Manu V. Devadevan

A Prehistory of Hinduism

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Managing Editor: Katarzyna Tempczyk

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In memory of U. R. Ananthamurthy

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This book was completed at 8:30 am on 30 August 2015 in Bhubaneswar. Fifteen minutes later, at Dharwad in northwestern Karnataka, two young men shot dead Professor M.M. Kalburgi, the greatest authority of our times on premodern religion, language, and literature in Karnataka. It was as if he stood by me like a guardian angel while the book was being written, and left immediately after the work was accomplished. I weep in silence.

A Guide to Pronunciation of Diacritical Marks

In order to ensure uniformity, the diacritical marks used in this book follow the Dravidian convention even for Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, and other non-Dravidian languages. Thus, Hāveri and *kevalajñāna* will be written as Hāvēri and *kēvalajñāna*, Gurshāsp and Shāh as Gurśāsp and Śāh.

Vowels

a	as *o* in *mother*
ā	as *a* in *park*
i	as *i* in *bill*
ī	as *ee* in *week*
u	as *oo* in *book*
ū	as *oo* in *root*
ṛ	as *r* in *crystal*
e	as *e* in *men*
ē	as *a* in *sage*
ai	as *y* in *cry*
o	as *o* in *robust*
ō	as *o* in *smoke*
au	as *ou* in *ground*

Semi-labial

ṃ	as *m* in *empire*

Semi-aspirate

ḥ	as *ah* in the exclamation, *yeah*, but with mild aspiration

Guttural or Velar Consonants

k	as *c* in *country*
kh	as *kh* in *ask her*
g	as *g* in *wagon*
gh	as *gh* in *big hunch*
ṅ	as *n* in *monk*

Palatal Consonants

c	as *ch* in *charity*
ch	as *chh* in *witch hunt*
j	as *j* in *jungle*
jh	as *geh* in *challenge him*
ñ	as *n* in *bench*

Retroflex or Cerebral or Lingual Consonants

ṭ	as *t* in *talk*, but uttered with tongue bent upwards to touch the hard palate
ṭh	as *th* in *boat house*, but uttered with tongue bent upwards to touch the hard palate
ḍ	as *d* in *rod*, but uttered with tongue bent upwards to touch the hard palate
ḍh	as *dh* in *god head*, but uttered with tongue bent upwards to touch the hard palate
ṇ	as *n* in the American pronunciation of *horn*, but uttered with tongue bent upwards to touch the hard palate

Dental Consonants

t	as *th* in *three*, but without aspiration
th	as *th* in *think*
d	as *th* in *other*
dh	as *theh* in *bathe her*
n	as *n* in *native*

Labial Consonants

p	as *p* in *province*
ph	as *ph* in *stop him*
b	as *b* in *beach*
bh	as *bh* in *abhor*
m	as *m* in *master*

Liquids

y	as *y* in *young*
r	as *r* in *aroma*
l	as *l* in *love*
v	as *w* in *wheat*

Sibilants

ś	as *sh* in *ash*
ṣ	as *sh* in *wash*, but with tongue bent slightly upwards
s	as *s* in *secret*

Aspirate

h	as *h* in *host*

Dravidian liquids

ṟ	as *r* in *ring*, but uttered with tongue slightly bent upwards to touch the hard palate

Dravidian retroflex liquids

ḷ	as *l* in *blow*, but uttered with tongue bent upwards to touch the hard palate
ḻ	as *r* in the American pronunciation of *practice*

