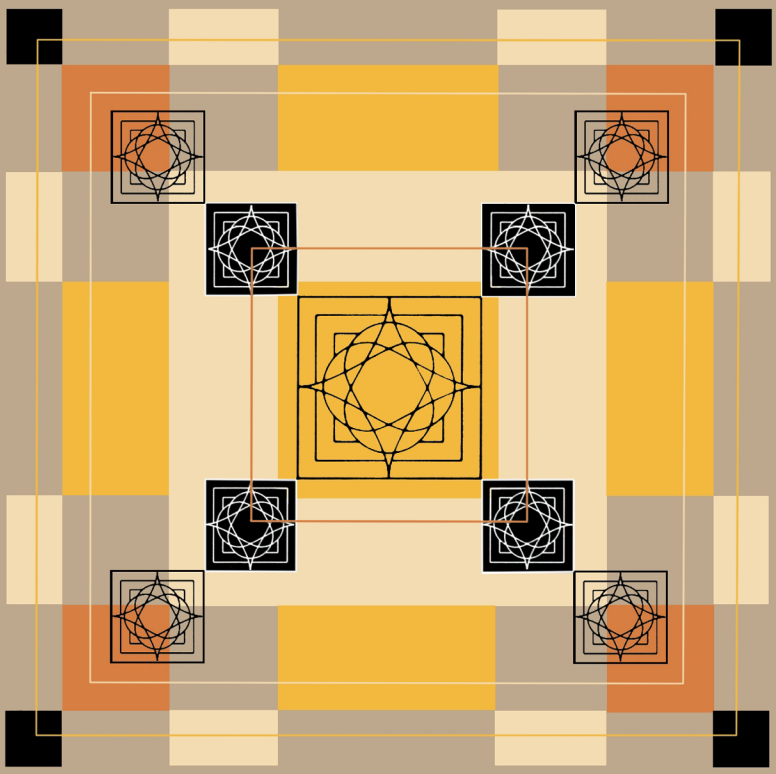
RELIGIONS OF INDIA IN PRACTICE

Edited by Donald S. Lopez, Jr.



PRINCETON READINGS IN RELIGIONS

RELIGIONS OF INDIA IN PRACTICE

PRINCETON READINGS IN RELIGIONS

Donald S. Lopez, Jr., Editor

TITLES IN THE SERIES

Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *Religions of India in Practice*

Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *Buddhism in Practice*

RELIGIONS OF INDIA IN PRACTICE

Donald S. Lopez, Jr., Editor

PRINCETON READINGS IN RELIGIONS

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

Published by Princeton University Press, 41 William Street,
Princeton, New Jersey 08540
In the United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, Chichester, West Sussex

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Religions of India in practice / edited by Donald S. Lopez, Jr.
p. cm. — (Princeton readings in religions)
Includes index.
ISBN 0-691-04325-6. — ISBN 0-691-04324-8 (pbk.)
1. India—Religion. I. Lopez, Donald S., 1952– . II. Series.
BL2001.2.R384 1994
294—dc20 94-34695

This book has been composed in Berkeley

Princeton University Press books are printed on acid-free paper and meet the guidelines for permanence and durability of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity of the Council on Library Resources

3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2
(pbk.)

DEDICATED TO

A. K. RAMANUJAN

1929–1993

PRINCETON READINGS IN RELIGIONS

Princeton Readings in Religions is a new series of anthologies on the religions of the world, representing the significant advances that have been made in the study of religions in the last thirty years. The sourcebooks used by the last generation of students placed a heavy emphasis on philosophy and on the religious expressions of elite groups in what were deemed the "classical" civilizations of Asia and the Middle East. Princeton Readings in Religions provides a different configuration of texts in an attempt better to represent the range of religious practices, placing particular emphasis on the ways in which texts are used in diverse contexts. The series therefore includes ritual manuals, hagiographical and autobiographical works, and folktales, as well as some ethnographic material. Many works are drawn from vernacular sources. The readings in the series are new in two senses. First, the majority of the works contained in the volumes have never have been translated into a Western language before. Second, the readings are new in the sense that each volume provides new ways to read and understand the religions of the world, breaking down the sometimes misleading stereotypes inherited from the past in an effort to provide both more expansive and more focused perspectives on the richness and diversity of religious expressions. The series is designed for use by a wide range of readers, with key terms translated and technical notes omitted. Each volume also contains a substantial introduction by a distinguished scholar in which the histories of the traditions are outlined and the significance of each of the works is explored.

Religions of India in Practice provides a particularly appropriate inaugural volume for the Princeton Readings in Religions. The thirty contributors include leading scholars of Indian religions, each of whom has provided one or more translations of key works, most of which are translated here for the first time. Each chapter in the volume begins with a substantial introduction in which the translator discusses the history and influence of the work, identifying points of particular difficulty or interest. Professor Richard Davis has provided an introduction to the entire volume, moving chronologically from the Indus Valley civilization to the modern period, identifying the place of each chapter in the currents of the religious traditions of India.

Three other volumes of the Princeton Readings in Religions are in press: *Religions of China in Practice*, *Religions of Japan in Practice*, and *Buddhism in Practice*.

Volumes currently nearing completion are devoted to: Islam in Asia, Islamic mysticism, and the religions of Tibet. Future volumes are planned for religions of Latin America, religions of Africa, as well as on Judaism and Christianity.

Donald S. Lopez, Jr.
Series Editor

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

The works in this volume are translated from many Indian languages. The translators have, in general, adhered to the standard transliteration system for each of the languages. Certain common place names and selected terms that have entered into English usage appear without diacritical marks.

CONTENTS

Remarkable Lives and Edifying Tales

Traditions in Transition and Conflict

CONTENTS BY TRADITIONS

As explained in the introduction, this volume is organized thematically, rather than by tradition, in order to suggest the interactions, intersections, and confluences in the religious practices of India. It is useful, nonetheless, to see also how the works included in this volume might be organized by tradition. Such an organization presents certain difficulties, as evidenced by the title of chapter 45, "Satya Pīr: Muslim Holy Man and Hindu God," which has been classed as "Hindu" below because Satya Pīr is more widely revered today by Hindus than by Muslims. There are three chapters, however, which are not listed below because they elude such classification: "Bāul Songs" (there are both Hindu and Muslim Bāuls), "Tamil Song to God as Child" (with songs to Muḥammad, Jesus, and Śiva's son), and "Kabīr." Kabīr (1398–1518) was an orphan raised by low-caste Hindu weavers who may have only recently converted to Islam. His guru was a devotee of Rāma. In his poetry, Kabīr criticized both Hindus and Muslims. According to a popular story, upon his death his body was claimed by both Hindus and Muslims. When they pulled back his shroud they found only petals.

Buddhist

Hindu

CONTRIBUTORS

Ali Asani teaches in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at Harvard University.

Guy Leon Beck teaches in the Department of Religious Studies at Louisana State University.

Douglas Renfrew Brooks teaches in the Department of Religion and Classics at University of Rochester.

John E. Cort teaches in the Department of Religion at Denison University.

Norman Cutler teaches in the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago.

Ronald M. Davidson teaches in the Department of Religious Studies at Fairfield University.

Richard H. Davis teaches in the Department of Religious Studies at Yale University.

Neal Delmonico teaches in the Religious Studies Program at Iowa State University.

Vinay Dharwadker teaches in the Department of English at the University of Oklahoma.

Carl Ernst teaches in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Ann Grodzins Gold teaches in the Department of Religion at Syracuse University.

Phyllis Granoff teaches in the Department of Religious Studies at McMaster University.

Lindsey Harlan teaches in the Department of Religion at Connecticut College.

Glen A. Hayes teaches in the Department of Religious Studies at Bloomfield College.

Marcia Hermansen teaches in the Department of Religious Studies at San Diego State University.

Dennis Hudson teaches in the Department of Religion at Smith College.

Rosalind Lefeber teaches in the Department of Religious Studies at McMaster University.

Todd T. Lewis teaches in the Department of Religious Studies at the College of the Holy Cross.

J. E. Llewellyn teaches in the Department of Religous Studies at Southwest Missouri State University.

Donald S. Lopez, Jr. teaches in the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of Michigan.

June McDaniel teaches in the Department of Philosophy and Religion at the College of Charleston.

Rachel Fell McDermott teaches in the Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Cultures at Barnard College.

Hew McLeod teaches in the Department of History at the University of Otago in New Zealand.

Mustansir Mir teaches Islamic Studies at International Islamic University in Malaysia.

Kirin Narayan teaches in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Wisconsin.

Patrick Olivelle teaches in the Center for Asian Studies at the University of Texas.

Michael D. Rabe teaches in the Art Department at St. Xavier's College in Chicago.

Paula Richman teaches in the Department of Religion at Oberlin College.

Carol Salomon teaches in the Department of Asian Languages and Literatures at the University of Washington.

Tony K. Stewart teaches in the Department of Philosophy and Religion at North Carolina State University.

David Gordon White teaches in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia.

RELIGIONS OF INDIA IN PRACTICE

INTRODUCTION

A Brief History of Religions in India

Richard H. Davis

Now Vidagdha, Śakala's son, asked him, "Yājñavalkya, how many gods are there?"

Following the text of the Veda, he replied, "Three hundred and three, and three thousand and three, as are mentioned in the Vedic hymn on the Viśvadevas."

"Right," replied Vidagdha, "but how many gods are there really, Yājñavalkya?"

"Thirty-three."

"Right," he assented, "but how many gods are there really, Yājñavalkya?"

"Six."

"Right," he persisted, "but how many gods are there really, Yājñavalkya?"

"Three."

"Right," he answered, "but how many gods are there really, Yājñavalkya?"

"Two."

"Right," Vidagdha replied, "but how many gods are there really, Yājñavalkya?"

"One and a half."

"Right," he agreed, "but how many gods are there really, Yājñavalkya?"

"One."

"Right," Vidagdha said. "And who are those three hundred and three, and three thousand and three gods?"

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 3.9.1

In one of the world's earliest recorded philosophical dialogues, the Indian sage Yājñavalkya pointed to the multiplicity of theological views concerning the number of gods in India. He then went on to show how, following different ways of enumerating them, each of these views could make sense.

Much the same can be said about the religions of India. Some scholars and observers focus on the tremendous diversity of distinct schools of thought and religious sects that have appeared over the course of Indian history. Others prefer to specify the three or five "great" or "world" religions that have occupied the subcontinent: Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, plus Jainism and Sikhism. And still

others, of a more syncretic persuasion, maintain there is really just one religious tradition.

The readings collected in this anthology convey much of the multiplicity, and may also suggest something of the unity of intent to which the syncretists point. The selections are drawn from ancient texts, medieval manuscripts, modern pamphlets, and contemporary fieldwork in rural and urban India. They represent every region of South Asia. Some are written texts reflecting the concerns of literate political elites and religious specialists, whereas others are transcriptions of oral narratives told by nonliterate peasants. Some texts are addressed to a public and pan-Indian audience, others to a limited coterie of initiates in an esoteric sect, and still others intended for a few women gathered in the courtyard for a household ceremony.

The editor has reinforced this diversity by not arranging the selections in the two most common ways. He has not grouped together all entries affiliated with each major religious community of India, nor has he placed them in a chronological sequence. Rather, he places the readings within several overarching themes and categories of discourse (hymns, rituals, narratives, and religious interactions), and encourages us to make our own connections. There is no set order. We may rearrange them as we see fit, finding new patterns in the materials as we do so.

For all of us who want to understand Indian religions more fully, there are major virtues to this varied collection and kaleidoscopic arrangement. The selections here highlight types of discourse (especially ritual, folktales, and oral narratives) and voices (vernacular, esoteric, domestic, and female) that have not been sufficiently represented in previous anthologies and standard accounts of Indian religions. Few of the usual canonical texts are here. Moreover, the selections juxtapose materials from different religious traditions that we often regard as separate and distinct. This format has the effect of broadening the range of what we consider. More important, it should push us to find areas of shared concern and dialogue, as well as areas of contestation and conflict among the widely varied materials of different communities. If this anthology helps us to see Indian religious history less as the unfolding of distinct, self-contained formations, and more as a dynamic process of borrowing, conflict, and interaction between and within religious traditions, it will have served a valuable role.

The same multiplicity and ahistorical arrangement, however, may leave the student approaching Indian religions for the first time in a state of bafflement. In the introduction I provide a brief account of the main periods, principal schools of thought, and most significant texts in Indian religions, to enable the reader to locate the individual selections of the anthology within a larger narrative. It is a historical thread to which the readings may, when necessary, be tied. Over the course of this account, I focus on certain key issues or points of controversy that appear and reappear through Indian religious history and in the anthology selections. I focus also on a set of terms—Veda, brahman, yoga, dharma, bhakti, Tantra, and the like—that constitute a shared religious vocabulary in India. As we will see, such terms were often considered too important to be left uncon-

tested, and so different authors or traditions would attempt to redefine the terms to suit their own purposes.[1]

The Question of Hinduism

The dominant feature of South Asian religious history is a broad group of interconnected traditions that we nowadays call "Hinduism." Although other distinct non-Hindu religious ideologies (notably Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity) have challenged its dominance, Hinduism is now and probably has been at all times the most prevalent religious persuasion of the subcontinent. According to the most recent census figures, 83 percent of India's population is classified as Hindu, a total of perhaps 700 million Hindus. This anthology reflects the dominance of Hinduism among the religions of India, devoting well over half the entries to Hindu materials, without isolating it from the other religious groups that have also made India their home.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that Hinduism does not share many of the integrating characteristics of the other religious traditions we conventionally label the "world religions." Hinduism has no founding figure such as the Buddha Śākyamuni, Jesus of Nazareth, or Muḥammad. It has no single text that can serve as a doctrinal point of reference, such as the Bibles of the Judaic and Christian traditions, the Islamic Qur'ān, or the Ādi Granth of the Sikhs. Hinduism has no single overarching institutional or ecclesiastical hierarchy capable of deciding questions of religious boundary or formulating standards of doctrine and practice.

This is not to say that Hinduism, lacking these supposedly "essential" attributes of other religions, is therefore not a religion. Rather, the historical process by which Hindus and others have come to consider Hinduism a unitary religious formation differs markedly from other traditions. In one respect, Hinduism is one of the oldest, if not the oldest continuous recorded religion, tracing itself back to a text that was already edited and put into final shape by about 1200 B.C.E. In another respect, though, it is the youngest, for it was only in the nineteenth century that the many indigenous Indian religious formations were collectively named "Hinduism." Before this, not only did these groups not have a name for themselves as a religious unity, but for the most part they did not consider that they were members of a single religious collectivity.

Since histories of names often tell us a good deal about the realities they signify, let us look more closely at the word "Hinduism." The term derives originally from the Indo-Aryan word for sea, *sindhu*, applied also to the Indus River. Persians to the west of the Indus picked up the term, modifying it phonologically to *hind*, and used it to refer also to the land of the Indus valley. From Persian it was borrowed into Greek and Latin, where *india* became the geographical designation for all the unknown territories beyond the Indus. Meanwhile, Muslims used *hindu* to refer to the native peoples of South Asia, and more specifically to those South Asians who did not convert to Islam, lending the term for the first time a reference

to religious persuasion. Non-Muslim Indians did not commonly take up the terminology, however, until much later.

Only in the nineteenth century did the colonial British begin to use the word Hinduism to refer to a supposed religious system encompassing the beliefs and practices of Indian peoples not adhering to other named religions such as Islam, Christianity, or Jainism. This coinage, based very indirectly on the indigenous term *sindhu*, followed the Enlightenment reification of the concept "religion" and the scholarly attempt to define a series of distinct individual "world religions," each with its own essence and historical unfolding. "Hindu" was then incorporated into the Indian lexicon, taken up by Indians eager to construct for themselves a counterpart to the seemingly monolithic Christianity of the colonizers. As much as anything, it may have been British census taking, with its neat categories of affiliation, that spread the usage of "Hindu" as the most common pan-Indian term of religious identity. To specify the nature of this religion, Western scholars and Indians alike projected the term retrospectively, to encompass a great historical range of religious texts and practices.

Even though anachronistic, the term "Hinduism" remains useful for describing and categorizing the various schools of thought and practice that grew up within a shared Indian society and employed a common religious vocabulary. However, applying a single term to cover a wide array of Indian religious phenomena from many different periods raises some obvious questions. Where is the system? What is the center of Hinduism? What is truly essential to Hinduism? And who determines this center, if there is any? Scholars and Indians have largely adopted two contrasting views in dealing with these questions, the "centralist" and the "pluralist" views.

