



Rethinking Hinduism in a Postcolonial Context

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In this article, I address the issue of how to rethink Hinduism constructively in a postcolonial context. First I revisit the 1990s debate on Hinduism as a colonial construction, discussing both sides of the debate, namely, Hinduism as a European colonial invention and Hinduism as something indigenously existent. I then outline the Orientalist framework that still unwittingly guides scholarship on both sides of the debate, using the work of German Indologist Wilhelm Halbfass. In the next section I attempt to address this problem through postcolonial and ideological critiques, also, however, discussing the problems with ideological critique. This

brings me to the major lacuna that I wish to address: the lack of sensitivity to what actual practitioners and those called Hindus are to do with the knowledge produced and constantly debated. My objective is to examine the issue critically in ways that may be meaningful to practitioners and inheritors of this legacy today. To this end, I suggest fruitful ways to approach the problem by interpreting South Asian postcolonial theorists constructively. My conclusion states the constructive importance of postcolonial theory to the fields of religion and theology.

A brief outline of the ‘Hinduism problem’ and its problems

Academic debates in the 1990’s focused on the invention of Hinduism in the colonial period by Western “outsiders.” The basic thesis runs like this: colonization created such an imbalance of power that colonized nations, such as India, were forever marred by this process, and through Orientalist discourses about them that defined and disempowered them as the Other to the West. The issue complicates itself in that first, Hinduism itself as a category and concept is seen as a construction of British imperialism, there being no such indigenous sense of such an overarching tradition encompassing the nation now called India. The same holds for the concept of religion, and philosophy in India. The issue is further complicated in that the reconstruction of ancient Hinduism has historically been done by these same colonial powers and Western scholars in Western academies, who rely mainly on ancient texts that they have translated. We

thus have both the construction and reconstruction of a religion done not only by outsiders to a tradition, but by outsiders to the geographical, cultural, and historical milieu of that tradition.¹

Some trace these debates to religion scholar W.C. Smith, who claimed that Hinduism existed as a reified category, but which is not something that adequately expresses the faith of Hindus.² More recently, Heinrich van Stietencron, along with Frits Staal and Robert Frykenberg, has claimed Hinduism is an umbrella term that ideologically places together varied communities, beliefs, ideas, and practices for which there is no universal or common ground.³ Stietencron states that

¹ For a discussion of this issue and Orientalism, see the following: Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (London: Hurst & Company, 1990); Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India, and the Mystic East* (London: Routledge, 1999), particularly chapters 3-5; Richard King, *Indian Philosophy: An Introduction to Hindu and Buddhist Thought* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1999); Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988); Wilhelm Halbfass, *Tradition and Reflection: Explorations in Indian Thought* (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1991); and *Beyond Orientalism: The Work of Wilhelm Halbfass and its Impact on Indian and Cross-Cultural Studies*, ed. Eli Franco and Karin Preisendanz (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997).

² Wilfred Cantwell. Smith, *The Meaning and End of religion: a New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind* (New York: MacMillan, 1963), particularly 60-66, 144-149.

³ See Brian Pennington's discussion of the topic in *Was Hinduism Invented?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 168-70. See also chapters 1 and 6. In addition, see Heinrich von Stietencron, "Religious Configurations in Pre-Muslim India and the Modern Concept of Hinduism," in *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity*, ed. Vasudha Dalmia and H. von Stietencron (New Delhi: Sage, 1995), 51-81, hereafter referred to as *Representing*; see also Stietencron, "Hinduism: On the Proper Use of a Deceptive Term," in *Hinduism Reconsidered*, South Asian Studies 24, ed Günther-Dietz Sontheimer and Herman Kulke (New Delhi: Manohar, 1989), 11-27, hereafter referred to as *Reconsidered*. See also Robert Eric Frykenberg, "The Emergence of Modern 'Hinduism' as a Concept and as an Institution: A Reappraisal with Special Reference to South India," in *Hinduism Reconsidered*, South Asian Studies 24, ed Günther-Dietz Sontheimer and Herman Kulke (New Delhi: Manohar, 1989), 29-49, hereafter referred to as "Emergence;" Robert Eric Frykenberg, "The Construction of Hinduism as a 'Public' Religion: Looking Again at the Religious Roots of Company Raj in South India," in *Religion and Public Culture: Encounters and Identities in Modern South Asia*, ed. Keith E. Yandell and John J. Paul (Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 2000), 3-26, hereafter referred to as *Public*. See also Frits Staal, *Ritual and Mantras: Rules without Meaning* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996).

it has been shown that the term ‘Hinduism’ is a relatively recent one. Not only is the term modern...but also the whole concept of the oneness of Hindu religion was introduced by missionaries and scholars from the West.... Historically, the concept of Hindu religious unity is questionable when applied to any period prior to the nineteenth century.⁴

Likewise, Frykenberg writes:

Unless by ‘Hindu’ one means nothing more, nor less than ‘Indian’ (something native to, pertaining to, or found within the continent of India), there never has been any such thing as a single ‘Hinduism’ or any single ‘Hindu community’ for all of India.... Furthermore, there has never been any one religion – nor even one system of religions- to which the term ‘Hindu’ can accurately be applied.... The very notion of the existence of any single religious community by this name, one may further argue, has been falsely conceived.⁵

Staal maintains that “for Hinduism does not merely fail to be a religion; it is not even a meaningful unit of discourse. There is no way to abstract a meaningful unitary notion of Hinduism from the Indian phenomena.”⁶ Engaging in an anti-Orientalist critique, historian Ronald Inden has aptly noted the construction of a passive and ahistorical Hindu Other for the purposes of constructing modern Western identity and to aid in the task of imperial domination.⁷ Richard King has further nuanced this view by arguing that Hinduism and religion are modern Western, Christianly biased categories and constructs that arose out of an Orientalist, colonial

⁴ *Representing*, 51.

⁵ “Emergence,” 29.

⁶ 397.