1 Introduction

In the first half of the nineteenth century, a new religious consciousness began to take shape in the Indian subcontinent. This was the great Hindu consciousness. It was a phenomenon that was at once passionate and compassionate, egalitarian and divisive, benevolent and virile. With a checkered, sensitive history, it has pervaded religious life in India ever since, integrating and dividing millions of Indians in its own ambivalent ways. Historians trace the origins of the Hindu consciousness to the late eighteenth century, when the scholarly study of Indian religious texts such as the Vēdas, the Upaniṣads, and the *Bhagavadgīta* commenced under the aegis of the Asiatic Society, established in Calcutta by Sir William Jones in 1784, but it was not until the early decades of the nineteenth century that it was used as a marker of identity. Raja Rammohan Roy is credited with the use of the word 'Hinduism' for the first time. Roy used the word in one of his writings in 1816, and again, in 1817.[1] It came into circulation almost immediately. At least one use of the word is known from 1818, and one from 1820, the latter in the *Asiatick Researches*.[2] By 1839, the word had already appeared in the title of a book, Alexander Duff's *India and Indian Missions: Sketches of the Gigantic System of Hinduism Both in Theory and Practice*.[3] Duff spoke, among other things, of the theory of Hinduism,[4] the origin of Hinduism,[5] the system of Hinduism,[6] and even the territory of Hinduism.[7] In fact, the use of the word 'Hindu' as a marker of identity was already known by the time Rammohan Roy spoke of 'Hinduism' as a religion. In the first volume of *the History of British India*, published in 1817, James Mill used phrases such as the Hindu religion,[8] the Hindu system,[9] Hindu expressions and beliefs,[10] Hindu ideas,[11] the Hindu doctrine,[12] the Hindu character,[13] the Hindu law[14] and the Hindu society,[15] — all expressions in which the notion of Hinduism as an identity was manifestly embedded. However, for many years, the reach of the expressions Hindu and Hinduism was limited to scholarly debates

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[1] Lorenzen 2006: 3.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid., 4.
[4] Duff 1840: 144.
[5] Ibid., 297.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid., 603.
[8] Mill 2010: 264.
[9] Ibid., 171; 470.
[10] Ibid., 198.
[11] Ibid., 215.
[12] Ibid., 243.
[13] Ibid., 304.
[14] Ibid., 141, 156.
[15] Ibid., 171, 429.

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and descriptions. Their scope as markers of identity was only feebly felt. Those who identified themselves as practicing Hindus were few in number. As the later half of the nineteenth century progressed, literate men and women in the leading metropolises of India were beginning, in increasing numbers, to speak of a religion called Hinduism to which they belonged. By the turn of the century, it had evolved into one of the most compelling historical realities of our times. So captivating was its impact that when the first World's Parliament of Religions was held in Chicago in 1893, its organizers identified Hinduism as one of the religions to be offered a platform. By this time, Hinduism was already being represented as the oldest religion in the world. Among its representatives at the Parliament in Chicago was the redoubtable Swami Vivekananda. On 11 September 1893, he thanked the "Sisters and Brothers of America" for the warm and cordial welcome they had accorded, and said: "I thank you in the name of the most ancient order of monks in the world; I thank you in the name of the mother of religions".[16] On 19 September, he opined in his address to the Parliament that Hinduism was one of the three religions of the world that have come down from prehistoric times, the other two being Zoroastrianism and Judaism.[17] Things evolved very quickly in the following years. In 1906, a Hindu Sahayak Sabha was formed in Lahore. On 4 August that year, Lala Lajpat Rai, Shadi Lal, Harkrishna Lal, Raja Narendra Nath, Ram Saran Das, Ruchi Ram Sahini, Ram Bhaj Datta, and Lala Hans Raj established a Hindu Sabha in the same city.[18] In 1915, an 'All India' organization called the Sarvadeshak Hindu Mahasabha was launched to protect the interest of the Hindus. The organization was renamed Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha in 1921.[19] The trajectory of evolution was rather spectacular.

How was Hinduism produced in the nineteenth century? Much ink has been expended in addressing this question over the last three decades. Attempts to explain Hinduism's emergence in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries are regarded as constructionist, as they proceed from the premise that Hinduism was constructed during the colonial period under British influence, if not under British patronage or supervision. Constructionism encapsulates several different positions. Some of them deny the very existence of Hinduism. Robert E. Frykenberg, for instance, holds that "there has never been any such thing as a single 'Hinduism' or any single 'Hindu community' for all of India".[20] More scathing is John Stratton Hawley's observation that Hinduism "is a notoriously illegitimate child".[21] It is worth quoting Hawley at some length as it exemplifies this strand of constructionism.