Centralists identify a single, pan-Indian, more or less hegemonic, orthodox tradition, transmitted primarily in Sanskrit language, chiefly by members of the brahmanic class. The tradition centers around a Vedic lineage of texts, in which are included not only the Vedas themselves, but also the Mīmaṃsā, Dharmaśāstra, and Vedānta corpuses of texts and teachings. Vedic sacrifice is the privileged mode of ritual conduct, the template for all subsequent Indian ritualism. Various groups employing vernacular languages in preference to Sanskrit, questioning the caste order, and rejecting the authority of the Vedas, may periodically rebel against this center, but the orthodox, through an adept use of inclusion and repressive tolerance, manage to hold the high ground of religious authority. Previous anthologies of Indian religious literature have generally over-represented the texts identified by the centralists as forming a Hindu "canon"; in this anthology they are largely absent.

The pluralists, by contrast, envision a decentered profusion of ideas and practices all tolerated and incorporated under the big tent of Hinduism. No more concise statement of this view can be found than that of the eminent Sanskrit scholar J. A. B. van Buitenen in the 1986 *Encyclopedia Britannica*:

> In principle, Hinduism incorporates all forms of belief and worship without necessitating the selection or elimination of any. The Hindu is inclined to revere the divinity

> in every manifestation, whatever it may be, and is doctrinally tolerant. . . . Hinduism is, then, both a civilization and a conglomeration of religions, with neither a beginning, a founder, nor a central authority, hierarchy, or organization.

Adherents of this viewpoint commonly invoke natural metaphors. Hinduism is a "sponge" for all religious practices or a "jungle" where every religious tendency may flourish freely. Within the pluralist view, the Vedic tradition figures as one form of belief and worship among many, the concern of elite brahmans somewhat out of touch with the religious multiplicity all around them.

This anthology might seem to favor a pluralist viewpoint, simply by presenting so many varieties of Hindu literature, belief, and practice side by side. Yet contrary to the pluralist notion of passive Indian "tolerance," the materials here suggest a lively religious atmosphere of interaction and criticism, of satire and polemic, existing among different Hindu groups.

In India, various contending religious groups have vied to present a view of the cosmos, divinity, human society, and human purposes more compelling and more authoritative than others. One finds such all-encompassing visions presented in many Hindu texts or groups of texts at different periods of history: the Vedas, the Epics, the puranic theologies of Viṣṇu and Śiva, the medieval texts of the bhakti movements, and the formulations of synthetic Hinduism by modern reformers. The religious historian may identify these as the paradigmatic formations of Hinduism of their respective times. Yet such visions have never held sway without challenge, both from within and from outside of Hinduism.

The most serious challenges to Hindu formations have come from outside, from the early "heterodoxies" of Buddhism and Jainism, from medieval Islam, and from the missionary Christianity and post-Enlightenment worldviews of the colonial British. These challenges have been linked to shifts in the political sphere, when ruling elites have favored non-Hindu ideologies with their patronage and prestige. In each case, such fundamental provocations have led to important changes within the most prevalent forms of Hinduism. This introduction will follow this pattern of historical challenge and transformation.

The Indo-Aryans and the Vedas

The textual history of Indian religions begins with the entry into the subcontinent of groups of nomadic pastoralists who called themselves "Āryas," the noble ones. Originally they came from the steppes of south-central Russia, part of a larger tribal community that, beginning around 4000 B.C.E., migrated outward from their homeland in several directions, some westward into Europe and others southward into the Middle East and South Asia. These nomads were the first to ride and harness horses; they also invented the chariot and the spoked wheel and fabricated weapons of copper and bronze. Such material innovations gained them obvious military advantages, and they were able to impose themselves on most of the indigenous peoples they encountered as they migrated. Wherever they went

they took with them their language, and it was this language that formed the historical basis for Greek, Latin, the Romance languages, German, English, Persian, Sanskrit, and most of the modern languages of northern India. We now call these pastoral peoples the Indo-Europeans, and those who migrated south into the Iranian plateau and the Indian subcontinent we call the Indo-Aryans.

As early as about 2000 B.C.E., Indo-Aryan peoples began to move gradually into the Indus River Valley in small tribal groups. In 1200 B.C.E., they were still located primarily in the Punjab, the fertile area drained by the five rivers of the Indus system, but by 600 B.C.E. the Indo-Aryans had gained political and social dominance over the Gangetic plain and throughout much of northern India.

The Ṛg Veda

The religious beliefs and practices of this community are contained in a corpus of texts called the Vedas. Since the term *Veda* comes up frequently in all discussions of Indian religious history, it is helpful to consider briefly some of its meanings and usages. The term derives from the verbal root *vid*, "to know," and so the broadest meaning of *Veda* is "knowledge," more specifically knowledge of the highest sort, religious knowledge. It denotes several compendia of religious knowledge composed in an early form of Sanskrit (the "perfected" language) by the Indo-Aryan community, the four Vedic "collections" (*samhitā*): the *Ṛg Veda*, *Yajur Veda*, *Sāma Veda*, and the *Atharva Veda*. Supplementary compositions were attached to each of these four Vedic collections—namely, the Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, and Upaniṣads—and these too became part of the Veda. This entire corpus of sacred literature came to be portrayed by its proponents as revelation, something that was only "heard" and not composed by human beings. Additional texts were later added to the corpus: the Vedāṅgas or "limbs" of the Veda, auxiliary works that aimed to explain and extend the significance of the Vedas. These later texts did not have the same revelatory status as the Vedas themselves, but they did belong to the Vedic corpus in an extended sense. The Vedas constitute a huge, diverse, and fascinating corpus of texts composed over many centuries.

The earliest of the Vedic collections, and one of the world's oldest intact religious texts, is the *Ṛg Veda*. It consists of 1,028 hymns, numbering around 10,000 verses, roughly equal in size to the complete works of Homer. These hymns were composed over a period of several hundred years by different lineages or families of poet-priests, and then compiled into a single large collection sometime around 1200–1000 B.C.E. This great collection was carefully memorized and transmitted orally, virtually without alterations, for almost 3,000 years by generations of religious specialists.

The hymns of the *Ṛg Veda* reflect the religious concerns and social values of the Indo-Aryan community as it settled in the Punjab. Most often the hymns address and praise a pantheon of deities, of whom the most important is undoubtedly Indra. The hymns portray Indra as an active, powerful, unpredictable, combative god who leads the other gods in a series of antagonistic encounters

with a competing group of superhuman beings, the demons. The poets honor and extol Indra for his courage and strength, and also supplicate him to be generous to his votaries. Moreover, they view him as a model chieftain: as Indra leads the gods in defeating their enemies, the poets proclaim, so may our leaders guide us to victory over our enemies.

Indra's paradigmatic status reminds us that the Indo-Aryans were not simply occupying uninhabited territory as they moved into the Indian subcontinent. They encountered other peoples there whom they regarded as posing a threat to their own well-being and expansion. These others, often referred to as *dāsas*, were described in the *Ṛg Veda* as dark-skinned, flat-featured stealers of cattle, speaking a different language and living in fortified citadels.

In fact, from around 2500 to 1700 B.C.E. a complex, urbanized, centrally organized civilization flourished in the Indus River Valley, with two capital cities and a host of other towns and smaller settlements. Although archeologists have excavated a great deal of evidence from the Indus Valley civilization, including several thousand brief inscriptions, much about its religious culture remains mysterious since no one has yet convincingly deciphered the Indus Valley script. Yet most linguists believe the language of this civilization was a member of the Dravidian family, which also includes the languages of southern India where the Indo-Aryan language did not penetrate. This suggests that the Indus Valley civilization was linked, in language and presumably in culture, with pre-Aryan peoples in other parts of the subcontinent.

Many elements of Indus Valley material culture suggest religious usage, and these have led scholars to postulate Indus Valley influence on the development of later Indian religion. For example, archeologists have interpreted the numerous terra-cotta figurines of fleshy women with accentuated breasts and hips and fabulous headpieces found in the Indus Valley cities as popular representations of a "Great Mother," whose domestic and rural cult would reappear in medieval Hindu literature. While such connections remain speculative, they do point to an important problem in Indian religious history. Much that appears as innovation in recorded Indian religious traditions may have been borrowed from nonliterate or undeciphered traditions that we do not yet know.

Although the urban civilization of the Indus Valley had largely collapsed prior to the arrival of the Indo-Aryans, the dāsas of the *Ṛg Veda* were probably the descendants of that culture, and they must have posed a significant obstacle to Indo-Aryan expansion. The *Ṛg Veda* shows us an Indo-Aryan culture primed for battle. Even the poets participated in battle, apparently, as singing charioteers, invoking Indra's strength on behalf of the warriors as they drove the horses.

If Indra was for the *Ṛg Veda* poets the divine prototype of the warrior, the second most important deity in the pantheon, Agni, can be seen as the model priest. Agni is fire, in its multiple forms: the sun, the hearth fire, the fire of the sacrifice, the digestive fire in one's belly, and the fire of poetic inspiration. But Agni's primary role in the *Ṛg Veda* pertains to sacrifice (*yajña*), the central ritual practice of Vedic society. Agni is the priest of the gods and yet is also accessible

to humans, so he is most fit to serve in sacrifice as the primary intermediary, bringing gods and humans together. The poets of the *Ṛg Veda* know sacrifice to be a powerful ritual, one that enables the gods to defeat the demons and that likewise can assist the Aryans to overcome their earthly enemies. It brings a host of worldly results: wealth, cattle, victory, and ultimately order. Yet in the *Ṛg Veda* sacrifice remains rather loosely organized, inchoate, experimental; only later is it systematized and elaborated into a full-fledged worldview.

One other figure in the Ṛg Vedic pantheon deserves attention: the mysterious Soma, also closely associated with sacrifice. Soma is simultaneously a plant, a liquid made by crushing the stalks of that plant, and a god personifying the effects of ingesting this concoction. The identity of the botanical soma has proved to be a major scholarly conundrum, but the effects ascribed in the *Ṛg Veda* to drinking its juice are clear enough. It is a drink of inspiration, of vision, of revelation. At their sacrificial gatherings the poets pound and imbibe the soma juice, and through it they come to mingle with the gods. They perceive the resemblances and identities between things that we normally see as different and unrelated, weaving the world together in a fabric of connectedness. The revelations inspired by soma, moreover, are not regarded as mere hallucinations or dreams, but as more real, more true than the awareness of normal consciousness. This is the first example of a recurrent theme in Indian religions: what is ontologically most real is often not accessible through ordinary human experience but must be sought through some other means—whether it be soma, yoga, meditation, devotional fervor, or ritual.

Sacrifice and Society

If the Indo-Aryans entered India as nomads over the ruins of the urban civilization of the Indus Valley, during the period from 1200 to 600 B.C.E. they reinvented urban society on a new cultural basis. The later Vedic literature reflects the social transformations of this period, particularly the growing role of sacrifice in the religious life of the Indo-Aryans and the beginnings of criticism of sacrifice. By 600 B.C.E. the Indo-Aryan community had changed from a nomadic and pastoral tribal society into a predominantly agrarian one. The introduction of iron during this period facilitated the clearing of the heavily forested Gangetic plain and the development of plough agriculture. A more stable population and greater food resources led in turn to larger settlements, and the tribal organization of the Indo-Aryan nomads began to give way to an incipient class society based on occupational specialization and status distinction. Those outside the Indo-Aryan community, rather than being treated as threatening dāsas, were increasingly incorporated into society as laborers and social inferiors, śūdras. Larger political formations, primarily kingdoms, began to form, and with these early kingdoms came the rebirth of cities as capitals and centers of trade. By 600 B.C.E. there were a dozen substantial cities in northern India.

These changes naturally had their consequences for Vedic religion. Surplus

production enabled society to support a nonproducing class of religious specialists, who could devote themselves to elaborating sacrificial ritual and articulating its significance. At the same time, the new rulers found in increasingly dramatic sacrifice a means to extend and legitimate their political authority over larger, mixed populations. The interests of nascent ruling and priestly groups thus converged in sacrifice. And with the defeat of the Indo-Aryans' primary autochthonous opponents, sacrifice came to be seen less as a way of defeating enemies than as a means of creating, maintaining, and stabilizing the order of the cosmos and of society.

One can already see this in some of the later hymns of the *Ṛg Veda*, most notably the famous Puruṣasūkta (*Ṛg Veda* 10.90), where the entire cosmos as well as human society come into being out of a primordial sacrifice. The sacrificial cosmology emerges still more clearly in the later Vedic texts devoted to prescribing sacrificial procedures (the *Yajur Veda*) and the interpretive texts known as the Brāhmaṇas. These texts outline a complex system of sacrificial practice, ranging in scale from modest domestic rites around home fires to elaborate public ceremonies sponsored by the wealthiest kings. The gods who figured so importantly in the *Ṛg Veda* seem to have been demoted; what is most important in the later Vedic period is the sacrifice itself.

As the role of sacrifice grew, so did the status of the new group of religious specialists who called themselves *brāhmaṇas* (Anglicized as "brahman" or "brahmin"). Like *Veda*, this is a crucial term in the history of Indian religions. The poets of the *Ṛg Veda* employ the term *brahman* primarily to refer to the Vedic hymns themselves, understood as powerful and efficacious speech. The notion that certain kinds of liturgical speech are inherently powerful is common to many schools of Indian religious thought. The Indian term most often used for such potent verbal formulae is *mantra*. The *Ṛg Veda* poets also used *brāhmaṇa* to refer by extension to those who fashioned and recited the hymns. At that time the brahman reciters did not constitute a hereditary or endogamous social group, but in later Vedic texts *brāhmaṇa* came to be defined, at least by the brahmans themselves, as a hereditary occupational social group, specializing in ritual matters and the teaching of the Vedas.

A crucial first step in the social institutionalization of the brahman class can be found in the Puruṣasūkta hymn. According to this hymn, four social classes emerged from the Puruṣa, the original sacrificial victim: the brahmans from his mouth, the kṣatriyas (warriors) from his arms, the vaiśyas (merchants) from his loins, and the śūdras (servants) from his feet. Thus the poem portrays the brahmans and other social classes not simply as social groups, but as an order of creation. Because the brahmans emerge from the mouth of the Puruṣa, they enjoy in this order the highest status.

The Puruṣasūkta hymn is the earliest depiction of what later became known as the fourfold *varṇa* scheme, a model of society as an organic hierarchized unity of classes or castes that was to have great persistence through Indian history. The word "caste" derives from *casta*, the Portuguese word for social class. Yet histor-

ically it was a flexible and contentious model, one that was just as often questioned and opposed as it was accepted and defended. One can get a taste of the kind of criticism and satire that was recurrently directed against brahmanic claims of privilege in Kabīr's poem, "The Sapling and the Seed" (Chapter 2), while a defense of the varṇa system appears even in such an unlikely setting as the "Dog Oracles" of the *Śarṅgadhara Paddhati* (Chapter 16).

The Upaniṣads and the Renunciatory Model

Within the supplementary texts of the Vedic corpus composed around 900–600 B.C.E., one sees evidence both of a growing sophistication in reflection concerning the sacrifice and also the beginnings of an opposition to sacrifice. The texts called the Brāhmaṇas, arising from discussions and controversies that engaged the new class of brahman ritualists as they conducted the sacrifices, devote themselves particularly to explication of ritual action, providing a learned commentary on the myriad sacrifices of the Vedic system. The idea underlying these hermeneutical texts is that the most adept priest not only performs the actions of sacrifice, but also understands their inner meanings.

The Āraṇyakas (literally, "forest books") and especially the Upaniṣads ("sitting close to a teacher") took the sacrificial worldview in a different direction. As their names imply, these texts were intended for a more restricted audience, often recounting private discussions between teachers and students in the forest. The Upaniṣads pose themselves, and were later accepted by many Indians, as the "culmination of the Veda" (*vedānta*), its highest teachings. For example, in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, one of the earliest and most influential Upaniṣads, we learn of the brahman teacher Yājñavalkya, whom we have already met in his enumeration of the gods. At the conclusion of a royal sacrifice, Yājñavalkya claims that he is the most knowledgeable of all present in Vedic matters. A series of interlocutors—not only priests, but also a woman, a cart driver, and the king himself—question him, trying to rebuff his declaration and gain for themselves the thousand head of cattle he has claimed as his reward. Yet as Yājñavalkya substantiates his superior Vedic knowledge, he introduces several important ideas unknown to earlier Vedic tradition. So too the other Upaniṣads: together they introduce a set of new concepts that grow out of earlier Vedic thought while calling into question some of its central premises. These concepts, simultaneously old and new, proved to raise enduring issues for Indian religious and philosophical debate.

