at the Board of Overseers.* He then went on to found the *Panoplist*, an evangelical magazine critical of the spreading liberalism, in June 1805. Morse also brokered a deal between Old Calvinists and New Divinity clergy to establish Andover Seminary in 1808 as a stronghold of evangelical theology and an alternative to liberal Harvard. For Morse, the battle between liberalism and orthodoxy in New England had begun. [2]

The two disputes merged when Hannah Adams' liberal friends in the clergy came to her aid and impugned Morse's character for stealing from a widow. Morse fought off the liberals on both fronts through private letters and communications before finally bringing everything out in the open in 1814 with *An Appeal*, where he argued that the liberals advocating for Adams did so because of the dispute over Ware's appointment. In

[2] For Adams' side of the controversy see Schmidt, *A Passionate Usefulness*, 154–222; For Morse and his conflicts over Adams and Harvard see Richard J. Moss, *The Life of Jedidiah Morse: A Station of Peculiar Exposure* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 54–80; Joseph W Phillips, *Jedidiah Morse and New England Congregationalism* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 129–160.

his view, it was all part of the encroachment of liberalism in the churches. "The *use* which has been made of the groundless complaints and accusations of Miss Hannah Adams, by my adversaries in this controversy, has undoubtedly led to this publication; and the *Revolution* in the religious character of Harvard College, is the prominent event, which has imparted so much importance to these complaints as to justify it."[3] Morse went on to accuse the liberals of an "ingenious policy of assailing the principles of the orthodox, by attempting to fix a stigma on their moral character."[4] With Morse's publication the conflict over Protestantism in New England reached a fever pitch and Morse and other evangelicals called for separation between the Trinitarian orthodox and the Unitarians.

Jedidah Morse's crusade against liberalism produced many of the institutions that would bring representations of Hindu religions into American print culture during the first third of the nineteenth century: Morse worked to found Andover Seminary, where the first wave of American missionaries to South Asia would be trained; he was a founding member of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) who sent those missionaries; and he founded *The Panoplist*, which eventually became the official publication of the ABCFM and a regular printer of missionary reports from India. Beyond Morse's work, the debate between Unitarians and Trinitarians would set the stage for Americas encounter with Rammohun Roy, a Hindu reformer in Bengal whose writings became part of the Unitarian argument against the trinity. While Protestants argued theology, trade between New England and Indian ports became an

[3] Jedidiah Morse, *An Appeal to the Public, on the Controversy Respecting the Revolution in Harvard College, and the Events Which Have Followed It* (Charlestown, Mass., 1814), v.

[4] Ibid.

important piece of the young American economy and mariners brought home "curiosities" reflecting the "exotic" religion of the Orient. Through evangelical expansion, theological controversy, and East India trade Yankees encountered Hindu religions.

India in Evangelical Missionary Print: "Obscenity and Blood"

An angel named Serenus visited Eugenia, the narrator in the story "Fragment of a Vision," and whisked her away to "present a fairer prospect of the unbounded love of Christ." The angel carried her along sunbeams through "regions of ether" until they landed on the "fertile plains of India."

> I looked and with amazement beheld innumerable crowds of the swarthy inhabitants of Hindoostan celebrating an idolatrous festival. The barbarous rites, the horrible clangour [sic] and confusion, with the dread of superstition of the poor, blinded votaries, displayed to my imagination a scene that rent my heart and filled my breast with sorrow and tumult.[5]

Eugenia pitied the Indians in her heart while her ears "were pained with the loud and noisy babblings of the multitude." The angelic travel guide directed Eugenia's attention to the banks of the Ganges River where she saw devotees bathing themselves in the waters and heard "the feeble cries of the helpless infants, who in vain struggled against the swellings of the flood." The scenes deeply disturbed Eugenia. She said a silent prayer for God to save the people of India.

Sensing Eugenia's distress at these sights and sounds, Serenus took her to the home of a dying Indian man. At first it appeared to be another scene of calamity, but,

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[5] "Fragment of a Vision," *The Massachusetts Missionary Magazine* 5, no. 6 (November 1807): 225.

though he was dying, the man's soul "as if unwilling to quit the body, still lingered to breath the last testimony of Jesus' love." The Indian man was a Christian and exclaimed with his dying breath,

> "Tell them, I bowed to idols; but did I put my trust in idols now, I should sink lower than the grave. Tell them, I performed the rites of the Ganges; but there is no water that cleanseth from the sin, besides the water of the river that 'proceedeth out of the throne of God and of the Lamb!'"[6]

And then he died. When the man died the vision of India fled, leaving Eugenia with "the grateful recollection" of a soul won for Christ.[7]

Published in the *Massachusetts Missionary Magazine*, "Fragment of a Vision" contained many images and themes through which American evangelicals would represent Hindu religions in the first third of the nineteenth century.[8] Just as the angel Serenus whisked Eugenia to a foreign land, the missionary print culture of the early nineteenth century brought evangelical readers to the mission field. In the pages of missionary print, evangelicals encountered Hindu religions as bloody, obscene and idolatrous and the "Hindoos" as in need of the rational and divine light of the Gospel to save them from their deluded heathenism.

The Massachusetts Missionary Magazine was one of many evangelical periodicals that sprang up in New England during the first decades of the nineteenth

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] I use the term "evangelical" to indicate Trinitarian Protestants with an actively outward focus. Such Protestants were attracted to revivalism and missionary societies. Also, many missionary societies used the word "evangelical" in the titles of their periodicals. I use the term not as a substantive definition but in order to distinguish one sort of New England Protestant from others. In this sense, some New England Protestants thought of themselves as "evangelical" in order to distance themselves from other Protestants. This difference is most pronounced in the subtitle of Robert Baird's 1844 book, *Religion in America: or an account of the origin, relation to the state, and present condition of the evangelical churches in the United States : with notices of the unevangelical denominations*.

century. Revivals in upstate New York and the Cumberland river valley consisted of camp meetings full of Methodists and Baptists. But in New England evangelicals channeled their fervor into various religious societies, including missionary societies. With each new missionary society came a new missionary journal with news of the heathen overseas. These journals brought New England evangelicals a global vision for Christian revival. As historian Oliver Wendell Elsbree described it, "With the rise of the missionary journal proper, as the official organ of the local missionary society, the public was educated on the subject of foreign missionary enterprises with ever increasing effectiveness. It was the period of world politics, and serious people were thinking in terms of humanity as never before."[9] So while evangelicals in New England like Morse fended off the unorthodox, they also began to establish the institutional structures for a global missionary movement and brought missionary reports from around the world into the hands of Yankees. Evangelical representations of Hindu religions appeared in missionary journals within the dual context of revivalist missionary zeal and theological controversy.

The earliest images of Hindu religions popular in the New England evangelical press came from the works of East India Company chaplain and missionary advocate Claudius Buchanan.[10] Buchanan presented Hindu religions as a bloody, violent, superstitious, and backwards religious system that needed to be overcome by the bright light of the Gospel. Buchanan presented this image of Hindu religions to American

[9] Oliver Wendell Elsbree, *The Rise of the Missionary Spirit in America, 1790-1815* (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1980), 104.

[10] For Buchanan's role in British evangelical and missionary culture see Allan K Davidson, *Evangelicals & Attitudes to India, 1786-1813: Missionary Publicity and Claudius Buchanan*, Evangelicals & Society from 1750 no. 4 (S.l.: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1990); Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?*, 85–93; Oddie, *Imagined Hinduism*, 75–83.

through a piece of Hindu religious culture that would dominate their imaginations for the rest of the century: the Juggernaut.

"Juggernaut" was the Anglicization of the god Jagannath, seated at a temple in Puri, Orissa, on the east coast of India[11]. The image of Juggernaut in America began with a letter from Buchanan written at Tanjore and originally published in the British *Christian Observer* but then reprinted throughout New England evangelical publications.[12] In the letter, Buchanan offered his observations from ten days spent at the Jagganath temple. He described the worship of "hundreds of thousands" of pilgrims and the great festival of the "Rutt Iatra" [Ratha Yatra] when the god is pulled outside the temple on a giant cart. More importantly, he described "human victims" who showed their devotion to the god "by falling under the wheels of the moving tower in which the Idol is placed."[13] In his description of Juggernaut, Buchanan provided a specific example of what he and other missionaries described as the "sanguinary superstitions" of Hindu religions.

Buchanan also described Juggernaut in biblical terms for his evangelical audience. Juggernaut was "the chief seat of Moloch in the whole earth," referencing the

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[11] I refer to "Juggernaut" throughout this discussion to highlight the difference between the representation of Juggernaut that moved throughout evangelical print culture and the Jagannath of the Puri temple. One is the construction of British and American evangelical cultures and reflects their concerns, imaginations, and desires. The other is an Indian religious culture with a long history before and after the British East India Company. For more on Jagannath see Nancy Gardner Cassels, *Religion and Pilgrim Tax Under the Company Raj*, South Asian Studies / Heidelberg University, New Delhi Branch, South Asia Institute no. 17 (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1988); Hermann Kulke and Burkhard Schnepel, eds., *Jagannath Revisited: Studying Society, Religion, and the State in Orissa* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001).

[12] Claudius Buchanan, "India," *Panoplist* 3, no. 3 (August 1807): 136–139; Claudius Buchanan, "An Important Letter from the Rev. Claudius Buchanan.," *Connecticut Evangelical Magazine and Religious Intelligencery* 2, no. 10 (October 1809): 388–393; Claudius Buchanan, "An Important Letter from the Rev. Claudius Buchanan," *The Adviser; or, Vermont Evangelical Magazine* 1, no. 11 (November 1809): 286–287.

[13] Buchanan, "India," 136.

god whose worship was forbidden in Leviticus 18:21. Buchanan saw "the place of the skulls, called Golgatha," a reference to the place of Jesus's crucifixion in the New Testament, "where the dogs and vultures are ever expecting" the corpses of the devotees.[14] The multitude worshiping Moloch/Juggernaut was "like that in the Revelations" but rather than Hosannas to Christ and his second coming they yell in "applause at the view of the horrid shape and at the actions of the high-priest of infamy, who is mounted with it on the throne."[15] The whole scene was "the valley of Hinnon," where children were sacrificed to the false gods in the Old Testament.[16] This biblical description worked by inverting traditional Protestant tropes. Rather than the Golgatha where Jesus' death atoned for sin, Juggernaut was a place of meaningless bloodshed. The worship was not the beautiful eschaton of the second coming, but "horrid." It was the valley of idolatrous blood shed to false gods, not the temple of worship to the one true God. Buchanan drove this point home by noting the difference between the scene of Juggernaut and the Indian Christians he met at Tanjore. At Tanjore "the feeble-minded Hindoo exhibits Christian virtues, in a vigour which greatly surprises me! Here Christ is glorified."[17] Through his description, Buchanan constructed an image of Juggernaut as the diametric opposite of Christianity, full of meaningless worship, unredeeeming death, blood that failed to atone, and horror instead of beauty.

Buchanan's bloody Juggernaut found its fullest rendering in his most famous work in America, *Christian Researches in Asia* (1811). In *Christian Researches,*

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

Buchanan built on the description of Juggernaut found in his earlier letter. Once again he emphasized the blood of the rituals at Puri. Recounting the Rath Yatra, Buchanan described a man who offered himself up as a sacrifice to the god by throwing his body under the cart. "He laid himself down in the road before the tower as it was moving along, lying on his face, with his arms stretched forwards…and he was crushed to death by the wheels of the tower." [18] Buchanan declared that the god "is said to *smile* when the libation of the blood is made."[19] When he saw the image of the god for himself, Buchanan described "a frightful visage painted black, with his distended mouth of a bloody color."[20] For Buchanan, the bloody smile of Juggernaut epitomized Hindu religion and its sanguinary rites.

While he had described the blood of Juggernaut in his earlier letter, in *Christian Researches* Buchanan added a new quality of licentiousness to it. He started with the outside of the temple. "As other temples are usually adorned with figures emblematical of their religion; representations (numerous and various) of that vice, which constitutes the essence of *his* worship. The walls and gates are covered with indecent emblems, in massive and durable sculpture."[21] During the Rath Yatra a priest pronounced "obscene stanzas" and "a boy of about twelve years was then brought forth to attempt something yet more lascivious…the 'child perfected the praise' of his idol with such ardent

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[18] Claudius Buchanan, *The Works of the Reverend Claudius Buchanan, LL.D. Comprising His Eras of Light, Light of the World, and Star in the East; to Which Is Added Christian Researches in Asia. With Notices of the Translation of the Scriptures into the Oriental Languages*, 6th American edition (Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1812), 106.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., 105.

[21] Ibid., 101.

expression and gesture, that the god was pleased…and the multitude emitting a sensual yell of delight, urged the car along." Next, "an aged minister of the idol then stood up, and with a long rod in his hand, which he moved with indecent action, completed the variety of this disgusting exhibition." Buchanan admitted that he "felt a consciousness of doing wrong in witnessing it."[22] Buchanan struggled to fully describe the horror he finds in the Juggernaut. On the one hand he struggled with the language of the devotees, which he does not know, and must rely on interpreting gesticulations. On the other hand, his English prose struggled to express the scene and maintain propriety. The sexuality Buchanan wanted to describe is always just a little outside of his words. The Juggernaut's obscenity and sexuality exceeded proper language for an evangelical readership.

Along with the blood and obscenity of Juggernaut, Buchanan paid special attention to the noise of Juggernaut's worshippers. In the quote above he described "obscene songs" and "a sensual yell of delight." In *Christian Researches* he described "a kind of *hissing* applause" from the women "who emitted a sound like that of *whistling*, with their lips circular, and the tongue vibrating: as if a serpent would speak by their organs, uttering human sounds" that he compares with the hissing of Satan's assembly in Milton's *Paradise Lost*.[23] Again and again, the worship of the Juggernaut, as described by Buchanan, was full of shouts, songs, hissings, "the sound of a great thunder," and acclamations. These were not sweet melodious sounds. Rather, "the voices I now heard, were not those of melody or of joyful acclamation; for there is no harmony in the praise

[22] Ibid., 106.

[23] Ibid., 104.

of Moloch's worshippers."[24] It was a noisy and disorderly affair that shocked his senses. True religion was melodious, interior, ordered. Where he saw idolatry, Buchanan heard cacophony.

Buchanan not only described Hindu religions in *Christian Researches*, he also surveyed Indian Catholicism and found little difference between the two. Touring through South India he writes, "Of the Priests it may truly be said, that they are, in general better acquainted with the Veda of Brahma than with the Gospel of Christ. In some places the doctrines of both are blended…[I] witnessed (in October 1806) the Tower of Juggernaut employed to solemnize a Christian festival." The priest accompanying Buchanan "surveyed the idolatrous cart and its painted figures…seemingly unconscious himself of any impropriety in them."[25] The link between Hindu practice and Catholicism engaged a larger Protestant critique of Catholics at home in Britain. As historian of religion Brian K. Pennington has argued, the strong connection between Hindu idolatry and British anti-Catholicism "partook of a history of opposition to Roman Catholic ritual, belief, and polity" and suggests "a pervasive Protestant Christian rationalism that was suspicious of the ritual use of images and any other institutional religious forms not governed by individual reason."[26] Idolatry and superstition united Catholicism and Hindu religions as forms of religion that required the bright light of rational Protestant Christianity.

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., 195.

[26] Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?*, 69.

Buchanan's writings in general and *Christian Researches* in particular gave American evangelicals their first images of Hindu religions during the early nineteenth century. In America, *Christian Researches* went through numerous editions and was promoted in burgeoning evangelical magazines like *The Panoplist*.[27] Various evangelical magazines in New England published reviews and extracts of *Christian Researches* that extracted the descriptions of Juggernaut and the "sanguinary superstitions" of Hindu religions.[28] Writing about Buchanan's influence in Britain, Pennington has argued that "idol worship" in general became the practice that held together a pan-Indian system of Hindu religion in the minds of nineteenth century evangelicals.[29] This observation about Buchanan's influence in Britain holds true for America as well. In America, Buchanan's accounts of Juggernaut represented Hindu religion as a system of idolatry that stretched across India and set the pattern for later reports by American missionaries writing home. The Juggernaut Buchanan constructed also became a symbol of blood and death beyond idolatry. For example, a temperance article in *The Panoplist* used Buchanan's account "of the sanguinary rites at Juggernaut" as a comparison to the "monstrous vice" of alcohol

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[27] "Work in Press," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine* 4, no. 3 (August 1811): 143.

[28] "Two Discourses Preached Before the University of Cambrdige, on Commencement Sunday, July 1, 1810; and a Sermon Preached Before the Society for Missions to Aftica and the East, at Their Tenth Anniversary, July 12, 1810: To Which Are Added Chrsitian Researches in Asia," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine* 4, no. 4 (September 1811): 174–178; "Dr. Buchanan's Christian Researches in Asia," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine* 4, no. 5 (October 1811): 221–229; "The English Review of Buchanan's Researches," *The Connecticut Evangelical Magazine and Religious Intelligencer* 4, no. 10 (October 1811): 382–393; "The English Review of Buchanan's Researches," *The Connecticut Evangelical Magazine and Religious Intelligencer* 4, no. 11 (November 1811): 429–435; "The English Review of Buchanan's Researches," *The Connecticut Evangelical Magazine and Religious Intelligencer* 4, no. 12 (December 1811): 458–470; "Review of Christian Researches," *The Adviser; or, Vermont Evangelical Magazine* 4, no. 5 (May 1812): 147–159; "The English Review of Buchanan's Researches," *The Adviser; or, Vermont Evangelical Magazine* 4, no. 6 (June 1812): 173–183; "The English Review of Buchanan's Researches," *The Adviser; or, Vermont Evangelical Magazine* 4, no. 7 (July 1812): 200–206.

[29] Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?*, 59–61.

that "has shrines on the banks of almost every brook" and "four thousand self-devoted human victims, immolated every year upon its altars."[30] Here the Juggernaut was shorthand for violent, mindless, death. American drunkenness was a form of idolatry as ignorant and destructive as Hindu heathenism and both demanded the sacrifice of human lives. Buchanan's Juggernaut became the dominant image of Hindu religion in the imaginations of evangelicals for the next half century.

When American evangelicals sent missionaries to India new images of Hindu idolatry were sent home in missionary reports. The founding of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) by New England Congregationalists in 1810 provided opportunity for representations of Hindu religions penned by American missionaries to enter evangelical print culture. The ABCFM had its roots in the evangelical New England network Jedidah Morse worked so hard to cultivate. Its first missionaries came from Andover Seminary and *The Panoplist*, later renamed *The Missionary Herald*, became its official periodical. In 1812 the ABCFM sent out their first batch of missionaries, headed for India: Adoniram and Nancy Judson, Samuel and Harriet Newell, Roxanna and Samuel Nott, Luther Rice, and Gordon Hall.[31] Hall and the Notts settled in Bombay and Samuel Newell joined them there in 1815 after the death of his wife and child in Ceylon. The ABCFM mission station at Bombay produced numerous journals and letters describing Hindu religious culture that were sent home and published in *The Panoplist* and *The Missionary Herald*. In these missionary reports the themes

[30] "On the Ruinous Effects of Ardent Spirits," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine* 5, no. 9 (February 1813): 416–417.

[31] While at sea on their way to India the Judsons and Luther Rice had an awakening and became Baptists. Rice returned to America to organize a Baptist missionary movement and the Judsons established a Baptist mission in Burma.

established by Buchanan emerge again and again. According to American missionaries, Hindu religion is a bloody, licentious, noisy, superstitious, and Catholic religion.[32]

Picking up where Buchanan left off, American missionary journals continued to publish accounts of the Juggernaut. In 1813, *The Panoplist* published a letter dated June 1812 from Harriet Newell, Samuel Newell's wife. Newell described the bathing and worship of Juggernaut at Calcutta, where the Newells awaited permission to travel south to Ceylon. She wrote, "The idol Juggernaut was taken from his pagoda, or temple, and bathed in some water taken from the river Ganges, which they consider sacred."[33] After bathing the idol, devotees began bathing in the river as well, "where they said their prayers, counted their fingers, poured muddy water down their infants' throats, and performed many other superstitious ceremonies."[34] Newell reads these actions within the Protestant framework of sin and atonement. For Newell, all of these actions reflect a desire on the part of Hindu devotees to find atonement for their sins, atonement only available through "the blood of Jesus, which does indeed cleanse from all sin."[35] In 1833 the ABCFM published an engraving of Juggernaut's cart. The text accompanying the

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[32] Elsbree, *The Rise of the Missionary Spirit in America, 1790-1815*, 110–114; For more on the history of the ABCFM see Clifton Jackson Phillips, *Protestant America and the Pagan World: The First Half Century of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1810-1860* (Cambridge, Mass.: East Asian Research Center, Harvard University, 1969); John A. Andrew, *Rebuilding the Christian Commonwealth : New England Congregationalists & Foreign Missions, 1800-1830* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1976); Donald Phillip Corr, "'The Field Is the World': Proclaiming, Translating, and Serving by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 18101-40" (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1993); Wilbert R. Shenk, ed., *North American Foreign Missions, 1810-1914: Theology, Theory, and Policy* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004); For a larger history of American missionaries in India see Sushil Madhava Pathak, *American Missionaries and Hinduism* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1967).

[33] Harriet Newell, "Letter from Mrs. Newell," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine* 5, no. 11 (April 1813): 515.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

image gave a history of the festival taken from British missionary William Ward and the now infamous account of the Rath Yatra from Buchanan. Having read about Juggernaut for two decades, New Englanders had a picture of the towering cart, the mass of people, and the gesticulations of the devotees.[36]

Missionary reports of Hindu religion's bloody character also included accounts of blood sacrifices and hook-swinging. Hook-swinging, or *charak puja*, involved devotees attaching hooks into the flesh of their backs and then being hung from various forms of tall poles that would swing them around in a circle.[37] Writing from Bombay, Samuel Newell and Gordon Hall described devotees offering the sacrifice of a rooster to the goddess of wealth, Lakshmi (or as they called her, "Luxumee"), and applying the blood of the animal to their foreheads. Newell and Hall also noted that the sacrifice of sheep was common among Hindus and that "the *life* and *blood* of the animal, are principally regarded by these idolators, in making their offerings to their gods."[38] In another account, Hall offered one image of the "scores of sheep" sacrificed and the details of the ritual, including the opening up of the belly and removal of the liver.[39] The specter of human sacrifices often haunted these accounts of animal sacrifice. As one missionary report mentioned, "*there is good evidence that human sacrifices, within a few years past, and*

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[36] "Juggernaut and His Worship," *Monthly Paper of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* no. 11 (May 1833).

[37] For the history of hook-swinging and colonial attempts to suppress it see Geoffrey A Oddie, *Popular Religion, Elites, and Reform: Hook-Swinging and Its Prohibition in Colonial India, 1800-1894* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1995).

[38] Gordon Hall and Samuel Newell, "American Missionaries," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine* 13, no. 7 (July 1817): 323.

[39] Gordon Hall, "Journal of the Rev. Gordon Hall, Missionary at Bombay," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine* 12, no. 12 (December 1816): 571.

within a few miles of Bombay, have been repeatedly made on various occasions to local deities."[40]

While human sacrifices were never witnessed or reported, the practice of hook-swinging often appeared in these missionary accounts. One account from the Bombay missionaries described a man and woman who each took a turn being hoisted twenty five feet in the air by two hooks in their back. The woman "seemed to manifest greater fortitude and contempt of pain than the man did…she voluntarily flung herself about by a variety of action, which must have greatly augmented her pains."[41] Missionaries generally interpreted animal sacrifice and hook-swinging as "the degraded, deplorable, perishing condition of the heathen."[42] But the missionaries also tended to interpret these blood sacrifices as a sign that the Hindus were not wholly unredeemable. Applying their own evangelical views of Christ's atoning sacrifice, the Bombay missionaries asked the reader "What should put it into the minds of these unenlightened heathens, that the shedding of blood could have any efficacy in appeasing of God against sin? Let the unbeliever solve this question, if he can."[43] As historian Carl Jackson has noted, bloody practices such as hook-swinging defined Hindu religion and "represented the very essence of Hindu teaching" for Protestant missionaries.[44] Bloody rituals pointed to the

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[40] "Journal of the Mission at Bombay," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Herald* 14, no. 2 (February 1818): 79 Italics in the original.

[41] "Journal of the Bombay Mission," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine* 13, no. 12 (December 1817): 560.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Hall and Newell, "American Missionaries," 324.

[44] Jackson, *The Oriental Religions and American Thought*, 90.

darkness of Hindu heathenism and the hope that real atonement for sin could be found when the blood of Christ replaced the blood of sheep, roosters, kids, and hook-swingers.

Along with blood, missionaries described sex and obscenity as central to Hindu religious culture. In their published accounts, the Bombay missionaries condemned the obscene and sexual dancing that accompanied Hindu festivals. Again and again missionaries railed against "those parts of the Hindoo system, which recommend and enforce impurity, licentiousness, and indecency, by annual exhibitions."[45] For example, one account described how during one festival "in the afternoon and evening there was, particularly among the lower sorts of people, abundance of music and dancing; males and females engaging in an indecent manner."[46] Another account described "*naches* (dances)" wherein "some places women were in men's clothes, and in others men were in women's clothes…The females are common prostitutes but by the natives are not considered less religious on that account…Their dress, and all their movements, were designed and well calculated, to excite all the passions which are for the interest of their abandoned profession."[47] Spectators of these dances seemed "gratified and delighted in the same proportions as the exhibitions are removed from decency."[48] Missionaries struggled, like Buchanan, with the proper language to describe Hindu eroticism. The editors of *The Panoplist* prefaced the above description with a note that the scenes in the

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[45] "Mission at Bombay and the Vicinity," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Herald* 16, no. 10 (October 1820): 457.

[46] "Journal of the Bombay Mission," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine* 13, no. 11 (November 1817): 526.

[47] Gordon Hall, "American Missionaries," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine* 12, no. 11 (November 1816): 507.

[48] Ibid.

missionary report "are so scandalously obscene, as not to admit of description in a Christian country." In another case, a missionary described the phallic shape of the lingam (an image of the god Shiva) as "a significant emblem of what decency forbids to be named; and *such was the deity*."[49] From festival worship to the forms of the gods, everywhere the missionaries looked they found obscene sexuality in Hindu religions and struggled to put it into words.

Much like Buchanan's description of Juggernaut, the ABCFM missionaries consistently described chaotic noise accompanying the licentiousness of Hindu religions. Accounts of Hindu ritual included descriptions of musicians with "ragged-sounding instruments" that played a "hideous clang" and music "struck up with redoubled violence."[50] Another report noted "The Hindoo holidays of the *Sheemgah* are just closed. For ten days past we have heard nothing but the noisy music of these people."[51] It was not just festivals in the streets either. Even a Hindu temple "resounded with the inharmonious notes of a band of native musicians, celebrating the praises of the cocoa-nut god."[52] For some missionaries, the cacophony of Hindu worship reflected larger spiritual disease. Bombay missionary William Ramsey described how the sounds he heard on a Sunday afternoon had a profound effect on him. "The sound of the *tom-toms* and the accompanying screeching noise of the jackals on the banks of the river chilled my very soul, and threw a damp over my spirits that I cannot well describe." Ramsey

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[49] Gordon Hall, "Journal of the Rev. Gordon Hall," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine* 13, no. 1 (January 1817): 35.
[50] Hall, "Journal of the Rev. Gordon Hall, Missionary at Bombay," 571.

[51] John Nichols, "Extracts from the Journal of Mr. Nichols at Salsette," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Herald* 16, no. 8 (August 1820): 374.

[52] Cyrus Stone, "Extracts from Mr. Stone's Private Journal," *The Missionary Herald* 25, no. 9 (September 1829): 266.

wondered when the "dismal sound of idolatrous revels" will become "hymns of praise to God and to the Lamb."[53] The dissonant noise of Hindu worship contrasted with the harmony of the Christian hymn just as the violent and bloody rituals differed from the single redemptive sacrifice of Jesus. Missionaries represented Hindu religions as the cacophonous antithesis to harmonious Christian piety.

The ABCFM missionaries in Bombay did not only observe Hindu religious culture, they also took note of Indian Catholicism and often found it little different from Hindu religions. Hall and Newell offered American readers a view of a Catholic Good Friday procession in Bombay. "Today we have witnessed among the Catholic Christians a scene not much inferior in grossness to the idolatry of the heathen: viz. a representation of the death and burial of Christ."[54] The blood and sacrifice of Hindu practice appeared in the form of a crucifix processed around the Catholic church. The noise of Hindu worship also accompanied the sacrificial savior in the form of stamping with the feet, rapping with canes, and clapping of hands. The whole scene was so close to Hindu worship that "many of the heathen were present. They feel much strengthened in their image worship by observing the same practice among Christians."[55] In another account the conversion of Hindus to Catholicism was specious at best. The missionaries write, "but though they assumed the name of Christian, yet they have never ceased to be idolaters; for instead of their former idols, they substituted the images of saints, to which they page a religious

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[53] William Ramsey, "Journal of Mr. Ramsey: Heathen Worship--Hindoo Indolence," *The Missionary Herald* 28, no. 5 (May 1832): 148.

[54] Gordon Hall and Samuel Newell, "Extracts from the Journal of Messrs. Hall and Newell, at Bombay," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine* 13, no. 8 (August 1817): 371.

[55] Ibid.

worship as really idolatrous as the worship paid by the Hindoos to their gods."[56] Indian Catholics also drew on Hindu ideas to defend their practices. In addressing some "lapsed Catholics," Gordon Hall discovered "they are fast learning to use the Hindoo sophistry in defence of their idolatry."[57] Catholic practice looked and sounded like Hindu religions in India and the missionaries saw little difference between Catholic or Hindu idolatry.

The bloody, lascivious, and noisy Hindu religions of evangelical missionary reports suited the needs of missionary propagandists. The titillating scenes of unutterable eroticism offered exotic entertainment to readers but they also reinforced New England revivalist theology. As religious historian David W. Kling has convincingly argued, the ABCFM and its missionaries were "a New Divinity creation, rooted in New Divinity theology, inspired by New Divinity revivals, and staffed by a well-established New Divinity social and institutional network."[58] "Disinterested benevolence," the hallmark of New Divinity theology emphasized by Samuel Hopkins, gave meaning to the ABCFM mission in India and structured missionary constructions of Hindu religions. According to New Divinity preachers "true Christians are given a new disposition (or 'taste' or 'relish') for God and all things he has brought into existence, and consequently they have a love of being in general"—a disinterested benevolence for God's creatures. The true Christian acted on this new benevolence "in unselfish acts of love and mercy (even in a willingness to die and be damned) in order to bring glory to God and further his

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[56] "Extracts from a Joint Letter of the Missionaries, Dated January 1829," *The Missionary Herald* 25, no. 11 (November 1829): 340.

[57] Gordon Hall, "Extracts from the Journal of Mr. Hall," *The Missionary Herald* 18, no. 7 (July 1822): 220.

[58] David Kling, "The New Divinity and the Origins of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions," in *North American Foreign Missions, 1810-1914: Theology, Theory, and Policy*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Grand Rapids, Mich: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 13.

kingdom."[59] Disinterested benevolence provided an important theological rational for heading to the mission field. As revivalism took hold among New England evangelicals, the representations of bloody and vulgar Hindu religions encouraged the benevolent action of giving to the missionary project. The chaotic noise of Hindu religions described in the pages of missionary propaganda attempted to engender benevolence in Christians at home. As historian Clifton Phillips put it, "if the Calvinist image of the sinful condition of natural man made it possible to believe in the moral degradation of the heathen, the need for continuing missionary support made imperative its constant evocation."[60] The ABCFM used representations of Hindu depravity to foster support for mission and increase their institutional strength.

The missionary reports also constructed a unified "Hindoo system" that could be found throughout the Indian subcontinent and even in Sri Lanka. At the heart of this pan-Indian religious system stood the idol. Pennington has described the evangelical construction of Hindu religion qua idolatry: "stripped of all of its show and pomp, the complex and intractable mess of Hindu rite sheepishly confessed its prosaic and pitiable brute veneration of matter…Hindus did not merely employ images as aids to meditation, nor did they believe them simply to house concentration of divine energy; they revered them as gods themselves."[61] The moral depravity of blood and obscenity grew out of attachment to the idol. "Unlike spirit, which was rational in nature and therefore unitary, ordered, and abstract, matter displayed no one ultimate form or reason. Each idol was a

[59] Ibid., 24.

[60] Phillips, *Protestant America and the Pagan World*, 273.

[61] Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?*, 96.

law unto itself."[62] For evangelicals, true religion was spiritual, rational, ordered, abstract, and systematized. Hindu religion, as constructed by New England evangelicals, was the antithesis of true Protestant religion.

"What May Be the Effects of This Man's Labors?": Rammohun Roy's Monotheism

While the missionaries were sending reports home, another movement within India worked to rid it of idolatry. Rammohun Roy rejected the idolatry of his Hindu countrymen. He argued that the bloody, obscene, and noisy rituals that engrossed the missionaries were anathema to true religion and to true Hindu religion. He further believed that Hindu religion was a monotheistic religion that called for worship of the one formless, supreme, creative deity. So, while the evangelical representation of Hindu religion traveled from Bombay to Boston, Roy's representation of Hindu religion began to makes its way to New England from Calcutta. Roy's writings about Hindu theism and Christianity embroiled him in controversy in America, Europe, and India. In India, he disputed with the English missionaries at Serampore and brahmans in Calcutta. In America, his writings became part of the larger Unitarian controversy. Americans wrote about Roy and his conflict with Calvinist missionaries as if it was the second theater of theological dispute between Calvinism and Unitarianism. Roy introduced America to Vedanta Hindu philosophy and engendered interest in Hindu texts and philosophy among liberal Protestants. During the years of his popularity in the American press, Protestants would use him as evidence in their own theological disputes.

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[62] Ibid.

Roy was born in either 1772 or 1774 in the Burdwan district of Bengal to a brahman family. His father served the Muslim rulers and gave Roy an education in Persian and Arabic, preparing him for civil service. His mother began his Sanskrit education, preparing him for life as a scholar. Rejecting his parent's religious devotion to Vishnu at the age of sixteen, Roy was a "highly independent, precocious, troubled, but dutifully filial youth."[63] In 1797, Roy settled in Calcutta where he first came into contact with the British East India Company by lending money to young British civil servants. It was through money lending that Roy made the contacts that landed him a place within the world of public administration. In Calcutta at the turn of the nineteenth century, Roy "may be seen as typical of the Bengali babu of the turn of the nineteenth century, an entrepreneur, a man of means, whatever his caste or background."[64] Beginning in 1805, Roy secured work for John Dibgy, the Magistrate at Ramgarh. While working for Digby he improved his Western languages "by perusing all of my [Dibgy's] public correspondence with diligence and attention, as well as by corresponding and conversing with European gentlemen, he acquired so correct a knowledge of the English language, as to be enabled to write and speak it with considerable accuracy."[65] Roy also accepted Digby's offer to read Greek and Latin literature with him. While with Digby, Roy took interest in European politics, especially revolutionary France, which he saw as a rational

[63] Bruce Carlisle Robertson, *Raja Rammohan Ray: The Father of Modern India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 12.

[64] Ibid., 19.

[65] Rammohun Roy, Translation of an Abridgement of the Vedant, Or, Resolution of All the Veds (London: T. and J. Hoitt, 1817), iii–iv cited in Lynn Zastoupil, *Rammohun Roy and the Making of Victorian Britain* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 26.

order for society and a land of equality.[66] By 1818, an Englishman touring India remarked upon meeting Roy that "his learning is most extensive, as he is not only generally conversant with the best books in English, Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Bengalee, and Hindoostanee, but has even studied rhetoric in Arabic and in English, and quotes Locke and Bacon on all occasions."[67] To his European admirers, Roy was a master of Western and Eastern culture, language, and philosophy.[68]

In New England, Roy caught the attention of Protestants on both sides of the period's theological disputes. In April of 1817, the Trinitarian *Boston Recorder* and the Unitarian *Christian Disciple* each extracted the introduction of Roy's *Translation of an Abridgement of the Vedant*, introducing Roy to each of their audiences.[69] These two American magazines took their extracts not from Roy's text itself but from an article in the British *Missionary Register*.[70] Roy addressed the introduction, "To the Believers of the only True God," which both sides assumed applied to them, and sought "to prove to my European friends, that the superstitious practices, which deform the Hindoo religion, have nothing to do with the pure spirit it dictates."[71] Furthermore, Roy argued, true Hindu

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[66] Iqbal Singh, *Rammohun Roy: A Biographical Inquiry into the Making of Modern India*, vol. 1 (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1958), 88.

[67] Lieutenant-Colonel Fitzclarence, *Journal of a Route Across India, Through Egypt, to England, in the Latter End of the Year 1817, and the Beginning of 1818* (London: John Murray, 1819), 106.

[68] Sophia Dobson Collet, *The Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy* (Calcutta: A.C. Sarkar, 1913), 1–23; Robertson, *Raja Rammohan Ray*, 10–24; Lynn Zastoupil, *Rammohun Roy and the Making of Victorian Britain*, 25–26.

[69] "A Remarkable Hindoo Reformer," *Christian Disciple* 5, no. 4 (April 5, 1817): 123–126; "Account of Rammohun Roy," *Boston Recorder* 2, no. 18 (April 29, 1817): 69.

[70] The *Missionary Register* article was itself a reprint of an article from another British magazine, the *Christian Observer*.

[71] "A Remarkable Hindoo Reformer," 123; "Account of Rammohun Roy," 69.

religion derived from the sacred texts of the Vedas. Roy then offered readers a brief explanation of the *Vedant* he had abridged and translated. The word *Vedant* came from the Sanskrit meaning "resolution of all the Veds" and it was the book "most highly revered by all the Hindoos; and in place of the more diffuse arguments of the Veds, is always referred to as equal authority."[72] True Hindu religion, for Roy, rejected idolatry and focused worship on a monotheistic supreme deity.

Roy invoked reason to defend his argument. As he put it, "if correct reasoning, and the dictates of common sense, induce the belief of a wise, uncreated Being, who is the supporter and rule of the boundless universe; we should also consider him the most powerful and supreme existence, far surpassing our powers of comprehension or description."[73] Such a deity would be beyond the forms and rituals of idols or images. Not only reason, but Hindu scripture itself supported the view of a unified creative deity and "by making them [other Hindus] acquainted with their Scriptures" he hoped to "enable them to contemplate, with true devotion, the unity and omnipresence of Nature's God."[74] Human reason and Hindu scripture pointed to a unified God, not polytheistic heathenism, and Roy wrote to convince European and Indian alike. True Hindu religion, true religion, worshipped one Supreme Being.

At first American Protestants were not quite sure what to make of the Bengali writer. The two magazines agreed that Roy was a "Reformer." But what kind? The *Boston Recorder* must have agreed with the assessment in the *Missionary Register* article

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[72] "Account of Rammohun Roy," 69.

[73] "A Remarkable Hindoo Reformer," 124; "Account of Rammohun Roy," 69.

[74] "A Remarkable Hindoo Reformer," 124; "Account of Rammohun Roy," 69.

it borrowed from. Rather than make any editorial comments it just reprinted the entire *Missionary Register* article which wondered if Roy and his followers might "undermine the fabric of Hindoo superstition."[75] Yet, the magazine reminded readers of the need for missionary work. For, "reason and philosophy may not have a voice powerful enough to reach the hearts" of Hindus and so "the Christian Missionary, who Christ sends forth, will find a mouth and a tongue, which no man shall be able to gainsay or resist."[76] Roy may be a reformer, and a monotheistic reformer at that, but his reforms fell short of the missionary's Gospel.

