

# INTRODUCTION

## Engaging South Asian Religions

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### PARADIGMS

The fact that the term *Hinduism* did not exist until the late eighteenth century (Oddie 2006, 71), when British imperial rule and cultural hegemony began to set many of the conditions of its evolution, reflects the significant impact that the European study of religion has had on South Asians (for various views on this, see Lipner 1994; King 1999; and Lorenzen 2006). The additional fact that Hindus played a critical role in the addition of this word—and its non-English equivalents—to their various vocabularies shows that, despite the asymmetries of power, this played out in no simple active-passive binary: South Asians practiced some agency no matter how constrained the spaces afforded to them by Western control. And, of course, Western-South Asian engagements occurred both before and after the two centuries of direct British rule.

Complexities abound in this history of engagement. While Edward Said's (1978) withering critique of European imperialist Orientalism clearly altered the connotations associated with that term in scholarship, in the heyday of that period, James Mill (1858) directed an equally eviscerating verbal fire against William Jones (1807) and his fellow self-proclaimed Orientalists for being too sympathetic with the Indian natives. Britons like Major General Charles "Hindoo" Stuart assumed Indian idioms of practice and accepted local beliefs before the advent of Victorian social constraints pressured such servants of the East India Company to stay on

their side of an increasingly racialized social boundary. Meanwhile, reformer Ram-mohan Roy urged the establishment of Indian schools incorporating European forms of knowledge, and later, some Muslims criticized Sir Saiyid Ahmed Khan for betraying Islam by introducing Western science into a curriculum shared with Islamic topics in his Anglo-Muhammadan University. Post-independence transnational flows of people, information, and epistemologies have confounded supposedly self-evident views of who and what, exactly, is Western and South Asian. Clearly, historical change, social diversity, and individual choices problematize any simple narrative of cultural interaction.

Yet central—whether explicitly or implicitly—to these engagements have been the various epistemological projects employed by all sides to understand their worlds. As the early modern period gave way to the modern, and casual European contact changed to systematic cultural, textual, social, and theological study, the notion of what it meant to know Indians—and the methods of doing so—changed, as did Indian opinions about and approaches to what should be known. Within Western ways of knowing South Asian communities, no category served longer and more centrally than religion. Europeans and, later, Americans investigating the Sub-continent often took religion as the common distinguishing character of cultures there because they viewed their own cultures as decreasingly religious. In other words, religion served as a key category, a central concern and an essential characteristic in Western attempts to know South Asia and its cultures, even as they conceived themselves as less committed to religion. Paradoxically, throughout this period, various Christian social and political movements continued to provoke significant transformations in these supposedly secularized societies.

This volume attempts to contribute to the scholarly discussion regarding Western-South Asian engagements by bringing particular focus to the interaction of, interchange among, and interpretation of epistemological and interpretative paradigms as practiced by all sides. By providing nine studies of such engagements, we hope to offer insight not only into the diversity of European and American approaches and indigenous responses but also into the interpenetrations attempted, avoided, and accomplished that have gone unacknowledged. We also focus on paradigms to bring attention to the explicit and implicit epistemological logics that have shaped the variety of Western-South Asian engagements. By *paradigms*, we refer to more than ideology or perspective. Instead, the term points to an intellectual framework that, in the words of Pierre Bourdieu, “determines the questions that can be asked and those that are excluded, the thinkable and the unthinkable; being both ‘received achievement’ and a starting-point, it is a guide for future action, a programme for research to be undertaken, rather than a system of rules and norms” (Bourdieu 2000, 15). Of course—as described by Thomas Kuhn (1970), the scholar most responsible for popularizing the term—paradigms are not permanently fixed, and each can shift when experience significantly exceeds the expecta-

tions engendered through the paradigm. A focus on the paradigms in practice in Western approaches to South Asian religions will hopefully prompt more critical engagement with contemporary paradigms as well as conventional categories and terms, not least of which is, of course, *religion*.