⁷ Inden, chapter 3.

matrix and are not applicable in other times and places. King argues for alternative ways of understanding that take into account indigenous understandings and interpretations.⁸

Other scholars such as David Lorenzen and Will Sweetman contend that Hinduism is a valid category corresponding to historical and social realities, and is meaningful to the self-understanding and the religious identity of practitioners even before colonial construction.⁹

Sweetman argues:

Moreover, the conception of Hinduism in the minds of early European writers on Indian religions did not result from their slavishly and unconsciously applying this kind of definition to an Indian religiosity which their theological preconceptions forced them to perceive as unified.... For Ziegenbalg [an early German missionary in India], at least, it is possible to demonstrate that he arrived at this conclusion in part on the basis of what Indians themselves reported about their religious affiliation.¹⁰

Lorenzen similarly avers:

If Hinduism is a construct or invention, then, it is not a colonial one, nor a European one, nor even an exclusively Indian one. It is a construct or invention only in the vague and commonsensical way that any large institution is, be it Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, communism, or parliamentary democracy. In other words, it is an institution created out of a long historical interaction between a set of basic ideas and the infinitely complex and variegated socio-religious beliefs and practices that structure the everyday life of individuals and small, local groups.¹¹

⁸ King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 10. See also chapter 1. See also Richard King, "Colonialism, Hinduism, and the discourse of religion," in *Rethinking Religion in India*, ed. Esther Bloch, Marianne Keppens, and Rajaram Hegde (London: Routledge, 2010), Kindle edition.

⁹ David Lorenzen, "Who Invented Hinduism?" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41:4 (1999): 630-659; see also David Lorenzen, "Hindus and others," in *Rethinking Religion in India*; Will Sweetman, "Unity and Plurality: Hinduism and the Religions of India in Early European Scholarship," *Religion* 31 (2001): 209-224.

¹⁰ 219.

¹¹ 654-55.

He concludes by asserting that “this Hinduism wasn’t invented by anyone, European or Indian. Like Topsy, it just grow’d.”¹² Wendy Doniger declares that there were always ways of thinking and practice in which people were engaging, that have now come to be included under the term Hinduism.¹³ Charles Hallisey has argued for the role of indigenous collaboration in the construction itself, while Brian Pennington has nuanced this view by declaring that construction was never a one-sided affair, and that indigenous responses were always at hand to alter, respond, and reconstruct the colonial construction in their own creative ways.¹⁴

The endless debates can lead to perpetual confusion about which side is “right” and what approach is best to take in the study of Hinduism—one that acknowledges the construction by outsiders and deconstructs it, sometimes in the effort to return to something more indigenous, or one that tries to allow some room for the continuity of the tradition as meaningful to adherents in the past, present and for the future, yet that may maintain a Western and Christian bias. I fear the voices on both sides, themselves usually non-religious and non-Hindus, leave little left for today’s adherents in one form or another. The West constructs, and then deconstructs a tradition. Where does that leave those who have been constructed and then deconstructed? Moreover, there have been crucial aspects which hitherto scholars on both sides have not addressed

¹² 655.

¹³ Wendy Doniger, “Hinduism by Any Other Name,” *The Wilson Quarterly* 15:3 (summer 1991): 35-41.

¹⁴ Hallisey’s thoughts are noted by King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 148-49; I have also had the privilege of being taught by Charles Hallisey in a course, and thus gather my views from both sources. Pennington, particularly chapters 1, 5 and 6.

adequately, the first being how the debate is still framed by Orientalist assumptions which still widely affect approaches, viewpoints, and interpretations, both in scholarship and at large.¹⁵

The legacy and remnants of Orientalism and the Hinduism problem: Wilhelm Halbfass

As an example of the problems still facing the western academic study of Hinduism due to its origins and legacy, I now focus on German Indologist Wilhelm Halbfass and his work *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*. One mistake I saw in Halbfass, and emblematic of others as well, was to count colonization and Westernization as signs of inauthenticity when it came to the tradition. The Indian world after colonization was so marred by this experience that post-colonial Indian culture can never return to an authentic Indianness. For Halbfass the experience of colonization exposed traditional Indian thought to an encounter with modernity like none before, and a more encompassing domination with universalizing and globalizing claims.¹⁶ In the “Europeanization of the Earth” in scientific, technological, and intellectual mastery,¹⁷ Halbfass notes that

in its attempts to define itself and to assert its identity and continuity against the West, modern Indian thought does not find itself on neutral ground: instead, it finds itself in a Westernized world. In responding to the West, it exposes itself to an ‘actuality’ and universality which European philosophy and science have brought about.... Even when it confronts, challenges, and questions Western

¹⁵ See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), particularly 96, 104, 107, 121, 197, 202-03, 326-27. See also Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), particularly chapters two and nine, 73-103, 309-28.

¹⁶ *India and Europe*, 217.

¹⁷ *India and Europe*, 440, 442.

thought—it reflects and presupposes its global actuality, and it not only responds to, but also participates in, the global predicament of Westernization.¹⁸

In other words, European modes of thought have created the world in which modern Indian thought must understand itself and speak. Halbfass thinks that the Western domination of the world has precluded the possibility of thinking outside a Western meta-discourse, context and presuppositions, stating that “modern Indian thought finds itself in a historical context created by Europe, and it has difficulties speaking for itself. Even in its self-representation and self-assertion, it speaks to a large extent in a European idiom.”¹⁹ He claims that because of this “the teachings and methods of the past and of Eastern traditions cannot speak and function in the modern Westernized world as they did in the past or in their own traditional contexts.”²⁰ For example, neo-Hindu movements during and after the colonial experience, for Halbfass, are too Westernized and trapped within Western concepts and ways of thinking.²¹ He writes that colonization “affected the very self-understanding of the tradition and turned out to be inescapable even when it was rejected or discarded. For it began to provide the means even for its rejection, and for the Hindu self-affirmation against it.”²²

Yet Halbfass also believed that something in Hinduism remained that was not marred by the colonial encounter, something “authentically” Indian. He states that “this does not, however,

¹⁸ *India and Europe*, 372.

¹⁹ *India and Europe*, 375.

²⁰ *India and Europe*, 441.

²¹ Halbfass thinks that neo-Hindu movements reinterpret their traditions by adopting western outlooks, concepts and orientations, as a result of contact with the west, and then reading those “foreign elements” into their own tradition and altering the meaning of the tradition in light of western outlooks, *India and Europe*, 220.