For their part, the Unitarians at the *Christian Disciple* used the Bengali reformer to take theological shots at Trinitarian orthodoxy. Noting that Roy had been opposed and even had two attempts made on his life by brahmans who disagreed with this monotheism and interpretation of the Vedas, the *Christian Disciple* saw Roy as a compatriot in the battle of true religion over despotic orthodox power. "For they [the orthodox] will very easily prove, to their own satisfaction, that *all good men* have been *orthodox* in their opinions, and that *polytheism* is *orthodoxy*."[77] In this, the article's final sentence, the subject of the pronoun "they" slipped between the orthodox on two continents. The orthodox brahmans were the same "they" as the New England orthodox. Polytheism was the same as Trinitarianism and Roy's reform was the same as Unitarian reform. Unitarians were beginning to make Rammohun Roy one of their own.

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[75] "Account of Rammohun Roy," 69.

[76] Ibid.

[77] "A Remarkable Hindoo Reformer," 126.

Interest in Roy could be found on both sides of New England's Protestant divide. In March of 1818, "Theology of the Hindoos, as taught by Ram Mohun Roy," appeared in the *North American Review and Miscellaneous Journal*, a magazine that was "Bostonian, Harvardian, Unitarian."[78] The article, written by William Tudor, reviewed three English pamphlets Roy published in Calcutta, *Translation of the Ishaopanishad*, *Translation of the Cena Upanishad*, and *A Defence of Hindoo Theism*.[79] The first two were Roy's translation of parts of the Vedas and the final was a work of religious controversy arguing against idolatry. Once again the emphasis was on Roy's argument for a Supreme Being as described in his interpretation of the Vedas. The review described how "although the Vedas taught the existence, the unity, and overruling providence of a Supreme Being, and the propriety, if not the necessity of worshipping him as being invisible and of pure intelligence; yet the Bramins carefully concealed this from the people, and insisted on the barbarous sacrifices and idols worship."[80] The review contained considerable extracts from the translations in order to make readers "somewhat acquainted with the present religious notions of the Hindoos, the pure doctrines of their sacred books, and the views and motives of the learned native [Roy]."[81] The extracts painted a picture of brahman conniving and Hindu ignorance conspiring together to keep Indians habitually inclined towards idols. The article stopped short of labeling Roy a

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[78] "Theology of the Hindoos, as Taught by Ram Mohun Roy," *The North American Review and Miscellaneous Journal* 6, no. 18 (March 1818): 386–393; Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1850-1865*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938), 223.

[79] Carl T. Jackson identifies Tudor as the author of the anonymously published article. Jackson, *The Oriental Religions and American Thought*, 34.

[80] "Theology of the Hindoos, as Taught by Ram Mohun Roy," 386.

[81] Ibid., 387.

Christian but granted that "the doctrine he inculcates differs very little from the christian [sic] doctrine respecting the nature and attributes of the Deity." Finally, the author hoped that Roy's work and "the aide of Divine Providence" might work together to change "the moral condition" of India.

The Trinitarian editors at the *Boston Recorder* agreed on that count and reprinted an article from a Calcutta newspaper that briefly reviewed the same three works and concluded that if Roy was successful "a reformation must take place—the power of the Priesthood, will be deprived of all its terror—reason will succeed to the dominion of prejudice; and the example of the higher classes will rapidly be followed by the mass of the population."[82] New England Protestants saw Roy as a native reformer who would pave the way for Christian progress in the country. He shared the Protestant abhorrence of idolatry and love of scripture. "He appealed to Protestant readers by casting himself as a crusader against ingrained superstition, idolatry, and priestcraft who suffered social ostracism for attempting to restore the pure religion of the Vedas."[83] Whether orthodox or Unitarian, New Englanders agreed that Roy's reform work was a good thing for India and the progress of Christianity.

As missionary involvement in India increased, Roy turned his attention to Christianity and the impurities he saw in the evangelical Protestantism Britons and Americans promulgated in India. In 1820 he published, *The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness*, a compilation of Jesus's moral teachings from the four gospels that left out any historical or miraculous material. Roy believed that separating out the

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[82] "Rammohun Roy: The Celebrated Hindoo Reformer," *Boston Recorder* 4, no. 38 (September 18, 1819): 156.

[83] Lynn Zastoupil, *Rammohun Roy and the Making of Victorian Britain*, 28.

moral teachings would "be more likely to produce the desirable effect of improving the hearts and minds of men of different persuasions and degrees of understandings" because "moral doctrines, tending evidently to the maintenance of the peace and harmony of mankind at large, are beyond the reach of metaphysical perversion, and intelligible alike to the learned and unlearned."[84] Roy rejected dogmatic impurities added to the pure moral monotheism of Christianity, just as he had with Hindu religion. The heart of Christianity for the reformer was "the law which teaches that man should do unto others as he would wish to be done by."[85] For Roy, Jesus' importance lay in his moral teaching, not his death on the cross or his place as the second person of the trinity. The Baptist missionaries based at nearby Serampore were not happy with Roy's text. Joshua Marshman replied to Roy in a series of articles in the evangelical *Friend of India* referring to Roy as an "enlightened heathen" at one point and arguing that Jesus' moral teachings could not be separated from his divine place as the Son of God and his atoning work on the cross. Roy wrote a series of replies to Marshman and argued that the three persons of the trinity were little different from the multiple gods of Hindu religions. According to Roy, it was the trinity that was the real heathenism.[86]

As the controversy between Roy and Marshman played out in the printed pages of Calcutta, Americans on both sides of their own Unitarian debate took notice. In

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[84] Rammohun Roy, *The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness, Extracted From the Books of the New Testament Ascribed to the Four Evangelists. To Which Are Added the First and Second Appeal to the Christian Public, in Reply to the Observations of Dr. Marshman of Serampore* (New York: B. Bates, 1825), xviii.

[85] Ibid., xxv.

[86] Collet, *The Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy*, 55–77; Singh, *Rammohun Roy: A Biographical Inquiry into the Making of Modern India*, 1:216–243; Jackson, *The Oriental Religions and American Thought*, 33; Dermot Killingley, *Rammohun Roy in Hindu and Christian Tradition: The Teape Lectures 1990* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Grevatt & Grevatt, 1993), 138–143; Robertson, *Raja Rammohan Ray*, 39–42.

November of 1821, the Unitarian *Christian Register* printed an article from its British brethren at the *Monthly Repository of Theology and General Literature* describing Rammohun Roy and "the controversy which he has so ably maintained with the English Calvinistic Baptist Missionaries." The dispute was "one of the most singular controversies which the world has ever witnessed."[87] The *Register* followed up in December with a seven-column, two-page article detailing Roy's life and the controversy with the Baptists. After outlining the debate through various selections from Roy and Marshman, the writer of the article concluded by declaring that Roy is "plainly a firm and zealous Unitarian," and ventures to wonder rhetorically if he could also be labeled a Christian.[88] In a single lengthy article Rammohun Roy, the Hindu Vedanta philosopher, was introduced to New England Unitarians and then fought with evangelical Baptist missionaries. In the process Roy became a Unitarian and possibly a Christian. One article in the *Register* even referred to the debate as the "Indian Unitarian Controversy."[89] The *Register* continued its coverage of the debate throughout the 1820s, reprinting Roy's *Second Appeal to the Christian Public in Defence of the Precepts of Jesus* in serial in its July 5 through August 30 issues of 1822.

The Unitarian account of the Indian controversy did not go unchallenged in New England. In March of 1823, the Baptist run *Christian Watchman* reviewed *Reply of the Baptist Missionaries at Calcutta, To Rammohun Roy*, which was Marshman's side of the dispute as published in the *Friend of India*. The review extracted a portion of

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[87] "Rammohun Roy," *Christian Register* 1, no. 15 (November 23, 1821): 57.

[88] "Rammohun Roy," *Christian Register* 1, no. 17 (December 7, 1821): 65.

[89] "Letter: Clapton, (Eng.) September 3, 1821," *Christian Register* 1, no. 21 (January 4, 1822): 81.

Marshman's argument focused on "the accuracy of various statements made by Rammohun Roy" in order to show how Roy's views were inaccurate. The editor at the *Watchman* was also desirous "to present this extract, as the author replied to has been praised by his friends in this country."[90] The extract from Marshman argued for the doctrines of original sin, the trinity, and the atonement for sin through Jesus' death and resurrection. Then in December the *Watchman* and *Boston Recorder* reprinted a scathing article from the *New Haven Religious Intelligencer* that claimed Roy had not written his own works but that they were penned by a British Unitarian in India. "So that the whole amount of this wonderful matter is, than an [sic] Unitarian can write in India, in much the same way that an Unitarian can write in Europe." The article also smirked at "writers in this country [who] trumpet forth the praises of a man merely because he writes heresy in India."[91] New England Calvinists saw Roy as yet another heretic to be denounced and his ideas about Jesus little different from their Unitarian neighbors.

The question of who counted as a Christian drove the New England Unitarian controversy. Unitarianism is heresy, claimed the orthodox, and not true Christianity. Meanwhile, Unitarians believed they had found the purest, most refined, and most reformed Christianity in Western history. Yankee Protestants pulled Roy into this question regarding Christian identity. In 1824, *The Missionary Herald*, true to its roots as a defender of orthodoxy, published some remarks about Roy from Rev. William H. Mill, Principal of the Bishop's College at Calcutta. The *Herald's* editor prefaced the remarks

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[90] "Reply of the Baptist Missionaries at Calcutta, to Rammohun Roy," *Christian Watchman* 4, no. 16 (March 29, 1823): 61.

[91] "Rammohun Roy," *Christian Watchman* 4, no. 51 (November 29, 1823): 202; "Unitarianism in India," *Boston Recorder* 8, no. 49 (December 6, 1823): 193.

by noting how Roy "swerved first from Hindooism to Mohammedanism" and "influenced by the light, which missionaries in the first instance had been the means of introducing into Calcutta…became a rational Hindoo Philosopher, or in other words, a Deist." The editor also interpreted Mill as asserting that Roy was at least "an infidel." Mill himself asserts that Roy claimed to be a Christian, but it was a Christianity divested of "supernatural revelation" leaving "no reason to applaud the change." The *Christian Watchman* reprinted the comments from the *Herald* and proclaimed that Roy's "advocates my hereafter see cause to be ashamed of their prodigal encomiums." Thus Roy's American critics echoed the "enlightened heathen" assertion of Marshman's first reply to Roy.

The *Christian Register* would not let these critics go unchallenged.[92] The Unitarian magazine published the remarks from Mill, noting their appearance in the *Herald*, and prefacing them with the words, "It was to be expected that so able an advocate for the Divine Unity, and so powerful and oppose of the leading doctrines of Calvinism, as Rammohun Roy, would excite the enmity, and be a subject of the detraction of all who are pledged to support the *trinity* and its accompaniments." A week later, more remarks in defense of Roy appeared in the magazine in a much longer two column article that critiqued Mill for requiring Roy accept a Christianity "disfigured and deformed by its association with the doctrines of the trinity, native depravity, &c. and with all the other human appendages" Calvinists attached to it. The article stopped short of claiming Roy was a Christian but does refer to him as a "friend and promoter of

[92] "Rammohun Roy," *The Missionary Herald* 20, no. 9 (September 1824): 301; "Rammohun Roy," *Christian Watchman* 5, no. 40 (September 11, 1824): 159.

Christianity."[93] *The Unitarian Miscellany and Christian Monitor* showed less restraint. The magazine, published in Baltimore but circulated among New England Unitarians, also responded to the Mill article claiming Roy "not only stands foremost in the ranks of those who oppose idolatry, but has declared himself a Christian."[94] Unitarians continued to defend the Christian identity of Rammohun Roy by asserting that he was a Unitarian and Unitarian theology was Christianity. As Unitarian clergyman Joseph Tuckerman put it, "This evidence may not satisfy his Trinitarian opponents, who refuse the name of Christian to their Unitarian brethren. But it will go far to solve the doubts of any who are themselves Unitarians."[95] Unitarians and Trinitarians continued to debate Rammohun Roy's Christian identity throughout the decade.[96] In defending Roy's Christian identity, Unitarians were also defending their own. Neither they nor Roy were the heretics Trinitarians claimed them to be.

Roy's social reforms attracted Unitarian attention as much as his theological controversy. Roy had long been an opponent of sati in India, arguing that the Vedic texts did not require or endorse the practice. Roy began publishing tracts opposing sati around 1819 and his 1822 tract *Brief Remarks Regarding Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females According to the Hindu Law of Inheritance* caught the interest of an

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[93] "Rammohun Roy," *Christian Register* 3, no. 57 (September 10, 1824): 226; "Rammohun Roy," *Christian Register* 3, no. 58 (September 17, 1824): 230.

[94] "Spirit of Orthodoxy," *The Unitarian Miscellany and Christian Monitor* 6, no. 19 (October 1, 1824): 215.

[95] Joseph Tuckerman, "Is Rammohun Roy a Christian? Or, in Other Words, Is He a Believer in the Divine Authority of Our Lord?," *Christian Examiner and Theological Review* 3, no. 5 (October 1826): 361.

[96] See for example: *Christian Register* 6, no. 16 (April 21, 1827): 62; *Christian Register* 6, no. 17 (April 28, 1827): 66; "Correspondence with Calcutta Unitarians," *Christian Watchman* 8, no. 56 (December 28, 1827): 222; "Rammohun Roy," *Spirit of the Pilgrims* 2, no. 5 (May 1829): 270–278; "Unitarian Mission in India," *Christian Register* 8, no. 21 (May 23, 1829): 82.

English reading audience. Roy continued publishing against sati in both Bengali and English until it was banned in the Bengal Presidency by William Bentinck at the end of 1829 under pressure from evangelical and Hindu reformers. For a decade, Roy argued that Hindu sacred texts required that widows inherit their husbands property and did not endorse sati or polygamy. David Reed, editor of the *Christian Register*, took great interest in sati and published multiple accounts of the practice.[97] But Reed also published Roy's work to combat sati. He published an extract of *Brief Remarks* in 1823 and then after the abolition of sati he credited Roy with doing much to hasten the ban and improve women's rights in India.[98] Historian Lynn Zastoupil has noted how Reed was also an avid abolitionist and argued that "sometimes Reeds interest in sati and slavery overlapped in the same successive issues of the *Christian Register*…This frequent juxtaposition proved a clue to why one early American abolitionist found inspiration in Roy's example."[99] Other Americans found inspiration in Roy as well. An 1833 tract written anonymously called on Congress to abolish slavery and signed: "In closing this address, allow me to assume the name of one of the most enlightened and benevolent of the human race now living, though not a white man. RAMMOHUN ROY."[100] Indeed, after his death in Bristol, England, in 1833, Roy became a material symbol of social reform among New

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[97] See for example: "Burning of Widows," *Christian Register* 1, no. 28 (February 22, 1822): 110; "Poona: Extreme Cruelty Towards a Hindoo Widow," *Christian Register* 3, no. 56 (September 3, 1824): 224; "Burning of Widows and Slaves," *Christian Register* 5, no. 45 (November 11, 1826): 180; "Hindoo Widows," *Christian Register* 8, no. 36 (September 5, 1829): 143.

[98] "Hindoo Female Rights.," *Christian Register* 2, no. 30 (March 7, 1823): 117; "Abolition of Suttees," *Christian Register* 9, no. 28 (July 10, 1830): 109; "Abolition of Suttees," *Christian Register* 9, no. 29 (July 17, 1830): 113; "Conditions of Females in India," *Christian Register* 11, no. 40 (October 6, 1832): 158.

[99] Lynn Zastoupil, *Rammohun Roy and the Making of Victorian Britain*, 94.

[100] Cited in ibid.

England liberals. Six envelopes containing locks of his hair were sold to raise money for the abolitionist cause in 1844 and Roy's hair was also distributed in America by those returning from the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention in London. The "Hindoo reformer" became a symbol for liberal theology and social reform among New England elites.

Indeed Rammohun Roy was a significant figure in New England religious culture for over twenty years. In 1833 Philadelphia artist Rembrandt Peale invited Roy to sit for a portrait while the two were both visiting London. The Boston Anatheum exhibited the portrait in 1834 and bought it in 1837, occasionally exhibiting it "for a community in which Rammohun Roy was well known and esteemed."[101] Contact between New England Unitarians and Roy prompted the Unitarians to attempt a missionary project in India. Though the project failed rather miserably, it strengthened bonds between Bengali reformers and Yankee liberals.[102] Though his impact was greatest in New England, word of him spread throughout the east coast. A bibliography of references to Roy in magazines during the period numbers over two hundred articles spread across thirty-one different publications. His name appeared in almost fifty percent of eastern religious journals.[103] Jackson has argued that Roy's greatest significance was his translation and explication of Hindu texts and philosophy. Roy's writings "provided many Americans the opportunity to hear Hinduism explained by an Asian—a unique experience in the early

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[101] Susan S Bean, *Yankee India: American Commercial and Cultural Encounters with India in the Age of Sail, 1784-1860* (Salem, MA: Peabody Essex Museum, 2001), 193.

[102] Jackson, *The Oriental Religions and American Thought*, 35–36; Spencer Lavan, *Unitarians and India: A Study in Encounter and Response*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Exploration Press, 1991), 41–72.

[103] Adrienne Moore, *Rammohun Roy and America* (Calcutta: Brahmo Mission Press, 1942), vii, 2–3.

nineteenth century."[104] Meanwhile, cultural historian Susan Bean has argued for Roy's influence on American literary culture: "The impact of Rammohun Roy in America paved the way for the serious consideration of Sanskrit literature and Hindu philosophy that influenced the Transcendentalists and led to the blossoming of American literature at mid-century."[105] But both of these evaluations miss Roy's important role in the New England Protestant controversy. He was part of the debate among liberal and evangelical Protestants about what constituted true Christianity and true religion. His writings emboldened Unitarians and frustrated the orthodox. The ripples of Roy's influence expand across literature, religion, and philosophy in America from the early nineteenth century to the arrival of another Hindu, Vivekananda, at the end of the century.

The Orient in Bits and Pieces: The East India Marine Society of Salem

The influence of Rammohun Roy and the reports of missionaries in Bombay could never have made it to New England without ships—ships carrying mariners and goods along with letters and pamphlets. Salem, Massachusetts was not only the place where the first ABCFM missionaries were ordained and sent to India, it was also a major port for trade between New England and India.

"The Fair of America and the wealth of India—in the pursuit of each a *Good Hope* is half the voyage." So toasted the men of the East India Marine Society of Salem (EIMS) and their guests in 1825. It was a big day for the society. They celebrated their

[104] Jackson, *The Oriental Religions and American Thought*, 36.

[105] Bean, *Yankee India*, 193.

26th anniversary, they opened the new East India Marine Hall, and they were joined by President John Quincy Adams as their guest. The toast, one of many, reflected the mariners' view of the past quarter century of trade with Asia. Indian wealth proved important to the maritime trade the early republic depended upon. According to Bean, "in 1791, 92 percent of U.S. revenues were generated from impost and tonnage duties." These revenues "derived from far-flung voyages and exotic cargoes [and] provided a measure of financial stability to the federal government." Furthermore, all of this trade gave the mariners and merchants of New England a cosmopolitan outlook valuing independence and the right to freely trade around the world.[106]

Writing to Secretary of State James Madison in 1806, Salem mariner and congressman, Jacob Crowninshield argued for the advantages of the trade at Calcutta:

> Calcutta is on the Ganges. It is a place of great trade. It exports vast quantities of rice for the supply of all India, of late years Sugar and Indigo, and its cotton and silk goods have always been much admired. We send from 30 to 50 ships annually to Calcutta. The outward cargo is chiefly Dollars, iron, lead, Brandy, Madeira and other wines, a variety of European articles, tar, large and small spars. It is estimated that we have imported in some years at least three millions of dollars worth of goods from Calcutta.[107]

Trade with India became important to the budding American economy. In 1807 imports from India tallied over $4 million.[108] The lucrative trade connected New England to India economically, but it also led to moments of cultural exchange.

The East India Marine Society sat at the crux of cultural and economic exchange between Asia and America. Founded in 1799 by mariners who had ventured around the

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[106] Ibid., 69–70.

[107] John H. Reinoehl, "Some Remarks on the American Trade: Jacob Crowninshield to James Madison 1806," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 16, no. 1, Third Series (January 1, 1959): 110–11.

[108] G Bhagat, *Americans in India, 1784-1860* (New York: New York University Press, 1970), 138.

Cape of Good Hope, the society formed to support the families and widows of mariners killed at sea and to gather and maintain information about the best routes to the East Indies. Beyond these two goals, though, the society also maintained a "cabinet of curiosities" filled with items brought back from Asia and the Pacific. It was, as one member toasted in 1804, a cabinet so "that every mariner may possess the history of the world."[109] The cabinet was a hodge-podge including items from natural history to minerals to cultural objects. A catalog from 1821 listed items ranging from "a portion of human intestine (Duodenum) with the capillary vessels filled with an injection of red wax, showing the folds (Valvulae conniventes) in which the lacteals open to take up the chyle" to pieces of minerals to a shark's backbone to "a print of the Temple of Elephanta, near Bombay."[110] The cabinet was a place at once scientific and exotic.

What started as a cabinet of curiosities was soon considered a museum by the society's members and folks in town, but it was a museum filled with items out of context. Only the whimsy of the patrons and mariners held the collection together. As one historian of the museum has written, "to the mariner [the artifact] was a curious souvenir; to the museum-goer it became a model, a synecdoche. Individual patrons had donated discrete items, often for reasons unique to them, but the museum synergized those artifacts, and from that synergism emerged an image that could have been quite different from the intent of the patron-mariner or the reality of the faraway land."[111] The image that emerged was not an image of India, China, or Java. It was an image of "the Orient,"

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[109] William Bentley, *The Diary of William Bentley, D.D., Pastor of the East Church, Salem, Massachusetts.*, ed. Peter Smith, vol. 2 (Gloucester Mass.: Essex Institute, 1962), 121.

[110] *The East-India Marine Society of Salem* (Salem, Mass.: W. Palfray Jr., 1821), 50, 64.

[111] James Lindgren M., "'That Every Mariner May Possess the History of the World': A Cabinet for the East India Marine Society of Salem," *The New England Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (1995): 200.

an internally undifferentiated other-place that was exotic, rich, and open to scientific inquiry.

For the first few years of its existence the EIMS celebrated its anniversary with a procession through town featuring Oriental artifacts from the museum and a genuine palanquin from Calcutta upon which the society members would ride. Salem clergyman William Bentley described one such procession in 1804. "Each of the brethren bore some Indian curiosity & the palanquin was borne by the negroes dressed nearly in the Indian manner. A person dressed in Chinese habits & mask passed in front. The crowd of spectators was great."[112] Bentley had apparently gotten used to the Salem gentleman costumed in the Chinese habit. Three years earlier he had disapproved of the Mandarin dress in the parade: "The dressing of one of their company in a Mandarin's dress, was no compliment paid to themselves on the occasion. Might they not rather have given the dress to one of their Servants or have exhibited a figure to the wondering multitude."[113] Reverend Bentley missed the meaning of the procession in his critique. The goal was not just to exhibit the Oriental objects, rather, it was to display mastery and ownership over them. The men of the EIMS desired to publically display that they inhabited the East as comfortably as they did the streets of Salem. Hence the African Americans carrying a palanquin full of mariners, the "Indian curiosity," and the Chinese habit. As their bodies moved down the streets of Salem, Massachusetts decked in pieces of the Orient, the EIMS members declared in public that the East was not that far from home and that they,

[112] Bentley, *The Diary of William Bentley, D.D., Pastor of the East Church, Salem, Massachusetts.*, 2:68.

[113] Ibid., 2:361.

and their traveling mariner bodies, bridged the gap between the rational world of New England merchants and the exotic world of the Orient.

India and the Orient often appeared in America as things, cloth mostly. Remembering her childhood in Salem during the early nineteenth century, Caroline Howard King wrote, "the wonders of India [were] so near our front doors, when my mother wanted a new set of china or a fresh camel's hair shawl or scarf, it was as easy a thing for her to speak to the Captain of the next ship starting to India as it would be now for us to order them at Brigg's or Hovey's."[114] But even earlier than King's lifetime, Indian cotton goods made their way to the American colonies by way of London up until the decade of the revolution.[115] The museum provided an exotic shadow to the familiar domestic goods of the East India trade in New England homes. The scarf and the idol came from the same place but one went into the New England home and the other into the museum. One was worn on the body of a woman as a fashion while the other was part of the mariner's exotic collection.

Out of context and with but a phrase or two of description, a number of artifacts from Hindu religious cultures ended up in the East India Marine Society Museum. The 1821 catalog lists "a group of idols worshipped in Bengal" gifted by Ephraim Emerton. These "idols," were images of Rama, Sita, and Jagaddhatri molded in clay and painted beautifully. Reverend William Bentley himself donated a "model of a fakir molded in clay." The museum also held a copper image of Ganesa from Java, noted as "the god of Prudence and Sagacity among the Hindoos," a "Burso, or Monument erected to the

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[114] Caroline Howard King, *When I Lived in Salem, 1822-1866* (Brattleboro, Vermont: Stephen Daye Press, 1937), 31.

[115] Bean, *Yankee India*, 31.

memory of the dead, in India, by the Hindoos," "beads worn by the Pundahs and Fakirs in India," and two items dealing with the infamous Temple of Elephanta. First was a print of the temple and second, "a Hand, broken from a Statue of Granite, in the Temple on the Island of Elephanta, near Bombay" given by Benjamin Lander. Accompanying these more obviously religious items were pieces of native clothing, Christian scriptures translated into Indian languages, and tools from India. Most of the items do not carry the date that they were donated to the museum so all that can be said is that they were all there before 1821, though it is likely that most of them arrived in the first decade of the century.[116]

The items from Hindu religious culture in the 1821 catalog reflected the interest these mariners had in Hindu religions during the period. Unlike Hannah Adams, Joseph Priestly, or the Unitarians, the society's members took little interest in Hindu texts or Hindu doctrine. Unlike Orientalists or Unitarians, EIMS mariners dealt in material objects, not texts, and they dealt with merchants in Indian ports, not brahman pandits in colonial bureaucracies. Thus the religious items they brought back centered around holy ascetics, images of deities, and the fabulous Temple of Elephanta. The items in the museum represented Hindu religion as an exotic religion of idolatry, ascetic practice, and ancient temples. In this way, the EIMS museum brought the pages of the evangelical missionary magazines to life, though without the theology. Evangelical missionary reports described Hindu religion as a pan-Indian religious system of idolatry and, at the EIMS museum, New Englanders could see the idols of this system for themselves. What held the items together in the collection, what made them "Hindoo," was their function

[116] *The East-India Marine Society of Salem* .

within the system of idolatry and ritual practice. The items were considered Hindu items because they were idols and temples.

However, the overall impression of Oriental mystique overshadowed and overwhelmed any representation of a single religious system. While some items did offer museum goers a look at Hindu religions, the collection of foreign cultural objects and natural specimens more strongly represented an undifferentiated Orient than any single culture or religion. Visiting the museum as a young girl, Caroline Howard King remembered it as having had a "mysterious attraction." She described her attraction to the museum and a set of life sized models of Indians near its entrance:

> Indeed it was an experience for an imaginative child, to step from the prosaic streets of a New England town, into that atmosphere redolent with perfumes from the East, warm and fragrant and silent, with a touch of the dear old Arabian Nights about it. From the moment I set my foot in that beautiful old hall, and greeted and was greeted by the solemn group of Orientals, who, draped in Eastern stuffs and camel's hair shallows stood opposite the entrance, until the hour of closing came, and Captain Saul went through this never-failing ceremony of presenting me with a strip of sandal wood cut from a huge log that stood near the door, or a sweet-smelling Tonquin Bean, the hours were full of enchantment, and I think I came as near fairy-land as one ever can in this work-a-day world.[117]

The museum was not a passage to India per se, but instead a passage to a "fairy-land" full of Oriental enchantment. King's words imply that it was a land of her imagination, a land that was not real. Yet she could smell the "perfumes of the East," feel the museum's warmth, and hold onto the strip of sandal wood. The materiality and sensuality of the museum was real but they launched her childhood imagination into an Orient populated by the clay models in the entrance and touched by the Arabian nights. Hindu artifacts melded with models of "Orientals," foreign tools, and natural specimens within the walls

[117] King, *When I Lived in Salem*, 29.

of the museum to make it a place of fantasy, imagination, and an undifferentiated exotic Orient.[118]

While King experienced the museum as a passage to the Orient, others in town believed the museum played an important role in the progress of science and human knowledge. In an open letter to the Society published in the Salem Gazette an anonymous admirer lauded the society for its collection and distinguished the society from "many men of sordid and contracted minds [who] consider a Museum as they do fire works, that give pleasure only while seen."[119] On the contrary, the society is "enlightened by science and refined by taste" and "filled with admiration at every thing which throws light on the history of nations, or exhibits the beauties, or displays the wonders of nature."[120] The author sees potential in the society's work for exploring the history of humanity.

> The country from which you bring us information has been emphatically called the "cradle of the world;" there we are to look for the earliest beginnings and slow progress of Art, and the still slower march of Science.
> Your researches united to the researches of others, will assist the philosopher in discussing that hitherto but partially explored subject, the powers and faculties of the human mind; by showing him the influence of climate, laws, superstition and habit on society.[121]

Rather than the imaginative world of King, this museum goer finds a very real world of rational science within the hall of the society. Every item sheds light on the progress of human development. The museum represents an Orient that holds the secrets of human history and that is open for scientific investigation. The image of Rama and Sita and the

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[118] This view of the exotic Orient may have had an influence on Salem's own Nathaniel Hawthorne. See Jee Yoon Lee, "'The Rude Contact of Some Actual Circumstance': Hawthorne and Salem's East India Marine Museum," *ELH* 73, no. 4 (2006): 949–973.

[119] "To the East India Marine Society," *Salem Gazette*, November 5, 1805.

[120] Ibid.

[121] Ibid.

broken granite hand from Elephanta point to the development of art and the influence of "superstition and habit." Again, the items from India do not represent any sort of "Hinduism," rather they represent an Orient that is "the cradle of the world" and holds the answers to questions about the development of the human mind. This Orient was imagined as primitive and promised to reveal the development and advancement of Anglo-American culture in comparison.

The East-India trade in New England brought Indian objects and materials into American hands. While most often these things were clothes at times they were also pieces that fit into the construction of Hindu religions as idolatry. While Unitarians lauded Rammohun Roy and missionaries described bloody rituals, the sailors of the East India Marine Society were exchanging goods and returning home with exotic objects from the Orient. The EIMS processions and museum used pieces of Hindu material culture to represent the Orient as "the cradle of the world" that could be scientifically examined and an imaginative fairy-land of the exotic other. In the hands of the East India Marine Society Hindu items became part of a larger representation of the foreign Oriental other. The Orient was either the land of luxury goods and fantastical mystery or the land that held the ancient secrets of human development. In either case it stood in stark contrast to the modernizing, industrializing, and rational New England. The East may have been just outside the door but everything changed when one crossed the threshold.

Hindu religions and True Religion in Early America

From 1800 to 1830 a triangle of exchange moved goods, people, texts, and ideas between America, Britain, and India. A series of relationships established and maintained this triangle. First and most obviously, Britain's imperial occupation of India and its continued rise to power in South Asia constituted the relationship between colony and metropole. Second, evangelical Christians in New England took part in a transatlantic evangelical movement that linked Britain and America and brought missionary intelligence about the British and American missionary movement in India to American Protestants. Third, American Unitarians discovered an ally in their battle against orthodoxy in the person of Rammohun Roy while also maintaining contacts with their theological brethren across the Atlantic. Finally, none of the connections between India and America would have been possible without the ships of American merchants in ports like Salem. Engaged in a lucrative East India trade, these merchants not only brought Indian cloth and goods to America but also the occasional "Hindoo idol." This triangle was sustained by a series of shared movements. Revivalism united evangelicals across the Atlantic. Religious liberalism, rationalism, Unitarianism and critiques of evangelicalism kept Unitarians and Hindu reformers connected in New England and Bengal. American mariners and Hindu merchants established long lasting business relationships. These relationships shrunk the distance between places like Boston, Bengal, Andover, Bombay, and London.

It is also important to note how the Protestants along this triangle shared a common view of Hindu religion as a system of idolatry. Clearly this is the case for

evangelicals, but even Unitarians believed the vast majority of Hindu religion was heathen idolatry and only accepted Roy because he rejected idols and believed in a monotheistic godhead. The collection of gods, goddesses, images of temples, and articles from fakirs testified to the EIMS members' belief that true Hindu religion was found in rituals and images. No one in the EIMS brought back any Hindu texts, just Christian ones translated in Hindu languages. Roy's popularity in America was possible because he admitted that his fellow countrymen who worshiped idols were indeed heathens, though he wanted to make the same point about Americans who believed in the trinity. At the height of his popularity with Unitarian Christians Roy went from being considered a Hindu to being labeled a Christian precisely because the idea of an enlightened monotheistic Hindu was unthinkable. If Roy believed in true religion, as Unitarians were beginning to think, then he must be a Christian. It would take a group of liberal Protestants who were willing to push past Unitarianism to a religious liberalism that found truth outside of Protestant Christianity for Americans to see Hindu religions as something more than heathen idolatry. As Transcendentalist writers turned to Hindu texts for religious sources and religious experimentation an image of the Hindu religion as the soul of a contemplative and spiritual East began to appear alongside the longstanding view of Hindu heathenism.

Part II

Metaphysical India, 1830-1893

Chapter 3

Transcendentalism, Brahmanism, and Universal Religion

The Unitarian controversy signaled fractures in American Christianity that reshaped the religious cultures of the United States throughout the nineteenth century. The gap between the evangelicalism of the missionary movement and the liberal Protestantism of the Unitarians grew as the century wore on. Yet, while Protestant sects proliferated, another American religious culture also grew during the period: metaphysical religion. Metaphysical religions are typified by the themes of mind, correspondence, movement and energy, and salvific healing, and constitute a religious culture spanning the entire history of America.[1] Previous chapters have analyzed representations of Hindu religions among Protestant writers. Turning to representations of Hindu religions from metaphysical writers offers a view of how Hindu religions became a source for critics of Protestant religion.

Early Transcendentalists imagined Hindu religion as the soul of an essentially spiritual and mystical India that provided a needed balance to Western materialism and Protestant practicality. Though they differed in the details, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau believed the West, with America as its pinnacle, and the East, typified by India, needed each other's cultural resources. An East-West hybrid would combine American actions of materialism and industry with an Indian mind of spirituality and unity. Building on the literary work of Thoreau and Emerson, later Transcendentalist

[1] Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 1–16. Albanese positions metaphysical religion alongside evangelical and liturgical or state-church religions, which she identifies with the historical work of Nathan Hatch and Jon Butler respectively.

writers produced comparative religion texts and invented a religious system they called "Brahmanism," the religion of India. Lydia Maria Child, Samuel Johnson, and James Freeman Clarke produced texts that put Brahmanism into a larger model of comparative religions meant to find universal truth across various "great religions." For the first generation of Transcendentalists, Hindu religion was one part of the larger Orient that they imagined as the complimentary opposite of the West, but as later Transcendentalists took up a more comparative model of religion they imagined Brahmanism as a world religion with its own claims to larger universal truths that transcended any East-West divide

The Transcendentalists are often considered the first Americans to incorporate Hindu religious culture into their thought, writing, and practice. For both scholars and non-scholars alike, the story of Hinduism in America typically begins in Concord, Massachusetts with Emerson and Thoreau. In his recent popular history of Vedanta and yoga in America, self-described "spiritual counselor" and author Philip Goldberg began the story with Ralph Waldo Emerson, "the first public thinker to openly embrace Eastern religious and philosophical precepts…Because of Emerson and his direct heirs, Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman, millions of educated Americans have been touched by India since the mid-nineteenth century."[2] On the academic side, Catherine Albanese cited the nineteenth century Transcendentalists, and Emerson and Thoreau in particular, as the starting point for considering the role of Asian religions and Hinduism in American

[2] Philip Goldberg, *American Veda : from Emerson and the Beatles to Yoga and Meditation--How Indian Spirituality Changed the West* (New York: Harmony Books, 2010), 26; For another recent example see Stefanie Syman, *The Subtle Body : the Story of Yoga in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 11–19.

metaphysical religion.[3] For new agers, yoga enthusiasts, and historians of religion alike, Asian religions enter the American story at Concord.

Academic attention to the encounter between Transcendentalists and Asian religions began with the work of Arthur Christy and Frederic Carpenter in the 1930s.[4] Christy described his project as explaining "*why* Concord men read the Orientals and to *what end*; and most important of all, the *sources* from which they took Oriental ideas and ornamentation for some of the classic pages of American literature."[5] Thus began a tradition of searching Transcendentalists' journals and published works for references to Hindu or Buddhists texts, symbols, and theologies. Some studies such as Christy's argued strongly for the influence of Asian religions on Transcendentalists and tried to match up the public and private writings of Thoreau or Emerson with Asian texts they had read as proof.[6] Other studies took a slightly different tack and argued that Asian religions provide the key to the "real" meaning of many Transcendentalist works.[7] In all of these studies, scholars assumed the Orient, Hinduism, or Asian religions to be stable categories that either influenced Transcendentalists or were the keys to understanding them. The

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[3] Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*, 347.

[4] Arthur Christy, *The Orient in American Transcendentalism: A Study of Emerson, Thoreau, and Alcott* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932); Frederic I. Carpenter, *Emerson and Asia* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1930).

[5] Christy, *The Orient in American Transcendentalism*, 3. Emphasis in the original.

[6] Carpenter, *Emerson and Asia*; R. K. Gupta, *The Great Encounter: A Study of Indo-American Literary and Cultural Relations* (Riverdale, MD: The Riverdale Company, 1987); Arthur Versluis, *American Transcendentalism and Asian Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[7] Paul Friedrich, *The Gita Within Walden* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2009); Steven Adisasmito-Smith, "Transcendental Brahmin: Emerson's 'Hindu' Sentiments," in *Emerson for the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Barry Tharaud (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2010), 131–164.

influence moved in one direction from a real Orient out there to the mind and work of the authors.

By focusing on influences and decoding journals and published works, scholars have assumed the same essentialist view of Hindu religions held by their Transcendentalist subjects. For example, Arthur Christy's point that "the religious aspect [of Indian literature] stands in the foreground, for the Indian mind is essentially of this temper" could just as easily come from Thoreau's pen.[8] By focusing on influence, scholars have constructed an essentialist "Hinduism," "Asian religions," or "Orient" that somehow influenced the Transcendentalist writers. This essentialist approach missed the ways Transcendentalists imagined and constructed Hindu religions and India as they read ancient Indian texts for literary resources and spiritual inspiration. Finding influences and connections with Indian texts in Transcendentalists' published or private writings is only the first step of understanding the Transcendentalist encounter with Hindu religions. The next step is an analysis of how these connections and influences led to the construction of the Orient, the Hindu, and Brahmanism in Transcendentalists' imaginations.

"Transcendentalism, thy name is Brahme!"

In 1822, Mary Moody Emerson wrote to her young nephew Ralph Waldo and encouraged him to search for his muse in the scriptures of the East. Young Ralph Waldo seemed intrigued but intimidated. He wrote back, "I am curious to read your Hindoo mythologies…When I lie dreaming on the possible contents of pages as dark to me as the

[8] Christy, *The Orient in American Transcendentalism*, 14.

characters on the seal of Solomon, I console myself with calling it learning's El Dorado."[9] He thought it natural that "literature at large should look for some fanciful stores of mind which surpassed example and possibility."[10] The "Hindoo mythologies" suggested by his aunt were, like the mythical city of El Dorado, full of riches but perhaps impossible to mine. Emerson seemed skeptical that studying them would ever pay off. He did, however, find value in the figure of Rammohun Roy. He wrote to his aunt: "I know not any more about your Hindoo convert than I have seen in the *Christian Register*" but he was glad the Unitarians had "one trophy to build up on the plain where the zealous Trinitarians have builded a thousand."[11] While at the age of nineteen Emerson had little to write to his Aunt about her "Hindoo mythologies," between 1836 and 1856 he read many classic Indian texts in part or in whole, including the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, the Vishnu Sarma and the Vishnu Purana.[12]

These texts fostered a view of India and its religion that continued the El Dorado trope of his earlier letter. India became part of "Asia," a land of unity and contemplation. For Emerson Asia was, as Carpenter described it, "the distant country whose very strangeness was fascinating. It was the other half of the world, proverbially unknown to the dwellers of the West…Asia and Europe, Orient and Occident, the East and the West, are always contrasted and usually made complementary to each other."[13] Emerson

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[9] James Elliot Cabot, *A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 1 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1887), 81.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Carpenter, *Emerson and Asia*, 159–160.