The eventual dominance of British rule in South Asia often obscures a full recognition of the presence of other Europeans who preceded them there. Nevertheless these Westerners made the first set of consistent engagements with Indians. Portuguese settlement in 1500 predated the British arrival by more than a century. The Dutch established themselves on the Subcontinent a decade before the British, the Danes soon thereafter, and the French in the last third of the seventeenth century. Each settlement was motivated originally by profit, its members commonly organized in trading companies by their respective governments, its presence tolerated by indigenous states out of an interest in commercial, artistic, and/or cultural exchange. Yet not all Europeans who visited South Asia at this time had commercial interests. Instead, many arrived as journeyers on the nascent, globalized web of intercontinental travel for which the European “voyages of discovery” served as pathfinders. Increasing advancements in navigation and shipbuilding that would only eventually overtake previously superior Arab and Chinese accomplishments, would allow trading enterprises to morph into imperial endeavors.

But before this materialized fully, Catholic and Protestant missionaries made their difficult ways to the Subcontinent and elsewhere with conversion their ostensible intent. Although many Europeans categorized South Asians through the medieval Christian division of the humanity into pagans, Jews, and Christians (with Muslims as either pagans or heretics), others found alternative arenas of commonality and difference. For example, the Portuguese Jesuit Roberto de Nobili (see 2000) developed a relatively nuanced taxonomy of civilizations that included both India and Europe; he quite controversially proclaimed the Bible to be the fifth, “flawless,” Veda. Due to the precarious trade situation for the first two and a half centuries of European presence, the proselytizers contended with not only an often disinterested populace but also nervous merchants who did not want to offend local rulers. Therefore, the earliest European interest in South Asian religion evolved through theological paradigms and mercantile interest in an environment in which they, initially, enjoyed very little leverage.

The Battle of Buxar in 1764 ushered in a sea change for the British position. The defeat of the governor of Bengal by the forces of the East India Company meant that Robert Clive conclusively replaced him as the Mughal-appointed civil administrator and tax collector for the province. As the Company enjoyed similar rising fortunes elsewhere and slowly eclipsed the other European trading enterprises, its motivations for understanding India and Indians necessarily expanded from those of trade and curiosity to include those of governance. While mapping surveys set out across the lands under its control as early as 1763, the Company soon commissioned

more comprehensive surveys to record flora, fauna, minerals, geology, agriculture, peoples, customs, and antiquities. Surveyors such as Colin Mackenzie and Francis Buchanan (later Buchanan Hamilton) made these arduous efforts, typically relying on “Hindu” and “Muslim” as primary classifications to categorize those they encountered. Meanwhile, individual Britons pursued private investigations in subjects ranging from astronomy to zoology. Some of these men established the private Asiatic Society in 1784 to share their observations and conclusions.

As the Company found a balance between its original acquisitiveness and the idealistic responsibilities it later espoused to justify its rule, its servants broadened the scope of epistemological engagement in divergent directions and with deepening specificity and institutionalization. For example, William Jones mastered Persian and Sanskrit in order to understand and adjudicate “Muslim” and “Hindu” law. In the Calcutta of his time, the Company founded a botanical garden for study. Embryonic educational efforts intended for Indians immediately became caught in the debate over which forms of knowledge should be taught and in what languages. Meanwhile, private endeavors led to the founding of the Indian Museum in 1814 after the Asiatic Society simultaneously pressed the Company to do so and offered a building for the purpose. Many of these efforts evinced the mutual epistemological engagements of Indians and Britons, as well as other Europeans, while more deeply inscribing religious differences. The “discoveries” of Jones, Mackenzie, and Buchanan would have been impossible without Indians like Ali Ibrahim Khan, Cavelli Venkata Boria, and Ramajai Batacharji as well as the countless, often unnamed scribes, informants, and interpreters (not to mention guides, bearers, and servants) upon whom Britain’s knowledge projects in South Asia relied.