²² *India and Europe*, 439.

mean that the dialogue and debate between India and Europe has been decided in favor of Europe, or that India has been superceded by Europe. The power of the Indian tradition has not exhausted itself in the self-representation and self-interpretation of modern India.”²³ In searching for it, however, he does not look to the lived tradition, or to modern-day Hinduism, but to ancient Vedic texts, which he somehow feels provide the authenticity and answers he seeks. He writes that “for Indians as well as Europeans, the ‘Europeanization of the Earth continues to be inescapable and irreversible. For this very reason, ancient Indian thought, in its unassimilable, non-actualizable, yet intensely meaningful distance and otherness, is *not* obsolete.”²⁴

I find this troubling in many ways, the first being that the dialogic partner he wishes to encounter is an ancient textual tradition, and not actual practitioners of a faith tradition. The second problem stems from the fact that this ancient textual tradition, in its translations, textual reproductions, printings, and editions, has not escaped from the Orientalist and imperialist influence and thus the Westernization Halbfass seems desirous to avoid. The third major problem is of course, the one of authenticity; modern Indian thought cannot “exhaust” the possibilities of the ancient thought because it not the legitimate untainted form of Indian thought. By making the ancient tradition the authentic Hinduism, or Vedic Hinduism, all other forms, including present-day practices, become inauthentic and somehow less legitimate.

Furthermore, what becomes clear is that Halbfass sees engaging with these ancient Vedic texts as important partially because he seeks dialogue with an Other, an Other to the modern, western predicament, that can somehow provide alternative understandings that can release us

²³ *India and Europe*, 375.

²⁴ *India and Europe*, 442.

from the conceptual ills of modernization.²⁵ For this reason, Halbfass seeks an other that is totally Other to this modern West, and this is also why he cannot accept a postcolonial Hinduism as “authentic.” It is too marred by this Westernization and modernization, and caught within this discourse to provide the alternatives through encounter with an Other that Halbfass seeks.

This move also takes Hinduism out of the context of a living, changing historical tradition and into the realm of time immemorial. Halbfass, in his attempts to provide an ancient non-Western Other for dialogue, also deadens the Indian tradition. He writes that “regardless of the ultimate metaphysical truth and potential of the Indian doctrines—Indian thought is not in the same sense *historically* actual and present as European philosophy. It does not ‘live’ and articulate itself in a present which it has actively shaped and helped to bring about.”²⁶ And how might this affect our understanding of Hinduism, and more importantly, present-day Hindus’ self-understanding? By placing it in such an ancient context, Hinduism becomes dead and archaic, something from long ago, not something that lives and breathes today, particularly among practitioners, and not something that can be taken up, practiced and lived.

²⁵ Halbfass often laments about the modern western predicament, one which has led itself into mastery and domination, but at the cost of self-questioning, self-criticism, self-doubt and self-alienation, a questioning and doubting of its presuppositions and goals, *India and Europe*, 374. At another point, he also speaks of a “crisis” due to modern western culture and the “Europeanization of the Earth,” *India and Europe*, 441. Thus it seems to me fairly obvious that Halbfass is seeking an outlet to this malaise of western modernity, and looking to ancient Indian thought as the other that has some possible answers.

²⁶ *India and Europe*, 372.

Halbfass exemplifies what Indian scholar of Indian philosophy Purushottama Bilimoria has noted in his analysis of Nietzsche's use of Indian philosophy.²⁷ Bilimoria is worth quoting in full because he sums it up perfectly when he says that Nietzsche is:

guilty of the same reliance on prescriptive texts for descriptive purposes typical of most Indology up to the present day. This discipline has traditionally opted for a textual rather than historical object of study. This has partly evolved from the nature of the academic disciplines originally involved in the 're-discovery' of India, disciplines such as philology, lexicography, textual criticism; and secondly from the lack of historical materials in the Indian context and the difficulties of historical study of Indian antiquity in general. There may have been other reasons connected with the West's creation of the East as an Other, which led to a heavy emphasis on ideal models of the Orient rather than detailed examination of existing India. This direction of study creates the oft-felt gap between the 'wonder that was India' and the perceived ingloriousness of contemporary India, a gap which often led to Orientalist disappointment and despair, and ultimate rejection of any ongoing validity in Indian progress in the fields of philosophy, literature, and so on. From an anthropological point of view this cannot but lead to a distorted and overly idealized picture of the society itself, a moral or ethical model rather than a living reality.²⁸

The Hinduism problem read through postcolonial and ideological critique

To be fair, in light of postcolonial theory, scholarship has changed since Halbfass' work in 1988. Yet the debate still rages on about the categories of religion and Hinduism and their construction. The recent five-year conference cycle entitled *Rethinking Religion in India*, and the recent book published from the first conference, show that these issues are far from resolved.²⁹ Nevertheless, very few scholars have noticed the Orientalist tendencies present in

²⁷ Purushottama Bilimoria, "Nietzsche as 'Europe's Buddha' and 'Asia's Superman,'" *Sophia* 47 (2008): 359–376.

²⁸ Bilimoria, 373.

²⁹ See www.rethinkingreligion.org, the conference cluster's website, and *Rethinking Religion in India*.

Halbfass.³⁰ Nor have many to my knowledge been very self-reflective on the marred history of the scholarship as it may influence their own viewpoints and scholarly work.

What Halbfass evidences is how far scholarship on Hinduism and in the field of religion, particularly as regards postcolonial cultures and traditions, has to go before it comes to terms with religious studies issues as regards colonization, imperialism, and ideology. As Sharada Sugirtharajah has noted, current study and understanding of Hinduism still continue to draw on its colonial construction, and continue to be influenced by its ideological and hermeneutic underpinnings.³¹ To pursue this issue further, I think Said, postcolonial theorists writing on religion, as well as ideologically critical scholars in the field can help us highlight the crucial questions and problems at stake and point us in the right directions. I begin with Said, without whom no other scholar mentioned afterward could have arisen.