Yājñavalkya was the first recorded spokesman for the notion of transmigration, which holds that upon death a person is neither annihilated nor transported to some other world in perpetuity, but rather returns to worldly life, to live and die again in a new mortal form. This continuing succession of life, death, and rebirth is termed *saṃsāra* (circling, wandering) in the Upaniṣads. *Saṃsāra* comes to denote not just the individual wandering of a person from life to life, but also the

entire world process seen as a perpetual flux. This cyclical worldview of the Upaniṣads grows out of an earlier Vedic concern with natural cycles of the moon, day and night, and the seasons, but projects it in a new direction.

Although transmigration answers the question of beginnings and ends, it also raises two new issues. What determines a person's subsequent form of rebirth? Is there anything other than eternal transmigration? To answer the first question, Yājñavalkya redefines the Vedic notion of *karman*. *Karman* (derived from the verb root *kṛ*, to do or to make, and usually Anglicized as "karma,") means action in a very broad sense; in the Vedas the term refers particularly to sacrificial actions, as the most efficacious kind of activity. In Vedic sacrifice, all ritual actions have consequences, leading to fruits (*phala*) that are often not apparent at the time but will inevitably ripen. Yājñavalkya accepts this extended notion of causality and gives it a moral dimension: the moral character of one's actions in this lifetime determines the status of one's rebirth in the next. Behave in this life as a god and you will become a god. But gods, in this view, are not immortal either, and may after a long period of heavenly hedonism be reborn as humans.

Yājñavalkya also suggests an alternative to this endless cycle of becoming. The release from the cycle of rebirth is most often called *mokṣa*, liberation or salvation. According to Yājñavalkya an individual may attain liberation through lack of desire, since desire is what engenders saṃsāra in the first place.

In postulating an alternative state superior to worldly life and attainable through individual conscious effort, mokṣa is perhaps the most consequential of all Upaniṣadic ideas for later Indian religious history. In contrast to the Vedic ideology of sacrifice, in which goals were as much social and collective as individual, the pursuit of mokṣa takes an individualist goal to be the highest attainment. If Vedic sacrifice was responsible for engendering and maintaining the world process, the search for mokṣa posed a direct abnegation of that process, an escape from saṃsāra into something transcendent. This division of aims forms a major point of contention throughout Indian religious history. "Ascetic Withdrawal or Social Engagement" (Chapter 37), a collection of passages from Vedic and other sources, engages the issue directly, and it reappears centuries later in the life stories of two modern women renouncers, Mīrāṃ (Chapter 31) and Śrī Arcanāpuri Mā (Chapter 27).

Although the Upaniṣads are not united in their views, the strategies they recommend to those seeking mokṣa most often include a regimen of renunciation and asceticism coupled with instruction in the higher forms of knowledge, namely, the world according to the Upaniṣads. If mokṣa is an escape from the world cycle, it makes sense that one would reach it through progressive abstention from worldly involvements. That is exactly what the renouncer (*sannyāsin*) does. He (or occasionally she) would leave home and family to live in relatively isolated and austere circumstances, sleeping on the ground, restricting the diet, practicing control of the breath, and bringing the senses under control—in short, withdrawing from all that might bind one to the world, with the ultimate goal of escaping

from rebirth itself. Such psychophysical practices were not confined to adherents of the Upaniṣads, as we will see, but the logic of renunciatory practice was first articulated in Upaniṣadic texts such as the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*.

The Vedas, then, contained a large variety of religious ideas and practices, introducing a host of terms and questions that would recur throughout Indian religious history. In sacrifice, the Vedas provided a system of public and private rituals that engendered the order of cosmos and of society, and that was utilized by political powers to validate their own authority. The brahmans appeared as an endogamous class of religious and intellectual specialists claiming high social status, and through the articulation of the varṇa system they portrayed society as an organic unity of distinct ranked classes pursuing different occupational specialties. The renunciatory model presented by the Upaniṣads centered around the individual pursuit of liberation through austerity and knowledge.

In later times the Vedas became one gauge for Hindu "orthodoxy." Those who adhered most closely to the Vedic tradition claimed a superior status and judged others as either within or outside the Vedic fold, even though the actual language of the Vedic texts had become incomprehensible to most. Many new Hindu groups honoring new deities with new forms of worship claimed allegiance to the Vedas, or portrayed themselves as extensions of the Vedas. The epic *Mahābhārata*, for example, poses itself as the "fifth Veda," whereas the Vaiṣṇava devotional poetry of Nammāḻvār is said to constitute a "Tamil Veda." Nineteenth- and twentieth-century reformist movements like the Brāhmo Samāj and the Ārya Samāj sought to return Hinduism to what they claimed were its purer Vedic roots.

Proximity to the Vedic tradition, however, is not an altogether reliable criterion for defining Hinduism. Although non-Hindus like Buddhists and Jains define themselves by rejecting the authoritative claims of the Vedas, so too do many later religious teachers such as Kabīr and the Bengali Bāuls, whom most Hindus view as Hindu. Theistic Hindu schools often contested Vedic authority in a different manner. Rather than rejecting the Vedas outright, the Śaiva devotional poet Māṇikkavācakar, for instance, simply asserts that Śiva is "Lord over the Vedas" (Chapter 7). His strategy, typical of many, is to establish a new hierarchy of religious values, within which the Vedas are included but subsumed under the higher authority of his god, Śiva.

In the end, what is most striking about the Vedas is their longevity rather than their hegemony. In the shifting, changing, contentious discourse of Indian religious history, one hears over and over echoes of the concerns, the terms, the goals, and the practices first recorded in India in the ancient Vedas.

The New Religions of the Sixth Century B.C.E.

Upaniṣadic sages like Yājñavalkya were not the only renouncers in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.E. From all indications, there were many peripatetic seekers wandering the fringes of Gangetic civilization during this period. The authors and

teachers of the Upaniṣads allied themselves with the Vedas, recommending that renouncers continue reciting the Vedas and view their ascetic practices as "interior sacrifice." Other forest teachers of the same period, including some undoubtedly not of the Indo-Aryan community, were willing to dispense altogether with Vedic models. They developed new teachings and practices with no attempt to link them to the established ideology of sacrifice and the Vedas. A teacher named Ajita of the Hair-Blanket proclaimed a thoroughgoing materialism (later identified as the Cārvāka school), denying both ethical prescriptions and existence after death. The Ājīvika school led by Makkhali Gosāla adhered to a doctrine of fatalism, claiming that human free will was an illusion; destiny was all.

Varied as they were, most teachers accepted a common intellectual foundation, not differing greatly from that taught by Yājñavalkya. With few exceptions, they accepted the notion of cyclical transmigration (*saṃsāra*), the causal connection between act and consequence (*karman*) as the moral determinant of one's rebirth, and the possibility of escape (*mokṣa*) from this cyclical existence. Within this broad consensus, disagreement and debate continued. What is the underlying cause of saṃsāra? What kinds of activities engender karma? What are the best means of avoiding or removing the consequences of one's actions? What is the character of mokṣa? What exactly is it that attains liberation?

The seekers also generally accepted certain kinds of psychological and physical practices as particularly conducive to the religious attainments they sought. The general Indian term for such practices is *yoga*, from the verbal root *yuj*, to bind together, as one harnesses animals to a yoke. In Indian religious discourse, *yoga* refers to all sorts of disciplined practices aimed at restraining one's unruly inclinations in order to attain a higher state of concentration or "one-pointedness." In the vivid metaphor of one Upaniṣad, the senses are wild horses hitched to the chariot of the body; the mind is the charioteer who must somehow bring them under control. Yoga is what one uses to do so.

The earliest systematic exposition of yoga is found in the *Yogasūtras*, a text composed by Patañjali in about the second century B.C.E. but systematizing a much older body of practices. Patañjali describes eight "limbs" of yoga, starting with physical restraints such as limiting one's food and practicing celibacy, proceeding through a mastery of physical postures, the control of the breath, gradual withdrawal of the senses from the outer world, and culminating in fixed meditative awareness. As the practitioner masters each limb, he or she gradually detaches from the physical world, reins in the wayward senses, and achieves a reintegration or unification of self.

Patañjali himself adhered to the dualistic metaphysics of the Sāṃkhya school, but the techniques he described and systematized were practical tools for all religious seekers, adaptable to various philosophical viewpoints. Later in Indian religious history, new groups developed new forms of yogic practice as well. Medieval devotional and tantric forms of yoga emphasize such practices as meditative visualization of deities (Chapter 11), repetitive chanting of the name of God (Chapters 4, 5, 40), and ritualized sexual intercourse (Chapters 9, 20), among

many others. Alchemists incorporated yoga into their transformative practices (Chapter 15), and non-Hindu religious specialists like Islamic Sufis also adapted yogic techniques to their own purposes.

Out of the questing milieu of the sixth century B.C.E. grew two new religious formations that have had a powerful and continuing impact on Indian religions—Jainism and Buddhism. Both were historically established in the Magadha region (present-day Bihar) by members of the warrior class who renounced their positions in society to find enlightenment: Vardhamāna (c. 599–527 B.C.E.) called Mahāvīra ("great hero"), and Siddhārtha Gautama (c. 566–486 B.C.E.) called the Buddha ("awakened one"). Both advocated paths of monastic austerity as the most effective means of attaining liberation, and both were critical of the Vedic formation. Adherents of the Vedas, in turn, characterized followers of Jainism and Buddhism as "outside the Veda," and accordingly modern scholars often classify the two religions as heterodoxies in contrast to Vedic orthodoxy.

Jainism

The name Jains use to designate themselves, *jaina*, derives from the verbal root *ji*, to conquer, and points to the central religious concern of the Jain community. Jaina monks must fight an ascetic battle to conquer the senses and karma, seeking to attain a purity of soul that liberates them from all bondage. Those who have succeeded in this quest are Jinas, conquerors, and their followers are Jainas.

According to Jain tradition, Vardhamāna Mahāvīra was only the most recent in a succession of twenty-four Tīrthaṅkaras, or "path-makers." His most immediate predecessor, Pārśva, may well have founded an earlier Jain community, but Mahāvīra is the first clearly attested historical Jain leader. Born of royal parents, the traditional biographies relate, Mahāvīra left his family and home at age thirty, abandoned all possessions, stripped off his clothes, and pulled out his hair by the roots. With these dramatic renunciatory acts he began twelve years of severe austerities, until finally at the age of forty-two he attained mokṣa, and so became a Jina or Tīrthaṅkara. Gradually a large group of followers grew around him. The first disciple was Indrabhūti Gautama, a proud brahman and Vedic scholar; in fact, Vardhamāna's eleven primary disciples were all converted brahmans. According to one tradition, Indrabhūti's conversion occurred when Mahāvīra delivered a sermon on the virtues of nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*) at a Vedic animal sacrifice—pointing to a major issue on which the Jains would most pointedly criticize the Vedic order.

Mahāvīra was a human being born of human parents, but he was also, as all Jain accounts make abundantly clear, something more than human. They describe his conception and birth as surrounded by auspicious omens and marvels preordaining his spiritual career. After he was liberated, the supramundane quality of Mahāvīra became still more apparent. His body, free of all impurities, was said to shine like a crystal on all sides. According to the Jain texts, the Vedic gods themselves, far from condescending to Mahāvīra as a mere mortal, recognized

that his powers, knowledge, and status were superior to their own and honored him accordingly. Later Jain reformers like Ācārya Vijay Ānandsūri (Chapter 42) argue that the Jina is God.

The Jain community, male and female, divided itself into two groups: lay followers and renouncers. For lay followers, Mahāvīra and later Jain preceptors advocated self-restraints and vows. A Jain layperson should avoid meat, wine, honey, and snacking at night. One should also give up falsehood, stealing, and especially violence. Jain texts also recommend fasting and distributing one's wealth to monks, nuns, and the poor as means of strengthening the discipline of a lay adherent.

Jains soon developed forms of devotional practice directed toward the Tīrthaṅkaras and other worthy figures. Most prominent among these rituals is devapūjā, in which followers worship the Jinas physically represented by statues depicting them in poses of deepest meditation (Chapter 19). Worshipers approach and bow before the image, chant the Jina's names, circumambulate, bathe the image, make a series of physical offerings to it, and wave lamps before it. Considering the transcendent status of the liberated beings, strict-minded Jains do not regard the Jinas as actually present in their images, nor do they suppose that offerings have any effect on the Jina, but rather view devapūjā as a meditational discipline intended to remind worshipers of the ideal state achieved by the Jina and to inspire them to seek that state for themselves. However, Jain devotional hymns indicate that most Jains have looked to the Tīrthaṅkara for direct benefits, and have believed the Jina to inhabit the images they honored.

Jains also incorporated into their temple liturgy the worship of goddesses and other guardian deities, lesser beings who may intervene in worldly affairs on behalf of the votary. As the stories in "Jain Stories of Miraculous Power" (Chapter 28) indicate, Jaina goddesses like Cakrā could grant practical rewards such as wealth and release from earthly prison, as well as helping their devotees on the way to escaping the prison of karma.

The ethical and ritual disciplines of the Jain laity were regarded as preparations for the more rigorous and more efficacious life of a Jain renouncer. Indeed, Jains organized their religion largely around the necessity of renunciation for attaining true purity of soul. This central theme emerges even in the didactic stories of medieval Jain collections (Chapter 26), in which the narrator seeks to instill in his audience a feeling of revulsion toward the world and to nudge it toward renunciation through exaggeration and macabre humor.

When a lay person decides to relinquish worldly life, this is treated as a great event both in the prospective renouncer's own spiritual career and in the life of the Jain community. In the ceremony of renouncing social life and entering upon a new monastic life—a veritable death and rebirth—Jain initiates cast off all their former possessions, pull out their hair in large handfuls, and give up their own names. They are presented with the austere provisions of mendicants and with new monastic names. At this point the new monk or nun undertakes the five "great vows," abstaining from all violence, dishonesty, theft, sexual intercourse,

and personal possessions, under the close supervision of monastic preceptors. Through self-restraint, careful conduct, physical austerities, and meditations, the anchorite gradually removes the karma that inhibits the soul's inherent powers and virtues, aiming always at the final victory. The Jain path of rigorous austerity may culminate most dramatically in sallekhanā, voluntary self-starvation, in which the Jain renunciant gradually abandons the body itself for the sake of the soul's ultimate purity.

One of the first major royal patrons of Jainism was the Mauryan emperor Candragupta I (r. 321–297 B.C.E.). According to Jain tradition, this ruler was also involved in the major schism of Jainism into two communities, named Śvetāmbara (white-clad) and Digambara (sky-clad—that is, naked) after the monks' characteristic robes or lack thereof. In the third century B.C.E., the Jain leader Bhadrabāhu apparently moved half the Jain community south to Karnataka in order to escape a famine in Candragupta's kingdom. Candragupta himself went along as Bhadrabāhu's disciple. Divided geographically, the two Jain communities began to diverge doctrinally, and eventually formalized those differences at the Council of Vallabhī in the fifth century C.E. The Śvetāmbaras were and continue to be based primarily in the western Indian regions of Rajasthan and Gujarat, whereas the Digambaras have always been most prominent in Karnataka, and were also influential for a time in Tamilnadu.

Throughout the early medieval period, Jain monks and advisers played prominent roles in the courts of many Indian rulers. During this period Jain authors produced a remarkable array of literary and scholarly works in virtually every field, and Jain patrons sponsored impressive Jain temples. In the later medieval period, with Islamic rulers powerful in northern India and the Hindu state of Vijayanagar dominating the south, Jains lost much of their public patronage and became a more self-sufficient, inward-looking community. They survived, however, and now number some four million adherents, mostly in India but with substantial groups of Jains in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and other parts of the English-speaking world.

Buddhism

Buddhists are those who follow the way of the buddhas, beings who have fully "awakened" (from the root *budh*, to wake up) to the true nature of things. In our historical era, the Awakened One was a kṣatriya named Siddhārtha Gautama, born in the foothills of the Himalaya Mountains in about 566 B.C.E. According to traditional accounts, the future Buddha Siddhārtha spent the first twenty-nine years of his life ensconced in affluent family life before renouncing society to seek liberation as a wandering ascetic. After spending six years in austerities, study, and meditation, Siddhārtha sat down under a fig tree in the town of Bodh Gaya one night in 531 B.C.E. and vowed that he would not get up until he had gained enlightenment. That night he attained nirvāṇa and became a buddha. One may view the remainder of the Buddha's life, and indeed all of Buddhist religion, as

an attempt to enable others to replicate for themselves what Siddhārtha accomplished that night under the Bodhi tree.