The rebellions of 1857–1858 hardened not only the lines many Britons drew between themselves and their imperial charges but also their commitment to better know those whose unexpected fury caught them so off guard. The British crown, having supplanted the Company as British India’s rulers after the devastating conflagration, initiated the first, albeit imperfect, comprehensive census of India in 1872. Of the few classifications used, religious and caste identity were prominent. New paradigms and practices, changing social institutions and expectations, and transforming political situations and identities altered what ways of knowing could and would be practiced by whom and when. While some South Asians initiated new projects—schools, universities, libraries—in an attempt to “catch up” with the West, others reexamined history and literature and “discovered” India’s preexisting epistemological superiority even as yet others ignored the debate and continued to propagate extant traditions. Hence, while Sir Saiyid Ahmad Khan melded Islamic and European curricula in his Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College, Mohandas Gandhi urged an emphasis on Indic traditions, as understood through his interpretative lens.

Meanwhile, the crystallization of secular political ideals in Britain simultaneously sharpened the perceived divide between the “rationally” guided British and

“religiously” impelled Indians. Not uncommonly, European representations of Indians derived from their experiences of religions at home and their conclusions reflected preexisting sentiments. For instance, early nineteenth century English complaints of the “priestly machinations” of both Brahmans and mullahs, and unfavorable associations of India with Ireland, reflected the waning yet still salient anti-Catholic sentiments so long endemic in England. As the century wore on, the Evangelicalism movement gained greater momentum and soon overcame the resistance of British administrators in India to proselytization there. Despite the heightened religious politics at home, as they critiqued the inherently religious, or communal, quality of Indian populations, most British observers stubbornly upheld their society’s secular sophistication.

In doing so, they influenced—but never single-handedly shaped—South Asian understandings. Political and religious contingencies had long molded relations between indigenous states and religious institutions on the Subcontinent in ways that often defied simplistic communal associations. For instance, the twelfth-century *Rajatarangini* (Kalhana 1974), while chronicling the kings of Kashmir, simultaneously praised Muslims who supported Buddhist monasteries and condemned Buddhist debaters who defeated their Brahman opponents. However, six centuries later, as Mridu Rai (2004) has narrated, Dogra leaders, influenced by their British allies, acted to play the refined role of “proper Hindu rulers” by patronizing only temples, not the Muslim mosques and Sufi shrines that Kashmir rulers had long supported.

As Indian nationalism evolved in the latter part of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, many proponents of democratic constituency building engaged in political strategies that aimed to generate religiously-defined voting blocs. They thereby helped reshape many self-understandings of Hinduism, Islam, and India. The dynamics of a statistical survey, communal identification, and nationalist politics culminated when an English accountant was brought to establish the boundaries of India and Pakistan on the eve of the British departure in 1947. This mathematical partition of British India, soon to have such cataclysmic effects on the ground, relied on census material to determine Pakistan, where Muslims represented 51 percent or more of village and town populations, and India, where Hindus and Sikhs enjoyed the majority. The insufficiency of religion alone as the foundation for nation-building for South Asia became apparent twenty-four years later when Bangla speakers won Bangladesh’s independence from the polyglot yet officially Urdu-speaking Pakistan.

Meanwhile, both on the Subcontinent and the West, academics struggled with various ideologies and critiques aimed at demonstrating the endemic power asymmetries that privileged some while disempowering others. Marxist, feminist, and postcolonial approaches challenged existing paradigms in the West. Later, Europeans and Westerners who practiced these critiques would themselves have to answer to their South Asian counterparts for their own privileged positions. As scholars of South Asian heritage have increasingly influenced the academy in

Europe and North America from both afar and within Western institutions, they have forced non-South-Asian scholars to justify not only their theoretical and methodological tools but even their presence in certain fields. “Who Speaks for Hinduism?” proclaimed the title of one special journal of the American Academy of Religion. Censorship, demonstrations, violence, and death threats practiced against various non-Hindu European-American scholars of Hinduism have made that question more than academic. The trials of Harjot Singh Oberoi (1997) in the face of Sikh opposition to his portrayal of the Khalsa, the unpopular use of Western source criticism of the Quran by Salman Rushdie (1989), and the most recent controversy surrounding Wendy Doniger’s most recent portrayal of Hinduism (2009) unfolding as this volume goes to press demonstrate that paradigmatic shifts meet with hostility from among a range of people. Many of these same controversies have also forced Western scholars to examine how their approach to “religion” both derives from a Protestant definition of that term and relies upon Christian-inflected categories such as scripture, doctrine, and canon.