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[16] Paranjape 2015: 3.

[17] Ibid., 5.

[18] Bapu 2013: 16. Note that the All India Muslim League was formed in December 1906, four months after the establishment of the Hindu Sabha.

[19] On the Hindu Mahasabha, see Bapu 2013. Also see Gordon 1975.

[20] Frykenberg 1989: 29.

[21] Hawley 1991: 20.

> Hinduism—the word, and perhaps the reality too—was born in the 19th century, a notoriously illegitimate child. The father was middle-class and British, and the mother, of course, was India. The circumstances of the conception are not altogether clear. One heard of the “goodly habits and observances of Hindooism” in a Bengali-English grammar written in 1829, and the Reverend William Tennant had spoken of “the Hindoo system” in a book on Indian manners and history written at the beginning of the century. Yet it was not until the inexpensive handbook *Hinduism* was published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge in 1877 that the term came into general English usage.[22]

Other positions are more cautions; thus, Christopher John Fuller writes:

> “Hinduism” as a term for that indigenous religion, became current in English in the early nineteenth century and was coined to label an “ism” that was itself partly a product of western orientalist thought, which (mis)constructed Hinduism on the model of occidental religions, particularly Christianity.... That linguistic development significantly reflects the impact of modern Hindu reformist thought and the Hindus’ own search for an identifiable, unitary system of religious belief and practice. Nonetheless, “Hinduism” does translate any premodern Indian word without serious semantic distortion, and it still does not correspond to any concept or category that belongs to the thinking of a large proportion of the ordinary people.... Yet that is not a decisive objection against employment of the term.... That “Hinduism” is not a traditional, indigenous category, concept, or “cultural reality”—albeit an important negative fact—in no way nullifies an analysis that demonstrates that Hinduism is a relatively coherent and distinctive religious system founded on common structures of relationships.[23]

More often than not, the constructionist position has held that Hinduism was invented by the British in the nineteenth century. J. Laine, an early constructionist, does not share this position fully. Writes Laine:

> the concepts ‘Hinduism’ and ‘religion’ were part of the intellectual baggage packed off to India with the eighteenth century British, and with their introduction into Indian thought, Indians themselves used these terms in their efforts at self-definition and understanding *vis-à-vis* the alien Englishmen. Even if the categories did not quite fit, the process of cultural translation thus sparked by the need for self-understanding necessitated their use.[24]

Arguments against the British invention thesis are also made by Brian K. Pennington, who holds that it “grants altogether too much power to colonialism; it both mystifies and magnifies colonial means of domination and erases Hindu agency and creativity”.[25] Pennington also rejects the view that the construction of Hinduism was carried out by reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy. In his view, popular Hinduism was ‘manufactured’ by initiatives that were opposed to both the colonial and the reformist projects. The early nineteenth-century Bengali newspaper, *Samācār Candrikā*, is identified as one such initiative. As far as the likes of the *Samācār Candrikā* are concerned,

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[22] Ibid, 20-21.
[23] Fuller 2004: 10.
[24] Laine 1983: 165.
[25] Pennington 2005: 5.

> the phrase ("construction of Hinduism") has broader implications, describing not only representational practices but also the manipulations of ritual, belief, and their rationale that helped produce a cohesive Hinduism in tune with its multiethnic, multireligious colonial environment…. Manufacturing this Hinduism proved to be an act less of promoting particular items of doctrine or sites of authority—a strategy pursued especially by the Hindu reformer Rammohan Roy and is religious organization the Brahmo Samaj—and more of patterning a general structure for Hindu action, social and ritual.[26]

The constructionist position has not gone unchallenged. The absence of the word Hinduism before the nineteenth century, it is argued, is no proof of the absence of what the word might represent. In David N. Lorenzen's assessment, "the claim that Hinduism was invented or constructed by European colonizers, mostly British, sometime after 1800 is false"[27] because "textual evidence against this claim is so overwhelming".[28]