The Buddha delivered his first public discourse, the first "turning of the wheel of Buddhist doctrine (*dharma*)," to an audience of five ascetics outside Varanasi. As soon as he had gathered sixty disciples, he sent them out in all directions to spread his teachings. From its inception, Buddhism was a proselytizing religion, and within a few centuries it was successful not just in the Indo-Aryan society of northern India but throughout South Asia. Spreading the message still further afield, Buddhist missionaries soon traveled to Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia as far as Indonesia, China, Japan, Korea, and Tibet. From the second through the seventh centuries C.E., Buddhism was the major cosmopolitan religion throughout Asia and probably the predominant religious community in the world at that time.

As a pan-Asian religion, Buddhism receives a separate volume in this series. It would be redundant to attempt to outline the complex doctrines or practices of Buddhism here. But Buddhism was first a powerful religious movement in India, and it had a major impact on the development of other religions in India, so it is necessary to refer to a few of its salient features.

Like Mahāvīra and the early Jains, the Buddha considered that the most effective way for his disciples to work toward individual salvation was in small monastic groups. Although renunciation of society was necessary, it was desirable also to avoid the isolation of the hermit. Monastic cells would allow for instruction, support, and enforcement of moral precepts. Establishing mendicant orders, however, posed a challenge to the brahmanic religious specialists and the sacrificial order. After all, mendicants still depend on alms, and the surplus production available to support the various religious claimants was finite.

In this competitive situation the Buddha and his followers developed a penetrating critique of the Vedic religion, much as the Jains did. Not only did the Buddha denounce the public sacrifices advocated by brahman specialists as overly costly, violent, and uncertain in their results, but he also sought to undercut the brahmans' own claims to authority. Satirizing the creation myth of *Ṛg Veda* 10.90, in which the brahman class emerges from the mouth of the primordial male Puruṣa, he pointed out that anyone could see that brahmans in fact emerge from the same female bodily organ as everybody else. He questioned brahmanic claims that the Vedas were revealed texts, not human in origin, as well as their claims to a special inborn religious authority.

Even early followers in the Buddhist community, however, considered the Buddha Śākyamuni to be a superhuman figure. Buddhists preserved his bodily charisma in his ashes and relics, entombed in burial mounds called *stūpas*. Located within monastic settlements, stūpas became centers of Buddhist devotion, where votaries would circumambulate, present flower garlands, burn incense and lamps, serenade with music, and recite eulogies. By the first century C.E. if not earlier, Buddhists also began to use physical images of the Buddha and other important Buddhist figures as objects of devotion. These informal acts of homage toward the Buddha in the form of stūpa or image were later formalized as the ritual of

pūjā. During this same period, bodhisattvas, those motivated by compassion to achieve enlightenment, became objects of veneration and emulation in a movement that came to be known as the Mahāyāna (great vehicle).

Buddhist monks and nuns often established their "retreats" on the outskirts of the largest cities of the time and actively sought the patronage of royalty and the wealthy urban merchant class. With the conversion of the great Mauryan ruler Aśoka in the third century B.C.E., Buddhism became the imperial religion of South Asia. Aśoka patronized Buddhist institutions lavishly and sent out missionaries to spread Buddhist teachings abroad. He also publicized his new policies with inscriptions carved on pillars or rock faces throughout the empire. In his epigraphs, Aśoka speaks of his pursuit of dharma, by which he means a common ethical code based on values of tolerance, harmony, generosity, and nonviolence. While proclaiming tolerance toward all religious seekers, he also emphasized nonviolence, thereby effectively ruling out the animal sacrifices that had been the heart of the Vedic system of sacrifice. Far better, he announced, to practice the nonviolent ceremony of dharma, by which he meant giving gifts to Buddhist monks and nuns and other worthies.

Though the Mauryan empire fell apart rather soon after Aśoka's death, he had established a model for Buddhist kingship. For several centuries, every successor dynasty seeking to claim imperial status in India would begin to patronize Buddhists as its primary, though never exclusive, religious recipients. By the time of Harṣavardhana, the seventh-century emperor of Kanyākubja, however, there were clear signs that the role of Buddhism in India was diminishing. It was at this time that the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang toured South Asia, and he observed the dramatic ceremonies of Buddhist gift-giving that Harṣa held at his capital; but he also noticed many abandoned Buddhist monasteries and temples throughout the subcontinent. Patronage and support apparently were drying up, a trend that accelerated after Harṣa's demise. Only in eastern India, the Himalayan regions, and Sri Lanka did Buddhism continue to flourish in South Asia. By the time of the Turko-Afghan raids of the eleventh through thirteenth centuries, Buddhism in northern India was confined to a few rich monastic institutions and universities, which made ripe targets for plunder. Many of the monks fled to Tibet, and Buddhism was effectively exiled from its land of origin.

Since the 1950s, Buddhism has been revivified in India from unexpected sources. A reformer and leader in the struggle for Indian independence, B. R. Ambedkar, was a member of a Maharashtran untouchable community and spokesman for untouchables nationwide. After a lifetime fighting for social justice, Ambedkar decided that Hinduism as it existed would never allow full status to the lowest orders of society, and at a huge public ceremony in 1956 he converted to Buddhism. Many of his followers did also, and the latest census estimates nearly four million Buddhists in Maharashtra alone. During the same period, the Chinese takeover of Tibet forced many Tibetan monks and lay Buddhists to flee south. The Dalai Lama, spiritual head of the Tibetan people, established his new home

in exile in India, where he leads a substantial and visible community of Buddhist refugees.

Hinduism Redefined

During the period of Buddhist initiative and imperial spread, those social and religious groups who remained loyal in some way to the Vedic tradition were not inactive. In fact, as one historian puts it, "in the face of this challenge Brahmanism girt itself up by a tremendous intellectual effort for a new lease on life."[2] This statement overstates the degree to which "Brahmanism" reacted as a cohesive entity; historical sources suggest rather a multiplicity of initiatives. Nevertheless, the intellectual and socio-political challenge posed by Buddhism, Jainism, and the other renunciatory groups did inspire many creative and fruitful responses, which collectively add up to a virtual transformation in "orthodox" circles, from the Vedic worldview to forms of classical "Hinduism" that explicitly maintained continuity with the Vedic tradition but effectively altered it into a new religious formation.

The literature of this period is extensive. There was continued production of texts within the Vedic corpus: new Upaniṣads, new auxiliary texts, and texts that styled themselves "appendices" to the Vedic corpus. During this period the formative texts of six major philosophical schools were first put together—the Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta, Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, and Vaiśeṣika schools. Of these, the Mīmāṃsā school occupied itself primarily with the interpretation of the Vedic sacrificial texts and ritual, whereas the Advaita Vedānta reformulated some of the teachings of the Upaniṣads into a consistent monist metaphysics. Sāṃkhya developed an alternative dualist philosophy, and Yoga systematized the psychophysical practices of the ascetics in accord with Sāṃkhya teachings. Nyāya was most concerned with the logic and rhetoric of philosophical disputation and the nature of reality, and Vaiśeṣika sought to develop a realist ontology of substances.

Another major genre of religious literature was the Dharmaśāstra, whose central concern, as the name implies, was the definition and delineation of dharma. The term *dharma* comes from the root *dhṛ*, to uphold, to maintain, and dharma may well be defined as "that which upholds and supports order." Yet different parties could hold very different ideas of what constitutes "order." In the Vedas the term *dharma* referred to the sacrifice as that which maintains the order of the cosmos. In Buddhist texts it meant the teachings of the Buddha, and Jain sources spoke of a Jaina dharma. Aśoka employed the term to describe his own religio-political policies. In the Dharmaśāstra literature, dharma referred to an overarching order of the cosmos and society, and to a person's duties within the world so constituted. It determined specific duties for all groups belonging to Indo-Aryan society, varying according to sex, class, family, stage of life, and so on. The Dharmaśāstras

addressed themselves especially to the male brahman householder, directing him to live a life of austerity, purity, Vedic learning, and ritual observance.

The Epics

If the early Dharmaśāstras represent the response of one important social group to the new situation, the immense epic poems formulated during this period constitute a still more significant corpus of texts explicitly meant for all Hindu society. There are two great epics: the *Mahābhārata* (at 100,000 verses, roughly six times the length of the Christian Bible) and the *Rāmāyaṇa* (a mere 25,000 verses), plus an "appendix" to the *Mahābhārata* (as if 100,000 verses weren't enough) called the *Harivaṃśa*. "Whatever is here may be found elsewhere," admits the *Mahābhārata* (1.56.34), "but what is not here is nowhere else." Not only do the epics claim to be comprehensive in depicting the world, but they also intend to be of continuing relevance. The *Rāmāyaṇa* (1.2.35) predicts, "As long as mountains and streams shall endure upon the earth, so long will the story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* be told among men." Together the epics illustrate with remarkable thoroughness and rich detail a Hindu world in transition.

Although the *Mahābhārata* was later claimed as a "fifth Veda," the Sanskrit epics developed outside the Vedic corpus. They originated as the oral literature of bards who told and retold stories of heroic battles of the past, primarily for audiences of kṣatriya chieftains and warriors. The *Mahābhārata* tells the story of a great war between two rival clans and their allies that may have taken place around 900 B.C.E. Unlike the Vedas, however, the bardic literature was never meant to be preserved and transmitted verbatim. Over the generations storytellers reworked their narratives of the great war, expanding and supplementing them with all sorts of other stories and teachings, until the tales assumed a more or less final form around the fourth century C.E.

The epics center around great battles and wars, reflecting their origins as oral literature of the warrior class. The narratives begin with family conflicts leading to disputes over royal succession. Developing this theme to an extreme, the *Mahābhārata* uses the rivalry between two related kṣatriya clans to characterize the entire warrior class as quarreling, contentious, and increasingly deviating from dharma. With the ruling classes in such disarray, disorder and violence threaten society itself. The dire situation is mirrored throughout the cosmos, where (in the *Rāmāyaṇa*) the demon Rāvaṇa has overcome Indra, the divine representative of the Vedic order, and new heroes and deities must intervene to reestablish dharma. The crises lead with tragic inevitability to great battles, involving all the warriors of India in the *Mahābhārata*—and not just humans but also demons, monkeys, bears, and vultures in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Through war the ancient order is purged and the demonic forces are subdued. The epics conclude with victorious kings restoring the social order.

While focusing on human conflict, the epics also present a new theophany. As

the Vedic gods appear unable to contend with the demons and threatening chaos of a new age, these texts introduce a deity who can overcome these threats: Viṣṇu.

Viṣṇu is not an entirely new deity. In fact, he appears even in the *Ṛg Veda*, which associates him with three steps that mysteriously stretch over the whole world; later Vedic texts relate a myth linking Viṣṇu's three steps to the sacrifice. The myth relates how the gods trick the demons, who foolishly agree to allow the gods only as much ground for their sacrificial enclosure as the dwarflike Viṣṇu can cover in three steps. The demons should have realized the danger from the name Viṣṇu, which means "the one who pervades." As the gods sacrifice at their altar, the dwarf grows to become as large as the entire world, and in three steps covers the three worlds of heaven, earth, and the netherworld. Likewise, by the time the epics were put into final shape, Viṣṇu's religious role had grown from its diminutive appearance in the *Ṛg Veda* to a position of superiority over all other gods.

The epics present Viṣṇu as a divinity with clearly heroic qualities, who takes over Indra's role as primary vanquisher of demons. Other gods have begun to recognize Viṣṇu as their superior and pay homage to him. He continues to associate himself with the sacrifice, and actively maintains the order of society. Most importantly, and paradoxically, the epics identify Viṣṇu both as the supreme deity and as an active, embodied, finite god who intervenes directly in human affairs. On the one hand, the epics assert that Viṣṇu is identical with the Puruṣa of *Ṛg Veda* 10.90, the *Brahman* of the Upaniṣads, and other previous formulations of a transcendent Absolute. Yet he also retains features of a more anthropomorphic divinity, particularly when he takes on human forms or incarnations (*avatāra*, literally a "crossing down" to human form) and intervenes directly in human society to kill demons and restore dharma.

In the *Harivaṃśa*, Viṣṇu incarnates himself as Kṛṣṇa in order to destroy the tyrannical demon Kaṃsa, who has usurped the throne of Mathura. Though born of royal parentage, Kṛṣṇa is raised among a tribe of cowherds, who only gradually become aware of his superhuman character. When Kṛṣṇa has grown to manhood, he returns to Mathura and puts an end to Kaṃsa and the other demons of his coterie. In the *Mahābhārata*, Viṣṇu appears again as Kṛṣṇa, ruler of Dwaraka and a loyal friend of the Pāṇḍava hero Arjuna. Here too the divinity of Kṛṣṇa is only occasionally revealed, though in many ways Kṛṣṇa acts as a hidden, inscrutable instigator and manipulator of events throughout the epic.

Viṣṇu takes on a different human embodiment in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, as Rāma, the young prince of Ayodhya, whose primary mission is to rid the world of Rāvaṇa and other demons. Rāvaṇa has gained a divine blessing making him invulnerable to other gods and demons, and this enables him to defeat Indra and to insinuate himself as sole recipient of sacrificial offerings. Yet he has arrogantly neglected to request invincibility from humans as well. Rāvaṇa's ruin comes about after he abducts Sītā, the beautiful and chaste wife of Rāma, and imprisons her in his palace in Lankā. With the aid of an army of monkeys and bears, the warrior-

prince Rāma, divine and human, defeats Rāvaṇa's army, rescues Sītā, and finally returns to Ayodhya to rule as its king.

The concept of *avatāra*, one can imagine, offered important advantages to an expanding community of Viṣṇu worshipers. It enabled the Vaiṣṇavas to maintain their identification of Viṣṇu as the Absolute, yet also incorporate other local or regional deities and their cults as incarnations of an encompassing Viṣṇu. Historically speaking, Kṛṣṇa no doubt originated as a human hero, the warrior leader of a pastoral tribe in the Mathura region. Folkloric aggrandizement turned him into a legendary hero with godlike qualities, and finally in the *Harivaṃśa* he was revealed to be a divinity incarnate, the avatāra of Viṣṇu.

Of all portions of the Sanskrit epics, none is considered more significant to the development of Indian religions than the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the "Song of the Lord Kṛṣṇa," a part of the *Mahābhārata* composed around 200 C.E. Placed at the dramatic climax of the epic's narrative, the *Gītā* also provides the central ideological and theological vision of the epic. Just as the great battle is about to begin, with huge armies facing one another across the battlefield of Kurukṣetra, the most powerful warrior on the Pāṇḍava side, Arjuna, suffers from a paroxysm of doubt and anxiety. Why should he fight, particularly when his opponents include relatives and former teachers? Acting as Arjuna's charioteer, Kṛṣṇa responds to his doubts by offering a sustained discourse on the moral and religious propriety of war, the nature of human action, and the most effective means of attaining liberation. Kṛṣṇa argues that worldly action in support of dharma is not incompatible with mokṣa, as the various renunciatory orders had suggested. One should accept one's personal dharma as a guide to proper conduct, he avers, but without regard to the fruits of that conduct.

To clinch his argument, Kṛṣṇa also progressively reveals himself to Arjuna as a deity, indeed as the highest, supreme divinity. The teaching culminates with an overwhelming vision. Granted "divine eyes" by Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna is suddenly able to see Kṛṣṇa's complete form, the awesome, all-inclusive Viśvarūpa. Kṛṣṇa acknowledges that previous methods of self-transformation such as sacrifice and yoga may be efficacious, but in light of his self-revelation he also recommends a new and superior method of religious attainment, which he calls *bhakti* (devotion). The most efficient way to reach the highest state, he tells Arjuna, is to dedicate one's entire self to Kṛṣṇa, a personal god who is simultaneously the Absolute.

With Arjuna's vision of the embodied Absolute and Kṛṣṇa's advocacy of bhakti we are initiated into the world of Hindu theism.