[13] Ibid., 27–28.

imagined Asia as passive, religious, contemplative, unifying, and feminine. "Mine Asia" was a pet name he used for his wife Lidian Emerson. Like his wife, Asia held a feminine attraction, the mysterious and fascinating opposite of his Western male mind.[14] When Emerson imagined Asia he imagined its essence in Hindu philosophy, in the Hindu mind. Through his encounters with Indian texts and his construction of India as the soul of Asia, Emerson imagined Hindu religions as the complementary opposite of America, the essence of the West.

Emerson made the East/West contrast central to his argument in his essay, "Plato, or the Philosopher," part of his 1850 book *Representative Men*. In the essay, Emerson argued that resolving the distinction between oneness and otherness was the central problem of philosophy. He laid out the problem:

> Two cardinal facts forever lie at the base [of philosophy]; the One; and the two. 1. Unity or Identity; and 2. Variety. We unite all things by perceiving the law which pervades them, by perceiving the superficial differences, and the profound resemblances. But every mental act, — this very perception of identity or oneness, recognize the difference of things. Oneness and Otherness. It is impossible to speak, or to think without embracing both.[15]

Unity, identity, and oneness defined Asia for Emerson. The tendency for "raptures of prayer and ecstasy of devotion" and losing "all being in one Being…finds its highest expression in the religious writings of the East, and chiefly in the Indians scriptures, in the Vedas, the Bhagavat Geeta, and the Vishnu Purana."[16] To prove his point Emerson paraphrased Krishna from the Vishnu Purana. "'You are fit,' (says supreme Krishna to a

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[14] Ibid., 31–32.

[15] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Wallace E Williams and Douglas Emory Wilson, vol. 4 (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 28.

[16] Ibid.

sage,) 'to apprehend that you are not distinct from me. That which I am, thou art, and that also is this world, with its gods, and heroes, and mankind. Men contemplate distinctions, because they are stupefied with ignorance.'"[17] Asia, and India most of all, contemplates unity in all things, seeing the one and not the many.

Emerson opposed Oriental contemplation and unity with Western action and diversity. He wrote, "If speculation tends thus to a terrific unity, in which all things are absorbed,--action tends directly backwards to diversity."[18] He then constructed a detailed list of qualities broken along the East/West divide: the one/the many, being/intellect, necessity/freedom, rest/motion, power/distribution, strength/pleasure, consciousness/definition, genius/talent, earnestness/knowledge, possession/trade, caste/culture, king/democracy, escapism/executive deity. Emerson pointed out the social effect of these philosophical differences. Asia's delight in unity led to a belief in "the idea of a deaf, unimplorable, immense Fate," made manifest in the caste system of India, while "the genius of Europe is active and creative" and produced culture, art, trade, and freedom. The central problem of the "two cardinal facts" played out in the national and social differences between India and America.

While Emerson considered the West superior to the East, his goal was not to set up a distinctive hierarchy. Rather, he sought a synthesis of the two and he found such a synthesis in the person of Plato. In Plato "a balanced soul was born, perceptive of the two elements." He was the man "who could see two sides of a thing." Emerson praised how Plato came to join "the unity of Asia and the detail of Europe, the infinitude of the Asiatic

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., 4:29.

soul and the result-loving, machine-making, surface-seeking, opera going Europe."[19] For Emerson, Asia and Europe, East and West, needed each other and could not be separated, just as the one was made manifest in diversity.

The theme of Asian unity extended into Emerson's poems as well. In his 1847 volume *Poems*, Emerson published "Hamatreya," a poem that represented the synthesis of Eastern unity and Western action he desired. H. H. Wilson's translation of the Vishnu Purana, which Emerson read and copied extracts from into his notebook in 1845, provided inspiration for the poem. The section of the Vishnu Purana on which Emerson based the poem features the goddess Earth explaining the folly of kings who seek to conquer great kingdoms and yet ignore their own mortality. As Emerson copied into his notebook, "How great is the folly of princes who are endowed with the faculty of reason, to cherish the confidence of ambition when they themselves are but foam upon the wave."[20] The king's sense of individual ambition was an illusion, for in truth his life was a brief moment of foam on the great unified wave of being.

Emerson used this warning to Indian kings as a jumping off point for his own critique of Yankee landlords. The first section of the poem named and described landlords from great families around Concord, Massachusetts, and how they believed their ownership of the land to be absolute. "Each of these landlords walked amidst his farm / Saying, ''Tis mine, my children's, and my name's.'"[21] Yet, the poem's speaker

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[19] Ibid., 4:31.

[20] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. William H. Gilman, vol. 9 (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960), 321.

[21] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Hamatreya," in *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Albert J Von Frank, vol. 9 (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), l. 4–5.

asked, "Where are these men? Asleep beneath their grounds."[22] Like the kings of the Vishnu Purana, they failed to remember they were mortal. And so "Earth laughs in flowers, to see her boastful boys."[23] In the second section of the poem, with the subtitle "Earth-Song," the Earth, as she does in the Vishnu Purana, rebuked the Yankee kings:

> 'They called me theirs,
> Who so controlled me;
> Yet every one
> Wished to stay, and is gone.
> How am I theirs,
> If they cannot hold me,
> But I hold them?'[24]

The Earth swallowed up the bodies of the dead New England landlords in an image that unites Eastern unity and Western action. The two balanced out one another. The active will of the Yankee landlord must not go unchecked and so the eternal and universal voice of Earth reminded the reader that life is short and flees "like the flood's foam," an image taken directly from the Vishnu Purana.[25]

The poem exemplified Emerson's belief that the East and West needed each other through its use of a Hindu text to critique the folly of New England landlord families. While it is unclear why Emerson altered the name "Maitreya" of the Vishuna Purana to the "Hamatreya" of his poem's title, the title was an allusion to the Hindu text. The fusion of East and West was immediately noticeable as the reader shifted from the Indian title to the first line of the poem, a list of New England family names: "Bulkley, Hunt, Willard,

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[22] Ibid., l. 11.

[23] Ibid., l. 13.

[24] Ibid., l. 54–60.

[25] Ibid., l. 50.

Hosmer, Meriam, Flint."[26] The poem also used the Hindu text to make a moral point about New England society. The final quatrain of the poem, following the "Earth-Song" section, reflected the speaker's moral and emotional response to the Earth's rebuke:

> When I heard the Earth-song,
> I was no longer brave;
> My avarice cooled
> Like lust in the chill of the grave.[27]

The Earth, the voice of the East, affected change in the speaker. The avarice and lust of his Western activity cooled. The grave became a reminder of the folly of his activity. The spiritual mind of the East balanced the industrial passion of the West.

Emerson expressed Asia's unifying principle in another poem with a Hindu name, "Brahma," which first appeared in an 1857 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*. In this poem the speaker was unity itself, the One.

> If the red slayer think he slays,
> Or if the slain think he is slain,
> They know no well the subtle ways
> I keep, and pass, and turn again.
>
> Far or forgot to me is near;
> Shadow and sunlight are the same;
> The vanished gods to me appear;
> And one to me are shame and fame.
>
> They reckon ill who leave me out;
> When me they fly, I am the wings;
> I am the doubter and the doubt,
> And the hymn the Brahmin sings.
>
> The strong gods pine for my abode,
> And pine in vain the sacred Seven;
> But though, meek lover of the good!

[26] Ibid., l. 1.

[27] Ibid., l. 61–64.

Find me, and turn thy back on heaven.[28]

The poem was one long meditation on unity drawing on Hindu texts. Arthur Christy cited influences and paraphrases in the poem from the Vishnu Purana, the Laws of Manu, and the Katha Upanishad.[29] In the poem, Brahma speaks and outlines its own fullness, exceeding any sense of difference or differentiation. Near and far, shadow and sunlight, shame and fame, all melt together in the great unity. This unity was the unity of Asia, specifically of the Hindus, whose Brahmin sings and whose gods pine. As Carpenter wrote about "Hamatreya" and "Brahma," "the two deal with different aspects of the same Hindu idea. 'Hamatreya' expressed the feeling for the identity of matter under its various appearances in spite of the 'magical illusions of reality'—the identity of earth and the human body. "Brahma" expressed the feeling for the identity of energy—of the human soul and the life-process."[30] Carpenter was right to identify the shared theme of identity and unity in the two poems. However, like Emerson, Carpenter saw these as "conceptions which were essentially Hindu."[31] Rather than essentially Hindu, these concepts were the essential components of Emerson's own construction of an "Asia" imagined through Orientalist translations of certain Hindu texts.

Emerson often befuddled readers and reviewers with his representations of India and Asia. With tongue planted firmly in cheek, the reviewer in the *North American*

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[28] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Brahma," in *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Albert J Von Frank, vol. 9 (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 363–366 The version of the poem printed in this text mistakenly starts the final line of the poem with "Fine" instead of "Find." Because every other version of the poem I found uses "Find" and because there is no note in the list of variants of the poem in the text I can only assume this is a typo and I corrected it in the above.

[29] Christy, *The Orient in American Transcendentalism*, 167.

[30] Carpenter, *Emerson and Asia*, 127.

[31] Ibid.

Review noted that in Emerson's first book of poems, which include "Hamatreya," "sometimes, an uncouth Sanscrit, Greek, or German compound word stands as the title of a few verses, and answers the poet's object to puzzle his readers quite delightfully. The contrivance is ingenious and shows how highly obscurity is prized, and that a book of poetry may almost attain the dignity of a child's book of riddles."[32] Both the title and the contents of the poem baffled the reviewer, who confessed lacking the knowledge or time to search encyclopedias "for a solution of the enigma."[33] "Brahma" also inspired bemused mockery from reviewers. In an article headed "Emerson Travestie," the *New York Times* called "Brahma" "an exquisite piece of meaningless versification, that no sooner is it read than the desire to parody it becomes irresistible." The newspaper wryly praised Emerson because "a poem in which no one can find a meaning, must be acknowledged a very great success. None but a man of genius could have produced such an exquisite piece of no-nothingism."[34] Indeed "Brahama" inspired many popular parodies, one printed in the *Times* a few days later, entitled "Mutton," turned the red slayer into a butcher, the slayed into lamb and, in the final line, asked readers to turn their back on pork.[35]

At least a few readers grasped the theme of unity in the poem, however. The *Boston Herald* published a poetic response to "Brahma" with lines reflecting that the writer grasped Emerson's meaning: "And I am God, for God is but the whole, / Of which

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[32] "Poems," *The North American Review* 64, no. 135 (April 1847): 410.

[33] Ibid., 411.

[34] "Emerson Travestie," *New York Times*, November 12, 1857.

[35] "Brahma," *New York Times*, November 16, 1857.

all souls form each an equal part."[36] Writing in *Graham's American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, and Fashion*, the editor claimed the poem "consists almost entirely of the characteristic and leading points" of the Bhagavad Gita. For the reviewer, the overall theme of the Gita was "God is all things, one being and one substance, or all beings and all substances" and the poem was an attempt to exemplify by offering pictures of opposites and declaring them identical.[37] The review then goes through a line by line reading of the poem matching each of Emerson's lines with passages from the Gita. Where these writers understood and appreciated Emerson's image of unity, *The Christian Watchman and Christian Reflector*, possibly remembering earlier critiques of Rammohun Roy, found *Representative Men* to be "Oriental Pantheism" and rejected it outright. The Baptist magazine identified the theme of unity Emerson associated with Asia and believed it to be a dangerous heresy.[38] Representation of Asia as the land of unity and the one seemed to resonate with those who were sympathetic with Emerson or had some prior experience with Hindu religions, either in the form of the Bhagavad Gita or the writings of Rammohun Roy.

Emerson's use of Hindu texts reflected his desire to balance East and West. As Carpenter described him, Emerson "was never more than half Oriental, and even when he wrote 'Brahma,' he organized it into a most perfectly balanced and proportioned poem, in conventional Western metre. In 'Hamatreya' he had expressed the feeling of Difference

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[36] "A Poetical Explanation," *Boston Herald*, December 3, 1857.

[37] "Editor's Easy Talk," *Graham's American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, and Fashion* 52, no. 3 (March 1858): 273.

[38] "Representative Men," *Christian Watchman and Christian Reflector* 31, no. 4 (January 24, 1850): 14.

as well as that of Identity, and thus produced a poem dual in mood and idea."[39] Along the same line, historian Carl T. Jackson identified Emerson as the first American "to envision this as a fusion of East and West."[40] Emerson's vision of East and West relied upon a notion of essential difference between the people, religion, and culture of each. That difference not only made fusion possible, but it also allowed for comparison, hence the long list of qualities divided between the two in "Plato." The desire for fusion and the reliance on comparative difference continued throughout Transcendentalist representations of Hindu religions and the East.

Emerson's friend Henry David Thoreau took a similar essentialist view of East and West but he went further than Emerson and more of his published work dealt directly with Hindu texts and religious ideas. Thoreau also praised the East more than Emerson and used the East/West contrast to critique New England Protestant Christianity. In Thoreau's two major works, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849) and *Walden* (1854) he picked up the basic East/West essentialism of Emerson but expanded on it, applying Hindu texts to himself and the society around him.

Like his mentor Emerson, Thoreau imagined Asia as a land of contemplation, unity, and ancient wisdom. As he and his brother reclined by the river and ate melons in the "Monday" chapter of *Week*, he described the two of them as "more or less, Asiatics" who "give over all work and reform."[41] Their thoughts "reverted to Arabia, Persia, and

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[39] Carpenter, *Emerson and Asia*, 151.

[40] Jackson, *The Oriental Religions and American Thought*, 57.

[41] Henry David Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 126.

Hindostan, the lands of contemplation and dwelling places of ruminant nations."[42] But for Thoreau India was the center of Asia, the heart of the Orient. Later in "Monday" Thoreau compared Eastern and Western philosophy and religion through a comparison of the Bhagavad Gita and the New Testament. The Gita recounted the god Krishna encouraging the warrior Arjuna to fulfill his duty as a warrior and enter battle against his estranged family members on the enemy's side. Thoreau praised Krishna's advice as "a sublime conservatism; as wide as the world, and as unwearied as time; preserving the universe with Asiatic anxiety, in that state in which it appeared in their minds."[43] For Thoreau, Hindu philosophers "dwell on the inevitability and unchangeableness of laws…The end is an immense consolation; eternal absorption in Brahma. Buoyancy, freedom, flexibility, variety, possibility, which also are qualities of the Unnamed , they deal with not."[44] Here Thoreau imagined Asia, similarly to Emerson, as typified by Hindu philosophy, unity, passivity, absorption, and lacking action, freedom, and diversity. Once again India was the land of the One.

Thoreau took a step further than Emerson, though, and made explicit comparisons between Hindu religions and Christianity. Where Hindu religions encouraged contemplation and represented a divine unity, "Christianity, on the other hand," he wrote, "is humane, practical, and, in a large sense, radical." Then, in a remarkable passage, Thoreau connected Hindu religions and Christianity while at the same time presenting their differences:

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[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid., 136.

[44] Ibid.

> So many years and ages of the gods those eastern sages sat contemplating Brahm, uttering in silence the mystic 'Om,' being absorbed into the essence of the Supreme Being, never going out of themselves, but subsiding further and deeper within; so infinitely wise, yet infinitely stagnant; until at last, in that same Asia, but in the western part of it, appeared a youth, wholly unforetold by them,—not being absorbed into Brahm, but bringing Brahm down to earth and to mankind; in whom Brahm had awaked from his long sleep, and exerted himself, and the day began,—a new avatar.[45]

Thoreau presented a new Christology and history for Christianity. Jesus emanated from the same God, the same Brahm, the Hindu contemplated. But while the Hindu contemplated, Christ reformed. Christ took action. The difference between Christ and the Hindu emerged in their texts. The New Testament "furnishes the most pregnant and practical texts" and "is remarkable for its pure morality; the best Hindoo Scripture, for its pure intellectuality."[46] While the Christian busily reformed evil, the Hindu resorted to ascetic attempts to "patiently starve it out."[47] Thoreau supported this claim through an extensive set of quotes from Charles Wilkins' translation of the Bhagavad Gita discussing "the forsaking of works."[48] For Thoreau the difference between East and West, Hindu and Christian, was action: "The former has nothing to do in this world, the latter is full of activity."[49]

Thoreau did not see the East/West difference as merely essential national characteristics; rather, he universalized the distinction: "There is a struggle between the oriental and the occidental in every nation; some who would be forever contemplating the

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[45] Ibid., 136–137.

[46] Ibid., 137.

[47] Ibid., 140.

[48] Ibid., 138–140.

[49] Ibid., 141.

sun, and some who are hastening toward the sunset. The former class says to the latter, When you have reached the sunset, you will be no nearer to the sun. To which the latter replies, But we so prolong the day."[50] There were Orientals and Occidentals everywhere, even in Concord, and the tension between those who sought contemplation and those who sought action typified society generally. Throughout "Monday" Thoreau praises the Gita and the Laws of Manu for their philosophy, contemplation, and understanding of universal truths, aligning himself with the contemplative Orientals. Thoreau took the trope of Eastern contemplation and Western action, the same trope Emerson unified in Plato, and applied it to the society around him and to people universally. But unlike Emerson, for Thoreau the East and West were not geographically far apart. They could be found anywhere, even in Massachusetts.

In a similar vein, Thoreau played with the common image of Hindu heathenism, turning it upside down. In the "Sunday" chapter of *Week*, Thoreau inverted traditional themes of work/rest and Christian/heathen in a critique of New England Protestantism. Thoreau recounted how he had been reprimanded by a pastor for heading on a hike up a mountain instead of attending church on a Sunday. For Thoreau, the Protestant emphasis on keeping the Sabbath was mere superstition.

> The country is full of this superstition, so that when one enters a village, the church, not only really but from association, is the ugliest looking building in it, because it is the one in which human nature stoops the lowest and is most disgraced. Certainly, temples as these shall ere long cease to deform the landscape. There are few things more disheartening and disgusting than when you are walking the streets of a strange village on the Sabbath, to hear a preacher shouting like a boatswain in a gale of wind, and thus harshly profaning the quiet atmosphere of the day. You fancy him to have taken off his coat, as when men are about to do hot and dirty work.[51]

[50] Ibid.

Thoreau's image of the pastor on Sunday used the same tropes as the missionary accounts of popular Hindu practice found in the *Panoplist* or *Missionary Herald*. The pastor was loud and profane. The church became a temple. The scene was "disheartening and disgusting." Thoreau used the noisy and profane image of the Hindu temple or festival to offer a critique of New England Protestantism as superstition. What Thoreau found unacceptable or distasteful in Hindu religion he used to further critique New England Protestants. For example, he compared New England superstition with Hindu superstition, calling Sabbath keeping "pagoda worship" and "like the beating of gongs in a Hindoo subterranean temple."[52] Just as Thoreau used the image of Hindu religion he found admirable to praise the Orientals of all nations, he used the parts of Hindu practice he found objectionable, the "superstitions," to critique the Protestant practices he saw around him. For Thoreau, the superstitious held to their creeds too tightly. The superstitious failed to contemplate and they failed to seek after truth. Instead, the superstitious held up in their churches and temples, preached and beat gongs. The contemplatives, meanwhile, could be found in the Gita and Manu or on top of a mountain. As he put it, "A man's real faith is never contained in his creed, nor is his creed an article of his faith. The last is never adopted."[53] The superstitious, Yankees and Hindus alike, reduced the greatness of their faith to creeds and ceremonies.

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[51] Ibid., 76.

[52] Ibid., 77.

[53] Ibid., 78.

In *Week*, Thoreau used notions of Oriental difference to critique society around him, but in *Walden* he began to apply his reading in Hindu scriptures to his own life and practice. In the first chapter of *Walden*, "Economy," Thoreau claimed his "purpose in going to Walden Pond was not to live cheaply nor to live dearly there, but to transact some private business with the fewest obstacles."[54] In the chapter titled "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For," he explains his business in a famous passage:

> I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not when I came to die, discover that I had not lived…I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and to publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my excursion.[55]

Here Thoreau emphasized living and acting. "Living deliberately" meant taking control of himself and his actions; living deep, living sturdily, driving life, reducing, cutting, shaving, publishing, and, most importantly, experiencing. This was no Emersonian essay on the nature of philosophy or poem on the One. Thoreau would apply his reading of Hindu texts to himself and his actions. Where Emerson pulled East and West together to produce a balanced poem, Thoreau sought to draw on the Orient and produce a balanced life.

Some scholars have read Thoreau's experience and practice at Walden Pond as the first American experiment with yoga. Christy argued that "the fact remains that

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[54] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, ed. J. Lyndon Shanley, 150th Anniversary edition (Princeton N.J.: Princeton Univerity Press, 2004), 19–20.

[55] Ibid., 90–91.

Thoreau *did* think of himself as a Yogi, and more than once affirmed it."[56] Christy cites a letter Thoreau wrote to H. G. O. Blake in 1849 where he remarked "even I am a yogi" and a September 1, 1841, entry in Thoreau's journal as corroborating evidence.[57] Religious historian Shreena Gandhi argued that Thoreau used "the Bhagavad Gita and the practice of yoga to deal with the alienation of modernism (and capitalism)."[58] Meanwhile, religious historian Alan D. Hodder linked Thoreau's yoga with his experiences of ecstasy. For Hodder, Thoreau's yoga operated "as a kind of spiritual model and imaginative construct, zealously distilled from his Eastern reading and thoughtfully elaborated, for the calculated purpose of representing to himself and his would-be readers authentic experiences of ecstasy."[59] Hodder saw three themes in Thoreau's yoga: celestial sounds, literary organicism, and asceticism.[60] It is the third theme, asceticism, I find most convincing and useful for considering how Thoreau represented and applied Hindu religious culture in *Walden*.

The deliberate living Thoreau strived for at Walden Pond and described in *Walden* was a life of control achieved through ascetic practice. In the chapter "Higher Laws," Thoreau quoted and expanded on Rammohun Roy's *An Abridgement of the Vedant*:

> "A command over our passions, and over the external sense of the body, and good acts, are declared by the Ved to be indispensable in the mind's approximation to

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[56] Christy, *The Orient in American Transcendentalism*, 199 Emphasis in the original.

[57] Ibid., 201.

[58] Shreena Niketa Divyakant Gandhi, "Translating, Practicing, and Commodifying Yoga in the U.S." (Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 2009), 54.

[59] Alan D Hodder, *Thoreau's Ecstatic Witness* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001), 184.

[60] Ibid., 184–190.

> God." Yet the spirit can for the time pervade and control every member and function of the body, and transmute what in form is the grossest sensuality into purity and devotion.[61]

By controlling one's passions, one's body, and one's actions, one could achieve spiritual devotion and purity. Furthermore, this devotion need not take extreme forms but could be found in a sacralization of the everyday. "Our whole life is startlingly moral," wrote Thoreau.[62] And he found sanction for this idea in Hindu texts. "Nothing was too trivial for the Hindoo lawgiver, however offensive it may be to modern taste. He teaches how to eat, drink, cohabit, void excrement and urine, and the like, elevating what is mean, and does not falsely excuse himself by calling these things trifles."[63] For Thoreau, Hindu texts required bodily control and used the ascetic control of the body to reach God.

Thoreau used this image of the Hindu's bodily control to once again critique New England Protestantism. "What avails it that you are a Christian, if you are not purer than the heathen, if you deny yourself no more, if you are not more religious? I know many systems of religion esteemed heathenish whose precepts fill the reader with shame, and provoke him to new endeavors, though it be to the performance of rites merely."[64] As with the comparison in *Week*, Thoreau flipped the usual Christian/heathen dichotomy. The heathen was pure because he denies himself and his religion prompts acts of denial that lead to purity. Thoreau ended the chapter with a brief story of John Farmer, an everyman who sat on his porch thinking at the end of a work day. He heard the notes of a flute and then a voice inside him asked, "Why do you stay here and live this mean

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[61] Thoreau, *Walden*, 219.

[62] Ibid., 218.

[63] Ibid., 221.

[64] Ibid.

moiling life, when a glorious existence is possible for you?" Farmer came to this conclusion: "All that he could think of was to practice some new austerity, to let his mind descend into his body and redeem it, and treat himself with ever increasing respect."[65] Ascetic denial and bodily control were not just for Hindus and hermetic writers, they were for all the John Farmers in New England, Thoreau claimed. Yankees like John Farmer could live a "glorious existence" by turning to the austerity of the East.

Just as Emerson imagined a union of East and West in Plato, Thoreau had his own vision of unity that connected the Orient and Occident. As with his image of Hindu asceticism, Thoreau came at this vision through experience and Hindu texts. In his chapter "The Pond in Winter," Thoreau began with a description of men working to harvest ice from Walden Pond that would be shipped around the world and then launched into a vision that united New England and India. He started by noting how many townsfolk considered Walden Pond to be bottomless. He wrote, "I am thankful that this pond was made deep and pure for symbol. While men believe in the infinite some ponds will be thought to be bottomless," signaling the potential the pond held for representing larger truths.[66] As he watched the men cutting and loading the ice, Thoreau began imagining where the ice would be shipped and he closed the chapter with a vision of East and West ignited by his imagination:

> Thus it appears that the sweltering inhabitants of Charleston and New Orleans, of Madras and Bombay and Calcutta, drink at my well. In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonal philosophy of the Bhagavat Geeta, since whose composition years of the gods have elapsed, and in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial; and I doubt if that philosophy is not to be referred to a previous state of existence, so remote is

[65] Ibid., 222.

[66] Ibid., 287.

> its sublimity from our conceptions. I lay down the book and go to my well for water, and lo! There I meet the servant of the Brahmin, priest of Brahma and Vishnu and Indra, who still sits in his temple on the Ganges reading the Vedas, or dwells at the root of a tree with his crust and water jug. I meet his servant come to draw water for his master, and our buckets as it were grate together in the same well. The pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges. With favoring winds it is wafted past the site of the fabulous islands of Atlantis and the Hesperides, makes the periplus of Hanno, and floating by Ternate and Tidore and the mouth of the Persian Gulf, melts in the tropic gales of the Indian seas, and is landed in ports of which Alexander only heard the names.

In this passage Thoreau began with the image of the East and India as distant, eternal, textual, and contemplative. The ice from Walden was headed to a land of exotic books like the Gita and exotic people like the brahman. But when Thoreau went down to the well he found, surprisingly, that India was not so far away. The economic connections that send Walden ice to India mirrored the spiritual connections established by texts like the Gita. Thus, Thoreau's bucket clanked in the pond alongside the brahman's servant's. The water of Walden and that of the Ganges were not separate. A union between East and West not only existed, it was central to Thoreau's spiritual experience.

Moving from *Week* to *Walden,* Thoreau's use of Hindu texts and his representations of Hindu religion shifted from India as a land of contemplation to India as a land of ascetic practice and control. In *Week*, Thoreau disparaged the Brahman for "starving out" evil, but in *Walden* he aims for his own ascetic control and purity. As he spent more time in his Indian sources Thoreau discovered that there was action in the East, but it was the everyday acts of control found in the Laws of Manu or the fruitless action of the Bhagavad Gita. Yet, for Thoreau, both contemplation and everyday action functioned to give the mind access to experiences of unity. The contemplation Thoreau admired in the texts of India and the sacralized everyday actions Thoreau recommended to Yankees like John Farmer fired his vision of Walden Pond's universal waters and the

unity between Concord and Calcutta. The representation of Hindu religion in Thoreau's works, then, was of a religion that praised contemplation and controlled action, things that Yankees in the West needed for their own spiritual experiences and that American Protestantism had failed to give them. While Thoreau lamented Hindu superstition, as he did Christian superstition, he did believe the Hindus had superior abilities of contemplation and control, qualities he believed too many Americans lacked.

Contemporary critics more readily grasped Thoreau's use of Hindu texts than they did Emerson's. But, as with Emerson, they roundly rejected Thoreau's praise of Hindu religions. George Ripley, a Transcendentalist and founder of the Brook Farm commune, identified Thoreau's philosophy as "Pantheistic egotism vaguely characterized as Transcendental."[67] Ripley took particular offense to Thoreau's "misplaced Pantheistic attack on the Christian Faith" in *Week* and found Thoreau's comparison between Hindu religions and Christianity to be "revolting alike to good sense and good taste."[68] Poet and critic James Russell Lowell echoed Ripley's critiques when he described Thoreau's "intelligent paganism" that "might absorb the forces of the entire alphabetic sanctity of the A.B.C.F. M."[69] Thoreau flummoxed Lowell with his desire for a sentence "which no intelligence can understand!" and Lowell thought "it must be this taste that makes him so fond of the Hindoo philosophy, which would seem admirably suited to men, if men were

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[67] George Ripley, "H. D. Thoreau's Book," New-York Tribune (New York, N.Y., June 13, 1849) and New-York Weekly (New York, N.Y., June 16, 1849) reprinted in Samuel Arthur Jones, ed., *Pertaining to Thoreau: A Gathering of Ten Significant Nineteenth-Century Opinions* (Hartford, Conn.: Transcendental Books, 1970), 9.

[68] Ibid., 11.

[69] James Russell Lowell, "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers," *Massachusetts Quarterly Review* 3 (December 1849): 40-51 reprinted in Samuel Arthur Jones, ed., *Pertaining to Thoreau: A Gathering of Ten Significant Nineteenth-Century Opinions* (Hartford, Conn.: Transcendental Books, 1970), 15.

only oysters."[70] For these critics Thoreau's use of Hindu texts was at best unintelligible and at worst an attack on the truth of Christianity.

Yet Thoreau found at least one more sympathetic reader. Edwin Morton, a Harvard student writing in *Harvard Magazine*, praised Thoreau's turn Eastward and proclaimed "Transcendentalism, thy name is Brahme!"[71] Morton went on to temper his praise of Thoreau: "There are many very wise things in those books…Yet [Thoreau] plays too long upon that one string,—we get too much of that heathenish music, when we have good or better of our own."[72] For Morton, the Vedas were "all very good in their way" but "that sublime life of Christ" was a better religion "with less obscurity."[73] Morton's assessment showed even the most sympathetic readers resisted Thoreau's critiques of Christianity. Thoreau's inversions of heathenism fell on deaf ears and his admiration for the control and asceticism he found in the Gita and the Laws of Manu was ignored. When Thoreau's contemporaries recognized representations of Hindu religions in his work it was only as a defect in his writing.

Emerson and Thoreau built on New England's history of encounters with India when they imagined the contemplative Orient. Like the East India Marine Society, these two Transcendentalists imagined the Orient as an exotic land altogether different from the West and, also like the EIMS, they imagined India to be its best example. But these early Transcendentalists also drew on the Vedanta of Rammohun Roy. Mary Moody Emerson

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[70] Ibid., 16.

[71] Edwin Morton, "Thoreau and His Books," *Harvard Magazine* 1 (January 1855): 87-99 reprinted in Samuel Arthur Jones, ed., *Pertaining to Thoreau: A Gathering of Ten Significant Nineteenth-Century Opinions* (Hartford, Conn.: Transcendental Books, 1970), 26.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid.

recommended the Bengali reformer to her young nephew and Thoreau read and quoted from Roy's English translations of Vedic texts. Both American writers accepted the Vedic Hindu religion Roy championed in America and Britain, a religion founded on the ancient Sanskrit texts. Where earlier religious liberals, such as the Unitarians, had turned Rammohun Roy into a Christian to protect the exclusive truth of Protestant religion, Thoreau and Emerson imagined true religion as something bigger than any one sect. Thus, Emerson imagined a unity between the One of the East and the many of the West—between Mind and Nature. Thoreau took it a bit further and used the contemplation and asceticism of the Hindu to critique the overly practical and industrious Yankee Protestant. Both men sought out true religion and neither was afraid to look to India in their search.

Ethnical Scriptures, Brahmanism, and the Search for a Universal Religion

In their published prose and poetry Emerson and Thoreau imagined a division between the East and the West, but their work in the pages of *The Dial*, a magazine for Transcendentalist thought and literature, showed the beginnings of a more nuanced comparative approach to religion. After taking editorial control of *The Dial* in 1842, Emerson decided to begin printing a series of "Ethnical Scriptures" in the magazine. These scriptures included excerpts of ancient texts from around the world, including two Hindu texts, the Laws of Manu and the Vishnu Sarma. In the introduction to one of these scriptures, portions of the Vishnu Sarma, Emerson argued that "each nation has its bible more or less pure; none has yet been willing or able in a wise and devout spirit to collate

its own with those of other nations."[74] Emerson hoped to do something of the sort with the "Ethnical Scriptures" and believed that it was necessary to drop the "civil-historical and the ritual portions" of texts and keep only the "grand expressions of the moral sentiment in different ages and races, the rules for the guidance of life, the bursts of piety and abandonment to the Invisible and Eternal."[75] He further believed that these various texts from around the world contained truth about the "Invisible and Eternal" and that removing their differences and comparing their similarities would reveal universal religious truth. This was not merely a literary exercise; it was a work "to be done by religion and not by literature."[76] Religious studies scholar Arthur Versluis described how "with these translations Emerson intended to begin a kind of universal reference work borrowing from all the various traditions."[77] It was the search for universal religious truth through literary comparison.

Two Hindu texts were selected for the "Ethnical Scriptures." Emerson began the series with the portions of the Vishnu Sarma taken from Charles Wilkins' translation. But, as Versluis has pointed out, Emerson dropped the narrative portions of the text and so what he published in *The Dial* was a series of aphorisms devoid of any context. From Emerson's perspective, he was simply getting rid of the unnecessary "civil-historical" portion so as to make the truth within the text more accessible. The resulting list of aphorisms had no cultural fingerprints and thus read with a certain universalized tone. For example, the first aphorism is: "Whatsoever cometh to pass, either good or evil, is the

[74] "Veeshnoo Sarma," *The Dial* 3, no. 1 (July 1842): 82.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Versluis, *American Transcendentalism and Asian Religions*, 188.

consequence of man's own actions, and descendeth from the power of the Supreme Ruler."[78] There is nothing obviously Hindu about the phrase. Further down the list, "Of all men thy guest is the superior" sounded like common manners.[79] The obviously exotic and Hindu title of "Veeshnoo Sarma" contrasted starkly with the decontextualized aphorisms. In printing the extracts Emerson transformed the Vishnu Sarma from a Hindu text to a universal scripture containing truth that transcended cultural context.

While Emerson pared down cultural context of the Vishnu Sarma, Thoreau used the contextual details of the Laws of Manu to point toward universal truths when he reprinted it as part of the "Ethnical Scriptures.". In his introduction to the text, Thoreau gave a brief history of the Laws of Manu taken from William Jones' preface to his 1794 translation of the text. Quoting Jones, Thoreau described the Laws of Manu as "being believed by the Hindoos 'to have been promulgated in the beginning of time by Menu, son or grandson of Brahma,' and 'the first of created beings.'"[80] Rather than strip the Laws of Manu of any cultural context, Thoreau kept the references in the text to the Vedas or various Hindu deities and reorganized the text around themes he felt important. He used the cultural details in the text to point toward higher universal truths. Thoreau reorganized the text around: Custom, Temperance, Purification and Sacrifice, Teaching, Reward and Punishment, The King, Woman and Marriage, The Brahmin, God, Devotion.[81] Throughout these various sections Thoreau's selection of passages emphasized bodily control, asceticism, and contemplation. For example, under

[78] "Veeshnoo Sarma," 82.

[79] Ibid., 83.

[80] "The Laws of Menu," *The Dial* 3, no. 3 (January 1843): 331.

[81] Versluis, *American Transcendentalism and Asian Religions*, 189.

"Purification and Sacrifice" he placed the passage, "Bodies are cleansed by water; the mind is purified by truth; the vital spirit, by theology and devotion; the understanding, by clear knowledge."[82] Again, under "The Brahmin" he put "Not solicitous for the means of gratification, chaste as a student, sleeping on the bare earth, in the haunts of pious hermits, without one selfish affection, dwelling at the roots of trees;—for the purpose of uniting his soul with the divine spirit."[83] Thoreau believed these specific injunctions about purity or the proper conduct of a brahman pointed toward universal truths. In his selections for the "Ethnical Scriptures" Thoreau universalized the themes of the Laws of Manu without stripping them of their cultural context. He imagined transcendent universal truth that lay behind the cultural specifics of the text.

The "Ethnical Scriptures" imagined Hindu religion as a religion of texts, ancient wisdom, contemplation, and asceticism that could be mined for transcendent and universal truth. Thoreau and Emerson assumed universal religious truth should be found in texts and that different texts distinguished different religions. To find a religion greater than these "civil-historical" differences, Emerson and Thoreau argued, one must take the best of all of them, the universal truths hidden within the cultural differences. Through the work of the proper editor, religious difference could be collated into universal truth.

The "Ethnical Scriptures" took the first steps in a larger project of comparative religion that engaged religious liberals for the rest of the nineteenth century. Transcendentalists constructed taxonomies of comparative religion to identify and compare religions in hopes of discovering a universal core of Mind, Truth, or Religion

[82] "The Laws of Menu," 332.

[83] Ibid., 337.

that could unite mankind. Transcendentalist writers surveyed world religions in the quest for the universal and in the process they constructed a religious tradition they named "Brahmanism" that stood as the religion of India and could be compared with other religions. Three major works during the latter half of the nineteenth century took this comparative approach to religions and Brahmanism: Lydia Maria Child's *The Progress of Religious Ideas Through Successive Ages* (1855), James Freeman Clarke's *Ten Great Religions* (1871), and Samuel Johnson's *Oriental Religions and Their Relation to the Universal Religion: India* (1873). These writers broadened the four part taxonomy of religions used earlier by Hannah Adams. They believed each religion in the taxonomy contained partial truth and when compared, these religions would reveal universal and transcendent religious truth for all people. Within these taxonomies of religions, authors represented Brahmanism as the religious system of the Hindus. As imagined by Transcendentalists, Brahmanism originated in the ancient Sanskrit texts. Its theology was pantheistic and spiritual and it resulted in a degraded society organized by caste.

Published a year after Thoreau's *Walden*, Lydia Maria Child's *Progress of Religious Ideas* was the earliest of these comparative texts and served as a bridge from the earlier comparative work of Hannah Adams and later works of Transcendentalist comparative religion. Child did not acknowledge Adams' earlier work, and in fact claimed she was not aware that anyone had ever before attempted to account for the various religions of the world.[84] Nonetheless, she shared Adams' frustration with sectarianism and schismatic Protestantism, desire to render religions in their own words and logic, and theory that religious truth progresses through history. For Child, universal

[84] Lydia Maria Child, *The Progress of Religious Ideas, Through Successive Ages* (New York: C. S. Francis & Co., 1855), 1:x.

religion meant getting rid of the divisive and exclusive claims of theology and doctrine and focusing on shared reverence and worship of God in various cultural forms. She used a musical metaphor to describe it: "*Unison* of voice was the highest idea *theology* could attain to; but when *religion* can utter itself freely, worshippers sing a *harmony* of many different parts, and thus make a music more pleasing to the ear of God, and more according to the pattern by which he created the universe."[85] Child's work was meant to be accessible by common readers but she made use of many elite Orientalist sources including the works of William Jones, Rammohun Roy, and Joseph Priestly. Reviewers criticized Child for not treating Christianity preferentially in her account of religions. "She appears to regard [the Christian Scriptures] as little better than the writings of Confucious, or the Shasters of the Hindoos," wrote a reviewer in the *New-York Observer*.[86] Yet, Transcendentalists and other religious liberals, most notably Samuel J. May and Theodore Parker, applauded Child's work as an important step in liberal religion and theology.[87]

Like Child, James Freeman Clarke claimed he was offering an unbiased an empirical account of religions, a science he dubbed "Comparative Theology," in his *Ten Great Religions*.[88] Writing fifteen years after Child, he mentioned her work in his introductory chapter, noting that it was well done considering the scarce sources available

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[85] Ibid., 3:450.