The importance of Said and his *Orientalism* for the study of Hinduism is of course his understanding of Orientalist scholarship's relationship to colonial systems of domination and power, not just in the political realm, but in the intellectual and cultural realms as well. Western culture has possessed the superior capacity not only to construct and represent Hinduism, but to

³⁰ Pennington notes that Halbfass' emphasis on ancient thought and on a "vanquished" Indian thought is outdated in light of new historical scholarship and postcolonial and subaltern studies, 11. Yet, even so, he still claims Halbfass' work as "the most balanced and extensively researched study of Indian and European thought to date," 10. He further claims that Halbfass' genius was in granting full agency and subjectivity to the Indian authors he referenced, and in its commitment to being about "full human beings" and to mutual understanding, 12. Even Richard King, with whom I generally concur, critiques Halbfass' attachment to the notion of Hinduism as preexisting colonial construction, but by and large references Halbfass as a source for European understandings of and dialogue with Hindu philosophy, *Orientalism and Religion*, 77-78, 90, 109-110, 124-25. Likewise, Masuzawa remains mum about Halbfass and any Orientalism. No critique of his outlook or representation is made.

³¹ "Colonialism and Religion," in *Rethinking Religion in India*, Colonialism and Hinduism section.

speak for it as well.³² Said writes that by the Orientalist, the Orient would be “put into cultural circulation a form of discursive currency by whose presence the Orient henceforth would be *spoken for*.”³³ Notice in the debates on Hinduism how much of it is indeed a scholarly affair; it rages on between scholars, usually among non-Hindu Western scholars, or sometimes among elite ethnically South Asian scholars, but rarely do the people represented and affected by the debates get to speak or represent themselves. The Orientalist, or here Hinduism scholar, is still the expert with the right to speak for the Oriental/Hindu, who knows him better than he knows himself. Quoting Middle Eastern scholar Manfred Halpern, Said observes that “we are reminded of the doubtless nonpolitical fact that Orientalists ‘are largely responsible for having given Middle Easterners themselves an accurate appreciation of their past,’ just in case we might forget that Orientalists know things by definition that Orientals cannot know on their own.”³⁴ The same holds for scholars of Hinduism, who are discovering for Hindus the constructed or unconstructed nature of their religion and bringing it to light for them, particularly through textual practice.

Furthermore, Orientalist scholars often created an imagined, lost pristine past through texts, in comparison to a corrupted political present needing redemption. Said notes:

Proper knowledge of the Orient proceeded from a thorough study of the classical texts, and only after that to an application of those texts to the modern Orient. Faced with the obvious decrepitude and political impotence of the modern Oriental, the European Orientalist found it his duty to rescue some portion of a lost, past classical Oriental grandeur in order to ‘facilitate ameliorations’ in the present Orient. What the European took from the Classical Oriental past was a vision (and thousands of facts and artifacts) which only he could employ to the

³² 12, 122, 273.

³³ 122.

³⁴ 300.

best advantage; to the modern Oriental he gave facilitation and amelioration—and, too, the benefit of his judgment as to what was best for the modern Orient.³⁵

While not explicit, this trope of nostalgia for return to a purer past in order to redeem a corrupt political present still informs interpretations and motivations. Frykenberg warns:

the concept of ‘Hinduism’ as denoting a single religious community has already done enormous, even incalculable, damage to structures undergirding the peace, security, and unity of the whole Indian political system. What’s more, continued popular use of this concept and popular belief in the existence of a monolithic ‘Hinduism’- in short, fervent adherence to any doctrine which assumes that there is one single religion embraced by the ‘majority’ of all peoples in India – can still do even greater damage.³⁶

Here Frykenberg the Hinduism scholar brings to bear on a politically suspect or damaged modern India what will “facilitate ameliorations.” Nor is this viewpoint only on the constructionist side. Lorenzen declares: “In any case, only a recognition of the fact that much of modern Hindu identity is rooted in the history of the rivalry between Hinduism and Islam will enable us to correctly gauge the strength of communalist forces and wage war against them.”³⁷

What is disturbing is that the scholar still believes he knows best how to ameliorate a present problem through the reach back through history and scholarship, and re-correcting the present.

Furthermore, as Talal Asad has shown, it is impossible to separate out religion from the domain of power, especially power in relation to a colonialist discourse intent on using religion for legitimations of colonial authority. Asad shows that modernity is often a teleology, a narrative, where non-Western states as India often come up incomplete, and where notions of

³⁵ 79.

³⁶ “Emergence,” 29.

³⁷ 631

subjectivity and creative agency in history are often denied to the postcolonial.³⁸ Said sums it up: “So impressive have the descriptive and textual successes of Orientalism been that entire periods of the Orient’s cultural, political, and social history are considered mere responses to the West. The West is the actor, the Orient a passive reactor. The West is the spectator, the judge, the jury, of every facet of Oriental behavior.”³⁹ As in the case with Hinduism, Western scholars in a Western academy not only debate and decide what Hinduism is, what is and is not a religion, what politics is most desirable for the modern Indian nation-state, but debates often center around who does the constructing, and Hinduism falls short in modernity because Hindus themselves are denied the role of creative and conscious agents in their history. Moreover, it is for scholars still to determine what it is, and how it should function in India, particularly in Indian politics; the need for scholarly intervention is also one of action.

Scholars as Russell McCutcheon and Timothy Fitzgerald have been astute to critique the sui generis discourse on religion (and thus Hinduism) for failing to acknowledge this very role of religion and religious studies in larger systems of domination and power.⁴⁰ McCutcheon shows how the field of religious studies plays a part in the subjugation and domination of non-Western traditional cultures studied as essentially religious.⁴¹ Likewise, McCutcheon shows how this sui generis ahistorical view of religion again separates it from the here-and-now of politics and

³⁸ Asad, 5-9, 29, 33, 5-9. 15-17,29, 33. 15-18, 22-4.

³⁹ 108-09.

⁴⁰ Russell T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion : The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), and Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), hereafter referred to as *Ideology*.

⁴¹ 151.

historical realities. McCutcheon relates that “the discourse on sui generis religion, then, can be understood as a romantic, redemptive project, a political program for constructing a modern social reality on the basis of the presumed difference between tradition, understood as influential, original, and real, and modernity, understood as devolution, repetition, and unreal.”⁴² One need only think back to Halbfass to recall this romantic anti-modern nostalgia that ancient Indian thought represents for him. Stietencron also displays this romantic, essentialist view of religion, writing for example that “religions, however, tend to move in a slower rhythm than political institutions, and the roots through which they draw their nourishment may be traced to a far more distant past.”⁴³ In this case, Stietencron seeks to deconstruct Hinduism not to question, but to uphold an ahistorical, universalist, essential view of religion free of history and politics.