The Purāṇas and Hindu Theism

Throughout the period loosely labeled as the "Gupta" and "post-Gupta" ages, 300–700 C.E., Buddhism remained a powerful religious force in India, but new groups devoted to Viṣṇu and Śiva gained in visibility and resources. The Gupta rulers themselves satisfied both sides by lavishly patronizing Buddhist institutions while also declaring themselves followers of Viṣṇu. Throughout history Indian

rulers have usually diversified their religious patronage as a means of integrating multiple religious communities within their kingdoms. The earliest Hindu temples built in permanent materials appeared during this period. Images of Hindu gods increased in scale and quality of workmanship. Reflecting and consolidating this growth in the religious orders of Viṣṇu and Śiva, another genre of texts, the Purāṇas, articulated more fully the theistic worldview outlined in the epics.

The Purāṇas (literally, ancient traditions) constitute another huge corpus of texts, numbering eighteen "major" Purāṇas, eighteen "sub-major" ones, and countless others. The major Purāṇas alone run to something like 400,000 verses. Like the epics, the Purāṇas were composed orally over many centuries, so that earlier and later teachings are regularly juxtaposed in the same texts. Bards put the earliest Purāṇas into final shape by about the fifth century C.E., while other texts kept incorporating new materials. The *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa* (or "Future Purāṇa," an oxymoron), the most open-ended of the major Purāṇas, contains sections from the fifth century or earlier, yet also "predicts" such late medieval figures as Akbar, Kabīr, Caitanya, and Guru Nānak, and even foretells the coming of British rule to India.

Comprehensive and encyclopedic in scope, the Purāṇas discuss cosmology, royal genealogies, society and dharma, the sacred geography of pilgrimage sites, yogic practices, town planning, even grammar and poetics. For the religious history of South Asia, however, the most significant aspect of the Purāṇas is their presentation of the theology, mythology, and ritual of the two primary gods Viṣṇu and Śiva.

Already in the epics, proponents of Viṣṇu were advancing him as the highest lord of the cosmos. The Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas advocate this with greater confidence and fuller cosmological breadth. The cyclical epochs of creation and dissolution of the universe, we now learn, are none other than Viṣṇu's alternating periods of activity and rest. The Purāṇas flesh out the incipient notion of Viṣṇu's intervening incarnations and gradually systematize it into a list of ten embodiments, including not only Kṛṣṇa and Rāma, but also zoomorphic forms (fish, tortoise, boar, man-lion), anthropomorphic ones (the dwarf who took three steps, Paraśurāma), a future incarnation (Kalkin), and even the Buddha. As the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* relates, once when the demons had become too powerful through sacrifice, Viṣṇu took form as the Buddha and also as a naked Jain mendicant to dissuade them from sacrificing, so that the gods could overcome them and restore the proper order of things. Generally, all his incarnations reinforce Viṣṇu's essential attributes: benevolence, a desire to preserve order in the world, and a paradoxical capacity to be simultaneously infinite and finite.

Like Viṣṇu, Śiva appears in a rather minor role in the *Ṛg Veda*, but gradually advances in status until the Śaiva Purāṇas single him out as the Absolute. In the *Ṛg Veda*, Rudra ("the howler") is a peripheral divinity. Dwelling outside society in the forests or mountains, he is associated with the destructive forces of nature and rules over undomesticated animals. Since Rudra is not numbered one of the auspicious gods, he is excluded from the soma sacrifice, and instead is offered

tribute to avert his wrath. Although he is characteristically destructive in his actions, Rudra may also become beneficent if properly praised and propitiated. When Rudra shows this kinder, gentler nature he is called Śiva, the "auspicious" one.

Already in this early appearance, we can observe two traits central to Śiva's later personality. In contrast to the sociable Viṣṇu, Śiva is an outsider. Residing typically in the highest Himalayan Mountains, he is the lord and role model for yogis, less concerned with instituting dharma on earth than with leading souls toward mokṣa. Second, Śiva has a dual nature, conjoining what are to us antithetical attributes. Not only is he both malevolent and benevolent, he is also both ascetic and erotic, hermit and family man, an immobile meditator and an unruly dancer. In one iconographic form, Śiva appears simultaneously male and female, an integral hermaphrodite.

In the epics, Śiva's character remains ambiguous, capricious, fierce, and sometimes wrathful. He continues to live outside society, and if he intervenes at all it is usually to disrupt things. Though they are predominantly Vaiṣṇava in orientation, the epics nevertheless recognize Śiva's growing power and his increasing claim to certain ritual prerogatives. In one famous episode, King Dakṛa organizes a large public sacrifice but declines to invite Śiva since, after all, Śiva is rather unruly. Learning of this slight, Śiva sends a swarming horde of emanations to break up the sacrifice, and then appears in person to demand that from now on he be the primary recipient of all sacrificial offerings.

One early Upaniṣad, the *Śvetāśvatara*, had identified Rudra-Śiva as the transcendental Absolute, identical with Puruṣa and the Upaniṣadic Brahman. The Śaiva Purāṇas reassert this claim and link it with a fully developed mythology of Śiva's doings. Unlike Viṣṇu, Śiva does not incarnate himself as a human being for an entire lifetime; rather he occasionally manifests himself physically in a body to carry out his varied intentions. In the Purāṇas, Śiva's manifestations most often demonstrate his superiority over other contestants, defeat demons, and grant grace to his followers.

Viṣṇu and Śiva are not the only deities in the world of the Purāṇas. In fact, these texts present a complex, inclusive pantheon, populated with divine families, animal mounts for each deity, Vedic divinities (now cast exclusively in supporting roles), and hosts of lesser semi-divinities such as celestial dancers, musicians, titans, sages, magicians, and many more. Among them two deserve special note: Brahmā and the Goddess.

The god Brahmā, with roots in the late Vedic and Dharmaśāstra literature, appears in the Purāṇas as the god of creation and as the patron of Vedic and orthodox brahmans. Sometimes the texts portray him comically as a senile grandfather who causes trouble by indiscriminately rewarding even demons for their austerities; at other times he shows better judgment in recognizing the preeminence of Viṣṇu and Śiva. Some Purāṇas of a more integrationist tendency, however, stress the interdependence of the three principal male divinities in performing distinct cosmic functions: Brahmā creates the world, Viṣṇu protects and

sustains it, and Śiva destroys it. In modern times this has become known as the "Hindu trinity."

The Goddess presents a more complex picture. In the literature of the fifth through seventh centuries, several important female deities gain a new importance. Three are consorts or wives of the principal male deities: Lakṣmī is the consort of Viṣṇu, Pārvatī of Śiva, and Sarasvatī of Brahmā. These goddesses often take on significant responsibilities in their own rights, as Lakṣmī becomes the goddess of prosperity and domestic good fortune. Some Puraṇic texts, most notably the *Devīmāhātmya* section (c. 600 C.E.) of the *Mārkaṇeya Purāṇa*, go further to present a single great Goddess not as a wife, but as the Supreme Lord, appropriating for her all the common epithets of the Absolute. In her most famous incarnation she appears as Durgā, a warrior goddess. A buffalo demon, having gained nearly invincible powers through austerities, is running rampant through the cosmos and none of the male gods can subdue it. Durgā is born from the collective anger and frustration of all the gods. She receives a weapon from each of them and then rides forth on her lion mount to confront and finally destroy the demon.

Like Viṣṇu and Śiva, this female Absolute has an absorbing personality. She incorporates many local and regional cults and manifests herself in a plethora of distinct guises and forms. Only occasionally in the major Purāṇas does she appear in full force, but these glimpses point to the existence during this period of a significant school of thought that identified the fundamental force of the cosmos as feminine in nature and devoted itself to her praise and worship. This religious sensibility reappears in new forms among the tantric schools of medieval India (Chapters 9, 20) and the Kālī bhakti of eighteenth-century Bengal (Chapter 1).

The rich and varied religious literature of the Purāṇas created a compelling portrayal of the theistic Hindu cosmos. Moreover, these narratives of divine characters and their supernatural doings became part of the cultural literacy of Indian audiences from this period on. Medieval poets composing epigraphic eulogies (Chapter 12) and devotional verses (Chapters 6, 7) could take this knowledge for granted and use it as a basis for literary allusion, exploration, and satire in their own verse. Temple sculptors rendered the puranic stories visible in their iconographic figures and narrative reliefs. Still today, hymns of praise recited in domestic and temple worship (Chapter 17) reiterate the mythic deeds and attributes of the Hindu deities much as they were first spelled out in the Purāṇas.

Temple Hinduism

By 700 C.E., the religious transformation first envisioned in the epics was complete. A new form of Hindu theism, focusing upon the gods Viṣṇu and Śiva as supreme deities but incorporating as well a host of other lesser gods and goddesses, now dominated the public sphere. Harṣavardhana was the last emperor to follow the Aśokan model by converting to Buddhism and supporting the Bud-

dhist establishment with ostentatious gifts. No longer did sovereigns proclaim their performance of Vedic sacrifices as the principal way of asserting their authority to rule. Instead, they increasingly chose to articulate royal claims in a more concrete and lasting form, by constructing massive stone Hindu temples. These mountainlike structures, rising up to two hundred feet high and covered with sculptural representations of the Hindu pantheon, assumed a conspicuous and commanding presence in the Indian religious and political landscape during the early medieval period. During the half millennium from 700 to 1200 C.E., temple Hinduism dominated the public religious life of India.

The inscriptions of the seventh-century south Indian king Mahendravarman (Chapter 12) exemplify this shift in royal patronage. Although his Pallava predecessors had performed sacrifices as their primary ritual means of establishing royal legitimacy, Mahendravarman switched dramatically to temple sponsorship. He viewed his lordship over rival rulers as directly linked to Śiva's own cosmic overlordship. By constructing temples for Śiva, he brought God into his own territory and also proclaimed his authority over defeated rivals and their territories. Similarly, the succeeding rulers and dynasties of early medieval India sought to outbuild one another in conspicuous devotion to their chosen deity, Viṣṇu or Śiva.

A Hindu temple is primarily a home or residence for a god. Located in the main sanctum of the temple is an image or icon, a physical form that serves as a support within which Viṣṇu, Śiva, or some other principal deity may make himself physically present and accessible, enabling worshipers to enact a direct personal relationship with that divinity. At the same time, the temple offers through its physical structure a vision of the orderly cosmos presided over by that deity, with hierarchical ranks of subordinate deities, semi-divinities, devotees, and other auspicious entities all finding their proper places. Finally, in its layout the temple provides a map of the spiritual path a worshiper must follow toward participation with the deity ensconced in the "womb-room" at the center. The temple is thus a place of crossing, in which god descends from transcendence and devotee moves inward from the mundane.

Anyone may build a temple, but its size will naturally depend on the resources available to the patron. From small home shrines meant for private devotions to village temples, and on up in scale to the imposing edifices put up by Hindu kings with imperial aspirations, all serve basically the same purposes. Temple liturgy centers around physical and spiritual transactions between the incarnate deity and worshipers, mediated in the case of public temples by priests. These transactions are called *pūjā*. In this anthology, "How to Worship at the Abode of Śiva" (Chapter 17), a nineteenth-century pamphlet instructing pious Śaiva worshipers in proper temple conduct, provides a concise and reliable account of south Indian pūjā based on early medieval formulations.

The historical origins of pūjā are uncertain. In Vedic texts, the term refers to the respectful treatment of brahman guests. Jains and Buddhists, as we have seen, developed forms of pūjā to images and stūpas quite early. Small but recognizable

images of the Hindu divinities, probably employed in simple household pūjā ceremonies, have been found dating back to the early centuries C.E. It is likely that all these forms of pūjā among the written traditions derive from earlier informal practices of image worship by autochthonous peoples outside the Indo-Aryan society. Hindu texts of the medieval period, however, see this new form of worship as the result of the god's own direct intervention and instruction, as in the puranic episode of the "Origin of Liṅga Worship" (Chapter 45). There, Śiva guides a group of renunciatory sages from their earlier Vedic-based rites to the new practice of worshiping Śiva's liṅga. Pūjā replaces sacrifice, but at the same time it incorporates select portions of the Vedic repertoire of mantras and ritual gestures, much as Śiva advises the sages to recite Vedic texts when offering pūjā.

In the context of large-scale royal temples, pūjā developed into an elaborate, rule-bound, priestly activity. New genres of liturgical guides were composed—Vaiṣṇava saṃhitās, Śaiva āgamas, and Śākta tantras—claiming to be the direct teachings of the deities concerning the metaphysical organization of the cosmos and how humans ought best to worship them. Pan-Indian Hindu theological orders, such as the Pāñcarātra and Vaikhānasa schools directed toward Viṣṇu and the Pāśupata and Śaiva Siddhānta schools dedicated to Śiva, employed these texts to maintain the temples as centers of community worship.

While priests and their texts emphasized proper ritual performance as a means of religious attainment, others began to assert that emotional enthusiasm, or bhakti, played a more crucial role in worshiping god. The term *bhakti* is usually translated as "devotion," but its meaning is more complex than our English equivalent would suggest. *Bhakti* comes from the verb root *bhaj*. In its earliest usage, *bhaj* means to divide or share, as one divides and partakes of the sacrificial offerings. *Bhaj* can also denote experiencing something, as one enjoys food or relishes music. It signifies waiting upon someone, as an attendant serves a king. It can mean to make love in a very corporeal sense and to adore in a more disembodied, spiritual manner. As its Indian adherents define it, *bhakti* partakes of all these shades of meaning. It is a way of participating or sharing in divine being, however that is understood, of tasting and enjoying a god's presence, of serving and worshiping him, of being as intimate as possible, of being attached to him above all else.

As a religious attitude or way of relating to a being one takes as superior, bhakti is widespread throughout Indian religions. One finds hymns of devotion throughout the Purāṇas and the liturgical texts of temple Hinduism, and similar genres of eulogistic poetry are common in Buddhist and Jain literature. Historians also use the term in a more restricted sense, however, to refer to a series of regional movements in medieval India that stressed intense personal devotion to god or goddess, the leadership of exemplary poet-saints, and the importance of a community of devotees. The earliest of these bhakti movements date from the seventh through ninth centuries, in the southern region of Tamilnadu, and are represented in this volume by the poetry of Māṇikkavācakar (Chapter 7). Later bhakti movements occurred in the Deccan and throughout northern India from the twelfth

century through the seventeenth centuries; these will be discussed in the context of Hindu responses to Islam.

The groups of devotees to Śiva and to Viṣṇu of early medieval Tamilnadu were closely allied with the spread and growth of Hindu temples in the region. Itinerant poets traveled from village to village singing hymns of praise to their gods as they saw them in each new place of worship. Although they did not overtly criticize the temple priests or their ritualism, the bhakti poets of Tamilnadu proposed what they saw as a more satisfying and accessible means of reaching the divine. Whereas priests performed ritual invocations to bring Śiva or Viṣṇu into visible material supports, the bhakti saints used their poetry to evoke each deity in full and sensuous detail. Reiterating the god's activities, they often placed themselves as participants in those mythical scenes. They stressed the importance of establishing a close relationship with the god conceived in a personal and particularized manner. Using a trope that would become common among bhakti poets, Tamil devotees often spoke in the poetic voice of women infatuated with the alluring male deity, drawing on the conventions of secular love poetry and transforming the erotic into a religious allegory of soul and God. Women saints like Āṇṭāḷ did not require this metaphoric step. According to her hagiography, Āṇṭāḷ's single-minded love led her to reject all human suitors and unite with Viṣṇu himself, in the form of a temple image.

Yet at the same time, as Māṇikkavācakar's poetry shows, the poets recognized the paradox inherent in conceptualizing the divine this way. However anthropomorphically the poets might portray their god, Śiva and Viṣṇu remained ultimately beyond, and unknowable as well. The tensions between god's immanence and his transcendence (or, as Vaiṣṇava theologians phrased it, his simultaneous "easy accessibility" and his "otherness"), and between the devotee's mixed feelings of intimacy and alienation provide central themes that run throughout Indian devotional literature.

While temple Hinduism centered around Viṣṇu and Śiva held sway in the public sphere in early medieval India, many other religious formations were present, as well. As we have seen, Hindus never sought to develop a pan-Indian "church" structure nor did they establish a clear ecclesiastical hierarchy. Even the brahmans, seemingly the religious elite, formed a very diverse and permeable social group, with new priestly groups sometimes successfully claiming brahmanic status for themselves.

Vedic schools continued their intellectual activities even though sacrifice was no longer a significant public form of ritual. The Mīmāṃsā school developed elaborate means of interpreting the Vedic texts, and scholars of Dharmaśāstra applied these principles to the reading of dharma texts. Groups of brahmans loyal to the Vedic traditions often received special land grants called *agrahāras*, where they were able to maintain small-scale Vedic sacrificial programs free from economic need.