[86] "New Publications," *New-York Observer*, November 15, 1885, 366.

[87] Carolyn L Karcher, *The First Woman in the Republic : a Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 383.

[88] The religions Clarke covered were Chinese (or Confucianism), Brahmanism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Egyptian, Grecian, Roman, Scandinavian, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Christianity, being a universal religion, was left out of his count of the ten "great" religions.

at the time. However, Clarke arrived at a very different conclusion from Child. He argued that an unbiased, empirical, and scientific survey of the world's great religious traditions proved that only Christianity could serve as a universal religion for all humankind. That said, Clarke's idea of Christianity was a liberal, Transcendentalist, and mystical one. Yet, for Clarke, Christianity was uniquely "catholic" and "therefore, capable of adapting itself to every variety of the human race."[89] Though he gave Christianity the privileged place in his comparative taxonomy, Clarke did take an overall positive view of the other religions in his study:

> We shall find them always feeling after God, often finding him. We shall see that in their origin they were not the work of priestcraft, but of human nature; in their essence not superstitions, but religions in their doctrines true more frequently than false; in their moral tendency good rather than evil. And instead of degenerating toward something worse, they come to prepare the way for something better.[90]

Clarke's text was widely read and available in the late nineteenth century. It began as a series of articles serialized in *The Atlantic* and the book itself went through 30 editions between 1871 and 1893, becoming a popular text among religious liberals.[91] Clarke shared the approach to comparative religion used by Joseph Priestly earlier in the century. Both were Unitarians, both believed Christianity to be the apex of religion, and both tried to prove this through a careful and empirical process of comparison.

If Child's project shared similarities with Hannah Adams and Clarke with Joseph Priestly, then Samuel Johnson was most similar to John Adams. Just as John Adams spent his late years searching through Orientalist literature to discover true religion,

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[89] James Freeman Clarke, *Ten Great Religions: An Essay in Comparative Theology* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1872), 21.

[90] Ibid., 9.

[91] Eric J Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), 137n.

Johnson turned to Orientalist accounts of Asian religions to discover Universal Religion.[92] Johnson's work spanned three volumes of *Oriental Religions and Their Relation to the Universal Religion*, one each on India, China, and Persia. For Johnson, Universal Religion could be found only through a careful and thorough examination of all the religions of the world. "Universal Religion, then, cannot be any one *exclusively*, of the great positive religions of the world. Yet it is really what is best in each and every one of them; purified from baser inter-mixture and developed in freedom and power."[93] The volume on India appeared in 1872 and was given "slight recognition" despite favorable reviews in a few papers such as the *North American Review* and the *New York Tribune*.[94] At the time of its publication, Johnson's text was the most extensive treatment of Indian religious history produced by an American even though it lacks the accessibility of Child's and Clarke's. He combined a Transcendentalist vision of a Universal Religion inherent within human religious imagination with in depth discussions of philosophy, philology, and history drawn from elite Orientalist sources to produce a text at that was inaccessible to common readers.

Despite the differences in their texts, all three of these Transcendentalist writers invented a religion they called Brahmanism to account for the religious culture of India. Child, Clarke, and Johnson characterized Brahmanism as a religion of spiritual contemplation. Child described Hindus as having "a temperament more inclined than

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[92] Johnson was born and raised in Salem, Massachusetts. In his memoir of Johnson, Samuel Longfellow wondered if Johnson had spent time at the East India Society museum and if the artifacts there had inspired Johnson's turn to the Orient later in life. Samuel Johnson, *Lectures, Essays, and Sermons* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1883), 2.

[93] Samuel Johnson, *Oriental Religions and Their Relation to Universal Religion: India* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1873), 6.

[94] Johnson, *Lectures, Essays, and Sermons*, 96.

others to veneration and mysticism" and Clarke described Brahmanism as a religion of "pure spiritualism" with a God who is "an intelligence, absorbed in the rest of profound contemplation."[95] Johnson built his entire appraisal of "Oriental religions" around the belief that the Hindu mind was the "Brain of the East." He described "the Hindu mind" as "subtle, introversive, contemplative. It spins its ideals out of its brain substance, and may be properly called *cerebral*."[96] Both Clarke and Johnson, fulfilling the vision of Emerson and Thoreau, connected the cerebral and contemplative Hindu mind to Euro-Americans through a theory of language drawn from the philological work of F. Max Müller. Using Müller's study of Indo-European languages, they connected the Aryans and their Sanskrit Vedic texts with Europeans as one common nation. As Clarke wrote, "The study of the Sanskrit language has told us a long story concerning the origin of the Hindoos…It has given us the information that one great family, the Indo-European, has done most of the work of the world."[97] Thus, Brahmanism was not only the Brain of the East; it was also the contemplative and spiritual ancestor of Euro-America.

Brahmanism, as imagined by Transcendentalists, consisted of Sanskrit texts and complex systems of philosophy. As with the "Ethnical Scriptures," Transcendentalists argued that the Sanskrit texts held the central theology and philosophy of Brahmanism. All three writers discussed the Vedas, epics, Laws of Manu, Bhagavad Gita, Brahmanas, and Puranas. Johnson and Clarke also spent considerable space discussing three major schools of Indian philosophy. Clarke devoted a whole section of his chapter on

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[95] Child, *Progress of Religious Ideas*, 3; Clarke, *Ten Great Religions: An Essay in Comparative Theology*, 83.

[96] Johnson, *Oriental Religions and Their Relation to Universal Religion: India*, 58.

[97] Clarke, *Ten Great Religions: An Essay in Comparative Theology*, 86.

Brahmanism to three schools of philosophy: Vedanta, Sankhya, and Nyasa. For his part, Johnson gave Vedanta and Sankhya philosophy each a full chapter. Contemplative Brahmanism relied on ancient texts to produce complex systems of philosophy.

All of these texts and philosophical systems pointed toward Brahmanism's theology of pantheism and unity of being. For example, Child claimed Brahm was the central god of Brahmanism and described how Hindus believed "God [was] in all things, and all things in God" and that "all life, whether in essence or form, proceeds constantly from Brahm, through a variety of mediums." [98] Similarly, Johnson praised the pantheism of Brahamanism and its "Hindu dreamers." Hindu pantheism suited his Transcendentalist vision of a unity of Being:

> In its [Hindu pantheism's] nobler forms it is essentially of the spirit and rests, as its name imports, on these principles: that Being is, in its substance, one; that this substantial unity is, and must be implicated in all energy, though indefinably and inconceivably, —as Life, all-pervading, all-containing, the constant ground and ultimate force of all that is; and that the recognition of this inseparableness of the known universe from God is consistent with the worship of God as infinitely transcending it.[99]

Clarke summed up the Transcendental understanding of Brahmanism's unified, pantheistic, and spiritual theology: "Brahmanism teaches the truth of the reality of spirit, and that spirit is infinite, absolute, perfect, one; that it is the substance underlying all existence."[100] Transcendentalists characterized Brahmanism as a pantheistic religion whose contribution to universal religion was a recognition of unity and pure being.

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[98] Child, *Progress of Religious Ideas*, 1:11.

[99] Johnson, *Oriental Religions and Their Relation to Universal Religion: India*, 343.

[100] Clarke, *Ten Great Religions: An Essay in Comparative Theology*, 136.

When these Transcendentalist writers shifted from accounts of philosophy and pantheism to discussion of religion in contemporary India they used a narrative of declension, often using the example of caste. Child's narrative of decline was representative of the later texts and reminiscent of Hannah Adams, Joseph Priestly, and Rammohun Roy:

> Many causes have been at work to produce a gradual degeneracy in the manners, customs, and opinions of the Hindoos. Knowledge of the Vedas is confined to the learned, and few ever heard of such a doctrine as the unity of God. The great mass of the people are neglected by the Bramins, who are either taken up with the acquisition of temporal power, or striving to obtain spiritual elevation for themselves, by contemplation and penances. Such instruction as the populace do receive, rather serves to confuse their moral perceptions.[101]

A failure to properly educate the common people in Vedic theology led to social decline. The result of this moral confusion is a backwards society where "thefts, perjury, or murder" can be atoned for through ritual practices officiated by brahmans but "killing a cow, selling beef to a European, offending a Bramin, or being converted to a foreign religion," results in the death penalty or social excommunication through loss of caste.[102] Indeed, caste itself stood as a powerful example of Hindu decline. Caste "narrow[ed] the sympathies and imped[ed] the progress" of Hindus. [103] Samuel Johnson described a similar narrative of declension and the evils of caste, comparing it with American slavery.[104] For all that Transcendentalist writers found to praise in the unity and spiritualism of Brahmanism, they believed the failure of Brahmans to spread correct theological knowledge to the masses had resulted in a socially backward India.

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[101] Child, *Progress of Religious Ideas*, 1:116–117.

[102] Ibid., 1:117.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Johnson, *Oriental Religions and Their Relation to Universal Religion: India*, 252–255, 299.

Transcendentalists turned to comparative religion as a tool for finding religious truth; be it in James Freeman Clarke's liberal and mystical Christianity, Lydia Maria Child's religious liberalism, or Samuel Johnson's Universal Religion. Brahmanism, the religion of Hindu India, played an important role in these comparative projects. It provided the spiritual, cerebral, contemplative, and pantheistic aspect of religion. More than that, drawing on Müller's theory of the Indo-European family, this contemplative and spiritual religion shared historical connections with European Americans. Reversing the usual declension narrative of Hindu religion, Samuel Johnson claimed Brahmanism provided "a new dawn after centuries of comparative death and night" in Western religion.[105] Brahmanism reached "its spiritual hands across the seas of race and mind—just as electric wire is encircling the material glove, just as all the relations of trade and science and politics are becoming ecumenical" to give an escape from "the Christian and the Judaic dogma…upon the ground of those inherent, inalienable, and immutable relations that unite Man with God."[106] For Johnson, Western religion was in decline and India could save it. Similarly, Emerson's Plato, that balance of East and West, came to pass as the world shrank and cables, texts, and universal truths of God and Man connected India and America. Within taxonomies of comparative religion, where every religious tradition offered its own pieces of truth, Brahmanism gave American Transcendentalists contemplative, pantheistic spirituality.

[105] Ibid., 574.

[106] Ibid.

Transcendentalist India and Metaphysical Religion

Beginning with the Oriental mind of Emerson's Plato and carrying through Johnson's image of Brahmanism as "the Brain" of the East, the contemplative aspects of Hindu religions attracted Transcendentalist attention and aligned with the metaphysical tradition's emphasis on the mind. Albanese has pointed to Emerson's *Nature* as "the early proclamation of Transcendental good news" and in her reading she finds "an American gospel of divinization."[107] This gospel relied upon a process of self-fashioning and interior work of the mind. "The result suggested that the restoration of the world meant its subjection to an enhanced ego-self, an ego-self that used the power of higher spiritual energies to advance this-worldly projects and delights."[108] The contemplative Hindu mind provided Transcendentalists a model of how one could fashion such an ego-self. The Oriental mind of Plato, Thoreau's reading of the Bhagavad Gita, and the contemplative philosophies of Brahmanism provided spiritual resources for fashioning the self through the mind.

Likewise, Transcendentalists returned to the unity and pantheism of Hindu religions or Brahmanism again and again because of their own metaphysical theory of correspondences. Transcendentalists theorized a connection between microcosm and macrocosm that resonated with the pantheism they saw in Hindu religions. Again, Albanese described how "Emerson was connecting human will to a higher source of will

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[107] Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*, 170, 168.

[108] Ibid., 169.

and desire, and he was arguing for the release of self into that vastness."[109] She also connects the emphasis on mind with the theory of correspondence in Transcendental thought: "In the Transcendental version of creating one's own reality, the deep recesses from which intuition willed were also the deep recesses that connected people with one another. The human cosmos, like the natural one, was a grand collective of the spirit."[110] Looking at the world with a vision that connected the individual to the cosmos through a shared spirit, it is no surprise that Transcendentalists would praise the pantheism they saw in Brahmanism. Hindu religions allowed Transcendentalists to crystalize and articulate their ideas of unity, pantheism, and contemplation. They drew these themes out of Hindu religions and articulated them as "the Orient" or Brahmanism. Yet this articulations was just the first step towards a larger project of discovering true or universal religion. For all the resources Transcendentalists found in Hindu religions and for all the ability it gave them to articulate an alternative religious vision to American Protestantism, Hindu religions were never an end in themselves. That said, Hindu religions did prove to be an important source for Transcendentalist renderings of American metaphysical religion.

Images of India as the "mystic East" did not begin with the Transcendentalists, as the East India Marine Society museum shows. Yet, in recognizing metaphysical themes of mind and correspondence in Hindu religions and imagining the religion of Brahmanism, typified by contemplation and unity, Transcendentalists were the first to turn to India for viable religious resources. Unitarians, the liberal Protestant grandparents of the Transcendentalists, imagined Rammohun Roy as a Unitarian in order to deploy his

[109] Ibid., 167.

[110] Ibid., 171.

arguments. But Emerson could rebuke Yankees through the voice of a Hindu goddess, Thoreau could imagine himself a yogi on the Ganges, and Samuel Johnson could find the mind of Universal Religion in India. It is true, as many have argued, that the Transcendentalists were the first Americans to appreciate Hindu religions. Yet, more importantly, they were also the first Americans to imagine a metaphysical India of contemplation and unity—an image that remains in American culture well into the twenty first century. But, Transcendentalist Brahmanism would not be the only metaphysical approach to Hindu religions.

Chapter 4

Theosophy and the Occult Power of Hindu Religions

While Transcendentalists compared religions and imagined "Brahmanism" in and around Boston, another metaphysical movement emerged from a chance meeting at a farmhouse in Vermont. Henry Steel Olcott noticed that when Madame Helena Blavatsky showed up the spirits who visited the Eddy home changed. In 1874 two brothers, Horatio and William Eddy, began summoning spiritual manifestations in their home in Chittenden, Vermont. Before Blavatsky's arrival the spirits that visited had been Native Americans, Euro-Americans, or Europeans.[1] These were figures from a Western past, whether native to the New World or the Old. But when Blavatsky arrived at the house on the fourteenth of October, the spirits the two fraternal mediums summoned shifted beyond the continents of Europe and America. On the first evening of Blavatsky's stay in Chittenden, her soon to be friend and confidant Olcott, wrote that "spooks of other nationalities came before us. There was a Georgian servant boy from the Caucasus; a Mussulman merchant from Tiflis; a Russian peasant girl…A Kourdish cavalier armed with scimitar, pistols, and lance; a hideously ugly and devilish-looking negro sorcerer from Africa."[2] But not all of the spooks could be so easily identified. On another evening during Blavatsky's visit a more curious visitor appeared at the séance, "one who seemed to be either a Hindoo coolie or an Arab athlete. He was dark-skinned, of short statue, a lean, wire, active form, with no more superfluous fat on his frame than has a greyhound

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[1] Henry Steel Olcott, *People from the Other World* (Hartford, Conn.: American Publishing Company, 1875), 293.

[2] Henry Steel Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves: The True Story of the Theosophical Society* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1895), 8.

in working condition."[3] The Eastern visitor "came to visit Mme. de Blavatsky, and made her a profound obeisance: but she failed to recognize him."[4]

Though they did not know it at the time, the night the ambiguous Hindoo-Arab appeared in the Eddy's parlor prefigured the future for Colonel Olcott and Madame Blavatsky as religious innovators and friends. The Hindoo-Arab spirit that materialized before Blavatsky and Olcott was an ambiguous figure from the East—maybe from India or Palestine or Egypt or somewhere else—but, whoever he was, he represented an Oriental other, different from the Western spirits that had been frequenting the Eddy's séance circle. In a similar vein, as the founders of the Theosophical Society, Blavatsky and Olcott mined religious cultures from the Kabbalah to Egypt to India to construct their Theosophical religion of ancient wisdom. Theosophy, like the ambiguous Eastern spirit, looked like Egyptian religion at one point and Hindu religion at another, but it was always an Oriental other and an alternative to American Protestantism. Beginning with Blavatsky, Theosophical writers imagined Hindu religions in different ways throughout the late nineteenth century, but Theosophical constructions of Hindu religion all shared the idea that Hindu religions held esoteric truths and associated these truths with metaphysical energy and powers.

The meeting between Blavatsky and Olcott in Vermont began a lifelong relationship and led to the formation of the Theosophical Society in New York in the fall of 1875. Olcott and Blavatsky shared an interest in the occult, spiritualism, and various forms of religious liberalism gaining popularity in nineteenth century America.

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[3] Olcott, *People from the Other World*, 359.

[4] Ibid., 360.

Occultism, Mesmerism, Rosicrucianism, Swedenborgianism, Freemasonry—in short, metaphysical religions—attracted Americans dissatisfied with American Protestantism. A group of such disaffected American seekers assembled in Blavatsky's apartment in New York on September 7, 1875 to hear a lecture from George Felt, himself a Mason and student of the Kabbalah, on "The Lost Canon of Proportion of the Egyptians." During Felt's lecture Blavatsky passed a note to Olcott: "Would it not be a good thing to form a Society for this kind of study?"[5] Olcott agreed and after the lecture he announced the formation of a new society for investigating the occult and esoteric.

Writing in his history of the Theosophical Society years later, Olcott remembered "it was to be a body for the collection and diffusion of knowledge; for occult research, and the study and dissemination of ancient philosophical and theosophical ideas."[6] But it was also a society meant to save Americans from what the founders saw as an anemic religious culture, repressed by Christianity on one side and science on the other. In his inaugural address as President at the first meeting of the Society on November 17th, 1875 Olcott identified the role of the Society in rejuvenating American religion. "If I rightly apprehend our work, it is to aid in freeing the public mind of theological superstition and a tame subservience to the arrogance of science."[7] Using the analogy of slavery, Olcott described the oppressive nature of American Protestantism and scientific materialism: "we see the people struggling blindly to emancipate their thought from ecclesiastical despotism…They struggle from an irrepressible desire to be free from shackles which

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[5] Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves: The True Story of the Theosophical Society*, 118.

[6] Ibid., 120.

[7] Henry Steel Olcott, *Inaugural Address of the President-Founder of the Theosophical Society*, Adyar Pamphlet Series 5 (Madras: The "Theosophist" Office, Adyar, n.d.), 10.

bind their limping reason after their volant intuitions have outgrown them."[8] Scientists "invite them to an apotheosis of matter" while "the clergy hold them back and hiss warnings and anathemas in their ears."[9] The current state of religion in America required action. "Society has reached a point where *something* must be done; it is for us to indicate where that *something* may be found."[10] And it could be found in ancient religious texts, especially "the primeval sources of all religions, the books of Hermes and the Veda—of Egypt and India respectively"—books from the lands of that ambiguous Hindoo-Arab spirit.[11]

Theosophical Comparative Religion: the Origins of the Ancient Wisdom Religion

In the wake of the Theosophical Society's founding, Madame Blavatsky wrote and published the first major work of Theosophical thought in 1877, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Ancient and Modern*. Blavatsky divided *Isis Unveiled* into two volumes, Science and Theology, representing her two main targets of criticism. Blavatsky identified a fissure between science and religion in modern Western culture, "a death-grapple of Science with Theology for infallibility."[12] While the divine and the scientist battled, Blavatsky saw "a bewildered public, fast losing all belief in man's personal immortality, in a deity of any kind, and rapidly descending to the level of a mere animal

[8] Ibid., 6.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., 11.

[11] Ibid., 12.

[12] H. P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled* (Wheaton, Ill.: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1972), 1:ix.

existence." The solution to the quarrel, she argued, was not to choose one over the other but to unite them. Blavatsky believed that science and religion should work together. Furthermore, she argued that the two were incomplete on their own and must work together in order to find truth. This cooperation could be achieved through a return to "the anciently universal Wisdom-Religion, as the only possible key to the Absolute in science and theology."[13] To find religious and scientific truth, modern society needed the wisdom religion of the ancients, which originated in the Orient. Theology and science would continue to falter until "these pretended authorities of the West go to the Brahmans and the Lamaists of the far Orient, and respectfully ask them to impart the alphabet of true science."[14]

Science had developed a tragic myopia, according to Blavatsky. Materialism had limited the scientist's field of study. "As it is claimed to be unphilosophical to inquire into first causes, scientists now occupy themselves with considering their physical effects. The field of scientific investigation is therefore bounded by physical nature."[15] For Blavatsky, the boundaries of physical nature excluded phenomena that the scientist must consider. True science, she argued, rejected boundaries. "For a man of science to refuse an opportunity to investigate any new phenomenon, whether it comes to him in the shape of a man from the moon, or a ghost from the Eddy homestead, is alike reprehensible."[16] By cordoning off the natural world, modern science had abdicated its

[13] Ibid., 1:vii.

[14] Ibid., 1:xiv.

[15] Ibid., 1:5.

responsibility to investigate spiritual phenomena. But this had not always been the case. Blavatsky argued that among ancient civilizations science was broader, bigger, and not held captive to materialism. She believed that the findings of modern science had been anticipated by the great ancient civilizations. "In the *Vedas,* for instance, we find positive proof that so long ago as 2,000 B.C. the Hindu sages and scholars must have been acquainted with the rotundity of our globe and the heliocentric system."[17] Blavatsky saw a return to the ancient science, the science of the wisdom religion, in the offing. She proclaimed, "the day is approaching when the world will receive the proofs that only ancient religions were in harmony with nature, and ancient science embraced all that can be known."[18] *Isis Unveiled,* then, was her attempt to restore that ancient wisdom religion that would renew and expand science to its true role in society as inseparable from theology in the quest for absolute truth.

As strongly as she critiqued modern science, her criticisms of religion in American society had an added bite. For example she offered this overview of Protestantism in America:

> The God of the Unitarians is a bachelor; the Deity of the Presbyterians, Methodists, Congregationalists, and the other orthodox Protestant sects, a spouseless Father with one Son, who is identical with Himself...We will not mention the multitude of smaller sects, communities, and extravagantly original little heresies in this country which spring up one year to die out the next, like so many spores of fungi after a rainy day.[19]

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[16] Ibid. The term "phenomenon" became an important one for Theosophy. It referred to any manifestation of occult power, such as a mysterious appearing letter, a spirit in the style of spiritualism, or finding lost objects.

[17] Ibid., 1:9.

[18] Ibid., 1:38.

[19] Ibid., 2:2.

But it wasn't just the various sects of American Protestantism that Blavatsky attacked. She saved her harshest language for Christianity writ large as a bloodthirsty world religion. "There has never been a religion in the annals of the world with such a bloody record as Christianity. All the rest, including the traditional fierce fights of the "chosen people" with their next of kin, the idolatrous tribes of Israel pale before the murderous fanaticism of the alleged followers of Christ!"[20] According to Blavatsky, this bloodshed flowed from the Christian church's goals of squashing Gnostic and Neo-Platonist heresies throughout history. Meanwhile, Blavatsky argued that the priests from the early church forward engaged in their own forms of "s*orcery* for the ages."[21] So, for Blavatsky, Christianity, and particularly the Roman Catholic Church, had on the one hand viciously opposed and marginalized the truth of the ancient wisdom religion and, on the other hand, run it underground and concealed it within itself in order to maintain church power and religious dogmatism.

Echoing the arguments made by Henry David Thoreau decades earlier, Blavatsky's critique of contemporary American Protestantism flipped the Christian/heathen distinction on its head. She particularly rejected the violent image of Hindu religion promulgated by evangelical missionaries. She complained, "there is scarcely a report sent by the missionaries from India, Thibet, and China, but laments the diabolical 'obscenity' of the heathen rites." Furthermore, she countered that Christianity had its own obscenities. "When a religion which compelled David to cut off and deliver two hundred foreskins of his enemies before he could become the king's son-in-law (*1*

[20] Ibid., 2:53.

[21] Ibid., 2:54.

Sam. xviii, 25-27) is accepted as a standard by Christians, they would do well not to cast into the teeth of heathen the impudicities of their faiths."[22] For Blavatsky, the Christianity of the Protestant and Catholic churches, what she referred to as "exoteric forms" or "external religious form of worship" was "pure heathenism" and Catholicism was "with its fetish-worshipping, is far worse and more pernicious than Hinduism in its most idolatrous aspect."[23] Blavatsky labeled Christianity as the real heathenism, an idolatry of church dogma that falsified the esoteric truths of the wisdom religion. Rather than comparing Hindu religions with Catholicism, as the evangelicals did, she argued that the Church was far more idolatrous than the heathen.

Blavatsky argued that the wisdom religion could unite science and theology and that it was the absolute truth undergirding every major religion in history. As she wrote, "What we desire to prove is that underlying every ancient popular religion was the same ancient wisdom-doctrine, one and identical, professed and practiced by the initiates of every country, who alone were aware of its existence and importance."[24] The wisdom religion, though found in every religion, had been entrusted to "initiates" and "sacerdotal castes who had the guardianship of mystical words of power."[25] The wisdom religion was secret and divulging its secrets meant a death penalty for the initiate. But most importantly, its origins lay in Hindu religion. "The Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries, among the Chaldean Magi, and the Egyptian hierophants;" contained the wisdom

[22] Ibid., 2:79–80.

[23] Ibid., 2:80.

[24] Ibid., 2:99.

[25] Ibid.

religion, but it was "with the Hindus from who they were all derived."[26] Though widespread throughout the ancient world, the wisdom religion began in India.

Indeed, for Blavatsky, all civilization traced back to India. She asserted "that it is to India, the country less explored, and less known than any other, that all the other great nations of the world are indebted for their languages, arts, legislature and civilization."[27] Blavatsky constructed a history through which the esoteric wisdom religion was handed down from civilization to civilization:

> It is on the strength of such circumstantial evidence—that of reason and logic—that we affirm that, if Egypt furnished Greece with her civilization, and the latter bequeathed hers to Rome, Egypt herself had, in those unknown ages when Menes reigned, received her laws her social institutions, her arts and her sciences, from pre-Vedic India; and that, therefore, it is in that old initiatrix of the priests—adepts of all the other countries—we must seek for the key to the great mysteries of humanity.[28]

It was in ancient India, the India older than its oldest Vedic texts, that one would find the origins of the great mysteries of esoteric truth. In another passage Blavatsky tied the Hebrew book of Genesis to the Chaldeans and the Akkadians and then argued that "the Akkad tribes of Chaldea, Babylonia, and Assyria" were "cognate with the Brahmans of Hindostan."[29] These Akkadians, according to Blavatsky, "were simply emigrants on their way to Asia Minor from India, the cradle of humanity, and their sacerdotal adepts tarried to civilize and initiate a barbarian people."[30] All esoteric roads led to India. Blavatsky had

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., 1:585.

[28] Ibid., 2:589.

[29] Ibid., 1:576.

[30] Ibid.

one answer for the origins of the wisdom religion buried in all the world's religions: "It was imported from India, and the importers were Brahmanical Hindus."[31]

Blavatsky's theory that brahmanical Hindu religion was the source of the esoteric wisdom religion relied upon a form of comparative religion. Blavatsky's Theosophical comparative religion built upon analogy in order to find the common root various religious cultures shared. Rather than a comparative religion that emphasized difference, Theosophical comparative religion focused on similarities, connections, and esoteric meanings. By comparing religions Blavatsky sought to find the shared core, the wisdom religion, buried deep within the variety of religious texts in the world. For example, through a series of analogies, identifications, and connections Blavatsky finds the origins of the Biblical patriarch Abraham in the Mahabharata:

> Now we have to remember that Siva and the Palestinian Baal, or Moloch, and Saturn are identical; that Abraham is held until the present day by the Mohammedan Arabs as Saturn in the Kaaba; that Abraham and Israel were names of Saturn; and that Sanchoiathon tells us that Saturn offered his only begotten son as a sacrifice to his father Ouranos, and even circumcised himself and forced all his household and allies to do the same, to trace unerringly the Biblical myth to its source. But this source is neither Phoenician nor Chaldea; it is purely Indian, and the original of it may be found in the Mahabharata.[32]

In another section, Blavatsky uses three columns to compare the "Indian Pantheon," "The Chaldean," and "The Ophite" to prove that they all share the same tri-parte theology of "THE GREAT FIRST CAUSE," "THE DOUBLE–SEXED DEITY," and "the creative Principle—the SON."[33] She then used another diagram to show how these three part theologies became the Christian trinity. Ancient Hindu religion held a special place in

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., 1:578.

[33] Ibid., 2:170.

Theosophical comparative religion as the origin of the esoteric wisdom religion that engendered all the other religions of humanity.

Beyond her own brand of Theosophical comparative religion, Blavatsky also rebuked the new field of comparative theology emerging during the period. She called comparative theology "a two-edged weapon." On the one hand there were Christian apologists, perhaps she was thinking of James Freeman Clarke, who "unabashed by the evidence, force comparison in the serenest way" in order to prove that "while [Christianity] teaches us the existence, powers and attributes of an all-wise, all-good Father-God, Brahmanism gives us a multitude of minor gods, and Buddhism none whatever."[34] But the other side of the sword shows how "despite missions, despite armies, despite enforced commercial intercourse, the 'heathens' find nothing in the teachings of Jesus—sublime though some are—that Krishna and Gautama had not taught them before."[35] For this reason, argued Blavatsky, the missionaries to Asia had failed in their quest for converts. Blavatsky argued that comparative theology could as easily prove the superiority of the Hindu as it could the truth of the Christian. "Comparative theology works both ways," she warned.[36]

For Blavatsky, Hindu religions not only provided the origins of the wisdom religion, but also the terms necessary for describing the wisdom religion. She articulated the wisdom religion by repurposing terms derived from Sanskrit Hindu religious sources. Near the end of the introduction to volume one of *Isis Unveiled* Blavatsky presented a

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[34] Ibid., 2:531.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

glossary of terms that she would employ throughout the work in order "to avoid confusion that might easily arise by the frequent employment of certain terms in a sense different from that familiar to the reader."[37] Many of the terms were typical for mid-to-late nineteenth century metaphysical religion: alchemist, hermetist, materialization, spirit. Other terms Blavatsky took from Sanskrit without changing the meaning, such as "fakir" and "mantra." But others were Sanskrit words that Blavatsky put toward her own metaphysical and Theosophical ends. "Âkâśa," the Sanskrit word for "sky" becomes, in Blavatsky's hands, "the *occult* electricity; the alkahest of the alchemists in one sense, or the universal solvent, the same *anima mundi* as the astral light."[38] Similarly, "Soma," both the name of a Vedic god and a mystical drink used in Vedic sacrifices, had its own esoteric meaning. "According to the exoteric explanation the soma is a plant, but, at the same time it is an angel. It forcibly connects the *inner*, highest 'spirit' of man, which spirit is an angel like the mystical soma, with his 'irrational soul,' or astral body, and thus united by the power of the magic drink, they soar together above physical nature, and participate during life in the beatitude and ineffable glories of Heaven."[39] Again making the sort of analogies common in her thinking, Blavatsky notes that soma "is mystically, and in all respects, the same that the Eucharistic supper is to the Christian."[40] Because the wisdom religion had its origins in India and Hindu religions, Blavatsky turned to the Sanskrit language for the terms to articulate it.

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[37] Ibid., 1:xxii.

[38] Ibid., 1:xxvii.

[39] Ibid., 1:xl.

[40] Ibid.

Of all the terms Blavatsky repurposed in her construction of the wisdom religion, "pitris" held an especially important role. The term traditionally referred to dead ancestors venerated by Hindus, but Blavatsky used it to transition from a Western spiritualist understanding of metaphysical power to the ancient wisdom religion grounded in India. Noting the usual meaning of pitris as "spirits of our direct ancestors" she observed that Hindu "fakirs, and other Eastern wonderworkers, are *mediums*," in the same way as the Eddy brothers or other Western spiritualists. But such an understanding got at only the exoteric meaning and missed what was really going on, for Blavatsky. The pitris were, in her view, not direct ancestors, but "those of the human kind or Adamic race; the spirits of *human* races which, on the great scale of descending evolution, preceded our races of men, and were physically, as well as spiritually, far superior to our modern pigmies."[41] Thus, when mediums, whether an American in Vermont or a Hindu fakir in Calcutta, produced phenomena these were not the spirits of the dead but the spirits of beings farther along the path of spiritual evolution.

Throughout *Isis Unveiled* Blavatsky was working to move beyond the spiritualism that brought her and Olcott together and her concept of pitris pushed spiritualist phenomena outside the bounds of Western ideas about communing with the dead. For Blavatsky, mediums did not know the depths they were diving when they summoned spiritual manifestations. The spirits materializing were so much more than those of the dead and spiritualism, as it had been conceived, lacked the philosophy, theology, and science necessary to fully account for what was going on. Spiritualist phenomena were "wholly misunderstood by themselves…Ignoring the teachings of the past, they have

[41] Ibid., 1:xxxviii.

discovered no substitute…In its modern aspect, it is neither a science, a religion, nor a philosophy."[42] Blavatsky went back to the teachings of the past and found a philosophical and religious explanation for the spiritualist's phenomena, the pitris. The pitris, the evolved race that worked for the medium, explained the "different modes of expressing the yearning of the imprisoned human soul for intercourse with supernatural spheres" that Blavatsky saw in the society around here.[43] For Blavatsky, American religion and spiritualism were turning to India and "the worship of the Vedic *pitris* is fast becoming the worship of the spiritual portion of mankind."[44] Blavatsky redefined a term for Hindu ancestral worship to offer a robust explanation for American spiritualism and its relation to the ancient wisdom religion.

Blavatsky's background in spiritualist phenomena turned her attention to those Hindus consistently represented as having metaphysical powers. Throughout *Isis Unveiled* she recounts the remarkable feats of the Hindu fakirs, jugglers, and sanyasins. For Blavatsky the fakir was the first level initiate into the occult powers of the wisdom religion. He was "a man who, through the entire subjugation of the matter of his corporeal system, has attained to that state of purification at which the spirit becomes nearly freed from its prison, and can produce wonders."[45] These wonders included producing spiritualist style specters, taming wild tigers, and sleeping with dangerous alligators.[46] The fakir's power worked by channeling magnetic fluid through his body or

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[42] Ibid., 2:636.

[43] Ibid., 2:639.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., 1:139.

through the power of the pitris.[47] In either case, Blavatsky argued, the power of the fakir and the Western medium's shared the same origins. In contrast to the pure fakir stood the "jugglers" who were "neither pure in their modes of living nor considered holy by anyone…*They are generally FEARED and despised by the natives*, for they are *sorcerers*; men practicing the *black art*."[48] These jugglers used their powers of mediumship for making money or other nefarious goals. The third and highest class of metaphysical wonder worker Blavatsky described was the "sanyasin." He was a "living adept" who had achieved a superior level of purity such that he had complete control over the various spirit beings summoned by fakirs and jugglers. He was "a saint of the second degree or initiation, the most holy as the most reverend of them all."[49] Furthermore, the sanyasins served as gurus for the fakir. The fakir exercised his power "under the direct mesmeric influence of a living adept, his *sanyâsin* or guru."[50] The sanyasin-fakir relationship prefigured Blavatsky's later theory of enlightened Mahatmas who took initiates under their auspices and even worked through the bodies of their pupils. More generally, the fakirs, jugglers, and sanyasins contributed to Blavatsky's overall representation of India as a land of occult powers and wonderworkers.

Blavatsky's description of the occult power of India in *Isis Unveiled* jumped from religious text to religious text across time and space--at one point she described this

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[46] Ibid., 1:383; ibid., 2:103–107, 383.

[47] Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, 1:139; ibid., 2:106–107.

[48] Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, 1:141 Emphasis in the original.

[49] Ibid., 2:98.

[50] Ibid., 2:106.

method as "the enchanted carpet of the historian."[51] The text was a hodgepodge of Western esotericism and Asian religious sources held together by Blavatsky's central argument that one primitive and original esoteric wisdom religion united science and theology. Blavatsky's Theosophical comparative religion emphasized similarity, a common core, instead of difference, and quilted together disparate religious cultures through analogy and formal resemblance. All roads led to the wisdom religion. In *Isis Unveiled* Blavatsky represented India as the cradle of civilization from which the wisdom religion emerged in prehistory and endured in the Sanskrit texts. Sanskrit terms held their own esoteric meanings distinct form their traditional Hindu understandings. But whatever original claim Hindus may have had on the wisdom religion, Blavatsky insisted that it had spread to the rest of the world, East and West. The wisdom religion may have derived in India but it did not belong to Hindus. There was no place for exclusivism in Blavatsky's Theosophical vision.

Wisdom Religion or Hindu Sect? The Theosophical Society and the Arya Samaj

Isis Unveiled reflected the growing interest the founders of the Theosophical Society took in India and the ways they imagined and repurposed Hindu religions to fit their concept of the ancient wisdom religion. Blavatsky and Olcott's interest in Hindu religions prompted them to reach out and make contact with Hindu religious leaders in India, but their idiosyncratic imagining and repurposing of Hindu texts and ideas would also ignite conflict between the American Theosophists and their Hindu conversation

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[51] Ibid., 2:369.

partners. Blavatsky represented Hindu religions as the origin for a wisdom religion much bigger than any one tradition and found in every religion. Theosophical comparative religion sought to remove boundaries of difference and focus on a shared esoteric core within all religions. But the Theosophical representation of India as cradle of a universal wisdom religion conflicted with a growing reform movement within India that constructed Hinduism as the pinnacle of spiritual truth and the unique religion of India. Eventually, Theosophical comparative religion encountered Hindu religious reform, in the form of the Arya Samaj, and conflict ensued.

Olcott and Blavatsky had been hoping to find contacts in India. As Olcott described it, "Our two hearts drew us towards the Orient, our dreams were of India, our chief desire to get into relations with the Asiatic people."[52] Through a chance encounter Olcott found a relationship with one such person in 1877, Hurrychund Chintamon, President of the Bombay Arya Samaj. After corresponding with him, Chintamon eventually put Olcott into contact with the head of the Arya Samaj, Swami Dayanand Saraswati. According to Olcott, he described the views of the Theosophical Society to Chintamon "as to the impersonality of God—an Eternal and Omnipresent Principle which, under many different names, was the same in all religions" and Chintamon identified the principles of the Arya Samaj to match those of the Theosophical Society such that the two should join forces.[53] So, at first blush, it appeared that the conclusions of Theosophical comparative religion echoed those of the Arya Samaj's Hindu religion.

[52] Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves: The True Story of the Theosophical Society*, 395.

[53] Ibid., 396.

The connection with Saraswati excited Olcott and Blavatsky. Olcott had become fascinated with Vedic philosophy and regarded Saraswati as both a scholar and a religious reformer, describing him as "a great Sanskrit pandit and actually playing the part of a Hindu Luther."[54] The comparison to Luther echoes the statements of Unitarians about Rammohun Roy half a century earlier. Americans consistently looked for the man who would reform Hindu religion. Blavatsky, meanwhile, proclaimed that an adept from the Himalayan Brotherhood inhabited Saraswati's body and that he was well known to that special class of teachers guiding the Society's work. Saraswati was everything the Theosophical twins could hope for in a Hindu contact: a Vedic expert, a religious reformer, and, whether he knew it or not, already a part of their esoteric network of enlightened adepts. In May 1878 the Theosophical Society passed a vote to unite with the Arya Samaj and changed their name to "The Theosophical Society of the Arya Samaj."