Timothy Fitzgerald also shows this sui generis claim as inherently influenced by (Christian) theological presuppositions and outlooks. It seeks to find in the universal category of religion a justification for its own (Christian) theological beliefs. Fitzgerald describes it this way:

Religion is really the basis of a modern form of theology, which I will call liberal ecumenical theology, but some attempt has been made to disguise this fact by claiming that religion is a natural and/or a supernatural reality in the nature of things that all human individuals have a capacity for, regardless of their cultural context. This attempt to disguise the theological essence of the category and to present it as though it were a unique human reality irreducible to either theology or sociology suggests that it possesses some ideological function within the western ‘configuration of values’ ...that is not fully realized.⁴⁴

⁴² 158.

⁴³ *Representing*, 52

⁴⁴ Fitzgerald, *Ideology*, 4-5.

Hinduism also becomes useful and meaningful to scholars of religion seeking to advance their own theological beliefs through it. As Halbfass, sometimes these scholars look to Hinduism to redeem their own corrupt, modern predicament, and use it for these ends. Stietencron desires to make Hinduism respective of a culture, and to break it up into several smaller religions such as Saivism and Vaisnavism, partly because he feels that before colonization these religions were able to coexist peacefully in ways that can teach lessons to Western religious traditions. He writes for example that “in Hinduism it was possible to create a culture of accepted multiformity, able to develop generous liberality and tolerance between religions and ideologies to a degree which civilizations based on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were never able to achieve.”⁴⁵ He further states that “the Abrahamic religions as well as the dominating ideologies of East and West should start learning spiritual liberality from Hinduism.”⁴⁶

Furthermore, Tomoko Masuzawa has shown how world religions discourse was also a good way of maintaining Christian truths as universal and important to all. Masuzawa also notes the problems first with the comparative theology field and then the world religions discourse, which sought by all means to justify Christianity as the preeminent religion or disposition under the pretext of comparative analysis.⁴⁷ The category of Hinduism must be seen as arising from this context, where it can be used both to affirm a Christian sense of religion as universal, and can also be used to show Christianity’s superiority as the true religion.⁴⁸ For Stietencron, for

⁴⁵ *Reconsidered*, 21.

⁴⁶ *Reconsidered*, 22.

⁴⁷ See Masuzawa, chapter 2, 72-103, and chapter 9, 309-328.

⁴⁸ See Sugirtharajah, The word/concept ‘religion’ section.

example, Hinduism falls short because unlike Christianity, it does not have a systematic belief system, soteriological method, universal scriptures, inward self-consciousness or universal validity. As another example, Pennington engages in Christian apologetics when asking readers to excuse Christian missionary practices by understanding the cosmological and theological frameworks under which missionaries were laboring, instead of interpreting their actions in light of postmodern, postcolonial perspectives or political ideologies.⁴⁹

In addition, not only the category of religion, but also the category of the secular, is a Western construct that serves an ideological function as well.⁵⁰ Fitzgerald explains:

Religion was one pole of the religion-secular dichotomy, an old distinction but given a quite different nuance, and the search for (or the invention of) religions in all societies by colonizing Europeans and Americans was proceeding hand in hand with the search for principles of natural rights, laws, and markets. The discovery of religion as either the special repository of traditional values or alternatively a private realm of individual, non-political, otherworldly commitment made possible the construction of a sphere of this-worldly individual freedoms, laws, and markets that were assumed to correspond to natural reason.⁵¹

Fitzgerald has also shown the historical contingency and genealogy of such terms as religion and the secular, noting how they have arisen within a Christian worldview and have been developed in the context of colonialism. In other words, when one uses such terms, they are hardly value-neutral or objective, and can hardly be taken as given, natural, or universal and then applied to

⁴⁹ See Pennington, 40-41, 177-83.

⁵⁰ Fitzgerald 3-4. 4-7. In his chapter on Hinduism, Fitzgerald, arguing for colonial construction of Hinduism in the nineteenth century, also notes the bifurcation between scholars who study religion, or Hinduism, and those who are engaged in empirical research in the social sciences, which again assumes the category as an ahistorical, transcendent essence, see chapter seven, particularly 134-155.

⁵¹ 5.

other non-western cultures.⁵² Understanding Hinduism as a religion free from the political and ideological, or understanding the modern secular in opposition to it, is highly problematic then.

Gil Anidjar's reading of Said's *Orientalism* in relation to religion, secularity and Christianity also shows us the convoluted relationship among religion, secularity, and politics in postcolonial states, and the Christianity that is at the base of it.⁵³ If as Anidjar maintains, secularity and religion are the way Christianity both conceals itself and spreads its hegemony over the non-Western world, then religion and Hinduism, and the study of them, are categories through which this hegemony takes place, and sub-serve its interests. Authenticating a dead Hinduism and relegating it to the past, or denying it legitimacy altogether in the present, are ways this domination can occur. Anidjar also relates that Christianity split itself into religion and the secular through a peculiar discourse with itself and about itself, maintaining itself through the secular at a distance from religion, including its structures of hegemony. Moreover, by making religion the problem and separating it from itself, it can dominate over religion through the secular; this includes dominating the non-Western world by categorizing it through religion, and thus as a realm that needs to be secularized. First, I read Anidjar's reading of Christianity, secularism and religion as a way first for Christianity to spread itself through the category of Hinduism, a religion. Second, I read the secular critique of religion both in the treatment of Hinduism as an ahistorical tradition relegated to the past, and in "secular" academic critiques of Hinduism denying it as a religion, as the same move to dominate over this religious

⁵² Timothy Fitzgerald, "Who Invented Hinduism? Rethinking Religion in India," in *Rethinking Religion in India*.

⁵³ Gil Anidjar, "Secularism," *Critical Inquiry* 33 (Autumn 2006): 52-77.

realm through the secular and thus, the Western. Last, I read his reading of Orientalism as religion as Hinduism as well, becoming thus a means of dominating over the Indian world, including through scholarly discourse. Moreover, if Anidjar reads Orientalism as religion/secularity and we read religion as Hinduism, then the relationship among religion, culture, identity, and nation become intertwined. Hinduism is inseparable from politics, the political sphere, the nation, and a concept of identity.