Throughout this history of engaging, overlapping, and contesting paradigms, three important themes recur: boundaries, appropriations, and resistances. The forms of knowledge that paradigms serve are all premised upon boundaries—such as distinctions between self and other, East and West; Indian and European; or Hindu, Muslim, and Christian. Boundaries, whether epistemological or political, set a context for appropriation by demarcating lines of possession and influence, lines that vary in their visibility, permanence, and penetrability. Speaking of appropriation is thus one way of speaking of human agency in relation to boundaries: people negotiate boundaries, operate through and around them, and manipulate them to their advantage all in the effort to appropriate something of use for themselves. Boundaries and appropriations together also set the context for resistances that challenge boundaries, the appropriations legitimated by them, and/or efforts to transgress them. Inevitably, when paradigms of difference are put into practice, boundaries are created, appropriations ensue, and resistances are generated. Taken together, the collected essays in this volume seek to illuminate this dynamic and also reveal the provisional nature of any kind of paradigmatic representation.

## BOUNDARIES

The boundaries pertinent to Western engagements with South Asians are of two interrelated orders. The first is social and the second is epistemological. Ruler and ruled; officials and commoners; European, Indian, and Anglo-Indian; Hindu, Muslim, and Christian; European Christian, Indian Christian, Catholic, Protestant, and Evangelical—most of these groups define and maintain social boundaries to varying degrees and in different contexts. Knowing one’s community and knowing others follows from a recognition of boundaries—boundaries that may be perme-

able or solid, occasional or permanent (on this theme, see Gottschalk 2000). Meanwhile, an outsider's description of a group's boundaries may not accord with its members' own understandings, presuming they even associate themselves with that group in the first place.

### **Overview**

Westerners observing South Asian societies, cultures, and religions have classified what they have seen using a variety of classification systems. Sometimes they have derived their classifications—to varying degrees—from indigenous systems (e.g., Brahman, Chamar), and other times they have relied strictly on their own notions (e.g., polytheist, monotheist). Often, each defined group is evaluated relative to others and qualified according to the standards of the observer (e.g., “wicked heathens” in the eyes of some Christians).

Much recent scholarship has focused on how Westerners have sought to draw boundaries between themselves and the people of South Asia. But, as the contributions in this volume demonstrate, Western efforts to distinguish between groups in the study of the Subcontinent have included attempts to establish, reinforce, or undermine boundaries among Westerners. While some Protestants used descriptions of South Asians to implicitly distinguish themselves from Catholics, some Catholics did the same in regard to Enlightenment thinkers. Being described by such terms as *heathen* and *idolater* was not restricted to the non-Christian, with more than one early European Protestant declaring Catholic missionaries as “heathenish.”

Boundaries are defined by specific qualities as determined by a particular manner of knowing. So, for instance, the European study of history, newly reembraced after the Renaissance, suggested genealogies that differentiated one group from the other according to its roots. Investigations of inscribed records and archaeological remains hinted at parallels that certain comparative studies found meaningful. In this way, many early observers attempted to make sense of contemporary South Asian customs and beliefs by drawing parallels with ancient Greek and Roman examples. For some, this made them venerable in light of contemporary studies of the classics; for others, primitive in light of Christian history. Later, Sir William Jones' work in the embryonic field of linguistics would offer another method of mapping roots and the diffusion of ideas. However, one of the earliest boundary-making epistemologies was theology which informed the worldview of so many European reporters, many of them missionaries. Surprisingly, even these theologically-informed investigations often relied on indigenous religious literature as guides to the boundaries of South Asian societies. So, for instance, some Christian investigators turned to the *Manavadharmashastra* (Laws of Manu) to understand caste distinctions.