> Major historical changes in the economic and political institutions of India during the Turco-Afghan conquest, the Mughal invasion, the consolidation of the Mughal polity, and the establishment of the British colonial regime undoubtedly effected important changes in the religious traditions of India, but the rapid changes of early colonial times never had such an overwhelming impact that they led to the construction or invention of Hinduism. Hinduism wasn't invented sometime after 1800, or even around the time of the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate. What did happen during the centuries of rule by dynasties led by Muslim Sultans and Emperors was that Hindus developed a consciousness of a shared religious identity based on the loose family resemblances of variegated beliefs and practices of Hindus, whatever their sect, caste, chosen deity, or theological school.[29]

We may call this the primordialist position, although this view is by no means oblivious to the changes brought about by historical developments of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. While acknowledging the extensive nature of the changes that Hinduism underwent during the colonial period, it argues that Hinduism existed in India long before the arrival of the British. Thus, according to Thomas R. Trautmann,

> there are a number of good reasons to be wary of saying that the British invented Hinduism. Many of the elements of the way in which Hinduism is constructed by the British in the period of Indomania derive from Indians and Indian sources…. The very (Persian) word *Hindu* for an inhabitant of India and follower of a certain religion shows that the conception predated British contacts with India. In any case the British conception of Hinduism as the religion of the natives

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[26] Ibid., 140.
[27] Lorenzen 2006: 2.
[28] Ibid., 24.
[29] Ibid., 36.

> of India is well along in its development in the seventeenth century, when Henry Lord wrote an account of what we would recognize as Hinduism…. To adopt the view that the British had no conception of Hinduism before the new Orientalism…would be to fall in with the propaganda of its own authority claims.[30]

A leading Indologist who shares the primordialist thesis on Hinduism is Wendy Doniger. Her unjustly controversial work, *The Hindus: An Alternative History*, which gives an account of the 'the Hindus', begins the story thus:

> Once upon a time, about 50 million years ago, a triangular plate of land, moving fast (for a continent), broke off from Madagascar (a large island lying off the southeastern coast of Africa) and, "adrift on the earth's mantle," sailed across the Indian Ocean and smashed into the belly of Central Asia with such force that it squeezed the earth five miles up into the skies to form the Himalayan range and fused with Central Asia to become the India subcontinent…. This prehistoric episode will serve us simultaneously as a metaphor for the way that Hinduism through the ages constantly absorbed immigrant people and ideas and as the first historical instance of such an actual immigration.[31]

The section where these words occur is entitled "Origins: Out of Africa". If the present writer was to attempt a history of the landmass we now call India, it would in all likelihood commence on a similar note. Only that it would not be called a history of the Hindus. Doniger makes her views clear in the opening piece of an anthology of essays "on Hinduism" in premodern India. "For the past few decades", writes she,

> scholars have raised several and strong objections to the use of any single term to denote one of the world's major and most ancient faiths. The name 'Hinduism' that we now use is of recent and European construction. But it is Eurocentric to assume that when Europeans made the name they made the game. 'Hinduism' (dare I use the 'H' word, and may I stop holding up my hands for mercy with quotation marks?) is, like the armadillo, part hedgehog, part tortoise. Yet there *are* armadillos, and they were there before they had names. I would like to suggest some ways in which the disparate parts of what we call Hinduism have in fact existed for centuries, cheek by jowl, in a kind of fluid suspension.[32]

She goes on to note:

> It is true that before the British began to categorize communities strictly by religion, few people in India defined themselves exclusively through their religious beliefs; their identities were segmented on the basis of locality, language, caste, occupation and sect. Even today…most people in the country would define themselves by allegiances other than their religion. There is, after all, no Hindu canon; ideas about all the major issues of faith and lifestyle—vegetarianism, nonviolence, belief in rebirth, even caste—are subjects of debate, not dogma. And yet, if we look carefully, there are shared ideas, practices and rituals that not only connect the diverse people

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[30] Trautmann 1997: 67-68.