No sooner was the merger approved than fissures between the two groups began to appear. When Olcott received an English translation of the Arya Samaj's rules and doctrines he was shocked to discover that maybe the two groups did not share the same views of God. As he wrote to Chintamon in September 1878, "Either we have been especially unfortunate in misconceiving the ideas of our revered Swami Dayanand, as conveyed to us in his valued letters to me, or he teaches a doctrine to which our Council, and nearly all our Fellows, are forced to dissent."[55] The rules outlined a theology and approach to Hindu texts that the Theosophists found too exclusive and narrow. They declared "the four texts of the Vedas shall be received and regarded as containing within

[54] Ibid.

[55] Henry Steel Olcott, "Swami Dayanand's Charges," *Theosophist* 3, no. 10 (July 1882): S5.

themselves all that is necessary to constitute them an extraordinary authority in all matters relating to human conduct."[56] The rules also outlined a set of texts that provided authoritative interpretation of the Vedas. Theologically, according to Olcott's reading, the rules and doctrines posited a personal God "to be adored in set phrases" who must be conciliated or else displeased, something quite different from the broad theology of the Theosophical Society.[57] The personal godhead and supremacy of the Vedas chaffed against the Theosophical Society's broad comparative religion that elided difference and celebrated the wisdom religion at the core of all religions.

In December of 1878, Olcott and Blavatsky took a ship to India, their "holy land," but face to face encounters with Saraswati did not solve the problems. Meeting at Meerut in 1880, Olcott and Saraswati agreed to maintain the independence of the Society and the Samaj but to view each other as allies, nonetheless.[58] The more time Olcott and Blavatsky spent touring India and Ceylon, however, the more skeptical of them Saraswati became. By 1882 Saraswati had become so disillusioned that he wondered whether the two groups should even be allies. In March of that year he gave a lecture denouncing the Theosophical Society and later published a tract in Hindi summarizing his lecture, titled "Humbuggery of the Theosophists," that presented nine points against the Theosophical Society, Blavatsky, and Olcott.[59] Saraswati claimed that Blavatsky and Olcott had approached him because they "were coming to India to accept the eternal Vedic Faith and

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[56] Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves: The True Story of the Theosophical Society*, 403.

[57] Olcott, "Swami Dayanand's Charges," S5.

[58] Henry Steel Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves: The Only Authentic History of the Theosophical Society, Second Series, 1878-83* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1900), 224.

[59] Har Bilas Sarda, *The Life of Dayanand Saraswati World Teacher* (Ajmer: Vedic Yantralaya, 1946), 556–559.

become pupils of Swami Dayanand Saraswati" but that they "did neither of these things. They do not believe in any religion, nor do they desire to study any religion."[60] Mirroring Olcott's concerns about Samaj theology, Saraswati claimed that the Theosophists had claimed they believed in God in their letters but "later, in Meerut, contrary to this, in the presence of Swamiji and other gentlemen, both of them denied that they believe in God."[61] He also accused them of claiming to be atheists and Buddhists at different points. Saraswati went after Blavatsky's Mahatma, Koote Hoomi Lal, "a person nobody has seen or heard of" and labeled all the assertions and phenomena attributed to the Mahatma as falsehoods. Of Blavatsky herself, Saraswati claimed that she had no real knowledge of yoga but rather her phenomena were the trickery of the mesmerists and jugglers.[62] The Vedic Hindu reformer pulled no punches in his outright rejection of the Theosophists and their attempts to include him in their comparative approach to the wisdom religion.

Olcott responded in *Theosophist*, the Theosophy Society's Indian publication. His response took on Saraswati point by point and argued that it was the swami who had misled him. Printing numerous extracts from their correspondence, Olcott argued that Saraswati had narrowed his theology and that his repudiation of the Theosophists contradicted many of his earlier statements, especially those that confirmed Blavatsky's yoga practice and abilities. Writing about the whole episode between himself and Saraswati in 1895, Olcott stated, "it was evident that the Samaj was *not* identical in character with our Society, but rather a new sect of Hinduism—a Vedic sect accepting

[60] Ibid., 556.

[61] Ibid., 557.

[62] Ibid., 559.

Swami Dayanand's authority as supreme judge as to which portions of the Vedas and Shâstras were and were not infallible."[63] The Arya Samaj appeared to Olcott as a "defined sect, a sect of Hinduism, a sect based on the lines traced by its founder." The Theosophical Society had been founded to move beyond sectarianism, dogmatism, and all forms of religious exclusivism, Hindu or otherwise.

It is important to note that the term "Hinduism" Olcott employed in his 1895 retelling of the conflict does not appear in his writings from the 1878-1882 period of the Arya Samaj relationship. Rather, when trying to describe the differences between the breadth of the Theosophical Society and the narrowness of the Arya Samaj he compared the Araya Samaj to the "Unitarian" Brahmo Samaj, founded by Rammohun Roy, or simply claimed the Arya Samaj believed in a personal God. In the early 1880s the idea of Hinduism as a world religion comparable to other world religions and internally divisible into sects had yet to occur to Olcott. In the 1880s Olcott relied upon Theosophical comparative religion that emphasized sameness. It was only later, after events like the World's Parliament of Religions, when a new model for comparative religion that emphasized difference arose that he could look back and use language of sectarianism.

Nonetheless, Olcott's problem with Saraswati came down to the difference between Olcott's Theosophical comparative religion and Saraswati's project of Hindu religious reform. Saraswati refused to accept Theosophical comparative religion and the dissolution of religious difference. The Vedas held truth, exclusive truth, and not some truth that all religions shared. As religious historian Stephen Prothero has put it, in Olcott's eyes the blame for the failed relationship between the Society and the Samaj

[63] Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves: The True Story of the Theosophical Society*, 398.

"fell entirely on the shoulders of Saraswati, and that failure consisted essentially in the Swami's refusal to see his religion (as Olcott demanded it be seen) as one among many and his scripture's truths as shared rather than unique."[64] Prothero has also pointed out that Olcott shared a similar approach to Hindu religion as the Christian missionaries he so often criticized. Olcott's ideology of the equality of all religions and the missionary emphasis on religious difference both "refused to recognize the Buddhist and Hindus of India as full human subjects…Thus Olcott's seemingly empathetic embrace of both Buddhism and Hinduism shared with missionary Christianity and British colonialism an imperial thrust."[65]

The "imperial thrust" of Olcott's attempt to fold Saraswati and the Araya Samaj into the wisdom religion ran aground on Saraswati's refusal to let Olcott represent Hindu religion as anything but an authentic and exclusive religion of the Vedas. Furthermore, Saraswati's denunciation of the Theosophists also served as a denunciation of their comparative religious project. Indeed, it is the first resistance to American religious comparativism to emerge in this study. The Protestant comparative religion of Hannah Adams and Joseph Priestly had no space for any Hindu voices of resistance. Similarly, the Transcendentalist comparative work of Lydia Maria Child, James Freeman Clarke, and Samuel Johnson went unchecked. The only criticisms these American writers faced came from conservative Protestants working to protect the exclusivity of their truth claims. But because the Theosophists went to India and sought contacts in the East, both

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[64] Stephen Prothero, *The White Buddhist: The Asian Odyssey of Henry Steel Olcott* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 107.

[65] Ibid., 69.

in the form of the Mahatmas and the Indians they met face to face, their comparative project and their representations of Hinduism were opened to Hindu critique.

The Mahatmas: Imagining India's Occult Power

Blavatsky and Olcott did not publicly articulate the existence of the Mahatma Koot Hoomi that Saraswati derided until after their arrival to India in 1879, but, according to Olcott, the Mahatmas had been a part of the Theosophical Society since its founding. Referred to as Adepts, Masters, Masters of Wisdom, or Mahatmas, these men—and they were always men—had reached the highest levels of human and spiritual evolution. According to Theosophists, Madame Blavatsky's phenomena derived from the Mahatmas' power, they guided her writings, they communicated their doctrines of spiritual evolution and occult power to their initiates, and they authorized the leaders of the movement. Holed up in the inaccessible heights of the Himalayan Mountains, they were the source of all that was powerful in Theosophical wisdom religion. The development of Theosophical thinking about the Mahatmas during the first twenty years of the movement reflected the movement's turn from Western spiritualism to an Eastern occultism that imagined India as the source of religious power, personified by the Mahatmas and their Great White Brotherhood in the Himalayas.

The transition from spiritualism to the Theosophy of Himalayan Ascended Masters began with John King. John King had been appearing at séances in America since the 1850s and was often thought to be the earthbound soul of Henry Morgan the pirate. In 1874 John King and another spirit, his daughter Katie King, began to manifest

at the home of Jennie and Nelson Holmes in Philadelphia. The mediums would climb into a large cabinet and the heads and hands belonging to the two spirits would appear in two large windows cut in one side of the cabinet. On January 4, 1875 Olcott, accompanied by Blavatsky who lived in Philadelphia at the time, began to test and research the truth of the King manifestations at the Holmes' séance. On his first night in Philadelphia Olcott himself conversed with John King through rappings. This was not their first encounter. Olcott claimed to have met John King in 1870 in London and, further, that Blavatsky had earlier encountered him in the 1861 in Russia, as well as in India and Egypt. John King's rap was "peculiar and easily recognizable from others—a loud, sharp, crackling report" and so Olcott was sure it was him once again in Philadelphia.[66] Two nights later John King produced two copies of a note that Olcott had stowed in his portfolio. John King closed out the night by offering to forge a check of any national bank with the name of any president, cashier, or other official. Olcott declined citing that the police did not yet believe in spiritualism. On the morning of the 13th, during one of Olcott's unannounced test séances, a faceless John King appeared in the cabinet window wearing a turban, prefiguring the Orientalized John King that was to come.[67] After completing a series of test séances with the Holmes, Olcott decided to move on to investigate another medium at Havana, New York. In one of his last conversations with John King at Philadelphia the spirit told him he would soon see "a phase of manifestation entirely new to this country," manifestations that "for many ages,

[66] Olcott, *People from the Other World*, 454.

[67] Ibid., 454–459, 464.

have been confined to the temples and pagodas of Egypt and Hindostan."[68] As Olcott's interest shifted from spiritualism to Eastern esotericism, John King was proved right.

In his initial account of John King in *People from the Other World*, Olcott did not connect John King to any idea of Mahatmas, Masters, or Adepts. In passing he mentioned that Blavatsky wore "upon her bosom the mystic jeweled emblem of an Eastern Brotherhood."[69] But what that brotherhood was or what connection Blavatsky had to it remained unclear. Looking back on the events in Philadelphia in his 1895 *Old Diary Leaves*, Olcott decided that John King was no human spirit, but rather, "a humbugging elemental" worked by Blavatsky to assist him in his education and initiation. "He was first, John King, an independent personality, then John King, messenger and servant—never the equal—of living adepts, and finally an elemental pure and simple, employed by H.P.B. and a certain other expert in the doing of wonder."[70] Blavatsky herself claimed later that John King's phenomena were the work of one of the Mahatmas through her, the "certain other expert" Olcott described. She wrote, "I went to the Holmeses, and, helped by M. and his *power*, brought out the faces of John King and Katie King from the Astral Light."[71] According to Olcott, Blavatsky was sent by the Mahatmas to transition America from "cruder mediumism" of spiritualism to "Eastern Spiritualism, or Brahma Vidya," that is, the right knowledge of Brahma.[72] Blavatsky would turn Olcott, and America, toward the wisdom religion of India.

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[68] Ibid., 480.

[69] Ibid., 453.

[70] Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves: The True Story of the Theosophical Society*, 11–12.

[71] "Important Note" in ibid., 14.

The Masters made their first contact with Olcott on March 9, 1875, but these first Adepts did not originate in India. Olcott received a letter written in gold ink on green paper addressed to him as "Brother Neophyte." The letter claimed "Brother 'John'" had brought three Masters to observe Olcott and encouraged him to take care of and watch over "Sister Helen." The letter was signed "TUITIT BEY." A letter from Blavatsky arrived in the same batch of mail saying that she had been ordered by the Universal Mystic Brotherhood to instruct Olcott in esoteric knowledge. Thus, through Blavatsky, Olcott became an initiate in the Brotherhood of Luxor, the Egyptian section of the Universal Mystic Brotherhood.[73]

Olcott's tutelage under the Egyptian Master did not last long. One night, when Olcott and Blavatsky had finished their night's work on *Isis Unveiled*, Olcott sat in his room reading. A white gleam in the corner of his eye caught his attention. He turned and dropped his book out of astonishment. "An Oriental clad in white garments, and wearing a head-cloth or turban of amber-striped fabric, hand-embroidered in yellow floss-silk" stood over him. Under his turban the man had long raven black hair, "his black beard, parted vertically on the chin in the Rajput fashion, was twisted at the ends and carried over the ears; his eyes were alive with soul-fire…the eyes of a mentor and a judge, but softened by the love of a father who gazes on a son needing counsel and guidance."[74] Olcott bowed his head and bent his knee. The Master sat in the chair across from him. The two talked about Olcott, Blavatsky, and "the great work that was to be done for

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[72] Ibid., 15.

[73] Prothero, *The White Buddhist*, 59–60; Bruce F Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revised: A History of the Theosophical Movement* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1980), 24; Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves: The True Story of the Theosophical Society*, 75–76.

[74] Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves: The True Story of the Theosophical Society*, 379.

humanity," in which Olcott was to take part.[75] A bond had now been established between the Master and Olcott—"a mysterious tie"—that could not be broken.[76] The Master then rose and untwisted the turban on his head, leaving it for Olcott as proof that he had not been "psychologically befooled," saluted him farewell, and was gone. Olcott had found his Master, but even more, he knew that his quest for religious truth would lead him to India. "This visit and his conversation sent my heart at one leap around the globe, across oceans and continents, over sea and land, to India."[77] Soon Olcott and Blavatsky would set sail for the land of their Mahatmas.

In India, Blavatsky's metaphysical phenomena attracted attention and brought her and Olcott into contact with Alfred Percy Sinnett, an Anglo-Indian newspaper editor. Sinnett wanted to know the secret to Blavatsky's abilities. Blavatsky attributed it to the Masters, the Mahatmas. Sinnett wanted access to these Mahatmas and their esoteric wisdom. Blavatsky obliged. A correspondence of mysterious letters thus began between Sinnett and the Masters. Letters from the Mahatmas reached Sinnett through the mail, appeared inside other letters, or even dropped from the ceiling. Based on these letters Sinnett published *The Occult World* in 1881, the first major description of the Masters and their teachings.[78]

In *The Occult World,* Sinnett described the Masters whose religious devotion had allowed them to acquire "unusual powers in the nature of such as Europeans would very

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[75] Ibid., 380.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Henry Steel Olcott, "Theosophy, the Scientific Basis of Religion," in *A Collection of Lectures on Theosophy and Archaic Religions* (Madras: A. Theyaga Rajier, 1883), 164.

[78] Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revised*, 56–57, 80–81.

erroneously call supernatural."[79] The power of the Mahatma was not supernatural, according to Sinnett, but came from occult knowledge of natural laws. Just as modern science had discovered the circulation of blood in the body, "occult science understands the circulation of the life-principle" and this understanding empowered the Masters.[80] These Mahatmas lived secluded lives and could only be accessed by candidates determined to be acceptable for occult training. Sinnett claimed contact with two Masters, Koot Hoomi Lal Sing or simply K.H. and a more mysterious M. Sinnett provided little biography of M., who he claimed had been Blavatsky's Master and "occult guardian" since her childhood.[81] However Sinnett offered a biography of Koot Hoomi, his more intimate Master, as a Punjabi who had been interested in the occult since childhood, went to Europe for his education, and "since then has been fully initiated in the greater knowledge of the East."[82] Koot Hoomi Lal Sing was his "Tibetan Mystic name" taken on after his initiation as an occultist. Along with the phenomenally appearing letters, Koot Hoomi also produced other phenomena, such as materializing a brooch of Sinnett's wife insider her picnic cushion. For Sinnett, Koot Hoomi represented the occult power available to the initiate, a power, like Olcott's turbaned visitor, represented as Indian and Hindu.

The Mahatmas, as described by Sinnett, introduced Americans to a representation of Hindu religion as an occult power wielded by holy Indian men. Such an image had its roots in earlier missionary literature reports of fakirs and yogis performing remarkable

[79] A .P. Sinnett, *The Occult World*, 9th ed. (London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1969), 8–9.

[80] Ibid., 4.

[81] Ibid., 180.

[82] Ibid., 83–84.

physical feats and in the Transcendentalist representation of Eastern mysticism and contemplation. Blavatsky's description of the fakirs, jugglers, and sanyasins in *Isis Unveiled* also prefigured the image of the powerful and turbaned Mahatma. But, as Kirin Narayan has noted, the Mahatmas signaled a change in American conceptions of Hindu holy men. "With these masters as guides, Hindu holy men were allowed the symbolic freedom to leave their beds of nails and take off for the spiritual heights of the Himalayas."[83] The Mahatmas paved the way for later images of Hindu holy men in American culture and for gurus who would come to American in the flesh at the end of the century.

Thus, Koot Hoomi prefigured a twentieth century American cultural image Jane Iwamura has dubbed the Oriental Monk. As Iwamura described him, the Oriental Monk was defined by "his spiritual commitment, his calm demeanor, his Asian face, his manner of dress, and—most obviously—his peculiar gendered character."[84] But more important than this Oriental Monk's image is his function. "Oriental wisdom and spiritual insight is passed from the Oriental Monk figure to the West through the *bridge figure* of the child. Ultimately, the Oriental Monk and his apprentice(s) represent future salvation of the dominant culture—they embody a revitalized hope of saving the West from capitalist greed, brute force, totalitarian rule, and spiritless technology."[85] The Oriental Monks Iwamura identified suited the needs and fears of twentieth century America. Similarly, Rammohun Roy was an Oriental Monk bringing wisdom to the debates among early

[83] Kirin Narayan, "Refractions from the Field at Home: American Representations of Hindu Holy Men in the 19th and 20th Centuries," *Cultural Anthropology* 8 (1993): 491.

[84] Jane Naomi Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 6.

[85] Ibid., 20 Emphasis in original.

nineteenth century New England Protestants. The Mahatmas served the needs of the late nineteenth century, especially the need to unite science and religion. Through the bridge figures of Blavatsky, Sinnett, Olcott, and other Theosophists, their occult science and wisdom religion reached the West. The Mahatmas were Hindu Oriental Monks for America: turbaned men from India, secluded in their mystical Himalayan Lodge, who sent forth ageless wisdom religion through their initiates that would solve the conflict between science and religion and save Western culture.

The Esoteric Path of Raja Yoga

The Mahatmas represented an esoteric power buried deep in India and accessible to only a select few, but Theosophists also presented an esoteric path toward spiritual evolution that was more widely available: yoga. Blavatsky and American Theosophical writer William Quan Judge both presented two different forms of yoga: a superior esoteric yoga that served as a path toward spiritual development and an inferior exoteric yoga of fleshy body postures and self-denial. In their published writings Blavatsky and Judge warned Theosophical seekers of the danger of exoteric hatha, or postural, yoga and praised the higher raja forms of yoga practice. Theosophists represented Hindu religions as a source of religious power and spiritual development but one had to turn to the proper resources. Hindu power could be dangerous.

Blavatsky published *The Secret Doctrine*, what historian Bruce Campbell has called her "masterwork," in 1888. In the two volume text Blavatsky shifts noticeably from the form of comparative religion that framed *Isis Unveiled*. While in *Isis*, India

represented the origin of the wisdom religion in a pre-Vedic esotericism, in *The Secret Doctrine* the wisdom religion no longer originates in India and the Vedas. Rather, Blavatsky turned to a different ancient text, one that had been revealed to her and her alone, the Book of Dzyan. In *The Secret Doctrine* Blavatsky presents stanzas from the Book of Dzyan followed by commentary. Blavatsky described the Book of Dzyan as one "utterly unknown to our Philologists" but whose "main body of the Doctrines given is found scattered throughout hundreds and thousands of Sanskrit MSS" and "are in every instance hinted at in the almost countless volumes of Brahminical, Chinese, and Tibetan temple-literature."[86] This book, revealed to Blavatsky alone, provided a new origin for the wisdom religion and displaced Hindu religious texts as the origin.

While the Vedas no longer held pride of place as the origin of the wisdom religion, now termed the Secret Doctrine in its eponymous text, yoga became a path of esoteric wisdom for the occultist drawn from Hindu religious sources. For example, in the text Blavatsky outlined a septenary division of the human constitution. She gave a chart that broke down the seven terms for the seven different "principles of man" into three columns: Esoteric Buddhism, Vedantic, and Taraka Raja Yoga.[87] Each of these three occult systems contained the same basic truth of the Secret Doctrine. Yoga was one esoteric path among many.

The goal of yoga according to Blavatsky was secret wisdom and knowledge of the higher spiritual self-attained through experiences of ecstasy. In her 1889 practical manual *The Key to Theosophy*, Blavatsky argued for the necessity of such ecstatic experience for

[86] H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine* (Los Angeles: The Theosophy Company, 1947), xxii–xxiii.

[87] Ibid., 157.

true spiritual self-knowledge. She also linked this ecstasy to yoga. Such ecstasy "is, indeed, identical with that state which is known in India as *Samadhi*. The latter is practiced by the Yogis, who facilitate it by the greatest abstinence in food and drink, and mentally by an incessant endeavor to purify and elevate the mind."[88] Blavatsky emphasized, however, that one must engage in the proper forms of yoga for spiritual progress. She distinguished between hatha yoga, the yoga of bodily postures, and raja yoga. She insisted that the would-be occultist stick to raja yoga and not tamper with hatha yoga. "The *Hatha* so called was and still is discountenanced by the Arhats. It is injurious to the health and alone can never develop into Raj Yoga."[89] Blavatsky did not outline the practical contents of raja yoga, but rather consistently defined it in contrast to the physical postures and breath control of hatha.

William Quan Judge, an influential leader of the American branch of the Theosophical Society, fleshed out Blavatsky's distinction between raja and hatha yoga by connecting raja yoga to the second century B.C.E. Hindu sage Patanjali and his Yoga Sutras. In 1889 Judge published an "interpretation" of Patanjali's Yoga Sutra titled *The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali*. The work was an interpretation, rather than a translation, meant to "interpret it to Western minds unfamiliar with the Hindu modes of expression, and equally unaccustomed to their philosophy and logic."[90] For Judge, Patanjali presented a yogic path toward knowledge and virtue. He granted that Patanjali's text made reference to postures and breathing practices typical of hatha yoga but cautioned

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[88] H. P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy* (Los Angeles: The Theosophy Company, 1962), 10.

[89] Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, 95.

[90] William Q. Judge, *The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali* (Los Angeles: United Lodge of Theosophists, 1920), vi.

that these practices were "for the purpose of extenuating certain mental afflictions or for the more easy attainment of the concentration of mind."[91] The central component of Patanjali's system, and of raja yoga more generally, was concentration. The first aphorism of Judge's interpretation read: "Assuredly, the exposition of Yoga, or Concentration, is now to be made."[92] For Judge, yoga meant the attainment of "'one-pointedness,' or the power to apply the mind, at any moment to the consideration of a single point of thought, to the exclusion of all else."[93] Postures and breathing techniques distracted from the mental and spiritual goal. True yoga, beneficial yoga, focused on the development of the metaphysical mind. As he wrote elsewhere, "the true student of Rāja Yoga knows that everything has its origin in MIND; that even this Universe is passing before the Divine Mind of the images he desires to appear."[94] Judge used Patanjali's text to build on Blavatsky's earlier contrast between raja and hatha yoga. He represented raja yoga as the superior practice of concentration leading to knowledge of the Divine Mind.

Despite these arguments from Blavatsky and Judge, American Theosophists continued to show interest in hatha yoga, as evidenced by the number of answers to questions about hatha practice Judge published in various Theosophical journals. Judge presented three main arguments against hatha yoga for his Theosophical readers. First, Judge ruled that hatha yoga was inferior because it was not about concentration leading to spiritual development, but instead resulted in "psychic development at the delay or

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[91] Ibid., ix.

[92] Ibid., 1.

[93] Ibid., 2.

[94] William Q. Judge, *Echoes of the Orient: The Writings of William Quan Judge*, ed. Dara Eklund (Pasadena, Cal.: Theosophical University Press, 2011), 3:259.

expense of the spiritual nature."[95] It was a "physical practice for physical results," while raja yoga "aims at changes of the Inner Nature."[96] Second, Judge argued, Western students faced "racial difficulties" in the pursuit of hatha yoga that would limit their abilities. As he wrote, "partial concentration of mind, even—the first step for any practical use of the recondite laws of nature—is conspicuously absent from our people."[97] Drawing on a longstanding American view of the Hindus as a race that was naturally more mystical than Americans, Judge argued that the Hindu's racial essence prepared him for the physical and psychic practices of hatha yoga in ways that the American lacked. American postural yoga was, in a sense, unnatural. Finally, hatha yoga was downright dangerous for Americans. In an 1891 circular to the correspondence group within the Eastern School of Theosophy, Judge described an experiment he had recently performed where a doctor tracked the pulse of a person as they practiced hatha breathing techniques. The experiment found a reduction of the pulse by 20 beats in 14 minutes, "an enormous alteration which might if persisted in be very injurious."[98] This medical experiment led Judge to conclude that such practice required a guide and regulations for avoiding such physical effects, neither of which was available in America. Thus, "there is great danger and no benefit in pursuing hatha yoga without a guide."[99] Hatha yoga represented the dangerous side of the Theosophical turn to India.

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[95] Judge, *The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali*, ix.

[96] Judge, *Echoes of the Orient*, 3:308.

[97] Ibid., 2:416–417.

[98] Ibid., 3:327 This experiment is in some ways a nineteenth century prefiguring of the meditation studies and brain scans of the twenty-first century and an inversion of current arguments for the physical benefits of yoga postures and breathing techniques.

Theosophical warnings against hatha and postural yoga set the tone for the introduction of yoga in America. Swami Vivekananda would arrive on the heels of Judge's writings about yoga and publish his own yoga text, *Raja Yoga*, in 1896. Like Judge, Vivekananda also identified raja yoga with the sutras of Patanjali. Historian Elizabeth De Michelis has pointed out that there is nothing in Patanjali's text connecting it to raja yoga and this misidentification between the two "betrays a cognitive confusion which causes a typically esoteric variety of yoga (further occultized by Vivekananda and his followers) to be understood not only in terms of mainstream yoga, but as the most important and universally applicable form of yoga."[100] Building on De Michelis, historian Mark Singleton has argued that hatha practice was taboo for English-speaking yoga gurus after Vivekananda until well into the twentieth century.[101] Theosophical representations of yoga shaped larger American understandings of hatha yoga as dangerous and raja yoga as spiritually progressive. Such representations of hatha yoga built on earlier missionary images of self-inflicted tortures of the fakir and hook swinger. Meanwhile, raja yoga represented the esoteric path to wisdom and Patanjali's text served as a Hindu guide to self-realization.

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[99] Ibid.

[100] Elizabeth De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga* (London: Continuum, 2005), 179.

[101] Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 80.

Hindu Religions and Occult Power in America

From the appearance of the Hindu or Arab man in Chittenden, Vermont through William Q. Judge's warnings about the physical effects of hatha yoga, Theosophists continually imagined Hindu religions as a source of occult and esoteric power. Again and again powerful agents carried marks of Oriental-ness and often specifically Hindu-ness: the turbaned Hindu-Arab spirit that visited Chittenden, the turbaned John King, the Rajput Mahatma that visited Olcott, Master Koot Hoomi, and the dangers of hatha yoga. Though a variety of representations of Hinduism emerged in Theosophical circles from the 1870s through the 1890s, they all shared a common assumption that esoteric and occult power resided in India and Hindu religious culture.

American Theosophists represented Hindu religion and India as mystical, otherworldly, and detached from social and political realities. While it is true that the Theosophical Society played an important role in Indian politics during the early twentieth century, American Theosophists, on the other hand, did not imagine India as a colonial territory or Hindu religion as a nationalist force. The writings of the first generation of Theosophists imagined Hindu religions as mystical, individual, and esoteric. As historian of religions Richard King has argued, "from within this interpretive paradigm one becomes predisposed to interpreting mystical doctrines, texts, traditions, and authors in a manner that makes them appear antisocial and otherworldly in orientation" and leads to "a characterization of 'mystics' as largely uninterested in or antithetical to social, ecclesiastical and political authority."[102] Theosophical

[102] King, *Orientalism and Religion : Postcolonial Theory, India and "the Mystic East"*, 33.

representations of Hindu religions played a major role in rendering Hindu religions and India as mystical in this sense. This rendering of Hindu religions as mystical constructed a contrast between the mysticism of Hindus on the one hand and the rationalism of Americans on the other. As King has pointed out, "the association of religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism with mysticism and the stereotype of the navel-gazing, antisocial and otherworldly mystic has come to function as on the most prevailing cultural representation of Indian religion and culture in the last few centuries."[103] The mystical Hindu could not be a political or social actor. Until Gandhi shattered this image in the 20th century, Hinduism could not be connected with political change in minds of Americans. The basic division between mystical India and its Hindu religions and rational America and its Protestantism provided structured understandings of American national identity that imagined American-ness in contrast to the Hindu other throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century.

[103] Ibid.

Part III

From Hindu Religions to Hinduism, 1830-1893

Chapter 5

Hindu Religions, Protestantism, and American National Culture[1]

Ralph Waldo Emerson warned the Harvard Divinity School class of 1838 that American Protestantism had run itself into the ground. "Historical Christianity has fallen into the error that corrupts all attempts to communicate religion. As it appears to us, and as it has appeared for ages, it is not the doctrine of the soul, but an exaggeration of the personal, the positive, the ritual," he declared.[2] But for all the failings Emerson and other metaphysicians found in American Protestantism, elsewhere in the country Protestants were hard at work building a national culture and moral establishment. Looking at the broad expanse of the West, Lyman Beecher claimed a special purpose for America as a Christian nation. Beecher believed the United States was "destined to lead the way in the moral and political emancipation of the world."[3] That destiny was to be decided in the West, where Beecher imagined a conflict for America's soul and identity. It would be "a conflict of institutions for the education of her sons, for purposes of superstition, or evangelical light, of despotism, or liberty."[4] As the rest of Beecher's plea would illustrate, superstition and despotism were allusions to the perceived evils of Roman Catholicism. But more importantly, Beecher argued that evangelical Protestantism was intimately linked to American liberty. According to Beecher, Protestant religion and

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[1] An earlier version of part of this chapter was published previously. See Michael J. Altman, "'The Manners and Customs of Nations': India in American Schoolbooks, 1830-1860," *Journal of Theta Alpha Kappa* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 1–21.

[2] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Wallace E Williams and Douglas Emory Wilson, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), 82.

[3] Lyman Beecher, *A Plea for the West*, 2nd ed. (Cincinnati: Truman & Smith, 1835), 11.

[4] Ibid., 12.

American liberty must be maintained and extended through proper education and institutions.

In the wake of the revivalism that shaped American Protestantism during the first third of the nineteenth century, American Protestants like Beecher built a moral and cultural establishment in America they believed to be vital to the health of the republic. During his tour of America in 1830, Alexis de Tocqueville noted the shared morality maintained by American Christianity: "each sect therefore adores God in its manner, but all sects preach the same morality in the name of God."[5] This morality undergirded the politics of the American republic. "I am sure that they believe it necessary to the maintenance of republican institutions. This opinion does not belong only to one class of citizens or to one party, but to the entire nation; one finds it in all ranks."[6] Religion suffused the American republic such that "in the United States religious zeal constantly warms itself at the hearth of patriotism."[7] As historian David Sehat has observed, "for much of its history the United States was controlled by Protestant Christians who sponsored a moral regime that was both coercive and exclusionary."[8] The Americans behind this establishment believed religion, specifically Protestant religion, was necessary to "reinforce the moral fabric of the people, was, in turn, necessary for the

[5] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Harvey Claflin Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 278.

[6] Ibid., 280.

[7] Ibid., 281.

[8] David Sehat, *The Myth of American Religious Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 8.

health and preservation of the state."[9] Protestant cultural power undergirded a coercive moral establishment that maintained the health and virtue of the republic.

The Protestant moral establishment worked through a variety of institutions, producing a national culture that united Protestant morality with American nationalism. "An increasingly nonspecific Protestantism," as religious historian Tracy Fessenden has termed it, dominated "over nearly aspect of American life, a dominance as pervasive as it is invisible for exceeding the domains we conventionally figure as religious."[10] In public schools and popular print culture, two such domains, nonspecific Protestantism and Protestant morality coalesced with American nationalism to produce a national culture that taught students and adults how to be moral, Protestant, American citizens in the republic.

As producers of American national culture, writers and editors constructed representations of Hindu religions that attempted to entertain and educate American citizens of various ages. These representations of Hindus reinforced notions of America as a white, Protestant, civilized, and democratic by imaging India as dark, Hindu, uncivilized, and hierarchical. According to these representations, Hindu religions led to despotism and American Protestantism led to freedom. Writers worked to inculcate Protestant morals and American nationalism in readers by representing the Hindu other.

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[9] Ibid.

[10] Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption : Religion, the Secular, and American Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007), 55.

Schoolbooks and the Production of American Citizens

"This extensive and populous country…retains its peculiar manners which have stamped the people as a peculiar race from the earliest periods of history."[11] So writes Samuel Goodrich in 1845, using the pseudonym Peter Parley, under the heading "Hindostan" in his schoolbook *Manners and Customs of the Principal Nations of The Globe*. For, Goodrich, and for the children reading his schoolbook, India was quite different from America. As common schools began to grow in the middle third of the nineteenth century, writers like Goodrich believed that children in America needed to have a global view. School book author S. Augustus Mitchell wrote in his 1840 geography book, "There is perhaps no subject of greater interest, or of more real value in education, than geography."[12] For Mitchell, and other nineteenth century educators, geography meant more than maps. "It treats, also, of the manners and customs, the moral habits and qualities, the social combinations, and the institutions of the various communities and races of men."[13] Other types of schoolbooks also took account of "manners and customs." Histories and readers joined geographies in presenting students examples of how different human beings in the world behaved and thought—a common school anthropology of sorts.

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[11] Samuel Goodrich, *Manners and Customs of the Principal Nations of the Globe.* (Boston: Bradbury Soden, 1845), 24.

[12] Samuel Mitchell, *Mitchell's Geographical Reader: A System of Modern Geography, Comprising a Description of the World* ... (Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co., 1840), iii.

[13] Ibid.

But geography books set the standard for how the differences between human beings would be understood. Geography schoolbooks presented students with a systematized approach to difference that allowed them to understand who they were and who they were not. Other historians have examined the ways American schoolbooks sought to engender a sense of American-ness and nationalism in children; however, these studies have focused on what the schoolbooks said about America.[14] But the ways these textbooks represented other nations and people, such as Hindus, also impressed American identity and cultural values on students. Children learned more about America by learning more about "Hindoostan."

Schoolbooks told American children who Americans were and what America was. In this way, schoolbooks were an early form of a burgeoning national culture that sought to overcome regional differences with a shared sense of the American nation. As one historian notes, "By the end of the 1820s, before the rise of wire services, nationally distributed newspapers, and mass-subscription magazines, children throughout the republic began to share the same spellers, arithmetics, geographies, and histories."[15] As an early form of nationally circulated print, schoolbooks constituted the beginnings of an American popular culture and a popular understanding of American-ness.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, schoolbook authors acted less as writers and more as compilers. In the schoolbook production process, "a teacher, doctor,

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[14] See for example: Martin Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literacy, and National Identity* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture by University of North Carolina Press, 2006); François Furstenberg, *In the Name of the Father: Washington's Legacy, Slavery, and the Making of a Nation* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006); Carolyn Eastman, *A Nation of Speechifiers: Making an American Public After the Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

[15] Joseph Moreau, *Schoolbook Nation: Conflicts Over American History Textbooks from the Civil War to the Present* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 33.

clergyman, or anybody might decide to write a text, do the necessary work, confer with the proprietor of a printing establishment, and a book appeared. Thus there was a new book for other compilers to contend with."[16] By 1830, Samuel Goodrich employed a salaried "professional compiler" for his Peter Parley series. The compilation process makes these schoolbooks particularly useful but also somewhat baffling for historical research. On the one hand, they reflect various strands of knowledge and discourse floating around in American and, more broadly, European culture during the period. A compiler of a geography or history text borrowed from multiple sources for each chapter or section and acted as a sort of cultural quilt maker, sewing together different accounts to make one whole text. More than the writing of one author, they reflected pieces of the broad cultural discourse on a topic. But on the other hand, the schoolbook only reflected what the author chose to include. Only the material he or she found interesting or important made it into the quilt. These early schoolbooks, then, were cultural products fashioned according to individual visions of what mattered for American children.

As cultural products for children's education, schoolbooks had to balance educational, moral, and civic aims in order to inculcate American values and produce children that would make good American citizens. Education historian John Nietz identified four major aims for schoolbooks: acquisition of knowledge, interest and entertainment, development of nationalism or world mindedness, and the connection of cause and effect relationships.[17] While Nietz had geography books in mind, histories,

[16] Charles Halsey Carpenter, *History of American Schoolbooks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963), 271.

readers and other texts that offered a broad and global view of human activity shared these same aims. All four aims were important to the growth of American children into citizens in the young republican nation. Most obviously, authors sought to engender nationalism in American children in order to produce loyal citizens. Secondly, educators believed that knowledge bred virtue, an important trait for citizens in a democracy and so the acquisition of knowledge was not aimed at individual betterment but at civic improvement. Likewise, an understanding of the relationship between cause and effect allowed students to grow into rational democratic citizens. Interesting, entertaining, and exotic material served to try and keep children's attention while these other aims were reached. In short, the schoolbooks tried to produce educated American citizens.

Faraway places, such as India, were crucial to fulfilling these educational aims. American schoolbook authors had access to a large body of English language knowledge of the country. American missionaries, British writers, and earlier American representations provided schoolbook authors with information about India and Hindu religions. By the middle third of the century, after decades of missionary activity and the early metaphysical representations, India held a special place in the American imagination and so too, in American schoolbooks. In schoolbooks, India served as a foil against which authors could identify what counted as American. Authors created American-ness through the difference of Indian-ness.

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[17] John A. Nietz, *Old Textbooks: Spelling, Grammar, Reading, Arithmetic, Geography, American History, Civil Government, Physiology, Penmanship, Art, Music, as Taught in the Common Schools from Colonial Days to 1900* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1961), 196–200.

Nineteenth century geography books loved classificatory systems. Roswell C. Smith's *Geography on the Productive System* (1836) began with water.[18] Water came from springs, it flowed in rivers, which then formed lakes, which were smaller than seas, which were parts of oceans. In between were waterfalls, creeks, bays, straights and sounds. In order for a student to fully understand water, the child needed to be able to classify it correctly. This same classificatory approach was applied to a child's understanding of humans. Schoolbooks in antebellum America categorized people, cultures, and societies along systems that insisted on mutually exclusive categories of race, religion, and condition of society. These systems appeared in the early chapters of the book alongside lessons on longitude and latitude or geographical terms, making them the hermeneutic through which students would understand the later chapters about specific countries. These categories gave students a grid for understanding themselves in contrast to people in faraway cultures, as well as emphasizing the superiority of American culture, religion, and values. Children learned that they were different and that they were better.

[18] Roswell Smith, *Geography on the Productive System: For Schools, Academies, and Families*, Second edition. (Philadelphia: W. Marshall & Co., 1836), 5.