Boundaries, of course change, as human constructions flex and vary according to the circumstances of their use by both the people who presumably fit within them and those who view them from outside. Attempts to project contemporary categories back too far into the past tend to unravel in the face of historical research and contemporary contestations. Nevertheless, too often scholars have assumed for all categories the quality of forever being bounded concretely by definite and solid borders. This has particularly been the case in efforts to distinguish separate religions. The expectation that membership in one religion inherently excludes one from participating in the rituals of others derives from the Protestant Reformation. Indeed, the very notion of a religion—as a specific set of commitments to beliefs and practices that create a tradition and community apart from a secular existence among individuals and their society—has few parallels in South Asia until the era of British imperial rule. Post-modern research (see Clifford and Marcus 1986; Clifford 1988) has helped demonstrate that the boundaries observers have assumed not only dictated what they observed but also reflected circumstances in their home cultures.

More contemporary scholarship has challenged notions of fixity and demonstrated the complexities involved in boundary making during Western studies of South Asian religions. Boundaries that once appeared to be towering, inflexible barriers standing between Hindus and Muslims now seem to be dubiously defined borders riddled with perforations of shared religiosity and identity. Meanwhile, in contestations regarding the rigidity and significance of these boundaries, some South Asian groups struggle to shore up these walls and route them through the social and political landscape to their advantage, while others resist.

The theme of boundaries cuts across Western efforts to understand South Asian religions in a variety of ways because the effort to classify stands centrally in all forms of knowledge. To classify inherently requires the sorting of individual examples into categories defined by some quality that distinguishes members of that class from others. Classification, therefore, bounds the example as *this* but not as *that*. Issues regarding the construction of boundaries involve the self-perception of Westerners, the epistemologies involved in establishing them, the valuation of various categories, the nature of the boundaries themselves, and their influence in shaping observation.

### ***Part One***

Part I of *Engaging South Asian Religions* examines the issue of boundaries. The section begins with Peter Gottschalk's chapter that focuses on British classificatory schemas, which proved central to classifying Indians. In "A Science of Classifying Boundaries," Gottschalk examines the census of India. But instead of focusing exclusively on religion, Gottschalk draws attention to how the development of religion as a bounded category drew upon the taxonomic paradigms of the natural sci-



ences as they coalesced in the nineteenth century. What was produced was a self-reinforcing matrix of epistemologies in which disciplines developed in tandem with the census and, as these disciplines became independent, confirmed one another's conclusions about religion and caste as crucial markers of identity. The current manifestation of this taxonomic paradigm is "bounded" in a dual sense: first, because discrete "bounded" categories like religion and caste are still employed in data gathering for the census and, second, because data related to religion and caste are "bounded" in the sense of being accessible only to the government, and not to the public at large.

Religion as epistemological paradigm and boundary is also the concern of Arvind Mandair in the second essay of Part I. While Gottschalk focuses on the operations of the British government in India, Mandair examines the German foundations of Indology. "The Repetition of Past Imperialisms" asks the question why South Asian resources have not been understood as potential contributors to contemporary critical theory. Western theorists such as Karl Marx or Max Weber, for example, are often invoked or argued with as living agents without the need to place them in their historical context in the way one might Rammohan Roy, Dayananda Saraswati, or Ahmed Iqbal. In probing this question, Mandair turns his attention to the distinction between religion and history, particularly as found in the works of G. W. F. Hegel. For Hegel, the boundary between East and West was primarily constituted by what Mandair, following Gaytri Spivak, calls an "epistemography" that charts a morphology of knowledge in which "religion obsessed" India is placed outside of history. Ironically, however, contemporary postcolonial scholarship replicates this past imperialism by positing South Asian religions as a discrete, bounded, knowledge area in part to protect Indology from religious incursions. By denigrating religion in favor of historicism, this secular anti-imperialist scholarship has unwittingly reproduced the boundary between religion and history that grounded Hegel's philosophical system. In examining the problems inherent in such unreflective historicism, Mandair diagrams a "new economy" for both the history and philosophy of religion that challenges conventional boundaries between religion and history, universal and particular, and theory and practice. At the very least, both India and the West share in the "universal" by virtue of their historical encounter, engagement, and contestation.