[31] These are the opening lines of chapter 2, Doniger 2009.

[32] Doniger 2013: 3.

> generally called 'Hindus' today, but also link the people who composed and lived by the Vedas in northwest India around 1500 BCE with the Hare Krishna converts dancing in the streets of twenty-first-century New York.[33]

This, certainly, is not a piece of history a modern practitioner of the craft is expected to produce. The *vaidic* people who lived "in northwest India around 1500 BCE" were still not familiar with the use of iron, while the group of ill-informed dancers "in the streets of twenty-first-century New York" live at a time when a manned mission to Mars is being worked out. The nature of the relationship which the two share is by no means obvious. One wonders if this is a piece of 'connected history' writ large?[34] As far as tracing the antiquity of Hinduism is concerned, this understanding of Hinduism is not qualitatively different from Zaehner's 1962 work, which the *Guardian* praised as "the best short introduction to Hinduism in existence".[35] Zaehner's Hinduism consisted of the Vēdas, Brahman, *mōkṣa* or liberation, god, *dharma*, and *bhakti*. It was, in other words, more of an intellectual history. Doniger's concerns are almost altogether different, as she engages with a wide range of topics such as gods and goddesses, women and ogresses, violence and sacrifice, devotion and sex. In her 'alternative' history, which is richer in details, sharper in analysis, and oftentimes illuminating for its raw insights, even dogs, monkeys, and talking animals find respectful space. This is, truly, a story coming from a gifted chronicler of times at the height of her powers. Nevertheless, her Hinduism and that of Zaehner share the same template of primordialism.

Most studies on Hinduism accept the fact that the term is hard to define. There are no prophets and no books acceptable to everyone, no single common deity worshipped by all practitioners. Yet, it is claimed that some essential features of Hinduism can indeed be identified 'if we look carefully'. Exemplifying this position are these words of Gavin D. Flood:

> while it might not be possible to arrive at a watertight definition of Hinduism, this does not mean that the term is empty. There are clearly some kinds of practices, texts and beliefs which are central to the concept of being a 'Hindu', and there are others which are on the edges of Hinduism.... 'Hinduism' is not a category in the classical sense of an essence defined by certain properties, there are nevertheless prototypical forms of Hindu practice and belief.[36]

The differences between the constructionists and the primordialists have produced a body of writings that is rich in documentation and spirited in arguments. Yet, the cumulative light it sheds on how Hinduism was constructed, or transformed, is by no means remarkable. This is due in large to the fact that both groups approach Hinduism with an essentialist bent of mind. The ‘illegitimate child’ thesis of the constructionists seems to be suggesting that other religions like Islam and Christianity were not constructed, or that the construction would have been legitimate had it happened several centuries before the coming of the British (or the Muslims). It also naively presumes that a religion like Hinduism can be constructed with the help of a body of writings produced in the nineteenth century by the British, or by Indian reformers, or by counter-manoeuvres like the one the *Samācār Candrikā* has represented. In other words, it bestows undue determinism and autonomy on discourse. If it was discourse that created Hinduism, all we would need in order to undo it in our day is a counter-discourse. The world, unfortunately, is ontological, not discursively constituted, as the present study will demonstrate.

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[33] Ibid., 3-4.

[34] The phrase 'connected history' is used here sarcastically and should not be mistaken for the idea made popular in South Asian historiography by the two-volume Subrahmanyam 2004a and 2004b.

[35] Zaehner 1962.

[36] Flood 1996: 7.

The primordialist position, on the other hand, is often apologetic, and expressed in the form of statements that are easy to falsify.[37] Its arguments are based largely on the fact that beliefs, practices, and texts identified as Hindu in the nineteenth century existed for several centuries before the arrival of the British. The occasional occurrence of the word Hindu, at least after the fourteenth century, in Indian sources is also taken as evidence for the existence of Hinduism before the colonial era. But the primordialists have failed to produce evidence to the effect that a Hindu universe was imagined before the nineteenth century in the same way as, for example, Christendom, the Islamicate, or the respective Buddhist, Jaina, Sikh, and Jewish worlds were imagined.