Figure 1 The races of the world from Mitchell's *A System of Modern Geography*

Geography books categorized people along racial lines first. For example, in his 1844 *A System of Modern Geography*, Mitchell described the human race as "differing greatly from each other in colour, form, and features."[19] These physical differences constructed race. The major divisions on the racial hierarchy were European, Asiatic, American (as in American Indian), Malay, and African. Each race corresponded with a color and a geographic area: white/ Europe and America, yellow/Asia and Alaska, copper or red/America, brown/Pacific islands, and black/Africa. Texts often also included engravings to illustrate each racial group. Smith included a small engraving with each description of a race, while Mitchell includes one image of all five races together—the European centered of course (Fig. 1). [20] The racial categories made up a loose hierarchy

[19] Samuel Mitchell, *A System of Modern Geography, Comprising a Description of the Present State of the World and Its Five Great Divisions: America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Oceanica: With Their Several Empires,* (Philadelphia: Thomas Cowperthwait & Co., 1840), 40.

insofar as Europeans were the noblest race and everyone else was below them. As Mitchell put it, the European "excels all others in learning and the arts, and includes the most powerful nations of ancient and modern times. The most valuable institutions of society, and the most important useful inventions have originated with the people of this race."[21] The white American students of the book's audience—authors seemingly ignored African and Native American students—could immediately locate themselves and were even asked to as part of the exercises in Mitchell's text, assuring themselves of their racial nobility.

[20] Smith, *Geography on the Productive System*, 78–80.

[21] Mitchell, *A System of Modern Geography*, 43.

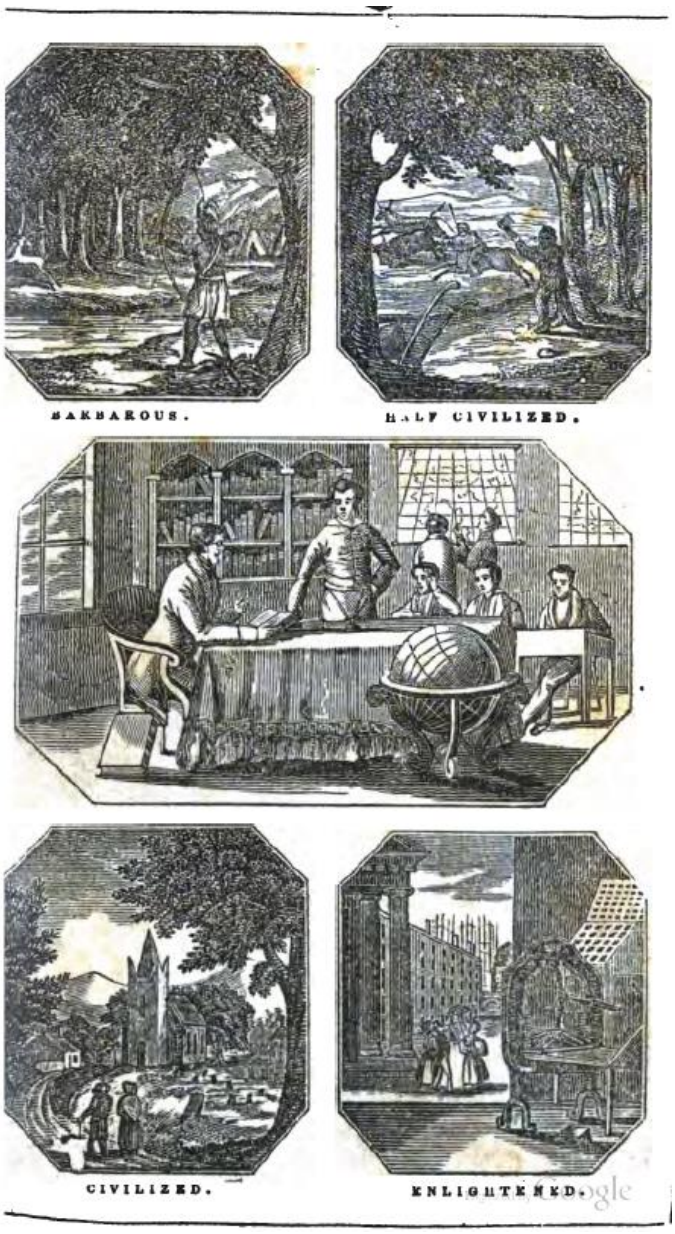

Figure 2 Engraving of civilizations from first page of Smith's *Geography on the Productive System*

These various races could then be plotted along a hierarchy of "states of society" or "conditions of man." Schoolbooks argued that some cultures had progressed further than others and had reached higher levels of civilization. "Savage" societies sat at the bottom of this hierarchy. These societies depended on hunting, fishing, and robbery, lived

in caves or huts, were superstitious and bloodthirsty, and treated their women as slaves. Generally, "half-civilized" societies made up the next level of the hierarchy. These societies had established laws and religion, could read and write, and had some commerce. But, they also treated their women as slaves, and were "very jealous of strangers." Most of the Asian countries, including India, were regarded as "half-civilized." Next on the social scale came the "Civilized" class which separated itself from its half-civilized competitors through its printing, scientific knowledge, and better treatment of women. But the civilized societies were also superstitious and maintained large gaps between the poor and the wealthy. Most of the examples of civilized society came from Eastern and Southern Europe, that is, Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Europe. "Enlightened" societies held the top position in the social hierarchy. These societies perfected art and science, were free from superstition (meaning they were mostly Protestant or secularized), were industrious, elevated women "to their proper station in society, as equals with, and companions for the male sex," and maintained free governments. Civilization, according to these schoolbooks, depended on the maintenance of gender roles. As expected, the United States and Western Europe exemplified these enlightened social values. Students in American common schools could identify themselves as part of the noblest race and the superior society in contrast to other people they encountered in their schoolbooks.[22]

[22] Ibid., 44–45; Smith, *Geography on the Productive System*, 83–85.

Figure 3 Inside cover of Mitchell's *A System of Modern Geography*

Finally, schoolbooks offered students a system for understanding religious difference. On the most basic level, schoolbooks divided religions into two categories:

"true and false."[23] Smith defined true religion as "The belief in, and worship of the one only living and true God."[24] Such a definition included Christianity and possibly also Judaism and Islam. In searching for a definition of true religion that skirted sectarianism, Smith left the boundaries hazy. But Schoolbooks also employed a clearer set of divisions between religions. Schoolbooks divided religion into four categories: Christianity,—which they subdivided into Protestant, Greek, and Catholic—Islam ("Mahomedan"), Jewish, and "Pagan or Heathen." The first two categories maintained rather standard definitions where Christians believe in God, Jesus, and the whole Bible, but Jews believe in God and only the Old Testament. The schoolbooks described Muslims as followers of Muhammad and labeled him an imposter and false prophet. The final and lowest category, Pagans, is defined by belief in false gods, worship of sun, moon, stars, and animals, and idolatry. Mitchell took special note to mention that there were several classes of Pagans, including "Bramins, Buddhists, and worshippers of the Grand Lama, &c."[25] This fourfold division was roughly unchanged from the one Hannah Adams put forward at the beginning of the century. Tomoko Masuzawa has described how this four category taxonomy, "recognizes 'Christians,' 'Jews,' 'Mohammedans,' and 'heathens,' rather than different 'isms' that supposedly prescribe distinct spiritual cosmologies and so-called worldviews particular to each of these different people."[26] As such, the taxonomy was about religious *identity* not about categorizing religious *systems*. Categories of religious systems or "world religions" would come later in the century,

[23] Mitchell, *A System of Modern Geography*, 48.

[24] Smith, *Geography on the Productive System*, 81.

[25] Mitchell, *A System of Modern Geography*, 50.

[26] Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 61.

Masuzawa has argued. At this point, Protestant American students could identify themselves as part of the true religion and identify where others they encountered fit into this early taxonomy of religion.

Figure 4 Engraving from "Religion" chapter of Mitchell's *A System of Modern Geography*

Mitchell and Smith published the two most popular schoolbooks of their time—Smith's geography went through over forty editions, while Mitchell's geography had the widest circulation of any in America before 1900.[27] But these same categories were central to other books as well. Goodrich used a similar set of categories in *A System of School Geography* (1833) and then simplified his categories down to a racial theory based solely on skin color and a division between "savages" and "gentle" people in *Peter Parley's Geography for Beginners* (1845), a book meant for much younger children and

[27] Nietz, *Old Textbooks*, 229. Nietz has isolated the most popular and widely circulated schoolbooks for each genre before 1900. I rely heavily on books from Samuel Goodrich's Peter Parley series, a series Nietz cites as the most popular series of schoolbooks in the period.

written mostly in verse.[28] Human beings were different from each other in myriad ways, but race, religion, and society held the central importance in nineteenth century schoolbooks. Furthermore, the convergence of all these major books around these three categories points to their central role in American culture at the time. American children needed to learn they were white, Protestant, and enlightened before they encountered other cultures in the pages of schoolbooks. When they encountered India, they could identify Hindus as brown, half-civilized, pagan and inferior to themselves in all three categories. While these differences could be the engine for missionary outreach, they also buttressed children's self-understanding as white Protestant Americans.

The Hindu Other: "A Distinct and Peculiar Nation"

"I shall now tell you of a people, who may be regarded as the most interesting of all the inhabitants of Asia, I mean the Hindoos…the Hindoos, in personal appearance, in disposition, in character, and in religion, are a distinct and peculiar nation," wrote Samuel Goodrich in *The Tales of Peter Parley About Asia* (1845).[29] Children would find the Hindus interesting because they were so different from Americans—so "peculiar." As Goodrich pointed out, they looked different, lived differently, and believed in a different religion. The categories of difference outlined in the geography books determined the material authors included about India in histories, readers, and other schoolbooks. Schoolbooks converged upon three themes in their descriptions of India: children and

[28] Samuel Goodrich, *A System of School Geography*, 6th ed. (New York: F.J. Huntington, 1833); Samuel Goodrich, *Peter Parley's Geography for Beginners* (New York: Huntington and Savage, 1845).

[29] Samuel Goodrich, *The Tales of Peter Parley About Asia* (Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co., 1845), 108–109.

women, Hindu religious practice and belief, and the British presence in India. The discussion of these themes in each text was grounded in the categories of difference outlined in the geography texts. The general systems of human difference in geographies determined the specific material about other cultures in other books.

Because they were written for children, schoolbooks often tried to include information about Indian children in their stories and articles about India. For example, Salem Town and Nelson M. Holbrook included a dialogue between the Scottish missionary Alexander Duff and an Indian youth entitled "The Theory of Rain" in their *Progressive Third Reader* (1857).[30] The dialogue recounted Dr. Duff and an Indian boy simply named "Hindoo" discussing where rain comes from. Hindoo claimed that it comes from the trunk of Indra's elephant because his guru told him the shastras say so. Dr. Duff then used various examples, such as a pot of boiling water with the lid on it, to explain how vapor rises and creates rain in clouds. The boy exclaimed, "Ah, our Shastra must be false! Our Shastra must be either not from God, or God must have written lies!" Hindoo was on the path toward becoming Christian.

"The Theory of Rain" played upon all three categories of difference. Hindoo was a brown, pagan, half-civilized child. From the American child's perspective, he was ignorant of science and held to a superstitious understanding of natural phenomenon. But by the end, some of the difference between the American child and the character of Hindoo were erased. First of all, both were children—an immediate touchstone. Second, Dr. Duff taught both Hindoo and the reader. By the end both the reader and Hindoo had a scientific explanation for rain. They had the enlightened understanding of it. Finally,

[30] Salem Town and Nelson M. Holbrook, *The Progressive Third Reader* (Boston: Sanborn, Carter, Bazin, 1857), 176–180.

when Hindoo rejected the shastras and his guru he came closer to Christianity. The introduction to the dialogue explained "how the principles of science are made the means of convincing the heathen of the falsity of their religious systems, and the truth of Christianity."[31] Dr. Duff revealed the truth of Christianity to Hindoo and reinforced it upon the reader. So, "The Theory of Rain" began by putting Hindoo in different categories than the reader and then gradually brought Hindoo closer to an enlightened and Christian identity and reinforced the reader's own white, enlightened, and Christian identity. Indian difference was highlighted then slowly effaced as Hindoo accepted Protestant and Enlightened values. This process of gradual effacement attempted to reinforce these same American values on the young audience.

While "Theory of Rain" offered students a happy ending, some stories of children in India most likely horrified child readers. Schoolbooks could not get over a perceived violence in Hindu religions, a violence taken out on women and children.
Mitchell's geography described Hindu religion as follows: "The people worship images, and, under the blind influence of superstition, drown their children in the rivers."[32] Smith wrote, "Their religion is of the most degrading kind [it] even prompts widows to burn themselves on the funeral pile of their husbands."[33] Even the normally bright and jovial Peter Parley series included in its *The World and Its Inhabitants* (1856) "the females of the two higher castes are required to burn themselves on the dead bodies of their

[31] Ibid., 176.

[32] Mitchell, *A System of Modern Geography*, 243.

[33] Smith, *Geography on the Productive System*, 230.

husbands."[34] Beyond the obvious religious difference emphasized in these examples, the treatment of women and children also signaled a social difference. Hindus who burned widows fulfilled the half-civilized expectations already set out in the texts. Enlightened societies like America treated their women with respect and equality and protected their children. On another level, these stories of child murder and widow suicide struck close to home. A child could immediately wonder if they would be killed had they been born in India. Reading that a child is drowned to appease the gods could have conjured up identification between the child reading and the child drowning. Also, women were key figures in the lives of nineteenth century children. In a period where the cult of domesticity held sway, women took care of children. The image of women being forced onto death fires would have profoundly horrified children—it would have signaled the end of their support structure. Because India was already a land of half-civilized pagans, according to the systems of difference, it was expected that one would find violence against women and children in the name of religion. Schoolbook authors made sure to include this violence in their texts.

Beyond the treatment of women and children, schoolbooks emphasized a violent theme throughout Hindu religious practice and belief. Much of this material must have been as horrifying for readers as the drowning children and burning women. Goodrich described how their religion taught the Hindus to "allow themselves to be buried alive in the earth, tear their bodies with hooks, cut their flesh with knives, and other things like these" in order to gain favor with their gods.[35] In another text, Goodrich attributed

[34] Samuel Goodrich, *The World and Its Inhabitants* (Boston: C.J. Rand Wm. J. Reynolds & Co., 1856), 258.

wrestling and "the performances of the cockpit, where they exhibit spiders, bugs and quails, trained in fighting" to Hindu religion. Goodrich then went on to give a lengthy description of the "Thuggees," which he identified as "an extensive and organized fraternity of *murderers*, which has spread itself over the whole country..."[36] The Thuggees were more than just criminals, though; they were another form of religious violence. Goodrich described an extensive ritual system and system of "gooroos" that regulated and maintained a religious form of robbery. Goodrich then ended the chapter by highlighting the violence he believed to be inherent in Hindu religion: "The same religious feeling which leads the Thugs to believe that they are performing laudable action in murdering travelers who are thrown in their way, while the auspices are favorable, causes them to be regarded without horror by the other Hindoos. They are supposed to be only doing their duty in that state of life to which God has called them."[37] For schoolbook authors, Hindu religion not only excused violence, but required it. Violence served as more evidence for the degraded and pagan nature of Hindu religion, further solidifying their place at the bottom of the religion hierarchy and further distancing them from the Christian child-reader.

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[35] Goodrich, *The Tales of Peter Parley About Asia*, 122.

[36] Goodrich, *Manners and Customs of the Principal Nations of the Globe.*, 332.
[37] Ibid., 338.

Figure 5 Engraving from *Peter Parley's Manners and Customs of the Principal Nations of the Globe*

Besides its violence, schoolbook writers emphasized polytheistic and "idolatrous" themes in Hindu religion—two themes that writers believed proved the falsity and moral degradation of Indian religion. Goodrich argued that "The Hindoos have a great many idols, and worship a great many different gods…They have a great many temples, and spend a great deal of time in the various services of religion…The tendency of their

devotion is not to make them virtuous."[38] Goodrich tied idolatry and polytheism to moral degradation. In other places, however, Goodrich deemphasized the idols and focused more on the Hindu pantheon. In *Lights and Shadows of Asiatic History* (1844) he wrote, "Of the host of Hindoo divinities, Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva are the most exalted. Other nations have generally bestowed upon one deity all power in heaven and earth; but the Hindoos have divided the creation and government of the universe among these three."[39] Similarly, in *The World and Its Inhabitants*, he outlined the same three gods and then commented, "these three persons are, however, but one God, and form the Trimourti, or Hindoo Trinity."[40] In these latter examples, Goodrich emphasized the existence of a trinity analogous to that of Christianity. But he immediately dispelled any ideas that India may be on the right religious track. "In India on the contrary, we behold only the vast allegoric image which represents majesty by enormous statue…providence by innumerable eyes, and ubiquity by innumerable bodies…the Hindoo seemed inspired with a sacred horror of bringing the actions of his deities within the range of human credibility…their fictions scorned the least approximation to truth."[41] Goodrich warned students not to take the similarity between the three Hindu gods and the Christian Trinity as evidence of any real similarity between the two. Christianity was true. Hindu religion was false. American children were Christians and they were different from people of India.

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[38] Goodrich, *The Tales of Peter Parley About Asia*, 121.

[39] Samuel Goodrich, *Lights and Shadows of Asiatic History* (Boston: Bradbury Soden & Co., 1844), 40.

[40] Goodrich, *The World and Its Inhabitants*, 258.

[41] Goodrich, *Lights and Shadows of Asiatic History*, 48.

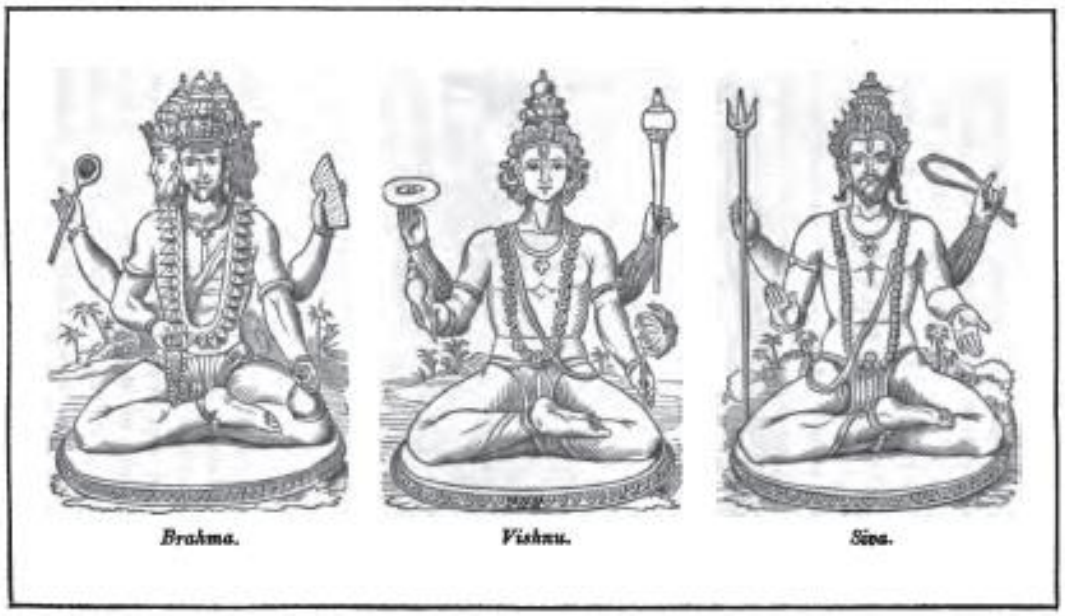

Figure 6 Engraving of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva from *Peter Parley's Manners and Customs of the Principal Nations of the Globe*

Caste also stood out as a central theme in descriptions of India. Schoolbooks always emphasized a connection between caste and religion. The chapter titled "Religion of the Hindoos" in *The Tales of Peter Parley About Asia* began, "The religion of the Hindoos is very curious. By this, the people are divided into four classes or castes."[42] In his more advanced text, *Lights and Shadows of Asiatic History*, Goodrich wrote, "The plan of society and government…is established by divine prescription," before he explains in the next paragraph, "The first feature which strikes us, in the organization of society among the Hindoos, is the division of the people into four classes, or castes."[43] The brahman priests, soldiers, merchants, and laborers made up the four castes, as explained in these books. Once again, caste fit into the overall understanding of India as a half-civilized land. Enlightened countries were marked by their equality and democracy

[42] Goodrich, *The Tales of Peter Parley About Asia*, 119.

[43] Goodrich, *Lights and Shadows of Asiatic History*, 38.

that offered freedom. On the other side, the rigid class-driven caste system described in schoolbooks fulfilled the description of half-civilized society. The half-civilized caste society was then tied to the pagan religion of Hindus, further drawing on the systems of difference to identify what Indian society meant for readers. The presentation of caste also reinforced the value of Protestantism, democracy and freedom in America. Children were taught that false religion (read paganism of the Hindus) led to hierarchical and unenlightened society (read caste) and that conversely, American Protestantism and American democracy were intimately connected and mutually supportive. Hindu religion led to a hierarchical caste system while Protestant Christianity brought egalitarian democracy.

The British colonization of India made much of the religious and social knowledge of the country available to textbook writers. The British imperial project created a wealth of knowledge about India that drifted into the hands of schoolbook compilers and these authors made sure to include the British in their descriptions of contemporary India and Indian history. For example, the model letter entitled "From an English Bishop in India to a Friend in England" appeared in *The Parlour Letter Writer* (1845). The letter offered students and families a model for how one should communicate while traveling in a colonized country. The letter stated, "I am sure there is no ground whatever for the assertion, that the people are become less innocent or prosperous under British administration."[44] It then went on to claim that in Bengal "the English

[44] R. Turner, *The Parlour Letter-Writer* (Philadelphia: Thomas Cowperthwait & Co., 1845), 236–237.

government is popular."[45] The model is clear—when touring an imperial colony be sure to compliment the empire on its beneficence and defend its control.

Missionary work gave schoolbook authors another justification for British control of India. "The Theory of Rain," analyzed above, offered a similar example. The imperial British control allowed the Scottish missionary to come to India, which in turn allowed Hindoo to see the falsity of his religion and the truth of Christianity. Goodrich made a similar argument in *The Tales of Peter Parley About Asia*, when he wrote: "One thing is certain, our religion is the best gift which God has imparted to man, and the diffusion of it among ignorant nations, is one of the highest and noblest enterprises, to which a man can devote himself." He followed this call to missions with: "I have told you that the British have large possessions in Hindoostan."[46] The implication is that missionary work was possible in India *because* the British had large possessions there. In both cases religious difference, Christianity vs. paganism, provided justification for imperial control. Authors presented the expansion of the British empire as a positive and beneficial growth of Christianity among the pagans.

The treatment of Indian women and children, the violence, idolatry, and polytheism of Hindu religions, and the benefits of British power in India were the convergent and central themes in the representations history, writing, and reading schoolbooks constructed about India. As authors approached India through the grids of difference outlined in the geography texts, they decided that these themes constructed the knowledge of India important for American students to learn. These themes at once

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[45] Ibid., 237.

[46] Goodrich, *The Tales of Peter Parley About Asia*, 123–124.

distanced India as a foreign other different from American children along racial, religious, and social categories and reinforced the importance of Protestantism, whiteness, and American democracy.

Antebellum common schools tried to educate American children and prepare them to be good American citizens. Educators emphasized virtue and knowledge as key components of the citizenry of the new republic. To that end, geography books gave students a system for gaining knowledge about other parts of the world. Through categories of difference built around race, religion, and society these schoolbooks tried to help students understand who they were and who other people were. The next step was to flesh out these categories with examples and authors did so in schoolbooks ranging from history to letter-writing. By presenting students with the horrors and immorality of India and the benefits of British control, schoolbooks reinforced the importance and value of Christianity, democracy, "civilized" society, and white imperial control. By teaching about difference, these schoolbooks reinforced American traditions and attempted to educate the next generation of American citizens.

Educating Citizens: Hindu Religions in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*

Just as schoolbooks taught American children about American citizenship, popular magazines functioned pedagogically for literate adult Americans during the latter half of the century. *Harper's New Monthly* Magazine, founded by Fletcher Harper in 1850, became the most successful magazine in the country during the second half of the nineteenth century as it sought to unite American citizens around a unified identity and

national culture. In his 1950 speech celebrating the centennial of *Harper's Magazine*, editor-in-chief Fredrick Allen narrated the national scope of the early years of his magazine. "To a family in a steepled town on the Erie Canal, or on a remote Ohio farm, the magazine was a welcome messenger from the great world, bringing information and ideas and entertainment to be devoured eagerly." Allen continued on to describe the array of matter available to these scattered readers: life in the Balkans, elephant-hunting in Ceylon, the Baltimore & Ohio's railroad line, current world events, book reviews, and serial English novels. "For the first time," Allen proclaimed, "the United States had what might reasonably be called a general national monthly magazine." In the 1850s, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* was "not only a show-place for English fiction but a mirror of American life and ideas as well."[47] Allen described *Harper's* as a magazine that reflected American culture back to American citizens.[48] This national culture, as envisioned by *Harper's*, was a Protestant, industrious, literate, and upwardly mobile America always poised ready for the next opportunity, the latest news, or a wider glimpse of the world.

The magazine combined this national influence with a national pedagogical project. Fletcher Harper touted the magazine as a "popular educator of the general public" that would present the best of English fiction as well as a record of current events, "science articles, travel accounts…and an illustrated section on ladies'

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[47] Frederick Lewis Allen, *Harper's Magazine, 1850-1950; a Centenary Address*, Newcomen Address 1950 (New York: Newcomen Society in North America, 1950), 14.

[48] Rather than trying to tease out the various agents—writers, editors, publishers, etc.—engaged in the production process of the magazine, I will refer to Harper's as a single entity throughout the essay. Such an personification of the magazines agency "stresses the collaborative nature of periodocals" and coincided with the view "that every periodical has a distinct character" that results from this collaboratoin. See Jennifer Phegley, *Educating the Proper Woman Reader: Victorian Family Literary Magazines and the Cultural Health of the Nation* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004), 35.

fashions."[49] These various genres worked together "to produce a new periodical format that was not merely eclectic and cosmopolitan, but focused and nationalistic."[50] Literary historian Jennifer Phegley has labeled *Harper's* and its pedagogy a "family literary magazine," meant to appeal especially to women readers. The magazine appealed "to women not solely through domesticity but also through literary values that the proper woman reader could use to advance the cultural status of her nation."[51] Phegley argued for the importance of "the roots of the [family literary magazine] in the nationalistic goals of the growing middles classes, who were struggling to construct a coherent identity through literary culture."[52] Placing *Harper's* within this genre of family literary magazines highlights its role in producing a national American culture for the middle classes that taught them how to be a part of the American nation-state.

The breadth of *Harper's* circulation combined with its pedagogical and nationalist aims made it one of the foremost producers of American national culture during the period. *Harper's* printed 7,500 copies of its June 1850 debut issue, but within six months its circulation reached 50,000. By the beginning of the Civil War the magazine had a national circulation of 200,000. As a rival magazine editor lamented in 1857, "Probably no magazine in the world was ever so popular or so profitable. There is not a village,

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[49] Barbara M. Perkins, "Harper's Monthly Magazine," in *American Literary Magazines: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Edward E Chielens, Historical Guides to the World's Periodicals and Newspapers (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 167.

[50] Phegley, *Educating the Proper Woman Reader*, 33.

[51] Ibid., 15.

[52] Ibid., 21.

there is scarcely a township in the land into which [it] has not penetrated."[53] Much to the chagrin of its competitors, *Harper's* had become the quintessential American magazine.

Harper's aimed to entertain and educate its audience. The advertisement to the first issue boasted that the magazine would give its audience "an immense amount of useful and entertaining reading matter" and "would seek in every article, to combine entertainment with instruction and to enforce, through channels which attract rather than repel attention and favor, the best and most important lessons of morality and of practical life."[54] Entertainment would serve to both educate and communicate a moral message to readers. This education and this moral message maintained the health of the American republic. Editors and contributors took the moral well-being of their readers very seriously and "asked readers what would become of the American republic if self-absorption caused them to abandon their loyalty to the nation, their commitment to the general welfare, and their desire to follow God's will."[55] For *Harper's*, education, nationalism, and moral uprightness worked together to maintain the republic. Furthermore, *Harper's* gendered its project of national education and moral instruction. "Harper's writers, both men and women, and its editors spelled out women's roles as guardians of Christian and republican morality. They described women as educators of their sons to the nature and importance of that morality and as protectors of family

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[53] Quoted in Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1850-1865*, 2:391.

[54] "Advertisement," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 1, no. 1 (June 1850): i.

[55] Lorman Ratner, Paula T Kaufman, and Dwight L Teeter, *Paradoxes of Prosperity: Wealth-Seeking Versus Christian Values in Civil War America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 49.

cohesion."[56] *Harper's* saw itself as a force maintaining republican morals in American households through entertaining content that would appeal to women readers.

Beyond its gendered audience, *Harper's* national project of education and moral instruction also included white supremacy and Protestant superiority. As immigration increased throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century and slavery gave way to the Civil War and Reconstruction, *Harper's* addressed its readers as members of a superior Protestant white race. In various articles the magazine represented immigrants as poor folks lacking the ambition and integrity to work their way out of poverty. Moreover, "readers were warned that, like the blacks and the Jews who preceded them, these newcomers were members of inferior races."[57] The magazine warned readers that these inferior races "comprised much of the city's criminal class and were a potential source of mob violence, ready to explode at any time for any reason."[58] Non-white races were marked by poverty, place, poor character, and the potential for violence. Furthermore, *Harper's* tied religious identity to this perspective and published feature stories deriding Joseph Smith and the Mormons, as well as Catholics and Jews, all of whom they saw as threats to the republic.[59] As it educated and instructed its white Protestant audience, *Harper's* warned of the dangers non-white non-Protestants posed to the nation.

The intentions of the publishers, editors, and contributors, along with the tastes of the perceived audience and the shifts in American culture of the period all swirled together as *Harper's* produced and maintained white Protestant American national

[56] Ibid., 53.

[57] Ibid., 52.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid., 53.

culture and sought to educate and morally instruct middle class white Americans. This moralistic, Protestant, white, and worldly national culture defined the horizons of meaning for many white readers in late nineteenth century America. How readers decoded and found meaning in the midst of this culture remains unclear and may be inaccessible. However, what is available in the historical record is a picture of what the national culture constructed by like *Harper's* looked like. It looked a lot like the Harper brothers themselves—white, literate, hard-working, internationally knowledgeable, Protestant, moralistic, and fiercely nationalistic. Representations of Hindu religions appeared on the pages of *Harper's* as part of this national culture and the magazine's educational and instructional project. These representations entertained and educated readers as they reinforced the superiority and importance of white Protestant America.

Harper's publishers sought to entertain their audience with stories that jump started the imagination. The magazine's earliest representation of India and Hindu religions transported the reader to a land of enchantment and the supernatural. The first article in *Harper's* to address India and Hindus immediately focused attention on enchanted spirits that were part of everyday Hindu life. "Ghosts and Sorceresses of India," published in 1853, offered *Harper's* readers several brief stories where household and village spirits affected life in India. Functioning more as entertainment than education, the article was a series of brief stories about supernatural events British colonial officials observed or experienced in India. *Harper's* reprinted the article from a British magazine, but placed within *Harper's* the article became part of American national culture.

The opening paragraph of the article set the stage, "the Hindoo…is not haunted by the vague, indefinable terror…he knows very well what he dreads…substantial and tangible inflictions—such as a sound drubbing."[60] The article then told the story of a spirit that haunted a specific piece of farmland. One day, the farmer of the neighboring plot thought he might take control of a bit of the spirit's ground by plowing his field over the boundary line and claiming some of the unmanaged land. That night a snake bit the greedy farmer's son and his bulls became sick. The story concluded: "The smitten sinner at once rushed to the village temple, confessed his crime, and promised not only to restore the stolen land, but to build a handsome shrine upon the spot to its true proprietor. The ghost was appeased: the boy and the bullocks recovered; the shrine was built, and is the boundary-mark to this day."[61] In this small part of the larger article, the reader was presented an India where sprits and ghosts dictate the mechanics of everyday life. Property, sickness, and agriculture are all manipulated and enchanted by these supernatural forces.

But the Hindu was not always at the mercy of this supernatural world: some women, and it is always women, were able to turn these enchanted powers to their own designs. In a later section of the article a traveler passing through a village on his way home took a chicken from an old woman without paying her. As he continued on his way home he got hungry, stopped, cooked and ate his stolen rooster. Immediately upon getting up and continuing homeward he began to feel sick to his stomach. By the time he reached his house he was screaming in pain. His pain attracted a crowd inside his house

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[60] "Ghosts and Sorceresses of India," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 7, no. 42 (November 1853): 830.

[61] Ibid.

consisting of both natives and Europeans. While the man writhed on the floor in agony the crow of a rooster echoed in the room. At first no one was sure what was happening but the rooster crowed one more time. Then, "a third chant removed every particle of doubt from their minds: the cock was crowing in the man's belly! As the groans of the dying wretch grew fainter, the note of unearthly triumph swelled the fuller; till at length death put a period to his sufferings, and to the crow of the phantom cock."[62] The old woman the man victimized was able to manipulate the enchantments of India for her revenge. In this enchanted land even the seemingly weakest person, an old woman easily robbed, could draw upon fabulous power. The story reflected a sense of anxiety that there might be native power somewhere in India that European power should fear.

The article structured the different brief stories such that the imagery in the stories built in intensity from one vignette to the next, adding to the entertainment value and slowly ratcheting up the sense of enchanted power in India. As the article moved forward the consequences meted out by the supernatural became scarier and scarier. At first an ox died and a boy got sick but recovered. Then a large snake appeared. Next two individuals got sick as payback for stealing, but they repented and recovered. Then the stories took a visceral and horrific turn when a sugar-cane turned to blood in a man's mouth. This story was followed by an account of a "sorceress" sucking a man's blood out through a stolen sugar-cane so that it spilled into the street. The grand finale of horror came in the final story where the thief stole the rooster and then died when it comes back to life inside his stomach (crowing and all). The article built narrative by narrative toward a climax in the final story and the horrifying "Cocki-lilli-la-a-a-w!" of an undead rooster.

[62] Ibid.

As it entertained with strange stories of the supernatural, "Ghosts and Sorceresses of India" also carried a gendered message about American morality. The article's narrative of how a woman becomes a sorceress in India reflected American domestic morality turned on its head. The sorceress "ministers" to her devil "by means of sacrifices, and pampers his unclean taste with livers of human beings. She makes no scruple of digging young children out of their graves, and bringing them to life…so that [the devil] may feast on the part he covets."[63] The moral American woman, on the other hand, was to sacrifice of herself for her husband and children and make sure they have clean, well-cultured tastes. Furthermore, the image of the young child brought to life from the grave stands as an inversion of childbirth. The American mother brought children into the world, taught them Protestant morality and raised them to be proper American citizens. The sorceress resurrected children to use as food for the devil. Hindu sorceresses represented the opposite of American motherhood and the difference between American and Hindu identity. As rendered by *Harper's*, American women were good moral wives and mothers while Hindu women were evil, blood-thirsty sorceresses. American women were the bastions of morality and Hindu women the propagators of evil. The sorceress of India was a cautionary tale to American women about what would happen if they abdicated their responsibility as moral guardians. If they began to serve themselves, to sacrifice proper morals for their own power, like the sorceress, then American culture would devolve to the same state as the nameless Hindus in the villages of India worshiping superstitious shrines.

[63] Ibid., 831.

"A Priest of Doorga," written by Phil Robinson and printed in 1885 also entertained readers through its representation of Hindu religions. Robinson, who was born and grew up in India, was a journalist, writer, and son of a reverend. His work focused on life in India and was published in *Contemporary Review* and *Gentleman's Magazine*, as well as *Harper's*.[64] In this story a young son of a cowherd, Gunga, was stolen from his family in a small village by a group of traveling Brahmans and taken to the temple of Durga where he was sold to the priests as a Brahman child. Gunga learned quickly and set himself apart as a wonderful student. Meanwhile, his father was killed by a man-eating tiger and his mother went mad with the despair from losing her husband and her son. The story had many twists and turns as Gunga felt despair about not having a mother or father and his mother continued to wait for her son and husband at the village well night and day. The story ended when Gunga's mother went to the Durga temple and died inside while Gunga made a vow to Durga that he would give his life in exchange for the end to a famine that had struck the land. As a large rain cloud moved into the area Gunga climbed to the top of the temple roof. When the first rain drops fell to the ground Gunga jumped to his death, upholding his vow.[65]

As with the earlier "Ghosts and Sorceresses of India," Robinson's story emphasized the supernatural powers and superstitions of Hindus. Gunga's father, Ram Lal, was said to have magical hunting abilities that allowed him to easily kill wolves, bears and other dangerous animals. Also, Ram Lal thought the man-eating tiger that

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[64] Victor G. Plarr, *Men and Women of the Time: A Dictionary of Contemporaries*, 14th ed. (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1895), 723.

[65] Phil Robinson, "A Priest of Doorga," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 71, no. 425 (October 1885): 734–741.

eventually killed him was the spirit of his ancestor. Yet, this later story reflected a more detailed understanding of Hindu religion and the description of the temple of Durga reflected some understanding of the centrality of the temple to Hindu religious practice.

Robinson's story also added an emotional element to the representation of Hindus. His story invited the reader to feel the pain of Motee, Gunga's mother, when she found her son had gone missing. In another emotional scene after Ram Lal died, his wife Motee was left waiting at the village well. Gunga's struggle to make sense of his place in society as an orphan was also intended to tug at the reader's heart. These examples of death, widowhood, orphan-hood, and loss may have occurred in a story about Hindu characters but they were experiences that also occurred in nineteenth century America. While the setting and the religions were fantastic, the human emotions in the story were probably quite familiar to readers. Motee the Hindu widow by the well was strange but the mother mourning the loss of her son was common to *Harper's* readers.

Other representations of Hindu religions in Harper's leaned more toward education than entertainment. *Harper's* published travel accounts and historical essays that represented Hindu religion as a religion of grand temples. For example, the 1857 article "Madras, In Pictures," described one traveler's visit to Madras and spent three pages describing the so-called "Seven Pagodas" of Mahabalipuram, or "Mavalipoor," as the author spelled it, south of present day Chennai on the coast of the Bay of Bengal. Most of the traveler's account was spent on descriptions of the architecture and imagery of the temples:

> I'm not sure that I can give dimensions, and I doubt whether it would be of any use if I could. It was not the size, but the shape, the sculpting, and above all, the situation of the temple, that lent it such a profound interest in my sight…The pyramidal top of the lower half, looking inland, might be about thirty, and the

> other that faced the sea forty feet high. As you entered the holy place of the lower temple, you saw sculpted on the back wall the four-armed god, while minor forms of 'gods and bulls' looked out, dim with age from the other walls and from the side-posts…But the most august aspect of the building was when you looked up from the rocks at the great door through which the sea had evidently dashed up many a time, mocking the power of man.[66]

In a similar vein, an 1869 article by then editor Henry M. Alden on the religious history of Benares narrated the history of the city through the building and razing of temples before, during, and after its conquest by Muslims. Because the Muslim conquerors "forbade the Hindus to build spacious temples," the article explained, "the Hindus of the present day, blindly following the example of their predecessors of two centuries ago, commonly build their religious edifices of the same dwarfish size as formerly."[67] Despite their diminutive size, the temples of Benares were "of elegant construction…delicately carved…[and] so lavishly ornamented that the eye of the beholder becomes satiated and wearied."[68] Large engravings depicting the temples towering over small foregrounded Hindus accompanied the textual descriptions, reinforcing the image of Hindu religion as sacred architecture on a grand scale.

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[66] "Madras, In Pictures," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 16, no. 91 (December 1857): 31–32.

[67] Henry M. Alden, "The Sacred City of the Hindus," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 38, no. 228 (May 1869): 754.

[68] Ibid.