Peter Gottschalk and Arvind Mandair present investigations of boundaries in South Asian studies that examine expansive epistemological paradigms. In contrast, Sufia Uddin begins with such broad epistemological paradigms and then moves to the particular. At issue in "Beyond National Borders and Religious Boundaries," the concluding essay of Part One, is the boundary between Hindu and Muslim. Uddin examines the concept of syncretism, a widely used academic construct that describes the mingling or blending of two bounded traditions. For Uddin, the term *syncretism* is not only derogatory but inadequate because it fails to appreciate the often malleable boundaries between religious groups. Uddin introduces the cult of Bonbibi,

the proctress of the Sundarbans of Bangladesh and West Bengal. Propitiated by those who depend upon the forest, like honey collectors and wood cutters, Bonbibi attracts both Muslims and Hindus. In the cult of Bonbibi, specific distinctions between Muslim and Hindu have little relevance. Nonetheless, Bonbibi often figures quite differently into the respective worldviews of Bengal's Hindu and Muslim communities. If for Mandair the approach to reifying boundaries is a move to appreciate the historical experience of the universal, for Uddin, as well as for Gottschalk, the answer lies in more fully understanding the nuances of the particular. While all three authors find problems with bounded conceptualizations of South Asia in general and South Asians in particular, they also agree that boundaries are "real" in the sense that they shape the epistemological paradigms of scholarship, which in some measure are constitutive of the very phenomena they seek to describe.

## APPROPRIATIONS

Appropriation assumes boundaries. Sometimes appropriations extend across boundaries inscribed upon physical spaces such as the borders of nation states, the walls protecting a home, or the margins of a body. Sometimes appropriations transgress seemingly less tangible frontiers, such as the covers of texts, the parameters of ritual, or established codes of speech and dress. But appropriation does not simply involve moving across or violating a boundary. Appropriation also involves a bringing back, a return across the boundary, presumably to safety. To this extent, appropriation can mean the taking of something owned by someone else or the use of something in ways never intended. Appropriation thus assumes agency. But most importantly, perhaps, appropriation inevitably involves authority—an authority that is usurped and deployed for other ends, an authority that is negated as one of its crucial components is taken away, or an authority that once was taken and now is regained. Indeed, without explicit or implicit understandings of authority, there can be no appropriation.

### *Overview*

The history of India has often been understood as driven by a dynamic of appropriation. Sometimes appropriation has been framed in terms of the usurpation the India's sovereignty by the Mughuls, the British, or Western capitalist interests. Sometimes this appropriation has been understood in terms of the use of Hindu religiosity for consumption outside the boundaries of the Hindu tradition. For example, Indian Catholic efforts "to appropriate" Sanskrit mantras, yogic postures, *arati* (rotation of an oil lamp) and other aspects of *puja* (worship) have been intended to negotiate the boundary between Christian and Indian (Schmalz

2001). When such appropriations become part of Western Catholic discourse, as they do in the sophisticated theological reflections of Francis X. Clooney (1993), they not only relate to boundaries between Hindu and Catholic but also to boundaries within the Catholic tradition in general and within institutional Catholicism in particular (Schmalz 2003). Of course, India has long been considered to have both a material and cultural capital that could be appropriated for commercial purposes. The trade in Indian spices and textiles in the European middle ages, the looting of India's art treasures during the age of Portuguese and British imperialism, the contemporary use of Indian symbols and styles in Western media and fashion—all point to how India's "exoticism" can be appropriated for material gain. Such efforts to appropriate Indian otherness can also be found in less obvious forms. Recently, for example, the American rock group Van Halen has inscribed its drum set with the Devanagari letters *Va* and *Ha*—representing initials of the group while forming the Hindi demonstrative pronoun for *it, that, he* or *she*. If nothing else, this shows the continuing appeal of the exotic India in American popular culture while also suggesting that appropriations do not have to be intelligible, or even comprehensible, to an audience to be part of the bounded dynamics between India and West.