The essentialist approach of the constructionists and the primordialists takes religion as an always-already formed entity, with an essential core of its own. Changes caused by political, economic, and other factors are of course acknowledged and extensively discussed. That most aspects of religion, ranging from the institutional to the ritual, are subjected to transformation is also accepted. Even so, the insistence that there is an identifiable set of features inherent in a religion tends to essentialize the phenomenon. Essentialism, per se, is by no means undesirable. In fact, the identification of common traits, and their classification and categorization, constitutes one of the methods through which information is processed for the purpose of knowledge production. Essentialism is central to this mode of information processing.[38] It is through this imperative that the structuring of knowledge, and the process of conceptualization through definitions and taxonomies, become possible. Thus, essentialism is characteristic of at least some forms of knowledge production. The problem with it begins to manifest when the approach is generalized in order to essentialize everything. This is also true of the urge to theorize that informs so much of our contemporary academic pursuits.

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[37] One wonders if falsification is what authenticates their claims to the status of knowledge (in the Popperian sense).

[38] However, such an exercise does not in itself constitute knowledge, as the early Jaina theorists of South Asia very clearly understood.

Today, it is more-or-less an accepted maxim that theorizing is the only way of producing valid knowledge about the human world. The validity of the maxim itself has never been tested. It is assumed, for no sustainable reason, that knowledge production is contingent upon the production of theory. "Theories," according to one definition, "are nets cast to catch what we call 'the world'."[39] It has "promised the relief of new problems and new interests."[40] These are sober views, more in the nature of an apology rather than an argument for theory. Less temperate views exist. One of them, for instance, tells us that a theory enables us to "decide whether or not some newly discovered entity belongs to its domain", and to assign domains through arbitration when such decision-making involves a conflict.[41] Well? This means that theory is all about distinguishing an apple from an orange, an aircraft from a submarine, a Hindu from a Muslim, a Brahmin from a Dalit. Theory, then, is all about segregation, placing objects of inquiry in distinct, unique, and well-demarcated domains, where there are no possibilities of overlaps, exchanges, similarities or spillovers of any kind. Ensuring distinction and difference in their pristine forms is what this approach to theory is aimed at.

The urge to theorize every object of inquiry is in fact driven by the desire to endow everything with distinct and unalterable attributes of its own. It is a *universal* desire to *particularize*, to *differentiate*, to *break up*, and *dismantle*, and to assign to every object its own space or domain. When brought to the level of human beings, the message it sends out is too unambiguous to be missed. There are no shared experiences or shared histories, no common hopes and dreams, no common destinies either, no possibilities of realization, transformation, forgiveness, or redemption. It affirms and celebrates a life of self-assertion and chauvinism that nurtures indifference—if not intolerance and hatred—for the rest of the world.

The essentialism that lurks behind the theory-bug is not free from the effects of reification. It has its parallels in the unique-in-itself logic of the commodity produced by the capitalist praxis of production, and is, clearly, a classic instance of reification of the commodity logic. More dangerously, it is also in reified harmony with the rhetoric of ethnicity, caste, religion, separatism, hatred-nationalism, fundamentalism, and clash of civilizations, which are all governed by the same logic of uniqueness and ontological difference from the rest. What we see here is the infamous we-cannot-live-together mentality in a thoroughly reified, and therefore unconscious, form. It reminds us of Octavio Paz's Mexican who "shuts himself off from the world: from life and from death."[42]

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[39] Popper 2002: 37.

[40] Jameson 1991: 182.

[41] Balagangadhara 2005: 246.