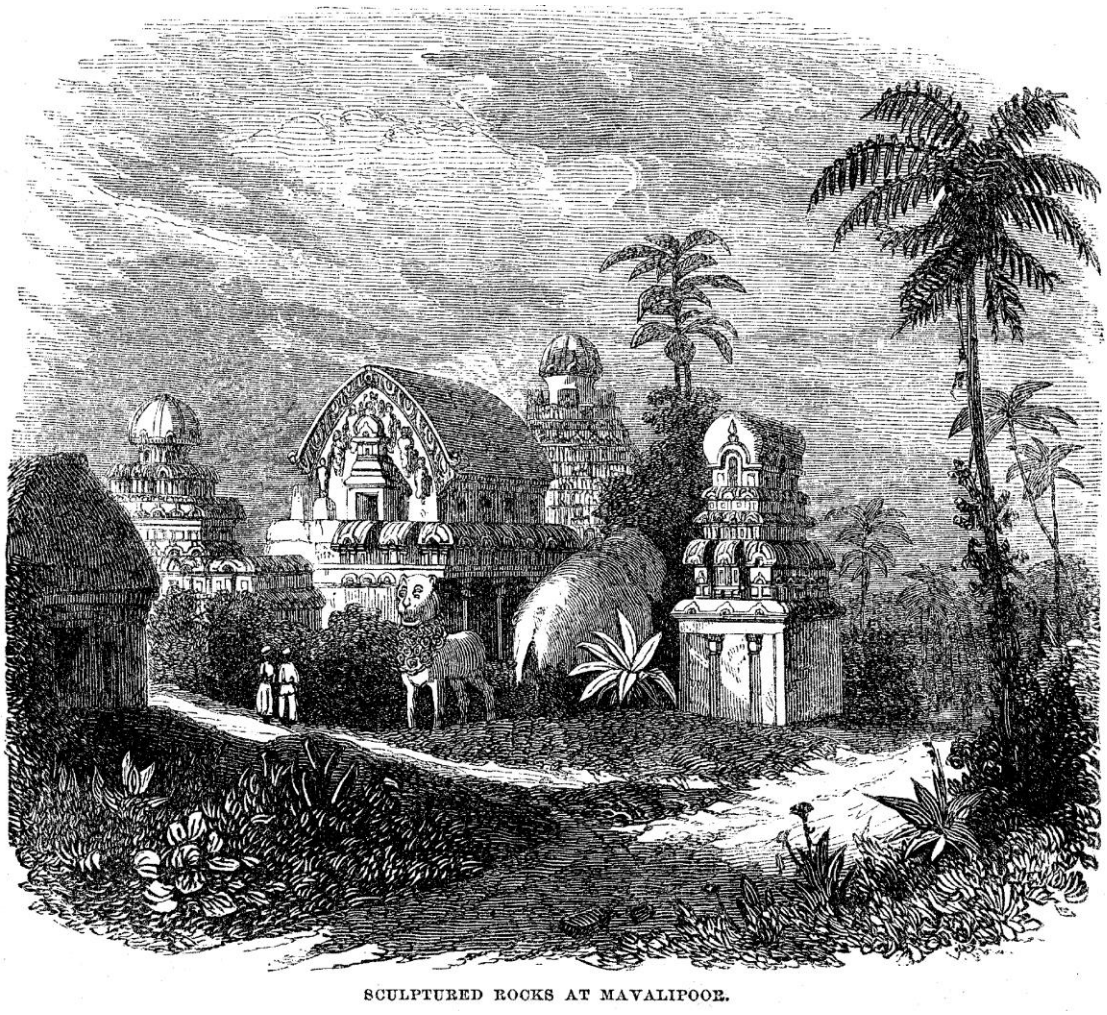


Figure 7 Engraving from "Madras, In Pictures." Courtesy of Cornell University Library, Making of America Digital Collection**.**

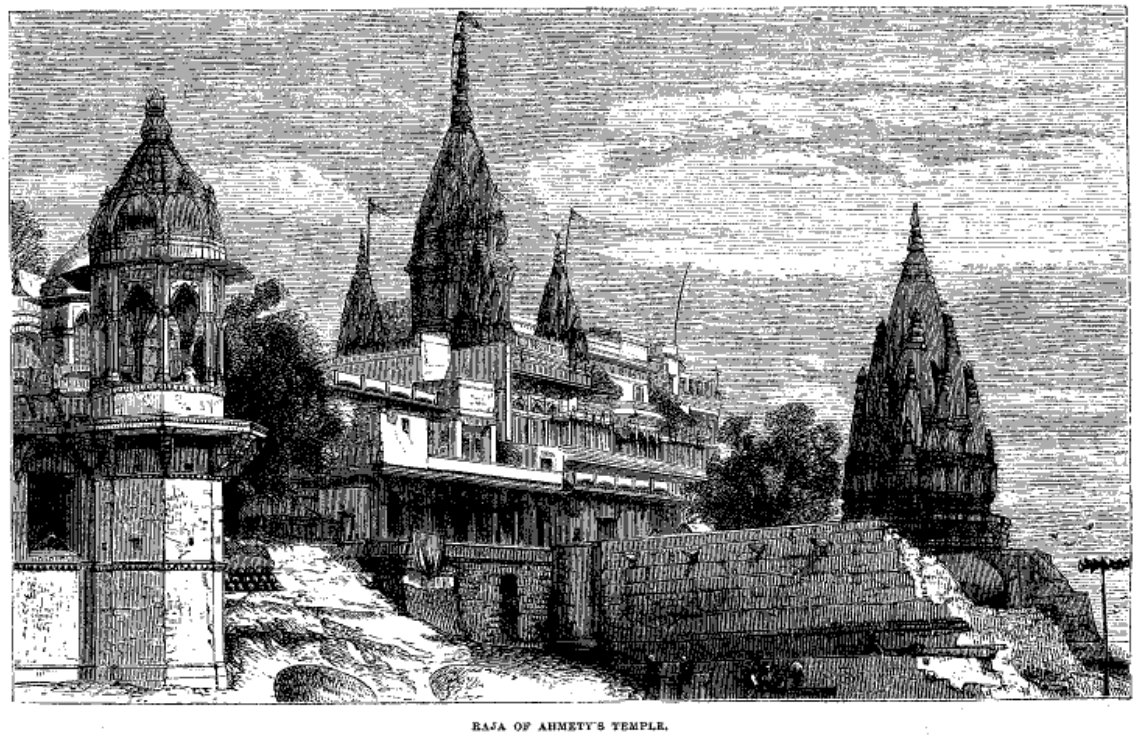


Figure 8 Engraving of Benares temple from "The Sacred City of the Hindus." Courtesy of Cornell University Library, Making of America Digital Collection.

But for all the striking descriptions and images of Hindu temples, travel narratives and essays also represented Hindu religion as filthy, malevolent, and superstitious. William L. Stuart's 1867 travel narrative, "Calcutta, the City of Palaces," described a city where the "background of everything that is repulsive and horrible," and "the heavens are offended by the smoke of abominable sacrifices."[69] The outward filth reflected the "Paganism and superstition" of Hindu religion, a religion where "perfect evil is the summit of religious aspiration" causing "the complete inversion of all natural and moral laws."[70] An engraving of "a devotee" sprawled on the ground accompanied Stuart's

[69] William L. Stuart, "Calcutta, the City of Palaces," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 34, no. 201 (February 1867): 302.

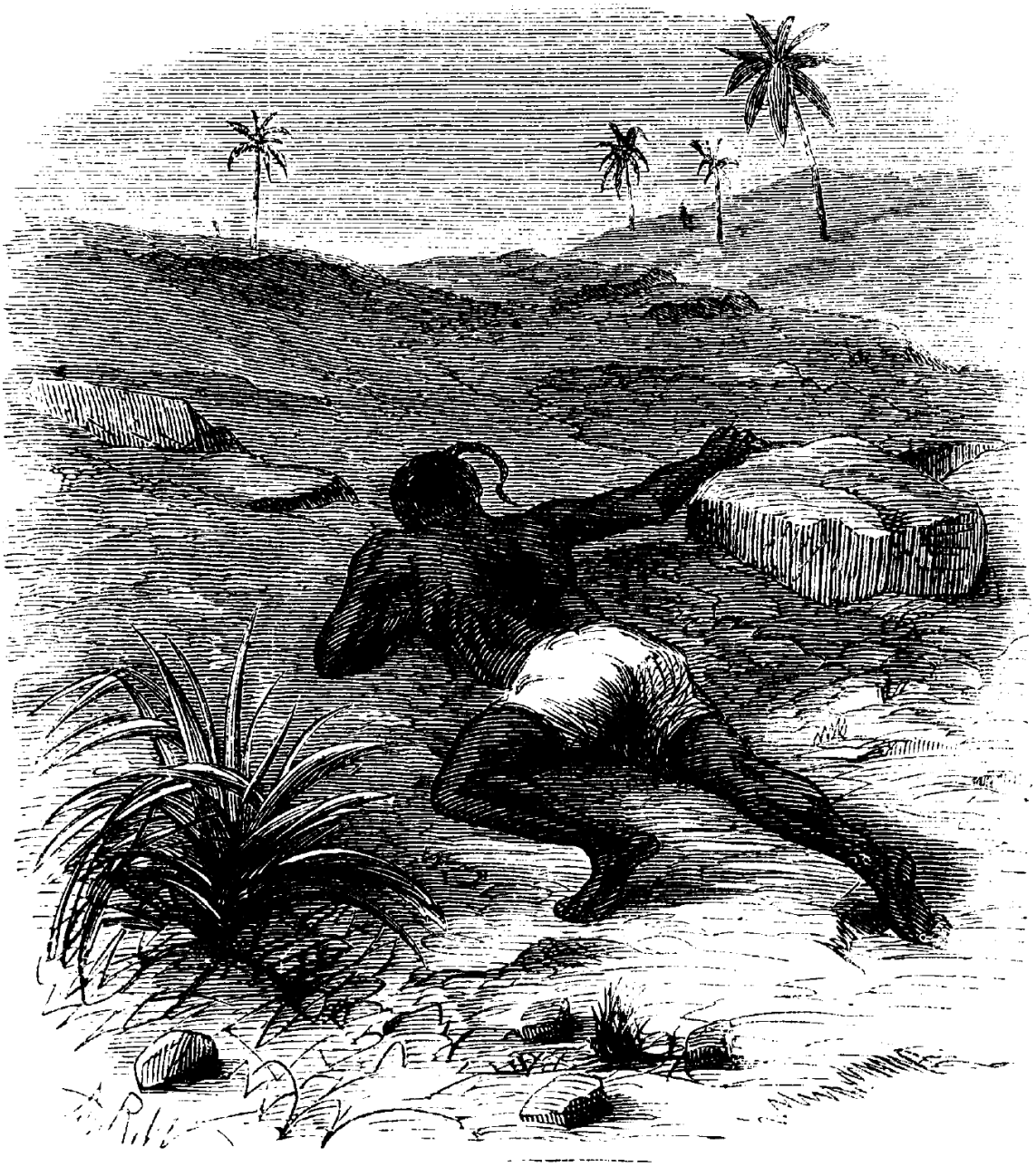
[70] Ibid., 302–303.

article. The account of Madras referenced the Jewish religious elites who opposed Jesus in its criticism of the brahman priests as "Pharisees and Sadducees," and "pompous ignoramuses."[71] And in Benares, Alden wrote, devotees bathe in a well that is "insufferably foul…The worshiper, descending into the water, laves his head and body in the vile liquid, and at, the same time, utters certain phrases appointed for the ceremony" in hopes of washing away his sins.[72] On top of these denunciations of Hindu religion, each article also made mention of how caste functioned as a religiously sanctioned social structure that kept Indian culture stratified. The representation of Hinduism as evil, foul, and superstitious ritual probably prompted most readers to agree with Stuart's appraisal that Hindu religion was so terrible it forced the traveler to "turn from the luxuriance of splendid tropical life about him with pious thankfulness to the comparative barren hills of New England, where civilization was taught and chastened by the spirit of Christianity."[73] *Harper's* writers represented Hindu religions in ways that tried to make American Protestants thankful of their religious identity and confident in their superiority.

[71] "Madras, In Pictures," 31.

[72] Alden, "The Sacred City of the Hindus," 760.

[73] Stuart, "Calcutta, the City of Palaces," 303.



A DEVOTEE.

Figure 9 Engraving from "Calcutta, City of Palaces." Courtesy of Cornell University Library, Making of America Digital Collection

The 1878 article, “Juggernaut,” by former editor of the magazine, A. H. Guernsey, represented Hindu religions as an ancient religion of temples and a

contemporary religion of filthy superstition all at once.[74] The article offered a detailed account of the Jagannath temple at Puri, India, the same temple popularized by Claudius Buchanan decades earlier. Guernsey was a Hebrew scholar who had worked his way up to the editor's chair by 1856 but stepped down as editor-in-chief in 1869.[75] Though he was a Protestant Christian, his approach to Jagannath differed from the earlier missionary representations. To begin with, Guernsey wrote of Jagannath not as a missionary seeking support from readers, but as a writer working to entertain and educate. Though the title used the word "Juggernaut," Guernsey quickly informed the reader that the proper name is Jagannath or "the Lord of the World." He also gave the reader a long narrative of the myth behind the founding of the temple and the history of its construction. As with the travel accounts, the architecture and structure of the temple itself was given central place in the article. "The central and chief pagoda" had a tower "rising like an elaborately carved sugar-loaf, back with time, to the height of 192 feet…surmounted by the mystic wheel and flag of Vishnu."[76]An accompanying map of the temple illustrated his physical description of the temple's various chambers inside.

[74] A. H. Guernsey, "Juggernaut," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 57, no. 338 (July 1878): 222–229.

[75] Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1850-1865*, 2:392–396.

[76] Guernsey, "Juggernaut," 226.

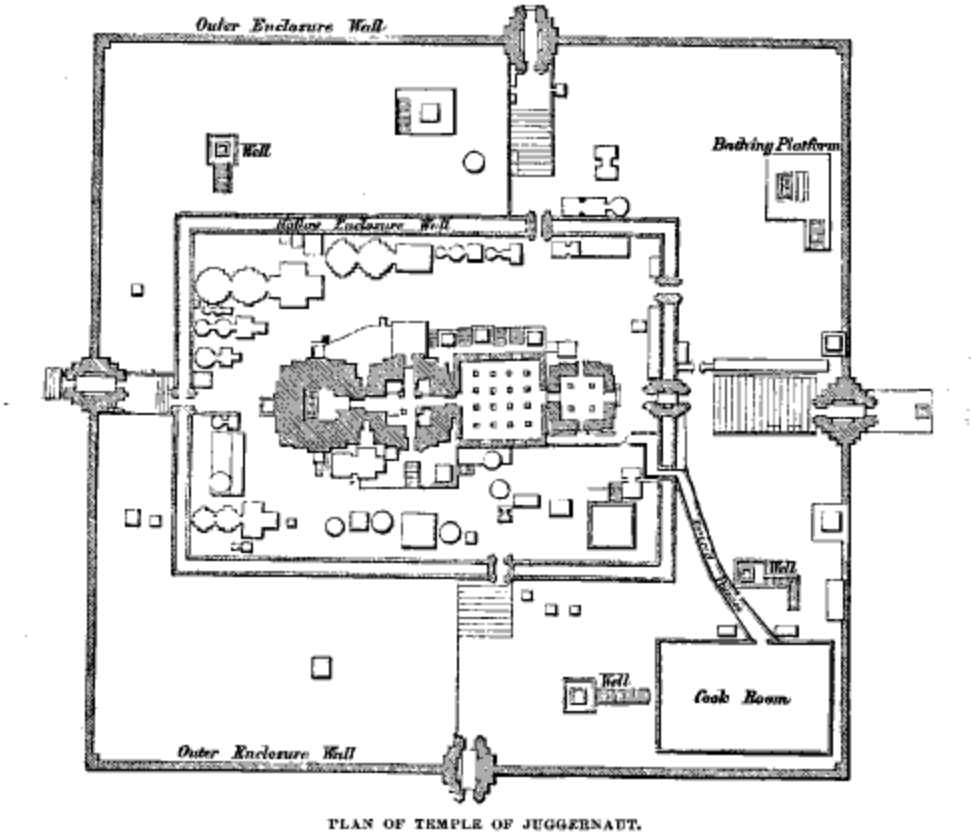


Figure 10 Map of the Jagannath Temple from "The Juggernaut." Courtesy of Cornell University Library, Making of America Digital Collection

But Guernsey, like the other writers in *Harper's*, also represented the worship at Jagannath's temple as filthy superstition. He made a distinction, however, between the older image of Juggernaut as bloody and his account of its filth. "Contrary to what has been almost uniformly asserted," he wrote, "the worship of Jagannath is absolutely bloodless."[77] Indeed, Guernsey asserted that blood was seen as a pollutant inside the temple and the real bloody worship went on at the nearby "temple to Bimala, one of the wives of Siva, who is worshipped with midnight orgies and bloody sacrifices."[78] While

[77] Ibid.

Jagannath does not claim lives in bloody worship, Guernsey still represented his worship as filthy superstition. He described Puri as "perhaps, the filthiest city on earth." The Rath Yatra, the festival when Jagannath rides on his car through the city, occurred during the rainy season; Guernsey described how "every lane and alley becomes a torrent or a stinking canal."[79] Furthermore, the eating of sacred rice sanctified by Jagannath "becomes a means of death" because after "forty-eight hours it becomes a loathsome mass of putrid matter unfit for human use—dangerous to a person in robust health, and deadly to the way worn pilgrims."[80] The poisonous rice was doubly tragic for Guernsey because it was the one democratic moment he found in the rigid caste system of Hindu religion. "This food is so holy that it wipes away all distinctions of caste or sect. The highest may eat it with the lowest."[81] According to Guernsey, the most democratic moment of Jagannath's devotion was also its most deadly.

Harper's blended Protestant morality with entertainment and education in hopes of attracting a broad national readership. In its articles about Hindu religions, *Harper's* consistently used Hindus as a warning for what a nation looked like that lacked America's Protestant morality and democratic freedom. Superstition led to filth and death. Hindu religion undergirded the hierarchy of caste. But Protestant Christianity gave Americans democracy, freedom, and life. Articles in *Harper's* described Hindu religion and its destructive effect on Indian society in hopes of impressing the important role Protestantism played in maintaining American society. For example, Stuart closed his

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[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid., 227.

[80] Ibid., 227–228.

[81] Ibid.

article about Calcutta by remarking that "never before visiting other lands have I known how to value the principles which, to a certain extent, govern us in our own country…measuring progress between these old kingdoms and the Western World, we may judge of the effect which pure and true religious principles can effect when grafted on human civilization."[82] *Harper's* allowed readers a similar experience of traveling to India, observing the grand temples, enchanted villages, and filthy superstitions, only to return home thankful for their life in Protestant America.

The American River Ganges: Hindus and the Protestant Moral Establishment

[82] Stuart, "Calcutta, the City of Palaces," 311.

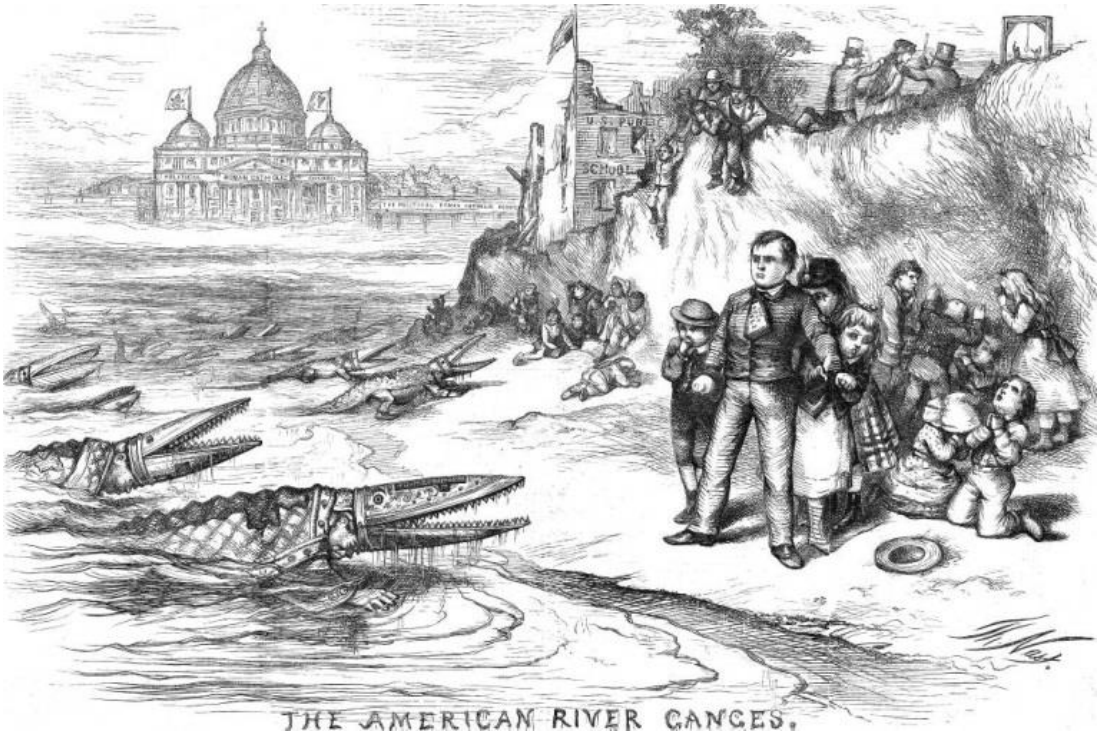

Figure 11 Thomas Nast, "The American River Ganges" (Cartoon), *Harper's Weekly*. New York: May 8, 1875.

Representations of Hindu religions in schoolbooks and in popular magazines converged in the 1871 cartoon “The American River Ganges” by Thomas Nast. Drawing on the image of children sacrificed to the Ganges River popularized in missionary reports and schoolbook accounts of Hindu superstition, Nast pivoted from Hindu superstition to Catholic superstition. A protestant pastor with a Bible in his coat protected the children from Catholic-crocodiles crawling up out of the river. The Vatican rose in the background while on the right side the U.S. public school crumbled. Thomas Nast used Hindu superstition to warn of the dangers of Catholicism and reinforce the power and necessity of the Protestant moral establishment. The theme of Hindu superstition and

anti-Catholicism that began with the ABCFM's missionary reports came into full view as part of American national culture.[83]

Representations of Hindu religion in national culture drew upon many images and themes from previous representations, especially those of early Protestant representations. Schoolbooks relied upon a similar system of comparative religion to Hannah Adams. Images of noisy Hindu ritual and superstition in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* built upon, if at times reevaluating, missionary reports from early in the century. But while they drew on past representations from earlier in the century, the representations of Hindu religion that spread as part of American national culture added racial and political difference to the earlier religious difference. Missionary reports and Protestant comparative religion during the first decades of the nineteenth century imagined Hindus as a religious other but national culture imagined Hindus as racial and political others as well. It is the combination of racial, political, and religious difference that makes the Hindu an apt comparison to the Catholic for Nast. Drawing in the 1870s, Nast believed Catholics posed a threat white democratic Protestant America. In representing others, at home and in India, American national culture reinforced the superiority of white, democratic, Protestant America.

[83] See Chapter 2

Chapter 6

The World's Parliament of Religion and the Invention of Hinduism

The Columbian Liberty Bell tolled ten times. Each tone symbolized one of the "ten chief religions of the world:" Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Taoism, Shintoism, and Confucianism. At ten o'clock on September 11, 1893 a parade of the world's religions walked down the aisle of the Hall of Columbus inside the Art Palace in downtown Chicago. The "stately column [was] composed of men of many tongues, of many lands, of many races: disciples of Christ, of Mohammed, of Buddha, of Brahma, of Confucius, in the name if a common God for the glorification of the Eternal Father." Observers noted the "strange robes, turbans and tunics" that revealed how "peculiar modes of dress were indicative of different religions." But despite their differences, all the members of this sacred cavalcade were part of "'a grand intermingling of religions…a gathering under the star of Christianity, whose steady beaming draws wise men of the East to the unfading brightness and growing splendor of the Prince of Peace."[1] Like the schoolbooks and magazines of American national culture, the Parliament too reinforced the American Protestant establishment. The optimistic, colorful, and grand opening of the World's Parliament of Religion set the tone for the rest of the meetings. The themes condensed into this opening ceremony—themes of difference (religion, language, dress, etc.) and the superiority of white American Protestant Christianity—would haunt the Parliament for the rest of its seventeen day existence.

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[1] Walter Houghton, ed., *Neely's History of the Parliament of Religions and Religious Congresses at the World's Columbian Exposition*, 4th ed. (Chicago: F. Tennyson Neely, 1894), 34–35.

Organized as part of the World's Columbian Exposition, the Parliament brought representatives of religious cultures from around the world together in an attempt "to unite all Religion against all irreligion."[2] As such, the Parliament offered a unique opportunity for foreign non-Christian religions to represent themselves on American soil to an American audience. For this reason, historian of religion Richard Seager titled his centenary anthology of Parliament papers *The Dawn of Religious Pluralism*. Seager argued that the Parliament "turned out to be a revelation of the plurality of religious forces on the domestic and international scene."[3] He also marked the Parliament as "the incipient broadening of and diversification in the American religious mainstream."[4] Elsewhere, Seager characterized the Parliament as "a liberal, western, and American quest for world religious unity that failed…Having failed as a liberal quest for religious unity, the Parliament unintentionally turned out to be a revelation of the plurality of forces on the American and world scene."[5] In the foreword of Seager's centenary volume, historian of religion Diana Eck outlined pluralism as "an attempt to come to terms with plurality in a positive way."[6] So according to Eck and Seager, the Parliament revealed the plurality of religions in America and the world and then sought to somehow come to terms with this plurality "in a positive way."

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[2] Charles Carroll Bonney, "The Genesis of the World's Religious Congresses of 1893," New Church Review 1 (January 1894) quoted in Richard Hughes Seager, ed., *The Dawn of Religious Pluralism: Voices from the World's Parliament of Religions, 1893* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1993), 5.

[3] Ibid., 8.

[4] Ibid., 9.

[5] Richard Hughes Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions: The East/West Encounter, Chicago, 1893* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), xxix.

[6] Seager, *The Dawn of Religious Pluralism,* xiii.

Putting the Parliament into the larger narrative of Hindu religions in American culture presents a different interpretation from Seager and Eck. For Seager and Eck, the Parliament was a dawning. But interpreted within the larger history of American representations of Hindu religions, the Parliament was not a dawning but a transition. At the Parliament Hindus finally represented themselves. It was the end of Americans exclusively representing Hindus for Americans and the beginning of Hindus representing themselves for an American audience.

The Parliament was also a cacophony of voices attempting to articulate their definitions, categories, and boundaries of what counted as religion. Various Protestants attempted to outline the boundaries of what counted as religion through their speeches at the Parliament. It was a Protestant engagement with the religious diversity of the modern world. Consequently, for Hindu delegates to be heard by the Protestant audience they had to represent themselves and their religion within the model of American Protestant religion.

Protestant Christians offered contesting definitions of what counted as "religion" at the Parliament. Inclusive Protestants saw religion as a broad category that encompassed multiple traditions with equal claims to truth, while more exclusive Protestants claimed that only Christianity was worthy of the category of religion.[7] Though Protestants at the Parliament disagreed about Christianity's exclusive claim to "religion," they did share the assumption that religion was monotheistic, rational, scientific, moral, socially progressive, equalitarian, and socially organizing. In the midst of this Protestant construction of religion, Hindus and Protestant missionaries imagined

[7] Ibid., 314.

Hinduism as a world religion, privileging some forms of Hindu religions as "Hinduism" and marginalizing others. In his speeches at the Parliament, Swami Vivekananda, a Vedanta philosopher monk from Bengal, successfully articulated a rational, moral, scientific, and monotheistic "Hinduism" that fulfilled the assumptions of his Protestant audience and became the dominant understanding of Hinduism as a world religion among religious liberals in the 20th century.

Placed within the history of Hindu religions in American culture, the Parliament represented a transitional moment where Hindus represented themselves to the Protestants that had previously represented them. Working within the constraints of a liberal Protestant event and a liberal Protestant audience, Swami Vivekananda articulated a "Hinduism" to America that drew on the best aspects of Americans' previous encounters with Hindu religions. As the previous chapters have shown, Hindu religions did not come to America at the Parliament. Rather, at the World's Parliament of Religions, Vivekananda galvanized past representations of Hindu religions into Hinduism, a world religion of rational, scientific, and moral monotheism, for an American audience.

The Liberal Protestant Parliament

From the initial planning stages to the opening addresses, the World's Parliament of Religion was an American Protestant project. Church historian Martin E. Marty described the organizers of the Parliament as "theological modernists" who "were male

members of the privileged subculture, almost all of them Protestant."[8] Marty marked a "cosmopolitan habit" across American Protestantism that sought "a universal outlook, to overcome the provincialism that they thought afflicted religion."[9] The Parliament was one expression of this Protestant cosmopolitan habit.

Charles Carroll Bonney represented the inclusivist wing of Protestants involved in the organization of the Parliament. Bonney was a member of the Swedenborigan church and Marty described him as "an essentialist who believed that there were common essentials by which everyone may be saved, in all the religions."[10] In the summer of 1889 Bonney came up with the idea for "a series of congresses for the consideration of the greatest themes in which mankind is interested, and so comprehensive as to include representatives from all parts of the earth."[11] He argued that the coming World's Fair of 1893 would be the perfect event to hold these congresses. The fair ought to be more than an exhibition "of the material triumphs, industrial achievements, and mechanical victories of man…Something higher and nobler is demanded by the progressive spirit of the present age."[12] These congresses were to cover topics ranging from government, finance, literature, science, education, and religion and to be "more widely representative of all peoples and nations and tongues than any assemblage which has ever yet been

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[8] Martin E. Marty, "A Cosmopolitan Habit in Theology," in *A Museum of Faiths: Histories and Legacies of the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions*, ed. Eric Jozef Ziolkowski (Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1993), 165.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., 168.

[11] Houghton, *Neely's History of the Parliament of Religions and Religious Congresses at the World's Columbian Exposition,* 15.

[12] Ibid.

convened."[13] For Bonney, the coming World's Fair needed to represent culture as well as exhibit material and technology.

Bonney's plans were picked up by Lyman J. Gage, president of the World's Columbian Exposition, as the fair came to be known, who made Bonney chairman of the World's Congress Auxiliary of the World's Columbian Exposition in 1890. The Auxiliary set up a series of congresses as part of the Exposition that covered twenty different departments including woman's progress, the public press, temperance, medicine, music, literature, and, of course, religion. Two hundred distinct congresses were held as part of the various departments and the proceedings were so extensive that a single volume including all of their programs numbered 160 pages.[14]

Bonney appointed Rev. John Henry Barrows, a Presbyterian minister, Chairman of the General Committee on Religious Congresses of the World's Congress Auxiliary. Barrows represented the exclusivist side of the Protestant spectrum. Whereas Bonney saw truth in all religions, Barrows believed Christianity to be the only truly universal religion. He also saw the Parliament as a chance to prove the superiority of Protestant Christianity. Barrows ambivalently imagined the Parliament as a project of religious unity and as a place to exhibit the triumph of Christianity. Barrows was joined by a committee that included one Jewish rabbi, one Catholic priest, and fourteen Protestant ministers from different church denominations. Under Barrows' leadership, the Parliament became "the crowning glory of the great series of ecumenical councils" that made up the Religious Congresses. For some, the Parliament was the crowning achievement of the whole

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid., 15–19.

Exposition. As one observer noted, "the World's Parliament of Religions will stand out in history as the greatest event of the World's Columbian year."[15]

Barrows and the committee composed a preliminary address that outlined goals of the Parliament. This address offered the first glimpse into what would count as religion at the Parliament. The address began:

> Believing that God is, and that he has not left himself without witness; believing that the influence of Religion tends to advance the general welfare, and is the most vital force in the social order of every people, and convinced that of the truth God is no respecter of person, but that in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted of him, we affectionately invite the representatives of all faiths to aid us in presenting to the world, at the Exposition of 1893, the religious harmonies and unities of humanity, and also in showing forth the moral and spiritual agencies which are at the root of human progress.[16]

Four aspects of religion, as the committee imagined it, appeared in this first sentence. First, religion involved belief. Second, it involved a monotheistic God. Third, religion brought about social order. Fourth, religion motivated people toward some sort of work of "righteousness" or some other good works. So, for the Parliament organizers, religion was monotheistic belief that organized society and motivated people to do good works. They also imagined this sort of religion could be found everywhere in the world and there were some harmonies or unities that related the different forms of religion. The remainder of the address noted that religion is also important for promoting "Temperance and Social Purity," has a "harmony with true Science," has "dominance in the higher institutions of learning," and values "the weekly rest-day on religious grounds."[17] This "religion", with

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[15] Ibid., 22–23.

[16] Barrows, *The World's Parliament of Religions*, 1:10. Note the ambiguity of the address. While inviting all religions, Barrows used biblical verses for his rationale drawing on Acts 14:17, "God has not left himself without a witness" and Acts 10:34-35, "God is no respecter of persons . . . .righteousness is accepted of him." Thanks to Arun Jones for the insight into these scriptural invocations.

its monotheism, focus on belief and social reform work, harmony with science, and Sabbatarianism was founded on the assumptions and model of late nineteenth century American Protestantism.

The committee sent the preliminary address to over three thousand religious leaders around the world and began the process of assembling delegates from various religious traditions. The organizers on the committee chose to seek out delegates individually, rather than through ecclesiastical bodies or organizations, in order to secure delegates "whose breadth of view, catholicity of temper, full confidence in the power of truth to bear full light of day, and hopeful faith that the Spirit of God…naturally made them friends of an effort to bring into amicable conference the religious leaders of mankind."[18] Despite some hold outs—the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Sultan of Turkey each refused to participate or lend any assistance to the Parliament—the committee was able to secure delegates from each of the ten religions and from throughout the world. But the selection of who would come to the Parliament was marked with the same white Protestant assumptions. Mormons and Native Americans were not represented at the Parliament--the former because of strong anti-Mormon sentiments among American Protestants and the latter because their form of religious life was "tribal." In terms of Asian delegates, contemplative Zen Buddhism was represented at the Parliament while more ritualistic Tibetan Buddhism was not. Swami Vivekananda represented monotheistic Vedanta Hindu religion while *bhakti* devotionalism had no Parliament representative. In short, Parliament organizers selected delegates who

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., 1:61.

matched the rational, logocentric, socially minded, intellectual, and scientifically commensurate ideals of Protestantism and ignored more ritualized, popular, or mystical forms of religious life.

The weekend before the opening of the Parliament, Henry Barrows invited the Buddhist delegates and the Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Zante to the service at his First Presbyterian Church. Barrows described the scene, which included a baptism, the reception of three Chinese converts and an address by the Archbishop, "as if the Parliament had already opened beneath the splendor of the Cross."[19] From Bonney's idea for a set of cultural congresses through Barrows' and the committee's selection of the delegates, the Parliament emerged through an American Protestant understanding of what counted as religion. Both inclusive and exclusive Protestants worked to create a Parliament that would find the unity amongst the plurality of religions in America and around the world. It was an attempt at pluralism. But the pluralism the Parliament produced could not move beyond its Protestant roots.

Putting the "Religions" in "Parliament of Religions,"

As Charles Carroll Bonney put it, the Parliament would "unite all Religion against all irreligion." Protestant assumptions shaped the organization of the Parliament, but Protestant discourse on the floor of the Parliament itself also constructed the boundaries of "religion" within which Hindu delegates would present themselves and their religion. Whether conservative and exclusivist or more liberal and inclusivist, Protestant speakers

[19] Ibid.

shared an understanding of what counted as religion and constructed the authoritative definition of religion for the Parliament and its non-Protestant delegates.

For many Christian delegates, religion meant Christianity and Christianity only. These exclusivists often sought to separate the category of religion into subcategories in order to champion Christianity as the only true religion. Joseph Cook, an evangelical preacher from Boston, offered one clear example of the exclusivist position. Barrows described Cook's "distinguished" orthodoxy before the preacher took the platform to deliver his address.[20] Cook quickly proved his orthodoxy by describing true religion as love of God as Lord and Savior and salvation from "the love of sin and its guilt". Using lines from Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as a metaphor for human sin, Cook asked of various non-Christian religions, "Can you wash our red, right hands?"[21] Cook finally argued for the only religion that can cleanse Lady Macbeth and everyone else. "How am I to keep peace with myself, my God and my record of sin except by looking on the Cross?"[22] For Cook, only Christianity offered God as "Savior and Lord" and can cleanse away sin; therefore, only Christianity counted as religion. Religion and Christianity were not just about salvation from sin for Cook. He was deeply concerned that religion be able to answer science. As he said, "The world expects to hear from us in this Parliament no drivel, but something fit to be professed face to face with the crackling artillery of the science of our time."[23] Cook understood religion as consisting of both

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[20] Houghton, *Neely's History of the Parliament of Religions and Religious Congresses at the World's Columbian Exposition*, 218.

[21] Barrows, *The World's Parliament of Religions*, 1:538.

[22] Ibid., 1:542.

[23] Ibid., 1:538.

Christianity and science: "If I were called upon to select watchwords for a universal religion, they should be these two: 1. Self-Surrender to the Self-Evident in Science and Scripture 2. Imitation of the Mind that was in Christ."[24] For Cook, religion was Christ in harmony with Science.

Congregationalist minister Lyman Abbot showed a more gracious, if equally exclusivist, side of Christian thought about other religions in his address. Abbot argued that human beings are essentially religious. In his view there was a universal religion at the source of all religions. As he put it, "Religion is the mother of all religions, not the child…And the temples and priests and rituals that cover this round globe of ours have not made religion; they have been born of the religion that is inherent in the soul."[25] He then described this religion: "It is such a perception of the infinite as produces an influence on the moral character and conduct of man."[26] With his definition of religion in general deployed, Abbot made moves similar to Cook, bringing Christianity in as the only complete perception and understanding of the infinite. Near the end of his address he welcomed the delegates from various religions all around the world. He said how glad he was to "believe that they have been seeking to know…the Divine" and that "we are glad to know what they have to tell us, but what we are gladdest of all about is that we can tell them what we have found in our search, and that we have found the Christ."[27] This led him to his point that "we believe no other revelation transcends and none other equals" Jesus Christ and that "we find in Christ one thing that we have not been able to

[24] Ibid., 1:541.

[25] Ibid., 1:494.

[26] Ibid., 1:495.

[27] Ibid., 1:500.

find in any other of the manifestations of the religious life of the world." [28] For Abbot, then, religion was the human longing for the Divine and this longing brought with it morality and certain kinds of conduct. Christianity alone fulfilled this longing perfectly through Jesus.

Another exclusivist, William C. Wilkinson, professor at the Chautauqua School of Theology, used the lives of Jesus and the apostle Paul to argue that what is "fundamental, central, in religion, any religion, all religion, [is] namely, its undertaking to *save*. Whatever religion fallaciously offers to save is, unless I have misunderstood him, according to Jesus a false religion."[29] Wilkinson affirmed that only Christianity offered salvation and, therefore, all other religions were not religion at all but only "pathetic and partly successful, gropings after God…gropings downward, not upward."[30] By centralizing salvation as the earmark of religion and then holding on to the death and resurrection of Jesus as the only source of salvation Wilkinson immediately placed the "ethnic religions," as he called them, in a category of "erring religions" or "false religion." He concluded that "men need to be saved *from* false religion; they are in no way saved *by* false religion."[31] Real, true, religion for Wilkinson saved people, and only Christianity could do that.

Wilkinson's address infuriated Julia Ward Howe, a religious liberal, friend of James Freeman Clarke, and author of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." She immediately rose to reproach him for his exclusiveness. Wanting to broaden the category

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid., 2:1247.

[30] Ibid., 2:1249.