The problems with the Hinduism problem, and postcolonial and ideological critique

However, as helpful as postcolonial and ideological scholars have been in bringing out the relationship between religious studies and imperialism, I do find their scholarship lacking in several aspects. One is the suspicion of all constructive work, and especially claiming it as inherently Christian or Western, or politically dubious, as if one, no one else ever engaged in constructive work, or could, and two, as if this work could not go on alongside analytical academic discourse of the human sciences and political and ideological critique.

Likewise, being by nature deconstructive and critical, they fail to offer any means of alleviation, of telling us what can be done now, of how Hindus themselves may come to terms with their own marred history. Scholars of Hinduism seem disinterested in what people are to do with the knowledge of their own constructedness. Last, scholars themselves, sometimes including myself at times, hold both a privileged and biased position, often that of anti-religious secular atheist; we are often out of sync with the majority of humankind, especially as regards what I will term (for lack of better categories) faith and religious practice.

For example, scholar S.N. Balagangadhara has claimed that Hinduism represents a European experience of India based upon a Christian theological framework which caused Europeans to see and experience religion in India when none was really there. According to Balagangadhara's definition of religion, religion includes meaning-making and explaining and making one's life intelligible in terms of a transcendent knowledge of God revealed through supernatural revelation, and is for that reason restricted to the Abrahamic traditions. Therefore there could be no such thing as religion in India, which means that Hinduism is only a theoretical construct with no real basis.⁵⁴ Other scholars, building upon his thesis, have argued that Indians have no such understanding of religion, and that outside of Western scholars, Westerners, and elite Westernized Indians, there is no such indigenous concept or experience as Hinduism.⁵⁵

While there is much that is valuable and insightful in Balagangadhara's thesis, I find it parts of it problematic. The first issue I find troubling is a lack of treatment of the historical and material realities of colonialism as the matrix in which Europeans experienced and imagined Hinduism; Hinduism did not just arise out of a vacuum of theological imagining in the presence of an Other, but through the material realities of colonialism and everyday encounter.⁵⁶ Second, deconstructing the concept of Hinduism is not problematic, but it is parasitic upon its hosts, namely, the categories religion and Hinduism, as is any new approach, and thus, we cannot dismiss the term as nonexistent, including its influence in present-day India. Moreover, where

⁵⁴ "Orientalism, postcolonialism, and the 'construction' of religion," in *Rethinking Religion in India*.

⁵⁵ See Jakob de Roover and Sarah Claerhout, "The colonial construction of what?" in *Rethinking Religion in India*, Is Hinduism a construct? section.

⁵⁶ For an argument about the importance of the actual colonial encounter in the construction of Hinduism, see John Zavos, "Representing religion in colonial India," in *Rethinking Religion in India*.

do we go from there, both as regards the academic discipline, and in understanding Indian culture and society in different, more authentic terms? The third point I find untenable in Balagangadhara is the issue of the objective reality of Hinduism. Although they may be the result of colonial construction, Hinduism and Hindu identity are held as realities by many people around the world, including those who may call themselves Hindus. Hinduism and Hindus are imagined communities, much like nation-states, ethnicities, or other religions, which never exist in reality, properly speaking. Whether practiced and experienced as such or not in reality, whether it ever fulfills the criteria for an empirically 'real' object in the world (whatever that may mean and however that can be defined), it is an ideological and conceptual force to be dealt with, and which affects identity and self-understanding, and thus behavior and action. Finally, I find the idea that only Christianity, or at most the Abrahamic traditions, engage in constructive issues such as meaning, faith, supernatural experience, or God, and other such categories, hard to accept. Even if not existing pre-colonially, they may have relevance today, for Indians and Hindus as well. Such a thesis could also make a field such as postcolonial theology illegitimate, and would cancel out much fruitful work being done in this field.

These questions, after all, are not just academic—they affect hundreds of millions of people around the world, and have an impact on their everyday lives, and their self-understanding. Therefore, I move to the final and in my view most important task of my paper. Here I desire to attempt to address what has been lacking in most of the debates and scholarship, hopefully in an innovative and enlightening way. I wish to sketch possible other ways of approaching the problem using postcolonial theory constructively, as I think it has the potential

to be read fruitfully and productively. The salient issues at hand for me are questions of agency and inheritance; can adherents, as well as those of us like me who would not strictly identify as adherents, find a way to recover our own voice in this process and think through these problems in meaningful ways? The question then remains of what those now called Hindus, or who call ourselves Hindus, are to do with all this? How can we finally speak and be authentic for ourselves, problematize our own histories and accepted categories, yet in a way helpful and meaningful for ourselves? Furthermore, how do we return agency to the people themselves in seeking to resolve these problems?

Another approach to the Hinduism problem: reading postcolonial theory constructively

I partially agree with certain scholars mentioned above that the first step in this process is for Hindus, and inheritors, to seek to recover their voice and see their own roles in this past “tradition.” Even construction and reconstruction of a tradition could not take place without reliance on indigenous participants, as most constructionists readily acknowledge.⁵⁷ As Richard King notes, using Charles Hallisey’s idea of intercultural mimesis, and Homi Bhabha’s idea of hybridity in colonial engagement, a more fruitful way of looking at it may be for Hindus to rewrite their tradition searching for their voices and connections within these texts, and recovering the ways in which they themselves had a hand to play in this reconstruction. Included in this are the possible effects it may have had on the colonizers themselves and in their

⁵⁷ Richard King, “Colonialism, Hinduism, and the discourse of religion,” response to bold paragraph three section.

understanding not only of Hinduism, but also religion itself.⁵⁸ Another fruitful approach may be to look for ways in which European terms and categories were “distorted,” or understood and reinterpreted, by indigenous participants.⁵⁹ In this way we can search for what is silenced, excluded, and repressed within this discourse, and uncover creative ways of trying to recover the heterogeneity of the texts, the multiple voices, and the work of concealing through traces, gaps, fissures and aporias in the writing and reading.