We are not suggesting that difference is evil or that there are no differences in the world. The existence of difference is what necessitates theory in the first place. But the belief that theory alone can make knowledge possible results in either affirming difference where they may not really exist, or in undermining the presence or possibility of similarities, exchanges, interfaces, and overlaps between different objects. A theory of the market, as different from a theory of language or a theory of renunciation is understandable. But a theory of the market, distinct from a theory of money, commodity, trade, and inflation, can only offer us a tunnel vision of the market.

The moral of the above discussion is plain and simple: the production of knowledge is not at the mercy of theory. Theorizing as an academic enterprise has its palpable limits. Its possibilities are not endless or extendable to every object of inquiry. At the same time, these limits by no means exhaust the possibility of generating valid knowledge about the human world. Inquiries that do not culminate in a theory can be as fruitful, or even more meaningful, than the ones that do. The desire to theorize everything is not found to be springing from an examination of the possibility or otherwise of theorizing. It is an *a priori* position, governed by the processes of reification in the capitalist world of generalized commodity production. Its logic of uniqueness, distinction, and difference is also the one that informs the marketing of cars, cellphones, chocolates, and cigarettes on the one hand, and the passions that drive the rhetoric of ethnicities, religious fundamentalism, and clash of civilizations an the other.

Karl Marx theorized capital. Ferdinand de Saussure and Sigmund Freud produced theories of language and the unconscious respectively, no matter how unconvincing they were. Not all objects of inquiry enjoy similar advantages. It is too early to say whether religion is open to theorizing or not. It follows, then, that the question of identifying the essential core of Hinduism—or any religion, for that matter—has not arisen.

This study is an attempt to trace a prehistory of Hinduism. The geographical limits and the select traditions chosen for analysis presuppose that it is *a* prehistory, and not *the* prehistory of Hinduism. Many such prehistories are possible, which differ in varying degrees in their details. The larger trajectory of historical development, though, is likely to be similar, if not identical, as it is intricately entwined with the trajectory of the political economy.

Our study proceeds from the presumption that Hinduism was imagined and brought into existence in the course of the nineteenth century. To that extent, it shares one of the central premises of the constructionists that Hinduism is a new religion. Our starting point springs from the following historical considerations.

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[42] Paz 1961: 64.

We have already noticed that the word Hinduism, or its variants in any Indian language, did not exist before the year 1816. Far more compelling is the fact brought to light by an analysis of the context in which the word Hindu figured in the sources before the nineteenth century. Let us look at two instances of the use of the expression occurring in sources from the region taken up for study in this work. One is from the corpus of Vijayanagara inscriptions. Here, the king of Haṃpi is identified as 'Hindūrāya Suratrāṇa' or 'Hindūrāya Suratāḷu'. The expression may be roughly translated as "a Sultān among Hindu kings".[43] It is noteworthy that the word Hindu is placed in juxtaposition with an Islamic term, Sultān. It is not an autonomous or internally constituted marker of identity. In other words, the referent is elusive. A religious identity—like all identities—is by definition, relational, and therefore not altogether self-constituted. However, it has always been possible for Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to produce self-descriptions without invoking the other. Such is not the case with the use of 'Hindu' in the Vijayanagara inscriptions. The second instance is from the *Nandiyāgamalīle*, the hagiography of the saint Koḍēkallu Basava that we will take up for discussion in chapter 4. Hindu occurs twice in this text. Both figure in the same scene of action, and in both cases, the word is placed in contradistinction with Musalmāna, i.e., Muslim. Koḍēkallu Basava has set out on a long journey, wearing a 'Hindu' footwear on one leg and a 'Muslim' footwear on the other. Towards the last leg of his journey in northern India, a group of curious interlocutors ask him why he wore different footwear on each leg. To this, the saint offers an explanation which they find convincing.[44] The point to be noted is that Hindu has no independent or self constituted reference in this case too. It is a term that occurs as a relational expression, *vis-à-vis* Muslim. What the word contained or signified is, therefore, not clear to us in retrospect. Nowhere else in the text is Koḍēkallu Basava identified as a Hindu.