Other orthodox writers with a more philosophical bent developed and systematized the metaphysical monism implicit in some portions of the Upaniṣads, cul-

minating in the ninth-century writings of Śaṅkara, a brilliant author and philosophical disputant of the Advaita Vedānta school. Śaṅkara's writings demoted temple image worship to the status of a useful but decidedly lower form of religious attainment, and reserved the highest place for intellectual realization of the oneness of Brahman. The other principal Vedānta school, the "qualified nondualist" system of Rāmānuja (c. 1050 C.E.) gave a more prominent role to devotion and engaged itself more directly in the doings of temple Hinduism. Rāmānuja even served as monastic superior in one of the largest south Indian Viṣṇu temples.

During this period, Buddhism was still strong in the areas of Kashmir and northeastern India, and such celebrated universities as Nālandā in Bihar served as international centers for Buddhist study. Communities of Jains were numerous in Gujarat and Karnataka, maintaining their own traditions of scholarship and asceticism, and not infrequently placing Jain ministers in the royal courts of those areas. We must assume the existence of many other forms of religious thought and practice during this period which, because they were esoteric or domestic or nonliterate, did not leave behind texts or other historical evidence.

The diversity of indigenous Indian religions was supplemented by religious and ethnic communities who migrated from elsewhere and settled in India, especially along the western coast. Jewish traders and Syrian Christians arrived in India at least as early as the fourth century, and from the seventh century Arab Muslim merchants set up a trading network around coastal India. Starting in the tenth century, the Parsees ("Persians"), who adhere to the ancient Iranian religion of Zoroastrianism, fled their homeland for the safer terrain of India. Each of these groups maintained itself as an autonomous, insular, and largely unthreatening religious minority within Hindu-dominated society.

In such a pluralistic setting, members of many religious persuasions articulated their differing positions and debated their views in public and at court. The stakes were sometimes high. Although some modern scholars and Hindus have portrayed the pre-Islamic period of Indian history as one of overriding religious tolerance, this was not entirely the case. The hymns of the south Indian poet-saints, for instance, included an often bitter polemic against Jains and Buddhists, and in the later biographies of these saints we hear of intentional destruction of Buddhist images and of a pogrom carried out against the eight thousand Jains of Madurai. Whatever the historicity of such later accounts, they clearly reflect an atmosphere in which religious concerns were taken as serious and consequential, not a matter of unobstructed personal choice.

Islam in India

Around 610 C.E. Muḥammad, a member of the Arab tribe ruling Mecca, began to receive revelations. By 622 his criticisms of Arab paganism and of the injustice of Meccan society had aroused considerable opposition. When residents of another city to the north invited him to come and act as arbiter, he led a few

followers in an exodus to build in Medina a new society based on divine law. Muḥammad had embarked on his career as the Prophet of Islam. Revelations continued until his death in 632, and were later collected into the foundation text of Islam, the Qur'ān. These distant events held immense consequences for the history of Indian religions.

For the first 150 years of its existence, Islam was the most dynamic, expanding religious movement the world had ever seen. Imbued with a theological and ethical directive to transform the "house of unbelievers" into the "house of submission (*islam*)" through "righteous struggle" (*jihād*), the military forces of the early Muslim leaders conquered first the Arab peninsula, then the surrounding West Asian regions of Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan, and the countries of North Africa. By the early part of the eighth century, Muslim armies had expanded into Spain and were pushing into the southern parts of France in the West; in the East they had reached as far as Sind, in present-day Pakistan. This success came at a price, though. The religious quest of Muḥammad's companions was stifled by disputes, and although the leaders of the Muslim community legitimated their regimes through Islamic law, they soon adopted the Roman Caesar and the Persian Shāh as their models of sovereignty, much to the disgust of Islamic religious scholars.

Over the next few centuries an Indian frontier was defined and gradually pushed back as Arab, Persian, and Turkish armies invaded and conquered Afghanistan, Kashmir, and the Punjab. Despite continued resistance by indigenous rulers, the more centralized and organized tactics of the invaders eventually proved successful. In the early eleventh century, Maḥmūd, the Turko-Afghan ruler of Ghazna (in Afghanistan), mounted eighteen campaigns into northern India. He conquered and incorporated the Punjab into the Ghaznavid empire and then enriched his state by sacking many of the Buddhist monasteries and Hindu temples of northern India, and transporting the loot back to Ghazna. Though he temporarily disrupted the existing Indian political and religious order, Maḥmūd did not seek to establish a permanent Islamic polity centered in the subcontinent. That was left to a successor dynasty also based in Afghanistan, the Ghūrids.

In 1193 Mu'izzuddīn Muḥammad of Ghūr and his general Qutb al-Dīn Aibak defeated the Cāhamāna ruler of Delhi, then the most powerful north Indian king, and in 1026 Qutb al-dīn declared himself Sultan of Delhi. The Delhi sultanate lasted some 320 years, under six different Turko-Afghan dynasties, and dominated much of north India. Other Islamic polities were established in the Deccan and southern India during this period. The sultanate was in turn supplanted by the Mughal empire, founded by the Central Asian adventurer Bābar in 1526. The Mughal empire held sway over much of India into the early part of the eighteenth century. Thus for roughly five hundred years of late medieval Indian history, from 1200 to 1700, rulers adhering to Islam prevailed in northern India. With these rulers came a conservative clerical elite who sought, with mixed success, to maintain Islamic social and legal order in the urban centers of India.

The face of the conqueror, however, was not the only visage of Islam in India,

nor even the most common one. With Islamic rule in India, itinerant Muslim Sufi teachers came to till the fertile religious fields of India. *Sufism* is the generic term for Islamic mysticism. Already sharing features with some forms of Hinduism, Sufis found it relatively easy to acclimatize their messages and concerns to the Indian environment. Indeed, they came to regard themselves as a kind of spiritual government of India, responsible for the religious welfare of the people, parallel to but separate from the political government of the sultans. The Sufis taught an esoteric form of Islam aimed at an elite, and they were not consciously interested in attracting non-Muslim masses to Islam. They used their Indian mother tongues to compose mystical poetry, however, and their tombs became centers of a cult of saints that increasingly attracted both Muslims and non-Muslims.

In a history of Indian religions, it is necessary to recognize both sides of Islam in India. The conquests of the Turkic, Afghan, and Central Asian Muslim warriors and their continuing struggles for power both among themselves and with Hindu warrior elites like the Rajputs had significant repercussions not only for Indian political history but also for the development of Indian religions, continuing to the present. At the same time, the more conciliatory and assimilative activities of the Sufis played a greater role in implanting Islam as an indigenous Indian religious formation in South Asia. In this anthology most of the readings emphasize the role of Sufism in Indian Islam.

Orthodox Islam and Political Authority

Al-Bīrūnī, one of the great medieval Muslim scholars, accompanied Maḥmūd on his military forays into India in the early eleventh century, and wrote of the Indians he encountered there: "They differ from us in everything which other nations have in common. In all manners and usages they differ from us to such a degree as to frighten their children with us, our dress, and our ways and customs, and to declare us to be the devil's breed, and our doings as the very opposite of all that is good and proper." The response he observed was perhaps not surprising, considering that the Ghaznavids were plundering their way across northern India at the time. Yet al-Bīrūnī points to very real differences between the various ruling Islamic groups of late medieval India and the predominantly Hindu society they ruled.

The book of Allah's revelations to Muḥammad, the Qur'ān, specifies five basic constituents or "pillars" of the Islamic faith: the profession of faith, regular prayer, giving of alms, fasting during the month of Ramadān, and pilgrimage.

Islam is based on a simple, shared creed, in which the Muslim believer acknowledges his or her submission to a single supreme God and recognizes Muḥammad as the Prophet. Orthodox Islam is rigorously monotheistic. Allah's transcendence excludes all other claims to divinity. Medieval Hinduism, by contrast, was hierarchically pluralistic in its theological outlook, admitting a host of immanent divinities and semi-divinities who participate in every sphere of the cosmos. A Hindu might well regard one of these deities as the highest "God of gods,"

but this did not prevent recognition of many other divinities appropriate for other persons or purposes. To the orthodox Muslim, this divine multiplicity of the Hindus appeared as a clear case of polytheism, which would diminish the adoration due to Allah alone.

The Allah of the orthodox is all-powerful and transcendent. While acting as the creator of all things, Allah never takes on physical form in the world. Hindu deities like Viṣṇu and Śiva, we have seen, do intervene directly in the world, often in human or even animal bodies. They also enter into the physical forms of icons and images, and this makes possible the institution of temples and their liturgies of worship. For orthodox Muslims, the Qur'ān and other authoritative traditions contain strong prohibitions against any adoration of physical idols.

Relations between the Muslim faithful and Allah are best expressed in prayer, a nonreciprocal and nonmaterial communication from believer to God. All believers should pray five times daily while facing Mecca, the geographical center of the Islamic community. Early in its history, the Muslim community institutionalized public prayer as a regular collective act, and the mosque grew to accommodate this activity. The Islamic mosque provides a large, mostly open area for congregational prayer, an egalitarian space enclosed by a surrounding wall to separate believers from nonbelievers. Though there can be no central image or icon representing Allah, the mosque does provide a spatial focus in the form of a wall indicating the direction toward Mecca.

The fifth pillar, pilgrimage, indicates another important aspect of Islam. At least once in a lifetime, the Muslim believer ought to make a pilgrimage to Mecca. From its earliest decades Islam was a universalistic and international religion, spread out geographically from Spain through northern Africa, across the Middle East, and into southern Asia. In different regions Islam naturally took on various regional characters, but it always maintained the ideal of a single unified community of believers. The institution of pilgrimage brought about an annual assembly of Muslims from all over the Islamic world, and thereby strengthened this unity. Islam in India had a dual identity. While grounded in the distinctive social and cultural realities of India, it was also part of the wider world of international Islam.

As Islamic warrior elites from Turkey and Central Asia established their authority in new parts of India there was inevitably conflict. At the frontiers of contested control, the conquerors sometimes symbolized their victories through a physical metaphor: the destruction of Hindu temples (as well as Jain and Buddhist sites, equally "polytheistic"), often followed by the construction of mosques on the leveled sites (Chapter 44). Hindu chieftains, in response, might reconsecrate these same religious sites as a way of claiming independence from Delhi's political overlordship. In this way temples sometimes became indices of political control.

Within areas of settled rule, however, Muslim authorities adopted a more lenient attitude toward their Hindu subjects. Early in Islamic history, Muslims had formulated an intermediate category for those who could not be classified as either

"believers" or "heathens." Christians and Jews, sharing the Abrahamic lineage with Muslims, were labeled "people of the book," and treated as tolerated religious communities within the Islamic state. The Hindus of India were idolaters and polytheists, admittedly, but brahmans could be regarded as the equivalent of Christian monks, and so could be left largely to their own religious customs. Hindu subjects might even construct temples, so long as these structures did not pose a threat to the dominating Muslim institutions. Indeed, Turkish and Mughal rulers even gave endowments of land and granted tax exemptions for certain Hindu, Jain, and Zoroastrian religious foundations. Reciprocally, Hindu rulers sometimes facilitated the construction of mosques for the benefit of their Muslim subjects.

Sufism

Sufism stresses the personal relationship between believer and Allah. The word *Sufi* (Arabic *ṣūfī*) derives from the Arabic for wool, alluding to the coarse woolen garments favored by early Muslim mystics. As with Ajita of the Hair-Blanket and countless other Indian ascetics, early Sufis chose to represent their austerity and renunciation of worldly concerns through a conspicuous rejection of comfortable clothing.

Despite its mystical and renunciatory tendencies, Sufism should not be seen as outside the mainstream of Islam. Sufis ground their teachings firmly in Muḥammad's revelation, but they draw on different portions of the Qur'ān than do more conservative exegetes. Whereas conservative Muslims focus on passages emphasizing Allah's almighty, awesome, and ineffable character, Sufi interpreters stress the sections that speak of Allah's pervasive presence in the world and in the hearts of his believers. Significantly, Sufis speak of a "jihād of the heart" as a more important religious struggle than the "jihād of the sword." In the medieval Islamic world, far from being a peripheral movement, Sufism engendered some of the most powerful and influential theological writings, such as that of Ibn al-'Arabī, and the most moving and popular Muslim poetry, as that of the thirteenth-century Jalāl al-Dīn Rumi. To a considerable extent Islam in medieval India took on a Sufi coloring.

Sufis arrived in India early. They were already in the Punjab during the Ghaznavid period. Once the Delhi sultanate was established, Sufis of the Chishti and Suhrawardi orders began to settle throughout northern India. Two other formal Sufi orders, the Naqshbandi and Qādiri, arrived during the Mughal period and became influential within the Mughal court. At court and in the urban centers, Sufis vied with the more orthodox Islamic scholars for status and influence, and needed to maintain a degree of respectability themselves. Even so they occasionally suffered persecution for their hubris, as when the Mughal ruler Jahāngīr imprisoned Sirhindi (Chapter 34). Others held aloof as much as possible from the court and its secular ways. Certain Sufis became more involved with local culture, and adopted the local language and customs. In some cases they took on

the deliberately unconventional character of the qalandar, the activist ascetic dropout who flouted the authority of respectable Muslim society.

The most basic relationship among Sufis is that of master and disciple. The master, known as a *shaykh* or *pīr*, is first and foremost a teacher, instructing his or her followers in proper ethical and spiritual conduct. As in the folk imagery of Sulṭān Bāhū's laudatory poem (Chapter 36), the master is a "washerman" for the heart, endeavoring to "shine up those begrimed with dirt, leaving them spotless." Disciples often recorded the teachings of masters as a way of perpetuating and disseminating their cleansing wisdom. "Conversations of the Sufi Saints" (Chapter 35) provides examples of this popular genre of Sufi literature.

Notable masters came sometimes to be regarded as "saints," figures possessing extraordinary capacities who could act as virtual intercessors with God on behalf of their followers. The hagiographies of these saints (such as those in Chapter 34) depict them performing a variety of miracles such as levitation, mind reading, and physical transformations. As in Indian religious discourse generally, miracles serve in these stories as visible confirmations of inner states of attainment and as criteria for determining religious powers. Tombs of Sufi saints often became pilgrimage centers, much as the stūpas and miracle sites of the Buddha had earlier. They perpetuated the charisma of the saint enshrined there and served as centers for the transmission of Sufi teachings and practices.

The saints were all subordinate to the Prophet Muḥammad. Concomitant with the rise of Sufi orders in the medieval Islamic world was an increasing veneration of the Prophet and his family expressed through ritual and song. A few puritan critics, forerunners of modern fundamentalists, objected to this reverence as idolatry, but most of the Islamic community came to see Muḥammad as a figure of loving devotion and miraculous powers. In domestic ceremonies honoring Muḥammad's birth (Chapter 22), Muslim women speak of the miracles surrounding his birth and childhood, and request his intercession in solving their everyday difficulties. In the various genres of devotional verse addressed to him (Chapter 8), Muḥammad appears as a guide, benefactor, miracle worker, and a lover, the supremely desirable bridegroom. Adapting a convention common to Hindu bhakti poetry, and employed also in Jain and Sikh poetry of the period, Indo-Muslim poets represented themselves as young women tormented by separation from their beloved, in this case the Prophet. Such mutual borrowings and recyclings of poetic themes were common in the close encounters between Sufism and Hindu devotionalism in medieval India.

Religious practice within Sufi circles centered around "recollection" (*dhikr*) and "listening" (*sama'*). The Qur'ān instructs Muslims to remember Allah frequently, and Sufis developed various techniques to evoke and intensify the recollection. Most commonly, the practitioner would rhythmically chant the one hundred names of God, and often enhance the chanting through bodily postures and breath control. Much like indigenous Indian forms of yoga, these disciplines are meant to bring the body, senses, and mind under control so they would not obstruct union with the divine. Though willing to borrow useful techniques from yogic

traditions, Indian Sufis were certainly not uncritical advocates or borrowers of all Hindu practices, as Chirāgh-i Dihlī shows in his vivid denunciation of image worship, reiterating a core Islamic tenet (Chapter 34).

Sufi poetry such as that of the two Punjabi poets Sulṭān Bāhū and Bulleh Shāh (Chapter 36) grows out of the musical assembly. Emphasizing their rural origins, these poets employ the vernacular language in preference to religious Arabic or courtly Persian, and draw their images from the everyday world of village Punjab. Reiterating common Sufi themes, they advocate love of Allah as the supreme virtue, and they often figure themselves as brides entreating their bridegroom Allah. From the austere and utterly transcendent God of the conservatives, these poets render him personal and accessible. They stress the importance of inner purity and criticize religious formalism, particularly ritual and intellectual approaches to the divine, in favor of an intuitive, personal approach. Again one sees here striking parallels with existing Indian traditions, in this case with the thematic repertoire of medieval Hindu bhakti poetry.