[31] Ibid.

of religion beyond only Christianity, she outlined her own definition of religion. "I think you will say that [religion] is aspiration, the pursuit of the divine in the human; the sacrifice of everything to duty for the sake of God and of humanity and of our own individual dignity."[32] Howe was clear to distinguish magic from religion: "In some countries magic passes for religion, and that is one thing I wish, in view particularly of the ethnic faiths, could be made very prominent—that religion is not magic."[33] Magic, for Howe, involved priests fooling people into thinking charms or rituals would bring them good luck, prosperity, or immortality. She then moved on to decry the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca. "This scourge is generated by a pilgrimage which pious Mohammedans—there may be some present—are led to suppose is for the benefits of their souls…this pilgrimage is not religion; a pilgrimage which poisons whole continents and sweeps away men, women and children by thousands has nothing to do with religion at all."[34] Howe also labeled anything which "puts one individual absolutely over others," especially one gender over the other, or anything "which sacrifices women to the brutality of men" as "no religion."[35] Religion for Howe was equalitarian, progressive, theistic, and demanded sacrifice for the greater good. Anything hierarchical, ritualistic, traditionalist or misogynist could not be rightfully labeled religion.

While Howe focused mostly on what was not religion other more inclusive Protestants, such as the Unitarian Thomas Wentworth Higginson, tried to label what was

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[32] Houghton, *Neely's History of the Parliament of Religions and Religious Congresses at the World's Columbian Exposition*, 765.

[33] Ibid., 766.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

shared across all religions. In his address, Higginson labeled this common denominator of religions the "sympathy of religions." For Higginson, "their point of sympathy lies in what they have sublimely created through longing imagination. In all these faiths are the same alloy of human superstition…all seek after God, if haply they might find him."[36] Christianity is not excluded from this "alloy of superstition." Rather, Higginson argued, Christianity's claims to exclusive truths were wrong headed. The final line of his address stood as a motto for the generations of religious liberals to follow: "give us God's pure air, and teach us the broadest religion is the best."[37] Higginson's sympathy of religions plowed down the hierarchy created by Protestants like Wilkinson and Cook and left a level playing field in its wake wherein every religion was one form of the human attempt to reach the divine. However, a deep monotheism—a God—still sat at the center of Higginson's sympathy of religions.

Higginson held a radical position amongst the inclusivists, but George T. Candlin, a missionary to China, stood on the more conservative side of the inclusivist camp. Echoing James Freeman Clarke's argument in *Ten Great Religions*, Candlin argued that all religions held some truth but only Christianity held the complete truth. He claimed "all religion whatever in any age or country is in its essential spring good and not evil."[38] The problem came when religion was "burdened with never so much error, with never so much superstition."[39] Despite the flaws of superstition, religion was "the root of all morality," "the spring of every philosophy," "the incentive to every science," and the

[36] Barrows, *The World's Parliament of Religions*, 1:781.

[37] Ibid., 1:784.

[38] Ibid., 2:1186.

[39] Ibid.

"animating soul of every civilized nation."[40] While Candlin admitted Christianity had some error and superstition within it, he quickly pointed out the places where it is the worst. "India may be as bad as you please under the reign of Brahmanism; China, Thibet, and Corea as degraded as you choose under that of Buddhism and Confucianism; Arabia and Turkey as cruel and lustful as you can imagine under Mohammedanism; Africa as savage as you care to suppose with its dumb, dark fetichisms [sic]; all would be worse without these."[41] Religion was the only bright spot in these otherwise dark nations. Candlin's religion was a rational, theistic, scientific, and civilizing religion.

Whether inclusive or exclusive all of these Protestants shared commonalities in their definitions of religion. First of all, they were all monotheistic. There was a God to which humans were striving, connecting, chasing or somehow reaching and this God, if gendered, was male. Second, morality was central to most of these speakers. Religion brings with it a moral code for evaluating the world and human behavior. Howe, Abbot, and Candlin also saw religion as generating social action through this moral code. Third, for Candlin and Cook religion cooperated with science. Religion was rational and intellectual and it confirmed the findings of science. Finally, all of these Protestants constructed an outside category against which religion was defined. "Ethnic religion," "erring," "false religion," "superstition," and "magic" were all words that marked the limits of religion. These non-religions were characterized by ritual, mysticism, traditionalism, and hierarchy. While Hinduism and other non-Christian traditions were lumped into this category, the real target of this rhetoric was American Catholicism. At

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

this time, Catholicism was an ethnic religion of Poles, Italians, Germans, and French and while there were assimilationist Irish Catholics at the Parliament, the latest ethnic immigrants were not represented. Catholicism was also associated with hierarchy and ritual—two other aspects of these categories of non-religion. So, like the assumptions guiding the Parliament's organization, the definition of religion constructed by a variety of Protestants on the floor of the Parliament reflected Protestant assumptions. As the majority of the organizing committee and the dominant delegation to the Parliament, Protestants authorized a definition of religion as monotheistic, rational, scientific, moral, socially progressive, equalitarian, and socially organizing. When they rose to speak at the Parliament, Hindus would have to find ways to engage this authorized definition if they were to be heard.

Young India and The Invention of Hinduism

The stated goal of the Parliament was unity—an erasure of difference. However, to erase difference on one level required the highlighting of difference on another. In seeking to reveal the unity among a plurality of religions by erasing difference and fitting all religious culture into a Protestant definition of religion the discourse at the World's Parliament of Religions marked the difference between this Protestantized religion and all other forms of religious culture. In the case of Hinduism, both Christian missionaries from India and Indian Hindus constructed a difference between a Hinduism that fit the authoritative Protestant model of religion and other Hindu religious cultures that did not.

These other Hindu religious cultures fell into Protestant categories of idolatry, magic, superstition, heathenism, ethnic religion or Brahmanism.

The Parliament classified religion into ten major world religions, leaving whatever was left to fall into categories such as ethnic religions or superstitions. Speakers addressing Hinduism, one of the ten religions, thus imagined Hinduism in ways that included or excluded certain aspects of Hindu religions. Missionaries manipulated the borders of this difference to privilege certain forms of Hindu religions over others. Meanwhile, Hindus represented their religion in ways that attempted to fit their Hinduism into the Protestant model of religion, often times at the expense of other forms of Hindu religion. When they succeeded these Hindus were lauded by the audience but whenever they failed they were ignored.

Missionary to India, Robert A. Hume, saw the difference between Hindus and Christians in terms of inherent differences of mind. Drawing on themes that dated back to the Transcendentalists, Hume described how "the Hindu mind is supremely introspective" and has "an intense longing for comprehensiveness," whereas, the Western mind "is practical and logical." So, Hume asked, "how then, could a mind which first and foremost is practical, logical, and executive, understand and repeat a mind which cares nothing for external facts or for consistency; which does not think it may act, nor act as it thinks?"[42] Like Emerson and Thoreau before him, Hume saw the West and the Hindu as having something to offer one another. The Hindu would teach the West to be

[42] Ibid., 2:1270.

introspective and holistic while the West would give Hindus the skills of rationality. It was Emerson's Plato all over again.[43]

Despite his vision of an East-West exchange, Hume still found plenty of problems in Hindu religions. Hume described "Hinduism at its worst. Polytheism, idolatry, a mythology explained by the Hindus themselves as teaching puerilities and sensualities in its many deities, caste rampant, ignorance widespread and profound."[44] He delineated this "popular" Hinduism from "the educated Hindu [who] now believes in the scientific spirit of the West…dissatisfied with the mechanical and unethical teachings of popular Hinduism."[45] These new Hindus had benefited from colonial contact with Christians and the history of Hinduism that Christians had given Hindus. "Fifty years ago neither Hindu nor Christian could give a comprehensive and rational account of the history of Hinduism. For more than half a century western thought has been studying by the scientific method the origin and growth of religious ideas and practices in India." Hume argued that this Western study had uncovered "how idolatry and caste and the superstitions of modern Hinduism had their roots in better things." [46] Drawing on the declension narrative that had characterized representations of Hindu religions throughout the century, Hume argued that the West gave Hindus a history and with it the understanding that contemporary "superstition" had its roots in ancient religion. Hume believed Hinduism and Protestant Christianity shared these roots. The two religions had ideas such as "an Infinite Being," the revelation of this being as "Word," "prayer, as

[43] See Chapter 3

[44] Barrows, *The World's Parliament of Religions*, 2:1269.

[45] Ibid., 2:1272.

[46] Ibid.

intercourse of man with God," sacred books and ethics in common. Hume made a distinction between Hindu superstition and idolatry and a privileged Hinduism that shares key concepts with Protestantism.

Another missionary, L. E. Slater, from the London Missionary Society, made a similar argument as Hume's in his address on "The Present Religious Outlook of India." Spending less time on the superstitious religion of India than Hume, Slater argued it was a time of transition in Indian religion. There were two Hinduisms. "On the one hand the old Hinduism—the masses of people under the dominion of the priesthood, all sunk in the grossest superstition. On the other hand, there is 'Young India,' the new thought and feeling of the country reflected in the men trained at colleges in the highest western thought."[47] Slater then gave three examples of "Young India," the Arya Samaj, the Brahmo Samaj, and the Christo Samaj, all of which point to the demise of superstition and the rise of Christianity.

The Arya Samaj was a "Vedic and monotheistic Hinduism…It holds that when purified from error Hinduism can hold its own against every other form of faith. It stands for Indian theism as against foreign theism, and enlists on its side the patriotic preference for Indian literature and thought."[48] The nationalist theism of the Arya Samaj stood against the same superstitions Christian missionaries decried. Similarly, the Brahmo Samaj was "the organized Theistic Church of India" that "started with the Vedas, but has gradually been approaching Christianity."[49] The capstone, though, was the Christo Samaj,

[47] Ibid., 2:1172.

[48] Ibid., 2:1173.

[49] Ibid., 2:1174.

which Slater noted was housed in Calcutta and only required members to take on the title of Christian, believe in the Apostle's Creed, and live a consistent Christian life. Slater drew the line of difference between the old superstitious Hinduism and the new theistic Hinduism that was slowly approaching closer and closer to Christianity. When this transition from old India to Young India was complete superstitious Hinduism would be completely overwhelmed by the new Protestantized Hinduism.

Protap Chunder Mozoomdar, author of *The Oriental Christ* (1883), came to Chicago to represent Young India and the Brahmo Samaj. In his address, Mozoomdar described the Brahmo Samaj, the Hindu reform movement founded by Rammohun Roy in the early part of the nineteenth century. Mozoomdar's representation of Brahmo Hinduism followed the model of the inclusivist Protestants. He began by citing the difference between the Brahmo Samaj and other Hindu religious cultures through the narrative of the Samaj's founder. He described how earlier in the century Bengal had been "full of mighty clamor. The great jarring noise of a heterogeneous polytheism rent the stillness of the sky….Amid the din and clash of this polytheism and so-called evil, amid all the darkness of the times, there arose a man, a Brahman, pure bred and pure born, whose name was Raja Ram Mohan Roy."[50] Mozoomdar then outlined how Roy proved "the falsehood of all polytheism and the truth of the existence of the living God."[51] Mozoomdar reconstructed the difference between false polytheistic superstition and true monotheism; however, like Slater, this time the difference was not between Hindu and Christian but between two different types of Hindus. Seventy years after

[50] Ibid., 1:345.

[51] Ibid.

Protestants invoked Rammohun Roy to separate Unitarians and Calvinists, Mozoomdar invoked him again to separate superstitious Hindu religion and Hinduism.

Mozoomdar then outlined the basic contours of the Brahmo Samaj's Hinduism, contours that fit the Protestant model of religion. Brahmos had a monotheistic theology rooted in "the one true living God." This theology was scriptural because "the Brahmo Samaj founded this monotheism upon the inspiration of the Vedas and the Upanishads." The Brahmos also focused on morality and reform. As Mozoomdar asked, "What is theology without morality?...The Brahmo Samaj, therefore, next laid its hand upon the reformation of society."[52] Finally, Mozoomdar turned to the moderate inclusivist argument, but instead of all religion finding its perfection in Christianity, "the Brahmo-Somaj accepts and harmonizes all these precepts, systems, principles, teachings, and disciplines, and makes them into one system, and that is his religion."[53] Where Protestants had put Christianity as the perfection of religious truth, Mozoomdar put Brahmo Hinduism. With its monotheism, scripture, reform, and claims to universalism the Brahmo Samaj looked an awful lot like liberal Protestantism. On the floor of the Parliament Brahmo Hinduism was Protestant Hinduism.

The response to Mozoomdar in a local newspaper revealed how effectively he was able to overcome the difference between Hindu and Christian by offering a Hinduism that fit the Protestant model. "The zeal with which this distinguished scholar advocated the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man carried the Christian of the

[52] Ibid., 1:346.

[53] Ibid., 1:351.

new world back to India for a genuine specimen of a true Christian faith."[54] By presenting a Protestantized Hinduism, Mozoomdar was able to erase the difference between his Hinduism and the Protestant Christianity that dominated the Parliament. Like his Brahmo founder, the Hindu Mozoomdar ended up being labeled a Christian.

Not all Indian delegates sought to align themselves so closely with Protestants. One Indian, who was not Hindu but Jain, offered a response to the missionary attacks on Hindu religious culture. When evangelical missionary George Pentecost attacked the morality of Hinduism and claimed that Hindu temples housed "hundreds of priestesses who were known as immoral and profligate" and who were "prostitutes because they were priestesses and priestesses because they were prostitutes," a Jain delegate, Virichand Ghandi responded the next day.[55] Ghandi explained that there were no priestesses or prostitutes at temples but rather, there were women dancers who danced in the outer passages of the temples and that their morality was no better or worse than any other woman's. He then used a story to reject the marginalization of so-called superstitious Hinduism by Protestants like Pentecost.

He told a story about a boat full of Muslims captured by the Portuguese during Akbar's reign in India. The Christian Portuguese hung all the copies of the Qur'an found on board the ship around the neck of dogs and had them tramped through the streets. Ironically, this same ship was later captured by Akbar's men. Akbar's mother, furious over the earlier treatment of the Qur'an wanted Akbar to treat the Bibles on board the ship similarly. Akbar's reply to his mother was Ghandi's reply to the Christian

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[54] *Daily Inter-Ocean,* 14 September 1893 quoted in Seager, *The Dawn of Religious Pluralism*, 450.

[55] Barrows, *The World's Parliament of Religions*, 1:143.

missionaries, "Mother, these ignorant men do not know the value of the Koran, and they treated it in a manner which is the outcome of ignorance. But I know the glory of the Koran and the Bible both, and I cannot debase myself in the way they did."[56] Ghandi's reply rejected the difference that placed a moral and rational Christianity above a superstitious and immoral Hinduism. In his story the morality and rationality belong to Akbar—and metaphorically to Indians. The story, told by a Jain with a Muslim main character, responded in the mode of unity and religious liberalism that appealed to the liberal Protestant audience at the Parliament. Barrows noted that "Mr. Ghandi's remarks were followed by expressions of sympathy from among the audience."[57] Ghandi had managed to reverse, for a brief moment, the difference between Western Christian and Indian Hindu by arguing for the Indian's rationality and the ignorance of Christianity.

Swami Vivekananda held the most ambivalent relationship to Protestant Christianity of any of the Indian delegates. Seager heralded Vivekananda as "beyond question the most popular and influential man in the Parliament…[who] on all occasions…was received with greater enthusiasm than any other speaker, Christian or 'Pagan.'"[58] Vivekananda may have been the person closest to Emerson's Plato of any one in the century. He had the advantage of a Western education at Presidency College and then General Assembly's Institution where he was attracted to Western philosophy and struggled with the thought of the Utilitarians. But he had also devoted himself to the

[56] Ibid., 1:145.

[57] Ibid.

[58] *Daily Inter-Ocean*, 20 September 1893 quoted in Seager, *The Dawn of Religious Pluralism*, 338.

bhakti and tantric guru Ramakrishna.[59] He spoke English well, dressed like a Hindu monk, and could speak to Western philosophy and the intricacies of Vedanta. He was Young India, a balance of East and West.

At points Vivekananda defended Hinduism against Protestant attacks while at other times he represented a Hinduism that fit the Protestant model of religion. He even went on the offensive against Christianity. At the end of one afternoon session Vivekananda gave a short speech in which he chastised American Christians for sending missionaries to India to preach instead of helping feed the starving and impoverished in the country. He declared, "It is an insult to a starving people to offer them religion, it is an insult to a starving man to teach him metaphysics. In India a priest that preached for money would lose caste, and be spat upon by the people. I came here for aid for my impoverished people and I fully realized how difficult it was to get help for heathens from Christians in a Christian land."[60] Here, as with Ghandi, the terms of difference switched. It was the Christian who lacked morality and social reform while the Hindu pleaded for food for his people. In his history of the Parliament, Barrows seemed to ignore the force of Vivekananda's statement. He only commented: "He concluded his speech by a few remarks on the Hindu doctrine of reincarnation."[61]

There were other criticisms of Protestant Christianity that Barrows did not include in his history at all. While Henry Barrows' authoritative history of the Parliament and

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[59] For a brief biography of Vivekananda seee Amiya P. Sen, *Swami Vivekananda* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000); For more on Ramakrishna and his tantra see Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Kālī's Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

[60] Barrows, *The World's Parliament of Religions*, 1:129.

[61] Ibid.

Walter Houghton's alternative collection of Parliament papers each included Vivekananda's address titled "Hinduism," neither volume contains his extemporaneous opening remarks to that address. In these remarks, Vivekananda condemned Christianity for its intolerance. He said:

> "We who come from the East have sat here on the platform day after day and have been told in a patronizing way that we ought to accept Christianity because Christian nations are the most prosperous. We look about us and we see England, the most prosperous Christian nation in the world with her foot on the neck of 250,000,000 of Asiatics. We look back into history and see that the prosperity of Christian Europe began with Spain. Spain's prosperity began with the invasion of Mexico. Christianity wins its prosperity by cutting the throats of its fellow men. At such a price the Hindoo will not have prosperity.
>
> I have sat here today and I have heard the height of intolerance. I have heard the creed of the Moslem applauded, when today the Moslem sword is carrying destruction into India. Blood and the sword are not for the Hindoo, whose religion is based on the law of love.[62]

In his remarks Vivekananda sharply condemned Christianity and rejected the subordination of Asian religion and Asian civilization to Western Christianity. According to Vivekananda, Christianity led to immorality and only the Hindu held to a religion of love. Vivekananda indicted modern Western prosperity. It was not built from the mind of western progress or Protestant morals, but from the "necks of 250,000,000" and the bloody throats of fellow men. The authoritative historians of the Parliament failed to record these words. Yet the newspapers did and they reported that the crowd in the Hall applauded the young monk. Another newspaper reported that this great crowd consisted mainly of women. "Great crowds of people, the most of whom were women, pressed around the doors leading to the Hall of Columbus…for it had been announced that Swami Vivekananda, the popular Hindoo monk who looks so much like McCullough's Othello,

[62] "Hindoo Criticises Christianity," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 20, 1893.

was to speak."[63] It is no wonder then that the conservative white Presbyterian minister, Henry Barrows, could not bring himself to print the sharp critique of his own religion by a dark skinned Hindu and its roaring approval by a room full of Christian laywomen. The Parliament was a triumph of Protestantism and Barrows would not publish a single fleeting moment of Protestant weakness.

Vivekananda's paper titled "Hinduism" exemplified a more ambivalent relationship to Protestantism than his fiery opening remarks. In the address, Vivekananda took a few jabs at Christianity. He reminded Christians who associated widow burning with Hinduism that one could also associate witch burning with Christianity. However, the Hinduism he presented in the paper fit into the same Protestant model of religion found in the inclusivist Protestants or Mozoomdar. For Vivekananda, Hinduism was monotheistic, scientific, and socially progressive. Further complicating things, unlike Mozoomdar he did not construct a difference between popular image worship, what others had called idolatry or superstition, and some rarified true Hinduism. Rather, he argued that temple practices in India only seemed polytheistic. Below the surface lay a deep monotheism. The images helped people realize the underlying unified deity. As he asked, "But if a man can realize his divine nature with the help of an image, would it be right to call it a sin?"[64] Though tempered by a Protestant model of religion, Vivekananda's Hinduism refused to draw the same Protestant distinctions between ignorant idolatry and rational monotheism. Rather, image use in worship could be reconciled with a monotheist God and rational belief.

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[63] Daily Inter-Ocean, 20 September 1893 quoted in Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions*, 337–338.

[64] Barrows, *The World's Parliament of Religions*, 2:976.

The Hinduism of the Twentieth Century

In the history of Hinduism in America, the World's Parliament of Religions stands as a culmination and a transition. Just as the representations of Hindu religions in American national culture drew on images and themes from evangelical missionaries earlier in the century, the speakers at the Parliament drew on themes and images from Hannah Adams, Joseph Priestly, Unitarian accounts of Rammohun Roy, and metaphysical religions. The inclusivist Protestants were the heirs of Samuel Johnson and the exclusivists owed a great deal to James Freeman Clarke. Meanwhile, Vivekananda formulated and articulated Hinduism in a way that appealed to the Protestant assumptions of the American audience.

Vivekananda's Hinduism also became the dominant construction of Hinduism for much of the twentieth century. To be sure, missionaries and conservative Protestants have still regarded Hindu religions as idolatry into the twenty-first century. But Vivekananda's monotheistic, rational, scientific Hinduism became the most common understanding of Hinduism among religious liberals during the first half of the twentieth century and its influence carried forward into the yoga boom of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. When religion scholar Wendell Thomas wrote his 1930 book *Hinduism Invades America* he described Yogoda and Vedanta as "the two most imposing Hindu cults in America" and spent the majority of the work discussing the work of Vivekananda and Yogananda, a yogi and guru who arrived in the U.S. in 1920.[65] He titled his chapter

[65] Wendell Marshall Thomas, *Hinduism Invades America* (New York: Beacon Press, 1930), 15.

introducing Vedanta "Classic Vedanta, the Essence of Hindu Faith," claimed raja yoga was "the most important and the system taught most in America," and lauded Vivekananda and his teachings as "the first real Hindu many Americans had seen…a symbol of international fellowship…something savoring of ancient oriental wisdom, yet refreshingly new."[66] From the Parliament forward, it was Vivekananda's construction of Hinduism that attracted Americans and defined Hinduism as a world religion.

[66] Ibid., 35,77.

Conclusion

On July 12, 2007 Rajan Zed, spokesman for the Indian Association of Northern Nevada, gave a prayer before an American audience in a manner similar to Vivekananda over a century earlier:

> Let us pray.
>
> We meditate on the transcendental Glory of the Deity Supreme, who is inside the heart of the Earth, inside the life of the sky, and inside the soul of Heaven. May He stimulate and illuminate our minds.
>
> Lead us from the unreal to the real, from darkness to light, and from death to immortality. May we be protected together. May we be nourished together. May we work together with great vigor. May our study be enlightening. May no obstacle arise between us.
>
> May the Senators strive constantly to serve the welfare of the world, performing their duties with the welfare of others always in mind, because by devotion to selfless work one attains the supreme goal of life. May they work carefully and wisely guided by compassion and without thought for themselves.
>
> United your resolve, united your hearts, may your spirits be as one, that you may long dwell in unity and concord.
>
> Peace, peace, peace be unto all.
>
> Lord we ask You to comfort the family of former First Lady, Lady Bird Johnson.
>
> Amen.[1]

Zed gave his prayer before the United States Senate. He was the first Hindu to open the Senate in prayer in American history and he opened it in a way that harkened back to Vivekananda, the Transcendentalists, the Theosophical Society, and Rammohun Roy before him. Like Vivekananda and Roy, Zed prayed to a monotheistic God. "Glory of the Deity Supreme" were words to which both of those earlier Hindus would gladly assent.

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[1] *Cong. Rec.*, 110th Cong., 1st sess., 2007, 153, pt. 11: S9069.

Likewise, Thoreau and Emerson shared Zed's desire that the deity "stimulate and illuminate" their minds. The deity inside the Earth, inside the sky and inside the soul of Heaven sounds a lot like the pantheism Thoreau praised. The "selfless work" by which "one attains the supreme goal of life" that Zed entreated the Senators to perform was the work required by Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita, also praised by Thoreau. The call for peace and unity struck the same notes as Theosophy's "universal brotherhood." Through his prayer—knowingly or not—Rajan Zed tapped the deep historic well of American representations of Hindu religion as monotheistic, unifying, peaceful, and self-denying.

Zed's representation of monotheistic Hinduism did not go unchallenged. The *Congressional Record* noted at the bottom of Zed's prayer in parenthesis: "Disturbance in the Visitors' Galleries."[2] That phrase failed to account for the fullness of what transpired in the Senate during the prayer. The video recording of Zed's prayer showed him being interrupted twice by protestors praying loudly in the visitors' gallery. "Forgive us, Father, for allowing the prayer of the wicked that is an abomination in your sight," declared one protestor.[3] "Thou shalt have no other gods before me. God forgive our nation," prayed another.[4] Conservative Protestant media outlets also registered their protest to Zed's prayer. Writing on the conservative website World Net Daily, former Navy Chaplain Gordon James Klingenschmitt criticized the senators for not objecting "while Zed committed the sin of idolatry, right there in public."[5] The conservative Christian activist

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[2] *Cong. Rec.*, 110th Cong., 1st sess., 2007, 153, pt. 11: S9069.

[3] *Hindu Prayer Interrupted In Senate By Christians*, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4XiizB9Lkqk.

[4] Ibid.

group the American Family Association "urged its members to object to the prayer because Zed would be 'seeking the invocation of a non-monotheist god.'"[6] For Protestants who objected to the prayer, prayers by any other religion and not addressed to their triune God were sinful and failed to maintain America's character as a Christian nation. As one of the protestors told a reporter, "we are Christians and patriots."[7] Janet Folger, President of Christian activist group Faith2Action, directly contrasted Hinduism as polytheism with American monotheistic Christianity: "Our national motto isn't 'in gods we trust'…U.S. Government sanctioned Hindu prayers are an abomination…Unless you sing 'gods bless America…' use your freedom of speech to let your senators know you are outraged."[8] Like the American missionaries at Bombay, Zed's critics imagined him as the wicked, polytheistic, idolatrous, Hindu and like the writers of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* and the common school textbooks, these critics also imagined him as the un-American Hindu other.

The controversy over a Hindu prayer in the Senate shows the continued influence of the earliest American representations of Hindu religions on contemporary American culture. The representations constructed by Protestants, metaphysicians, and national culture continue to echo in the twentieth century. Tracing these echoes back to the nineteenth century, this dissertation followed the thread of Hindu religions across the

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[5] Gordon James Klingenschmitt, "Hindu Chaplain Prays, Christian Chaplain Told 'Go Away'," *World Net Daily*, July 16, 2007, http://www.wnd.com/2007/07/42585/.

[6] Charles Babington, "Protestors Disrupt First Senate Prayer by a Hindu," *Associated Press*, July 12, 2007, sec. Washington Dateline.

[7] Ibid.

[8] "Senators Hillary Clinton and Harry Reid Both Refuse to Allow Chaplain Who Prays 'in Jesus Name,' but Welcome Hinduism to the Floor of the U.S. Senate," *Christian Newswire*, July 12, 2007, http://www.christiannewswire.com/news/322633629.html.

fabric of American religious history. By following this thread through a series of events, institutions, movements, and people, some more well-known than others within the historiography, this dissertation brings elements of American religious history usually on the fringes to the fore and offers new understandings of those figures and events that have become commonplace in historical narratives.

A number of figures that are usually on the outskirts of scholarly narratives of American religious history find a central role in the story of Hindu religions in America. Rammohun Roy stands out as a name that rarely, if ever, appears in accounts of early Unitarianism or religion in the early American republic. Yet, Roy became an important voice for Unitarians as they waged their theological dispute with their Calvinist opponents. Furthermore, as the abolitionist letter submitted to congress and signed with Roy's name showed, Roy had a role as a symbol for global reform during the period. A more focused study on Roy himself and his overall impact in America beyond that covered in this dissertation is an important next step.

Other than Roy, women such as Hannah Adams, Lydia Maria Child, and Helena Blavatsky played an important role in researching and representing Hindu religions in America. These women writers tend to get mentioned in passing during survey courses on American religious history and in textbooks, but placed in this narrative they take on a new significance. These women produced important texts for Americans interested in religions outside of Christianity. Blavatsky offered an entirely new approach to religion that sought to unite science and religion under the banner of the wisdom religion. Meanwhile, Adams and Child presented Americans with a broad and cosmopolitan view of religious belief around the world. These women were of vital importance to the story

of Hindu religions in America, but, as this dissertation highlights, they were also vitally important to the nascent discourse of comparative religion in America. Future studies should seek to flesh out the roles these women played in the rise of comparative religion during the century.

But this dissertation also presents a new angle on more common aspects of American religious history. For example, the Unitarian controversy is a key moment in the history of religion in the early republic, but in this study it is given another layer of significance as the controversy that brought together Boston and Bengal. The two Unitarian controversies, one in New England and the other in Calcutta, reflect a transnational moment of conflict between conservative Protestants and their critics, Protestant and otherwise. Throughout the Anglophone world rational religion was up for debate. Similarly, most accounts of Transcendentalism note the influence of the Bhagavad Gita and other texts on Thoreau and Emerson. Yet, very few scholars have gone through the paces of tracing out that influence and analyzing how the Transcendentalists imagined Hindu religion as I have done.

Thoreau and Emerson were influenced by Hindu religions, but they also imagined Hindu religion as contemplative and unified in contrast to the activity and materialism of American Protestantism. Their representations of the contemplative Hindu have had a lasting impact on how Americans imagine India and Hinduism. Finally, historians and religion scholars have emphasized the cultural and national power of white Protestantism in the latter half of the nineteenth century, but this dissertation has shown how that power was buttressed through knowledge and representations of racial and religious others outside the United States. Further work on more religious others around the world

imagined by Protestants, perhaps Muslims, would amplify and complicate the picture I have drawn here. In this dissertation, I have retold the narrative of American religious history during the period through representations of Hindu religions.

Across the various representations of Hindu religions during the period three themes have emerged in this study. First, comparative religion was a prevalent interest among Americans during the entire century. As historian James Turner has argued, the disciplinary history of comparative religion has been dominated by a Eurocentric narrative. "Americans do pop up from time to time in standard histories…But Americans appear as superfluous ornaments on a Eurocentric history."[9] Yet, throughout this dissertation, again and again, Americans engaged in projects of religious comparison. There were the more obvious examples of Hannah Adams, Joseph Priestly, Lydia Maria Child, James Freeman Clarke, and Samuel Johnson, who all published comparative texts. And, of course, there was the World's Parliament of Religions. But comparative religion also worked within the systems of difference in the geography schoolbooks, the comparisons of philosophical systems in the writings of Helena Blavatsky, and the comparative passages of Thoreau. Whatever each writer's specific goal, the general point of all this comparison was to find some sort of truth—be it the ancient wisdom religion, the universal religion, or Protestant Christianity.

As many Americans imagined Hindu religions they also imagined religion as a comparative category. Further study is necessary, but it seems the roots of American religious studies may be found in this variety of comparative projects. Claims by some in the field that religious studies is a Protestant or Christian project are right. But they are

[9] Turner, *Religion Enters the Academy: The Origins of the Scholarly Study of Religion in America*, 6.

only half right because they ignore the contributions by critics of Protestantism and metaphysicals such as the Theosophical Society and the Transcendentalists. The roots of comparative religion and its heir, religious studies, rest in a variety of comparative projects during the nineteenth century, some evangelical, some liberal Protestant, and some metaphysical. Like the variety of comparative projects analyzed in this dissertation, the discipline of religious studies is defined by an internal tension between Protestantism and its dissenters.

Second, as they attempted to make sense of Hindu religions within their comparative systems, Protestants repeatedly compared Hindu religions with Roman Catholicism. Throughout the century, when Protestants wrote about Hindus they were also writing about Catholics. Beginning with early missionary reports and culminating in Thomas Nast's "American River Ganges" cartoon, Protestants consistently conflated Hindus and Catholics. Protestants viewed Catholics and Hindus as superstitious, idolatrous, immoral, lazy, un-American, hierarchical, repressive of their women, blood thirsty, and dangerous. Catholicism gave Protestants a language for understanding Hindu religions early in the century. To Protestant eyes, Hindus looked and acted kind of like Catholics. They had priests and ornate temples. They had idols and rituals. But by the latter part of the century, as Protestants had more knowledge of Hindu religions, conflating Catholics and Hindus served to bolster white Protestant American identity and render Catholics as heathen outsiders. Initially, Catholicism provided a familiar example for understanding Hindu religions. In the end, Hindu religions provided an exotic example for excluding Catholics.

Finally, the perceived idolatry and superstition of Hindu religions led Americans, Protestant or otherwise, to a declension narrative in their representations of Hindu religions. Even the most ardent critics of Hindu religions granted that Hindus had at one time lived through a golden age. Joseph Priestly imagined that Hindus had a monotheistic God in the wake of Noah's flood. Transcendentalists focused their attention on ancient Sanskrit texts from the golden age of Hindu religion. Helena Blavatsky wrote that ancient India was the seat of all civilization. *Harper's* published accounts of travelers visiting picturesque ancient temples. For Americans, the best Hindu religion was the oldest. Americans consistently argued that Hindus' best days were behind them and that their religion was a degraded shell of its former glory. This declension narrative for Hindu religion ran in contrast to the progressive vision most writers held for religion in America. Blavatsky and Olcott believed humans were always evolving and that their wisdom religion, though ancient, would lead toward social and spiritual progress. Lydia Maria Child, James Freeman Clarke, and Samuel Johnson looked ahead to the universal religion that would unite mankind. Hannah Adams believed Christianity was progressing toward greater truth. When Americans represented Hindu religions, Hindus were going backwards while Americans progressed forward.

These three themes are related by their shared emphasis on religious difference. In narratives of American religious history some historians have emphasized the role that religious freedom played in opening up a competitive religious marketplace. In this narrative, religious difference grew as the "democratization" or "churching" of American

culture expanded the religious marketplace.[10] Others have insisted that, though America proclaimed freedom of religion, institutions and the state coerced and Christianized America during the nineteenth century, establishing boundaries on what forms of religious difference were tolerated.[11] Both of these narratives account for religious difference as a byproduct or phenomenon to be managed by Protestant leaders.

Breaking from these other narratives, Catherine Albanese made religious difference central to the narrative in her survey of American religions, *America: Religions and Religion*. Albanese organized American religious cultures around the dichotomy of manyness and oneness.[12] The manyness, which took up the bulk of the book, accounted for the variety of religious movements, institutions, and cultures in American religious history. The oneness, the second part of the text, emphasized the role of Protestant cultural power, civil religion, and popular culture in American religious culture. Albanese argued that "the manyness and the oneness are interconnected, each affecting the other and both together writing American religious history."[13] Yet, it is only in the conclusion, a single chapter, that Albanese investigated the encounters between the one and the many. In that chapter she examined "the ways in which the one religion of

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[10] Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

[11] Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People*, Studies in Cultural History (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990); Sehat, *The Myth of American Religious Freedom*.

[12] It is interesting to note how Albanese's distinction between the one and the many in American religious history resembles Ralph Waldo Emerson's view of the one and the many in Plato, the representative philosopher (see chapter 3). Emerson's desire to balance the one and the many—imagined as the East and the West—also resembles the balance Albanese desired for American religious culture; as she writes on page 531 "the one and the many have found it difficult to maintain balance" in America. Perhaps, the balance between oneness and manyness is best understood as Albanese's Platonic ideal for American religious culture.

[13] Catherine L. Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*, 3rd ed. (Wadsworth Publishing, 1999).

Protestantism responded to the many religions of other Americans."[14] The responses left her disconcerted. Looking at the broad narrative of American religious history she had laid out, Albanese concluded with a note of anxiety:

> The ordinary and extraordinary religious problem of the nation is finally the content of the one religion and the many religions insofar as they share, in certain respects, a pronounced culture of contraction in the present and an overexpansive millennial vision for the future. In short, caught between boundaries and visions or dreams, the one and the many have found it difficult to maintain balance. Ironically, the numerous forms of religions combination that flourished did not appreciably alter the human substrate of apprehension at other groups and misapprehension of one another.[15]

The "ordinary and extraordinary problem" plaguing America, and Albanese, was religious difference. "Others" continued to create apprehension throughout American religious history. Albanese's text was a first step in beginning to wrestle with those apprehensions, if for only a chapter.

Albanese's text was a first step toward reimagining American religious history with an emphasis on difference, but the second and third steps have been slow to follow. As American historians trained outside of religious studies have begun to "take religion seriously" recent studies in the American religious history have not kept religious difference or Albanese's oneness and the manyness, central to their narratives. Religious difference has once again become epiphenomenal because historians have taken the term "religion" for granted. As Kathryn Lofton has described, "even as historians currently purvey diverse modes of historical inquiry, there remains an extraordinary confidence within history departments that all objects—especially the object *religion*—may be

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[14] Ibid., 503.

[15] Ibid., 531.

objectified through the methodological scrutiny of history itself."[16] Making a distinction between the methods of history and the methods of religion, Lofton concluded that "if the subject of history brings us to characters and advents from the past, then the methods of religion draw our gaze to the indicative, comparative, and repetitive projects those very characters launch in their Parliaments, leagues, and missionary propositions."[17] Building on Lofton, the discipline of religious studies reveals religious difference in ways that history does not because of its emphasis on comparison and its theoretical interrogations of the category "religion." Because religious studies does not take "religion" for granted, but rather argues over its definitions and contours ad nauseam, it will emphasize religious difference in its accounts of American religious history. As I have argued here, religious difference and comparative religion rely upon one another. Difference breeds comparison and comparison is impossible without difference.

By tracing one case of religious difference, "the Hindu other," across the nineteenth century, this dissertation gestures toward a narrative of American religious history that reclaims an emphasis on religious difference. This is one attempt at a second step beyond Albanese. Other such second step narratives would pay particular attention to the places, times, and events where religion became a marker of difference and a comparative category. Furthermore, they would pay attention to the politics of religious difference; the ways religious difference condoned, constructed, justified, and reinforced hierarchy, power, and oppression. As one example of narrative of religious difference in

[16] Kathryn Lofton, "Religious History as Religious Studies," *Religion* 42, no. 3 (July 2012): 386.

[17] Ibid., 392.

America, this dissertation has moved back and forth between Albanese's oneness and manyness and it has attempted to reveal the diversity within the so-called "oneness."

I introduced this dissertation as a study that sits at the juncture of Protestantism and diversity. That juncture is a place of religious difference, a place where Protestants encountered the religious other, and a place where religious difference gave rise to comparative religion. It is a place where the oneness of American religion imagined the Hindu as the foil against which white Protestant American identity was reinforced. It is also a place where the manyness of American religion gave rise to systems of comparative religion that accounted for Hindu religious cultures. Thus, the story of Hindu religions in America does not begin with Vivekananda, but with the ways a range of Americans imagined "the Hindu" a century before his arrival.

Coda

I completed this dissertation in the spring of 2013. At the beginning of this year, the manyness of American religions was on full display amongst the 113th Congress of the United States. The 113th Congress, which was only 56% Protestant, was the first to include a Buddhist in the Senate and included Tulsi Gabbard, the first Hindu in either chamber. Gabbard herself is characterized by religious difference. She was raised by a Catholic father and a Hindu mother and had exposure to the Gita and the New Testament. As a teenager she turned to the Gita for spiritual guidance.[18] When Gabbard took her oath of office, there were no protests in the visitors' gallery and conservative Christian

[18] Stephen Prothero, "A Hindu Moment for Congress; Swearing in of New House Member Holds Lesson for Politicians," *USA Today*, January 4, 2013, sec. News.

activists largely ignored her. She took that oath on her personal copy of the Bhagavad Gita.[19] January 12, 2013, ten days after Gabbard became the first Hindu in Congress and two months before the defense of this dissertation, marked the 150th birthday of Swami Vivekananda. Vivekananda marked the end of this dissertation and the beginning of Hindus representing themselves to Americans. Tulsi Gabbard marks a shift from Hindus merely representing themselves to Americans and the beginning of a Hindu representing Americans.

[19] Deepti Hajela, "For Indian Hindus, a Key Moment," *The Washington Post*, January 18, 2013, Regional edition, sec. A.

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