These two instances capture in a nutshell the manner in which Hindu as a marker of identity was deployed in the Deccan region before the nineteenth century. The use of the term from other parts of the Indian subcontinent follows this broad pattern. It occurs in a situation that warrants comparison with Islam. Where this is not the case, the expression signifies India as a geographical entity. The identification of Islam as a religion centered on the *Korān* and the Prophet, and as characterized by monotheism and opposition to idol worship, recurs constantly in the sources. This is clearly a self-definition of Islam, although practitioners consistently deviated from these norms by incorporating the worship of non-Islamic deities, polytheism, and adherence to tomb-worship into their everyday practices. Scholarly discussions are not duty-bound to accept such a self-definition as the essential constituent of Islam; for scholarly engagements are professionally obliged to ask why such self-definitions were arrived at, and not to take them at face value. Inasmuch as such self-definitions of Hinduism were never formulated before the nineteenth century, there arises the question why they were never attempted. Genuine scholarship must raise this question, rather than decrying the recent 'invention' of Hinduism, or making apologetic statements concerning the absence of Hinduism as a clearly-defined category before the nineteenth century.

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[43] See Wagoner 1996 for a lively discussion. Also see Wagoner 2000.

[44] *Nandiyāgamalīle*, 13.44 and 13.51.

An attempt is made in this study to understand a set of religious processes that unfurled between the eleventh and the nineteenth centuries in the Deccan region, especially in the present-day Karnataka, and partly, southern Maharashtra. The study is set against the backdrop of the changing nature of the political economy over these centuries, and how religious processes were constitutive of, or responded to, these changes. The foregrounding of class relations is central to this enterprise. Although it is now fashionable among a section of the academia to underrate the effects of class in the Indian context, and to foreground caste in its stead, our study will demonstrate why this view is misplaced.

It is generally presumed that religious identity is an essential component of the human world.[45] Thus, discussions on early Indian religion use expressions like Buddhist, Jaina, *vaidic* or Brāhmaṇical, and so on, rather uncritically to refer to the religion of the communities concerned. Chapter 2 of this study demonstrates why this presumption is historically unfounded. It shows, through an examination of texts and inscriptions from the Deccan region, that religious identities were created as a result of formidable historical processes during the eleventh and the twelfth centuries. Chapter 3 discusses how a new religious orthodoxy emerged between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries in the Deccan region. This orthodoxy commenced in the early twelfth century with Rāmānuja, who offered an ingenious interpretation of *vēdānta* in his scheme of qualified monism (*viśiṣṭādvaita*). Rāmānuja's system was profoundly influential, and its impress was felt in the systems developed by the pioneering dualist (*dvaita*) saint, Ānanda Tīrtha, and the leading exponent of monism (*advaita*), Vidyāraṇya. New religious forces in the fifteenth century, who were opposed to the tenets of *advaita*, *dvaita*, and *viśiṣṭādvaita*, were nonetheless influenced by them, and produced a rich body of exegetical works in the court of the Vijayanagara king, Dēvarāya II. Chapter 4 explores how these fifteenth-century projects and the changing class structure of the period paved way for innovative religious practices in the region by way of pioneering the establishment of new monastic institutions that were fundamentally different from the monasteries of the preceding centuries. It also examines how the new monasteries underwent further transformations in the course of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. Chapter 5 explores a great divergence in the practices of renunciation that began to unfold from the late fifteenth century. It explains how the divergence was governed by two diametrically opposite ethical paradigms produced by the political economy, one centering on the ethic of enterprise, and the other, on the ethic of complacency. Sainthood underwent tremendous transformations in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, paving way for the rise of stand-alone saints, who neither built monasteries nor were affiliated with any religious lineages. At the same time, existing monasteries expanded their portfolio to include a set of new initiatives that were crucial vis-à-vis programmes of the Christian missionaries. These processes are taken up for examination in chapter 6. The study concludes with an epilogue, which offers a prolegomenon for a fresh assessment of that great phenomenon of the nineteenth and twentieth-century religious history, called Hinduism.

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[45] See Balagangadhara 1994 for a poorly-informed critique of this position.