Sufism unquestionably germinated within the earliest phases of Arab Islam and flourished throughout the medieval Islamic world, but it was uniquely suited to the Indian religious setting. From the monist cosmological formulations of Ibn al-ʿArabī to the personalizing of Allah in Sufi poetry, from the familiar renunciatory appearance of Sufi masters to their use of yogalike meditative techniques, this form of mystical Islam could seem both familiar and yet new to India. Adapting to their surroundings, Sufi teachers were able to bring the message of Islam to an Indian audience that the more conservative scholars of the urban centers could never reach. In this sense, the Sufis of late medieval South Asia deserve the greatest credit in making Islam a truly indigenous Indian religion.

Although Islam did originate historically as an extraneous religious formation, it is important to bear in mind the counterargument offered in "India as a Sacred Islamic Land" (Chapter 39). Whether migrating from other parts of the Islamic world or adapting Islam through conversion, most Indian Muslims did not regard themselves as foreigners in India. Rather, from the very start they sought to integrate their homeland, India, into the larger sacred topography of the world of Islam. Indeed, in the view of Āzād, the first man—Adam—descended to earth in South Asia, and so South Asia figures as the site of the first revelation and the first mosque. For Indian Muslims no less than Hindus, Jains, or Buddhists, India is a religious terrain, a place where the divine, in whatever form, can indeed manifest itself to all.

Hinduism under Islam

Prior to the thirteenth century, as we have seen, temple Hinduism had offered a pan-Indian theory and legitimation of political authority, with royal claimants articulating their sovereignty through personal and ceremonial devotion to the Hindu deities Viṣṇu and Śiva. Subsequently, however, the most powerful rulers

in Delhi and many other parts of South Asia grounded their dominion in a very different theo-political system. Hindu ruling elites were largely confined to southern India and peripheral regions. Not only was the political sphere transformed by this shift in rulership, but the growing presence in the subcontinent of new religious teachers with competing and often compelling messages, most notably the Sufis, also posed a serious challenge to the authority of existing forms of Hindu thought and practice.

Hindus responded to the presence and political sway of Islam in late medieval India in complex, diverse, and creative ways. As in any period of social change, there were many in medieval India who sought mainly to defend and hold on to what they had. Hindu warrior elites might signal their independence from Islamic overlordship by reconstructing or reconsecrating a desecrated temple. In the religious sphere this attitude manifested itself in efforts to collect, maintain, and reassert already existing aspects of Hindu traditions. By collecting and commenting on the older textual genres such as the Vedas and Dharmaśāstras, brahman scholars made a conscious attempt to recreate past formations in altered conditions. The scholarly work of orthodox brahmans at this time, aimed at conserving and reasserting what they saw as traditional Hindu values, also had a large and generally unrecognized effect. They were the first to assemble what later scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries would reassemble as a Hindu canon of sacred books.

However, the eclipse of temple Hinduism as the prevailing ideological formation in northern India also set new and innovative directions in the development of Indian religions. What is most apparent in late medieval Hinduism is the vitality of forms of religion that are devotional, esoteric, or syncretic, and a corresponding deemphasis on the role of religion in constituting the political and social order.

Devotional Movements

Hindus sometimes personify bhakti as a beautiful woman, born in southern India, who grew to maturity in the Deccan. In twelfth-century Karnataka, a group of devotees called the Vīraśaivas coalesced around the Kalacuri minister Basavaṇṇa, and from the late thirteenth through seventeenth centuries, the Maharashtrian pilgrimage center Paṇḍarpur was the center of Marathi devotionalism toward the god Viṭhobā, a form of Kṛṣṇa. Tukārām, whose songs are translated in this volume (Chapter 3), was the last of the great Marathi poet-saints. Finally, according to the metaphor, the woman reached her finest flourishing in the north. Bhakti movements appeared in northern India by the fourteenth century, and from then on were a major force in north Indian Hindu life, from Kashmir and Gujarat to Bengal.

It is somewhat misleading, however, to speak of a single organic bhakti movement. Different groups used the various regional languages in their poetry, directed themselves toward different deities, and assumed distinct theological standpoints. Some poet-saints were profoundly inward and mystical in their lives and

song, while others adopted a more outward, socially critical orientation to the world around them. Some north Indian poets and bhakti groups appeared oblivious to the presence of Islam, but for others this was a cardinal reality. Yet virtually all considered emotional "participation" with God as a core value. Whether devotees direct themselves toward Śiva, Kṛṣṇa, Rāma, or the goddess Kālī, they seek always to develop a personal relationship with that divine figure. For bhakti theologians mokṣa consists more in attaining or reattaining closeness to God than in gaining liberation.

The deities of medieval bhakti bring with them the mythical narratives of theistic Hinduism that had previously been set forth in the epics and Purāṇas. The Kṛṣṇa of the sixteenth-century Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas (Chapter 40), for instance, is the same Kṛṣṇa whose story is told in the *Harivaṃśa* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. But most bhakti poets shift the cosmic scope of the Purāṇas and temple Hinduism to the background. There is less concern with God as creator and ruler of the cosmos, and more with God as humanly alive and embodied on earth. So with Kṛṣṇa, devotional poets and theologians tend to play down his earlier identity as an incarnation of Viṣṇu and instead focus on the pastoral life of his youth among the cowherds of Vraja. At the same time, they emphasize the inward presence of God in the heart and his loving regard for the faithful. Even when they do acknowledge the deity's role in creating and sustaining the world, devotionalists often portray God as playful, inscrutable, and sometimes downright devious in his or her activities. How else could one explain the bad state of things?

Not all devotionalists, however, comprehend God as an anthropomorphic form. Although most, like the Gauḍīyas, orient themselves to a God "with attributes" (*saguṇa*) like the eminently embodied Kṛṣṇa, others like Kabīr prefer to conceptualize God "without attributes" (*nirguṇa*). For the nirguṇa poets, any attempt to characterize or comprehend God is doomed ultimately to fail, and all the mythical and ritual ways we humans seek to relate to God are distractions or delusions.

According to the sixteenth-century devotional theologian Rūpa Gosvāmī, it is possible to enjoy various relationships with God. Rūpa specified five predominant ones, largely based on analogies with human relationships. One may relate to God as an insignificant human relates to the supreme deity, as a respectful servant relates to his lord and master, as a mother relates to her child, as a friend relates to his friend, or as a lover relates to her beloved. Devotional groups explore all these modes of relationship, and particularly the latter three, through their poetic and ritual practices. In the south Indian devotional genre of piḷḷaittamiḻ (Chapter 10), for example, poets address their chosen deities in the form of a child, employing a domestic idiom and redirecting parental love toward religious figures. Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas envision themselves as cowherd friends of Kṛṣṇa to participate in his divine sports (Chapter 13). Of all forms of association, Rūpa claims, the erotic is the highest, and much bhakti poetry explores the passionate love between the cowherd women of Vraja, who represent all human souls, and the enchanting young Kṛṣṇa. Arguing against other more conventional Hindu ways of concep-

tualizing one's relationship with God, Rūpa values emotional intensity over the meditative stasis of the yogis or the intellectual comprehension of the Advaitins as the highest goal.

The bhakti movements engendered various forms of devotional yoga, techniques for evoking and focusing the devotee's participation with God (Chapters 23, 30, 40). According to the Gauḍīya followers of Caitanya, the simplest technique, and therefore the one most suitable for the present age of decline, consists in repetitive chanting of God's name. Since Kṛṣṇa's name is more than just an arbitrary signifier—it is itself a portion of his reality—chanting his name as a mantra makes Kṛṣṇa himself actually present. The Gauḍīyas institutionalized chanting combined with ecstatic dancing as a collective practice, similar to the musical sessions of the Sufis. The tale of Haridāsa (Chapter 40) illustrates how these public displays of congregational revelry could provoke suspicion and suppression by civil authorities. At the same time, Haridāsa's miraculous fortitude in the face of adversity provides a metaphor for the resistant powers of inner bhakti against outward social pressure.

The practice most characteristic of medieval bhakti, though, was song and poetry. In contrast to Indian courtly traditions of poetic composition, poet-saints of north India sang in vernacular languages and drew their imagery from everyday life. They adopted highly personal poetic voices to speak of the tribulations and joys of the devotional life. The poetry of medieval bhakti in Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, and other vernacular languages of India is quite likely the richest library of devotion in world literature, distinguished not only by its religious intensity but also by the great variety of psychological states and emotional responses it explores. These medieval songs of devotion remain very much alive in contemporary India. Few of us indeed can recite as much of any author as the average Hindi speaker can reel off from Kabīr, Sūrdās, or Mīrābāī.

For devotionalists, the poetic invocation of God often supplanted ritual invocation and physical images. Although the earliest devotional movements in south India treated temples as an important locus of religiosity, some later bhakti groups dispensed with the temple as superfluous or criticized it as a place of purely formal religious observances, where priests and the dull-witted could go through the motions of worship. Bhakti poet-saints often broadened this skeptical attitude toward temple ritualism into a critique of all aspects of what they considered conventional or orthodox Hindu practice: Vedic recitation, pilgrimage, and the social hierarchy of the caste system.

The critical perspective of medieval bhakti reached its apogee in the writings of Kabīr. Raised in a poor community of Muslim weavers, Kabīr was initiated into bhakti by a Vaiṣṇava guru, and later attracted a following among both Muslims and Hindus. Throughout his poetic utterances he drew from the many religious traditions around him—Sufis, devotionalists, tantrics, Buddhists, and others. Yet, as in his poem "Simple State," Kabīr was quite happy to dish out equal scorn for the orthodoxies of Islam and Hinduism, urging instead a spiritual path of merging with an indescribable Absolute outside, or perhaps equally within, those verbose

schools of thought. The historical irony is that both Hindus and Muslims later claimed this irascible skeptic and mocker of formal religions, and his verse was also incorporated into the canon of a third religion, the *Ādi Granth* of the Sikhs (Chapter 2).

Tantra

Like devotionalism, the developments we now classify as tantra originated when temple Hinduism still dominated the public sphere. It developed from older and largely unrecorded practices of yoga, medicine, folk magic, and local goddess cults. From about the seventh century, Hindu and Buddhist tantra texts begin to appear, as do descriptions, often satirical, of recognizable tantric adepts. Beginning around the time of Maḥmūd's raids into north India, Hindu tantric groups and literature began to proliferate throughout the subcontinent. Reaching its greatest influence during the period of Islamic dominance, tantra continues in varied forms in present-day India, albeit much diminished, and has made itself known and notorious in the West through such international gurus as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh.

The word *tantra* does not admit to a single unequivocal definition. Drawn from the vocabulary of weaving, where it may refer to the threads, the warp, or the entire loom, the term *tantra* was extended to signify texts as things spun out and threaded together, both physically (since palm-leaf manuscripts require strings) and verbally. Later the word came to refer especially to one genre of texts directed to the Goddess, the Śākta tantras, and to the adherents of its teachings.

Historians of Indian religions use the word *tantra* primarily in two ways. In a broad sense they employ *tantra* to identify a whole series of ritual and yogic practices not found in the Vedic lineage of texts, such as visualization, geometrical designs, impositions of mantra powers, and Kuṇḍalinī yoga. The word *tantra* in this sense refers more to a shared repertoire of techniques than to any religious system. Many religious groups in medieval India made use of these techniques, and so there were Buddhist tantra, Jain tantra, and many "tantric elements" incorporated in the rituals of the temple Hindu schools. In a more restricted sense, tantra is taken as a system of thought and practice, based on a few shared premises and orientations. In this anthology, we use tantra primarily in this narrower definition.

Hindu tantric groups most often recognize the female goddess Śakti ("energy"), Śiva's consort, as the fundamental creative energy of the cosmos, and therefore as the Absolute. Tantrics view the human body as a microcosm of the universe, and focus on it as the only vehicle for attaining powers and liberation. Through yogic practices and ritual activities the tantric adept seeks to inculcate knowledge physically. Rather than seeking a disembodied escape from bondage or a devotional relationship with divinity, tantrics set as their highest goal the transformation of the body itself into divinity.

Tantra is often promulgated away from society, within small circles of initiates

clustered around preceptors. Tantric groups often compose their texts in "intentional" or "upside-down" language, making them deliberately unintelligible to those outside the initiated group. Some tantrics intentionally transgress social proprieties and consume forbidden meat and wine, in order to escape what they consider conventional reality and proceed directly to the ultimate. Though practiced by only a few tantric circles, this antinomian tendency, combined with the esoteric and ritualistic orientation of tantra, led to its widespread condemnation as a degenerate form of Hinduism by many Western scholars and by punctilious Indians, as well.

One of the most distinctive characteristics of tantra is the role played by the Goddess. Worship of goddesses is undoubtedly very ancient in South Asia. The *Devīmāhātmya* proclaimed a single pan-Indian Goddess as the Absolute. Medieval Śaiva theologians often bifurcated the godhead into male and female. They postulated an inactive but transcendent male Śiva who carries out all his worldly activities through an immanent energetic female Śakti. From this cosmic division of labor, tantra took the next logical step: if Śakti is doing everything anyway, why not focus upon her as the real force of the universe? Tantra thereby subverted Śiva's superior role and located Śakti—identified as Pārvatī, Durgā, Kālī, and all female divinities—at the top of the divine hierarchy, indeed as the animating energy of all.

As in bhakti, tantric groups paid close attention to the erotic, but they viewed it from a different perspective. Devotional poet-saints most often directed themselves toward male divinities, figured themselves as female lovers, and used human romance and sexuality as metaphor for the complex personal relationship between soul and God. According to tantric cosmology, the world itself comes into being through the primordial, recurrent coupling of Śiva and Śakti. Since the human body in tantra is a concentrated microcosm, an embodiment of the cosmos, it makes sense to view sexual union as a way of reenacting creation, bringing the practitioner in harmony with the forces of the cosmos. Detached from the romantic narratives of bhakti and given an impersonal cosmic significance, ritualized sexual union enabled the tantric adept to transcend all dualities. Ultimately, most devotionalists did not wish to overcome duality. For them, Rāmprasād Sen's observation rang true: "I like the taste of sugar, but I have no desire to become sugar."

Tantra, like bhakti, sometimes took a skeptical view of the social categories of merit and demerit, right and wrong, promulgated by the orthodox. Followers of bhakti might be led by their passionate attachment to God to transgress normal social boundaries, much as the cowherd women of Vraja willingly left their husbands and children to rendezvous with Kṛṣṇa in the forest. Some tantric groups prescribed a more deliberate, ritualized overturning of conventional mores. For the Kaula school, five normally forbidden offerings—the famous "Five Ms" of liquor, meat, fish, parched grain, and sexual intercourse—were regularly consumed or enjoyed as part of pūjā. Here too transgression acknowledged the superior claims of religious attainment over the everyday rules of social conduct.

But by no means did all tantra groups accept this antinomian attitude. The eleventh-century tantric alchemical treatise *Rasārnava*, for instance, strongly criticized the Five-M mode of tantra (Chapter 15). As in every other religious formation we have looked at, there was always internal debate among tantric proponents over the ultimate ends and the best means to reach it.

Guru Nānak and Sikhism

When conservative proponents of two seemingly irreconcilable religious systems were struggling to gain ideological supremacy, one religious option was to declare both equally wrong. Alternatively, one could consciously adopt whatever seemed most worthwhile from both traditions. In medieval India this unitarian strategy sought a domain of spiritual peace outside the pervasive disagreement between orthodox Muslims and orthodox Hindus. The most influential of medieval Indian syncretists, Guru Nānak (1469–1539) ended up founding a new religion, Sikhism.

Born in a Hindu merchant family in the predominantly Muslim Punjab, Nānak worked as an accountant until, at age twenty-nine, he had a transformative experience. He fell into a bathing pool and disappeared from sight. Unable to find him, friends and family finally gave him up for dead. When Nānak returned to society three days later, his first utterance was, "There is no Hindu; there is no Muslim." He spent the remainder of his life traveling, teaching, singing, and gathering a band of followers. The name "Sikh" is derived from the Sanskrit word for pupil, *śiṣya*, indicating the relationship first adopted by Nānak's followers toward their guru.