Second, as Richard King also notes, the construction of a textual tradition of Hinduism, and the construction of Hinduism through texts, shows a great Western, Christian bias in its understanding of religion and religious traditions.⁶⁰ Texts play a part in religion, and in what is now classified under Hinduism, but for the great majority of practitioners, then and now, texts may not be the connection the majority of those called Hindus make with their tradition, and with its past. The way of breaking out of this academic bias may then be to look at it as also something transmitted through orality, and through symbols, rituals, and mimesis, from parent to

⁵⁸ King notes that the Orientalist construction of Buddhism, as Charles Hallisey notes, involved local production with the use of local discourses and authorities, 148-49. Further, using Hallisey’s ideas of intercultural mimesis and Bhabha’s idea of hybridity, along with Foucault and De Certeau, King notes how the colonized can create spaces for indigenous discourses and actions that invert the “master discourse,” and that provide for agency even within domination, *Orientalism and Religion*, 148-156.

⁵⁹ De Roover and Claerhout argue for a ‘semantic distortion’ that occurred when Indians adopted the religious terms Europeans used for explaining Hinduism, which shows they did not really understand these concepts, What is constructed section. I think their semantic distortion idea could be fruitfully explored to uncover these indigenous voices and understandings and see how they interpreted these concepts differently in terms of their own experience.

⁶⁰ King notes that the textual bias has resulted in the privileging of textual interpretations in academies as the authentic or true form of religions such as Buddhism or Hinduism, and a discrepancy between the textual reconstruction of the religions and the actual practice of the religions by the majority of adherents. Moreover, in the case of Hinduism, it has tended to privilege elite, Sanskritic, Brahmanical forms of Indian religion as normative, over more popular oral forms or practices, *Orientalism and Religion*, 62-72, 101-05, 146-48.

child, from community to individual, and thus as something still extant, not in centuries-old texts, but as part of living realities being understood and practiced in the present.

As a means of doing this, I propose utilizing Dipesh Chakrabarty's model of what I call thinking historical difference. I read Chakrabarty's characterizations of Marx' History 1 as the totalizing modern Western meta-narratives replete with universal categories, teleological linear histories and historical consciousness, that objectify the past and displace the present in order to bring a completed intended future. However, with this lies Marx' History 2, consisting of everyday unconscious lived realities that interrupt this narrative with different ways of being in the world, that make pasts alive in presents, and posit heterogeneous possibilities for the future, which remains forever incomplete and open. This historical difference that is not part of a modern and European theoretical meta-narrative, brings a present or a "now" that is heterogeneous and out of sync with itself, and modern historical understanding. Through heterogeneous lived relations with an "anachronistic" past existing in the present, and with a future open to the possible, it collapses the totalizing distinctions between a present, an objectified historical past, and a predetermined future. It shows something of a anti-historical and non-modern aspect to subjectivity and consciousness, what I will say remains of a non-colonial, non-Western *Weltanschauung*, and one that Chakrabarty notes also exists apart from a non-secular historical time, a coexistence in difference of the sacred with the secular and modern. While notions of the sacred are not unproblematic, I use it here as I think Chakrabarty does, to note this difference in consciousness and understanding, from a secular, historical perspective, that for instance, brings back notions of gods as actors on the human scene, and a different sense of the

self and its social and communal relationships, among other non-modern viewpoints. Chakrabarty places this understanding in the peasant and subaltern, not peasants as empirical realities per se, but as exemplifying this non-modern position within a modern space. As Chakrabarty notes, this tends to exist side-by-side with a modern, historical understanding, especially among educated classes in postcolonial cultures.⁶¹

What I suggest then is using this model as an approach to how Hindus can come to terms with understanding their own past tradition in relation to the present, the present where they exist as a split historical subject, between modernized colonized individuals, and the non-modern anti-historical “traditional” (for lack of a better word).⁶² Moreover, where they exist between the History 1 as universal, essential, unified Hindu subjects that Orientalism has produced, and the repressed memories of their own indigenous living realities in History 2. Understanding the effects of colonization and imperialism on themselves, they can also self-reflect on what is not colonized and westernized within themselves, what has not been produced by it, on the difference within. This comes about not only from self-reflection through split subjectivity, but from engaging textual and field studies in what we now call Hinduism, as well as personal

⁶¹ I draw upon two of Chakrabarty’s works, one being the introduction to *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), the other being “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for ‘Indian’ Pasts?” *Representations* 37 (Winter 1992): 1-26 (an abridged version also appears as chapter 1 of *Provincializing Europe*). Chakrabarty notes that while colonization did impose a modern subjectivity on western educated classes in India, it did not completely destroy indigenous modes of subjectivity either, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History,” 7-11 Chakrabarty uses the terms History 1 and History 2 from an analysis of Marx’ *Grundrisse* and *Theories of Surplus Value*, in an analysis of his category of capital .

⁶² Chakrabarty reads the split historical subject as a present, of non-modernity or lack, and a future, where it will become fully modern. I instead would like to interpret it as a relationship with a past, an ancient premodern, precolonial thinking, now no longer present, or repressed, and the present modern, or postmodern, secular or Hindu, postcolonial moment, though again, the past that splits is actually outside historical time and present as a trace, or rupture, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History,” 8, 13.

histories, which can provide a means for present-day South Asian Hindus to reflect on who they are in the present, and who they can be in the future. They can come to terms with colonization and modernization and with themselves as defined and changed by it. But in this way they can also see the fault lines where they are related to their own past, their own traditions, and their own ways of seeing the world. This includes how this tradition still exists and speaks within them today and will continue to speak to them.

Furthermore, Homi Bhabha's model of hybridity and the third space can help us here as well. While referring to culture, I believe it can equally apply to the categories of religion and Hinduism. Bhabha posits hybridity and the third space as the in-between that allows for difference and alterity. Moreover, contact no longer takes place between two or more whole or discrete entities or identities that have positive, essential natures. What Bhabha points us to is the idea that experience itself consists of difference, of incommensurable realities and practices not just coexisting but occupying the same aporetic space, and jostling with and negotiating with each other in endless reformulations and rearticulations that are non-essential, non-unitary, and unstable. They are interdependent, interchangeable, indeterminate, and ambivalent. The idea then of religion, Hinduism, and identity as essential, holistic, discrete, self-contained, unique, organic, and stable, is itself a fallacy. Contact takes place in this third space, in this hybridity which is this aporetic, indeterminate site that opens up to and allows difference, that reveals the constructed and illusory nature of holistic and organic entities, that breaks down and deconstructs categories, that allows for alterity, ambivalence, otherness, and alienation. It thus exists in this in-between or liminal space in indeterminate, messy, contested, and sometimes incommensurable

relations. Thus, there are no pure or originary states available or possible. This hybridity or third space also opens up the possibilities for the appearing, expression, and enunciation of hitherto marginalized and suppressed experiences and representations, co-existing with dominant ideologies and in inseparable relationship to them. Difference and hybridity take note of and allow for an infinite number of different positions to emerge. Hybridity moreover has a political function in destabilizing the idea of a unitary community and allowing a politics of difference and alterity into the picture. In Chakrabarty's terms History 1 is dislodged by History 2.⁶³