In his teachings and songs, Nānak gently but firmly repudiated the external practices of the religions he saw around him—the oblations, sacrifices, ritual baths, image worshiping, austerities, and scriptures of Hindus and Muslims. For Nānak, the all-pervasive and incomprehensible God must be sought within oneself. The nirguṇa Absolute has no gender, no form, no immanent incarnations or manifestations. Despite God's infinitude and formlessness, Nānak proposed a very simple means of connecting with the divine. One must remember and repeat the divine Name. Nānak rigorously refused to specify what that Name was, though he sometimes called it "Creator of the Truth," equating truth with godliness.

During his own lifetime Nānak began to organize his followers into a community of the faithful. He set up informal procedures for congregational worship centering around collective recitation. Most important, he chose one of his disciples, Aṅgad, to follow him as preceptor and leader of the group, its guru. By choosing a single successor, Nānak established a precedent of group leadership that would last through ten gurus and nearly two hundred years. Nānak's followers collected anecdotes of his life that illustrated his central teachings and located his songs within biographical events, whether factual or imagined. Hagiography became an important genre of early Sikh literature, as it was among Sufis and devotionalists (Chapter 30).

Nānak most often identified himself as a Hindu by virtue of birth, but as his

followers consolidated their own practices they gradually distinguished themselves from both Hindu and Muslim communities. The fifth guru, Arjan, collected the writings of the first five leaders and other like-minded poet-saints into the *Ādi Granth*, the foundation text of the Sikh religion (Chapter 5). In Sikh ceremonial this book came to occupy the central place on the altar, where Hindus would place an image. Guru Arjan rebuilt the temple at Amritsar and set himself up as lord of the Sikhs. With the Sikh community now a formidable social group, its Gurus began to play a more active role in north Indian political conflicts. They took sides in Mughal dynastic disputes and sometimes suffered the consequences of backing the losing side.

In the late seventeenth century, the time of the tenth and last guru, Gobind Singh, many Sikhs identified themselves still more visibly and decisively as a separate religious community. A determined opponent of Mughal rule, Gobind Singh instituted the Khālsā fellowship (the "army of the pure"), a group of Sikh initiates who accepted a code of conduct that included five insignia: uncut hair, a dagger or sword, a pair of military shorts, a comb, and a steel bangle (Chapter 18). Gobind Singh required initiates to renounce all previous religious affiliations and to repudiate all gods, goddesses, and prophets other than the one Name recognized by the Sikhs.

Under Gobind Singh, the Sikh community solidified both its socio-religious identity and its military strength. By the beginning of the nineteenth century a Sikh kingdom led by Ranjīt Singh posed the last major independent opposition to British rule in South Asia. Though finally defeated in the late 1840s, Ranjīt Singh's kingdom left a memory of a separate Sikh state, a Khalistan or "land of the pure," that would be evoked at the time of Partition, when the departing British divided India along religious lines into Muslim Pakistan and Hindu India, and again in the 1980s. Though they form a relatively small religious community of around 13 million in India, roughly 2 percent of the population, the Sikhs today constitute the most visible and in many ways one of the most prosperous communities in South Asia. Large numbers of Sikhs have emigrated to the U.K., Canada, and other parts of the Commonwealth.

The British Period

From 1757 on, British traders with the East India Company gradually increased their role in South Asia until, by the time British armies defeated the Punjabi kingdom of Ranjīt Singh in 1849, they ruled most of India. And so, from the late eighteenth century until 1947, Indians were dominated by a foreign power whose seat of authority was halfway around the world in London. These foreigners brought with them not only a new language and philosophy of rule and a different set of religious beliefs but also a worldview grounded in the secular, modernizing ideology of the Enlightenment. The encounter of existing religious formations of India with new forms of Christianity and with post-Enlightenment modes of

knowledge within this colonial milieu ushered in another period of challenge, debate, and dynamism within South Asian religions.

Christianity was not completely new to the subcontinent. Syriac Christian trading communities had inhabited the Malabar coast of southern India from as early as the fourth century, and continued as autonomous groups of high status integrated within the largely Hindu society around them. The Portuguese, who established themselves on the western coast in the sixteenth century, carried out Christian missionary work with rather mixed results. Some lower-class communities realized the advantages that could result from forming religious bonds with a colonizing power and converted en masse, gradually developing their own indigenized forms of Christianity. The Portuguese were unable, however, to make much headway with the large majority of Indians they proselytized. Unlike Islamic Sufism, the Catholicism of the Counter-Reformation did not seem particularly compatible with the Indian religious environment.

British administrators took a decidedly ambivalent attitude toward missionary activity in their colonial territories, fearing it might "stir up the natives," whom they wished mainly to pacify. Under pressure from evangelicals in England, though, they eventually allowed Protestant missionaries to pursue their work on a limited scale. The missions did not achieve the conversions of great masses that they hoped for, but their incisive and often hyperbolic critiques of indigenous religion in India did have the important effect of inspiring some spirited defenses from the indigens. The Tamil Śaivite Ārumuga Nāvalar, for instance, studied and worked for many years in a Methodist school before setting out on a personal mission to refortify the Śaiva Siddhānta religion and defend it against Christian attacks. Religious apologetics, defending one's own religion against outside attack, often has the effect of altering precisely that which one seeks to defend, giving it a definition or fixity it did not have previously, and this occurred repeatedly among Indian religions during the colonial encounter.

More challenging to the self-esteem of educated Indians were the Western scholars who for the first time began to study the religions of India as historical entities. The Western concern with delineating the various religions of the world was given tremendous impetus in India through the inspiration and organizational work of William Jones, an exemplary man of the Enlightenment. Jones was the first to publicize the linguistic connection of Sanskrit with classical Greek and Latin, enabling scholars to reconstruct the Indo-European family of languages and laying the basis for the field of historical philology, an important intellectual discipline of the nineteenth century. In Calcutta, where he served as a judge, Jones organized a small group of British civil servants who had become enamored with India's classical literature into the Asiatick Society, the first scholarly organization devoted to comprehending the religions, history, and literatures of India from a Western perspective. These officials were responsible for the earliest attempts to translate what they considered to be the most important Indian texts—all ancient and Sanskrit—into English, making them available to the West and engendering a kind of "Oriental Renaissance" among educated Europeans in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

These classical Indiaphiles, also called "Orientalists," felt less affectionate toward the present-day Indians among whom they were living. They judged contemporary Indian religions to be debased from their lofty origins in the classical past. The Orientalists' high valuation of classical antiquity, coupled with a condescending dismissal of modern India, led to a long-standing prejudice in the Western study of India, whereby the oldest, elite Sanskrit works were valued above all others.

An alternative position, still less sympathetic to the Indians, soon took shape in England and was then exported to India. Inspired by Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian philosophy, James Mill, an official with the East India Company based in London, wrote his *History of British India* in the 1820s without needing to set foot in India. Mill's *History*, an immense and thorough indictment of the Indian peoples, tried to justify the need for British rule among a population supposedly unable to govern itself. Mill especially condemned Hinduism, blaming it for much of what was wrong with India. Hinduism is ritualistic, superstitious, irrational, and priest-ridden, Mill charged, at each step implicitly contrasting it with the deist version of Christianity that he believed to be the highest form of religion. For several decades the East India Company provided a copy of Mill's tome to new Company officials embarking for India, to sustain them in their sense of racial and cultural superiority while in the colony.

The attitudes the British held toward India had far-reaching effects on the Indians who came in contact with them. While some were satisfied to reiterate what they saw as the traditional, time-tested, and therefore superior forms of Indian religiosity, other Indians, more deeply affected by Western forms of knowledge and British criticisms of Hinduism, became highly circumspect and self-critical. From this spirit of cultural self-reproach came the widespread religious reformism of colonial India.

The prototype of the Hindu reformer was Rammohan Roy (1774–1833), a Bengali brahman who received a wide education in Persian and Arabic (languages of the Indo-Muslim court culture), Sanskrit (language of his own religious background), and then English (the emerging language of commerce and administration in colonial India). Taking advantage of new moneymaking opportunities as the British expanded their operations, Roy was able to retire young as a wealthy landlord to pursue his intellectual and religious interests. Roy valued British "progress" and Western modernity, and believed there was an urgent need to modernize Hinduism, which he had come to see as a stagnant tradition. To do this, he urged a reappraisal and selective redefinition of Hinduism. Of course, Indian religious thinkers had been doing exactly this for centuries, but never before with such a historicist self-awareness. In many cases Roy accepted British and Christian judgments as valid. He agreed, for example, that Hindu "polytheism" and "idolatry" were primitive and debased, and he joined in British efforts to outlaw and suppress satī, the practice of widow self-immolation (see Chapter 14). Concurring with the Orientalists' notion that current Hinduism had degenerated from a more glorious past, Roy recommended that Hindus return to earlier, purer beliefs and

practices, and he sought to advance the ancient Upaniṣads with their idealism and monotheism as the foundation texts for a new Hinduism. In 1828 he founded the Brāhmo Samāj, a voluntary religious organization, to help put his ideas into effect.

Rammohan Roy was the first but not the only religious reformer of colonial India. Reform movements arose in every region of South Asia under British control, and while each reflected its own local culture and religious tradition, all shared the fundamentalist attitude of the Brāhmo Samāj in criticizing contemporary forms of religiosity and in seeking to return to some presumed state of purity located in the past. The Ārya Samāj, founded in 1875 by Svāmī Dayānanda Sarasvatī in western India, likewise advocated returning to the Vedic texts (Chapter 31). From the standpoint of the Vedas, Dayānanda argued, one should oppose not only religious corruption but also what he saw as the evils of contemporary Indian society, such as caste, untouchability, and the subjugation of women. Many Hindu reform movements saw their task as reforming both Hinduism and Indian society.

Among the Sikhs, the Nirankāri movement called for a rejection of existing Sikh practices and a return to the "formless" worship of the founder, Guru Nānak. The Śvetāmbara Jains had their own reform movement led by the mendicant Vijay Ānandsūri (Chapter 42), and even the Syriac Christians experienced millenarian revivalist movements during the nineteenth century.

The Muslim-controlled areas of northern India were the last to come under direct British control, and the Muslim elite, nostalgic for the lost glories of Mughal imperium, initially resisted British learning and remained aloof from British administration. Nevertheless, by the late nineteenth century colonial reformism took shape among Indian Muslims as well. Syed Ahmed Khan set out to purge contemporary Indian Islam of what he considered its extraneous and unnecessary practices and to return to a pure Islam, while at the same time he attempted to harmonize Islamic ideology with modern science. In the early twentieth century, Mohamed Ali envisioned the reestablishment of a pan-Islamic polity centered in Ottoman Turkey. By this time religious reformism had begun to take on a more overt anti-colonial dimension among Muslim and Hindu elites as well, and Ali's call for a Turkish Khilafat was simultaneously an appeal for ending British rule.

Perhaps the most renowned nineteenth-century Hindu reformer was Svāmī Vivekānanda. He was a young member of the Brāhmo Samāj when he first met Rāmakṛṣṇa, a charismatic ascetic and devotee of the goddess Kālī. Eventually Vivekānanda became Rāmakṛṣṇa's disciple, and sought to integrate within a single religious outlook the experiential devotionalism of Rāmakṛṣṇa, the social agenda of the Brāhmo Samāj, and the nondualist philosophy of Śaṅkara and the Advaita Vedānta. As a spokesman for Hinduism in 1893 at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, he created a sensation. Building on this success, he toured the United States for three years, attracted many Western followers, and set up the Vedanta Society. Returning to India, Vivekānanda founded the Ramakrishna Mission, an organization dedicated to education and social service much like

Christian missions in India. Vivekānanda is still celebrated as a teacher of "practical Vedānta," which scholars sometimes label "neo-Vedānta," a significant version of modern Hindu ideology. He was also the prototype of a new breed of cosmopolitan Hindu gurus who would bring their teachings to Western audiences.

As the movement for Indian independence took shape in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, activists drew upon and reworked elements from the Hindu tradition for explicitly political purposes. The Maharashtrian leader B. G. Tilak, for example, instituted a public festival to the elephant-headed god Gaṇeśa, celebrating Hindu popular culture as a means of regaining "self-rule," and not incidentally attracting large crowds for his political speeches. In Bengal the ferocious goddess Kālī lent her fierce energy to the independence struggle, and the new goddess Bhārat Māta ("Mother India") appeared, iconographically modeled on Lakṣmī, as a national focus for devotion and sacrifice. Literary and political figures alike rewrote and reinterpreted old texts like the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, making them speak to the colonial situation. Although reintroducing Hindu deities and rituals to make political statements was nothing new in India, and it certainly helped extend the politics of anticolonialism beyond the educated urban elite, in the colonial setting it also had the unfortunate effect of identifying the independence movement as a largely Hindu enterprise, alienating Muslims and other non-Hindu communities.

Throughout the colonial period, the British viewed India as a society made up of distinct, identifiable religious communities: Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, "tribals," and so on. British administrators soon learned the advantages of "divide and rule," and often promoted religious divisions as a conscious strategy to weaken those who might oppose them. Even in seemingly nonpolitical administrative activities like census taking, the British use of unequivocal categories to classify a religious reality that was complex and mingled promoted a clarification and hardening of religious distinctions.

Indians themselves increasingly employed the same classifications, and many of the reform movements, with their weekly meetings, membership lists, and search for the essence of their traditions, also helped define and solidify community boundaries. By the early decades of the twentieth century, religious conflict increased in Indian society. The outcome of this "communalization" was that, when the English finally quit India in 1947, they felt it necessary to divide their colony along religious lines into two nation-states, Islamic Pakistan and Hindu India. This tragic decision led to terrible violence and suffering among Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs alike during the Partition, and its consequences are still felt powerfully in the politics of modern South Asia.

Religions of Home and Village

One important dimension of Indian religions that is too often lost sight of in historical summaries like this one is the religion of the domestic sphere. Historians

have frequently overlooked domestic religious traditions because the activities of the household are generally transmitted orally, from woman to woman over the generations, and do not receive the textual documentation accorded more public, male-dominated domains of religion. Only with the work of recent anthropologists and folklorists have these traditions begun to receive the attention they deserve. Several readings in this volume exemplify this new scholarly focus on the home as a locus of religiosity.

Transmitted orally, domestic religious traditions show marked local and regional diversity, but certain themes are common. Domestic forms of Indian religions directly address the concerns of women, but not only those of women. Successful marriage, healthy offspring, domestic accord, and prosperity of the home are values shared by all members of the household. Domestic rites seek to ward off the various calamities—disease, family dissension, poverty, death—that threaten the well-being of the family and lineage. Though one finds little interest here in the attainment of mokṣa that looms so large in other Indian religious traditions, these domestic concerns certainly are not trivial or parochial. Other forms of divine salvation, such as marriage or motherhood to a god, are recognized, and the world of the kitchen may even be identified with the cosmos itself, as in the Tamil poem addressed to the child-goddess Mīnāṭci, "Sway back and forth" (Chapter 10).

Female divinities figure strongly in domestic religion. Some are decidedly benign, like Mother Ten (Chapter 29) and the basil-shrub goddess Tulsī (Chapter 33), worshiped for their capacities to bring sustenance and health. But there are other goddesses of a more uneven temperament, such as Mother Ten's opposite number, "Bad Ten," or the Bengali Śītalā, goddess of smallpox (Chapter 24). Quick to take offense, Śītalā requires careful mollifying to insure that her wrath does not come down on one's own family. In Rajasthan, women sing devotional songs also to satīs, exemplary women who overcame the inauspiciousness of their husbands' deaths through extraordinary adherence to purity, and who have become protector spirits of the lineage (Chapter 14).

Although domestic religions often take a different perspective from the public traditions, they nevertheless share with them a single language of Indian religious discourse. The domestic goddess Tulsī, for instance, is linked with Kṛṣṇa, and her stories explore the jealous rivalry that may arise among co-wives attached to this famously promiscuous male god. The Rajasthani regional goddess Mother Ten, we find, is identified as Lakṣmī, the pan-Indian Sanskritic goddess of good fortune. Likewise, when Muslim women worship at moments of domestic crisis, they focus on the miraculous birth of Muḥammad, connecting their concerns about procreation and healing with the most public figure of the Islamic tradition (Chapter 21). Domestic ceremonies, too, draw upon the common Indian repertoire of ascetic and ritual practices, such as fasting, bathing, purification rites, pūjā, and the maintenance of vows (*vrata*) to bring about the desired ends (Chapter 22).

An earlier generation of anthropologists and Indianists spoke of the ongoing relationships between public, literary, pan-Indian traditions and localized, oral