What this means is that differing configurations of what we call Hinduism, different history 2s and lived experiences, can all configure themselves within a hybrid third space of difference, a neither-nor, no longer caught within the dialectic of tradition and modernity, past or present, nor existing within a purely religious or secular, modern or non-modern space. Moreover, we can give up the search for pure origins, an authenticity, or an essential identity, and accept fragmentation, alienation, ambiguity, estrangement and heterogeneity as part and parcel of our religious experience of Hinduism. These differing configurations of difference thus can also involve those supposedly neo-Hindu "inauthentic" forms and also supposedly secular and modern forms of Indian culture, no longer neither inauthentic nor impure. This again opens up spaces for present-day Hindus to move beyond essences and dichotomies, but it does more than that. It may allow for us also to find our own responses to Hinduism, to secularization and

⁶³ See Homi Bhabha, "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha." In *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. Ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 207-221, especially 208-213. See also Homi Bhabha, "Commitment to Theory," 19-39; "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern: the question of agency," 171-197; "How Newness Enters the World: Postmodern Space, Postcolonial Times and the Trials of Cultural Translation," 212-235; and "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree outside Delhi, May 1817," 102-122, in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge), 1994.

modernity, and to negotiate the differences within us. Rather than claim any normative or authoritative stance, we can see different configurations of the space of difference as equally legitimate ways of understanding Hinduism, different ways of understanding ourselves. Moreover, with nothing essential, pure, authentic, original, or stable, constantly changing, ephemeral, fluid, new configurations may emerge and pass away, reconfigure, negotiate or contest with one another, leaving the future open to possibility, alterity, and even transformation.

Finally I would like to offer one more possibility for rethinking Hinduism in a postcolonial context. In *The Politics of Postsecular Religion*, Ananda Abeysekara discusses thinking through aporias of the name and un-inheriting history in relation to ideas of secularity and democracy.⁶⁴ What I find useful for this discussion is thinking through the aporia, the necessity of the historical continuity and weight of a name, and our inability to get beyond it. At the same time we realize the necessity of trying to do so for the sake of positing a “now” of the present open to alterity and creating an indeterminate future. I propose thinking through our own aporia of the name of Hinduism, our admission of its tainted history and construction, but also of our admission of its construction of us, our identity, and our inability to think outside it. Yet, at the same time, I acknowledge the necessity of not denying or avoiding, but dwelling in this

⁶⁴ See Ananda Abeysekara, *The Politics of Postsecular Religion: Mourning Secular Futures* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), particularly chapter 1. By un-inheriting democracy (or any concept) I think Abeysekara means we first see the political-knowledge-power context in which it arose and came to be, and then un-inherit it by the realization first of the impurity and aporetic nature of the concept itself, and the realization of this aporia and the genealogy of the name in a way that is no longer unconscious, or the realization of how the name and its genealogy really haunts the present and constricts us in a way we cannot get out of. Then, we do the work of thinking about the future from there, of “mourning” this secular future. In regards to Hinduism, I think we should realize in similar fashion how we are indeed constructed by the name and cannot get out of it, or out of its history and legacy, but also there is and never will be a purity of the name or concept, and how it will always haunt us regardless.

aporia, this heterogeneity, this difference, this impurity and danger. In this we open to the alterity and heterogeneity within the name, within us, and attempt within this aporia, to imagine un-inheriting this name and history in order to envision a new, undetermined future.

Conclusions

Before I conclude I would like to mention one more aspect of Hinduism—what I myself think it is both as a scholar of religion and as a nominal Hindu. This is a difficult question and I am not sure I have an answer, but I think it involves many things, especially in the postcolonial, globalized world. It is about geography, cultures, and living realities. It is about politics, and nations, and power, including colonial histories and Orientalist ideologies. It is about identity, including national, cultural, and religious identities; it is about modernity, and non-modernity, hybridity. It is also about tradition and continuity but also history and historical change, flux, temporality as well, constructed and changing meanings, discontinuities within continuities. It is also about encounters with others, violence and conflict, and finding ways to work through them. But it is also about meaning, experience, and faith, perhaps different ones—those we would categorize as religious, and those living-worlds suppressed by meta-narratives.

In summation, I think these theories of thinking historical difference, hybridity, and aporias of the name in relation to religion also serve as a useful model for practitioners in many postcolonial cultures and traditions. They may prove fruitful in recovery of lost or repressed voices from their own past, in pointing out avenues of negotiation of difference within, or of thinking through their own aporias of their traditions. I also think thinking through these

questions brings up important concerns for the study of religion and theology, especially as concerns postcolonial issues. There can never be a straightforward easy understanding of religion, or particular postcolonial religions such as Hinduism, that avoids implications in ideologies and systems of power and domination, particularly the history of Western imperialism, including for practitioners themselves and scholars of such traditions. We must acknowledge this and not see it as threatening to the study of religion, or to faith as well. Nor can we return to the days of straightforward theological or religious discourse that ignores politics, history, change, and lived empirical realities for abstract categories of faith or inner experience; in the case of Hinduism, that also means not seeking a return to a dubious purity or authenticity, or to a time immemorial. We must learn to see religion and faith as implicated in the human, historical, and political, without fearing that experience or faith will somehow be destroyed in the process. However, that also does not mean we can reduce theology, religion, or experience, merely to ideological critiques, particularly in the case of postcolonial cultures. We should learn not to look at postcolonial theory as the enemy of religion, and learn important lessons from it, including constructive lessons in theology and religious studies. Constructive work always should go on. While the constructive work we postcolonial children engage in may have a different look and wrestle with different issues, including both complicating and problematizing notions of religion, faith, and identity, it is no less important or significant than any other work. I think in this light postcolonial theorists read constructively can make an important contribution to the fields of theology and religion as well.

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