Of course, Hinduism has often been portrayed in many academic and popular representations as the "appropriating religion" par excellence in its ability to absorb foreign elements much like a sponge absorbs water (see Inden 1990). Following this logic, the achievements of Rammohan Roy, Keshub Chandra Sen, Bankim Chandra, and other key figures of the nineteenth century Bengal Renaissance are thus understood to have accomplished a successful, and necessary, appropriation of Western forms of thought within Indian life. Thus labeling something as an appropriation is a way of reclaiming ownership or authority. For example, the Indian Christian theologian M. M. Thomas (1969) reflected upon India's intellectual engagement with the West in *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance* and thus asserted a Christian origin for "progressive" forms of Hinduism that appeared in the nineteenth century. The trope of India as the appropriator par excellence also extends to India's parliamentary democracy, understood as an appropriation of Western modes of thought in civil society (see Larsen 1995), as well as to its successful appropriation of influence within the global economy, celebrated in a recent cover story in *Time Magazine* (Perry 2006) entitled "India Inc."

What is perceived as "appropriation" usually relies upon a particular understanding of authority and its relation to power. Most obviously, crossing the boundary between East and West, in either direction, has often been a way of appropriating authority and power. Paradoxically, appropriation is a sign of both strength and weakness. Usually, appropriation is an act of force, exerted by victors over and against the vanquished. But appropriation is focused on something that has value, a "something" that is possessed by another—implying that the one who appropriates is, in some way, the weaker party. Appropriation, as a descriptive

category and as an act, thus depends upon shifting understandings of authority and power, which frame processes of recontextualization, interpretation, and use. Appropriation can also be reciprocal, based upon an implicit agreement to trade or barter. Accordingly, texts, bodies, and rituals, indeed anything, may become potential objects of appropriation when invested with power and authority. Appropriation may thus be understood both as theft and as the most sincere form of flattery.

### *Part Two*

Part II of *Engaging South Asian Religions* examines the issue of appropriation. In “Boundaries and Appropriations in North Indian Charismatic Catholicism,” Mathew Schmalz examines a Catholic charismatic healing service in the city of Varanasi. In its spatial confines and in its exclusive rhetoric, the charismatic prayer service maps a series of boundaries such as the distinction between sinner and saved and, most crucially, the distinction between Hindu and Catholic. But in spite of this bounded exclusivity, charismatic Catholicism is the form of Christianity that involves Hindus most fully, as evidenced by the over one thousand Hindus who attended the prayer service. This paradox is in one sense a function of boundaries, because boundaries not only exclude, they also conceal and protect. In the case of charismatic Catholicism, the boundedness of the space and the rhetoric conceals and thus protect the improvisational appropriations of agency and authority between and among Hindus and Catholics.

Schmalz discusses appropriations across the boundary between Hindu and Catholic that reveal the tactical or contextual malleability of such religious distinctions. William Pinch follows by examining the interpenetration of the European and Indian imaginations in “The Corpse and Cult of Francis Xavier.” Pinch focuses on the miracles attributed to Francis Xavier, particularly the claims of resuscitation or resurrection of the dead. These claims were resisted not only as being inconsistent with the “enlightened” tenor of the times but also as being concessions to Indian forms of paganism, at least according to Alessandro Valignano, a Jesuit and leading critic of the canonization process surrounding Xavier. But, when combined with the evidence of Francis Xavier’s uncorrupted body itself, it was the testimony of the Paravas, poor fisherfolk on the Goan coast, that eventually proved decisive in the canonization. The power of Francis Xavier was thus appropriated in a variety of ways. In his canonization, the power was that of holiness or sanctity—a holiness and sanctity that represented in many ways a triumph of an Indian paradigm over a European one. But Francis Xavier’s life and body also became appropriated as an antitype: for Valignano, Xavier’s life and body represented an occasion for doctrinal heresy, while for contemporary scholars, they represented racism, colonialism, and other modern “heresies.” The boundary between India

and Europe was thus reestablished, manipulated, or reconfigured by the self-conscious appropriation of Francis Xavier's life and body as invested with differing valuations of power and authority.

Both Schmalz and Pinch discuss how particular appropriations of power, authority, and agency relate to conventionally defined boundaries between Hindu and Christian or India and Europe. Liz Wilson extends this discussion by reflecting on the applicability of Western feminist interpretative methods to ancient Indian materials. In "Sati or Female Supremacy," Wilson examines portrayals of the life of Gotami, aunt and adoptive mother of the Buddha. Gotami established a female monastic order, preceded the Buddha in death, and achieved *parinirvana* to the accompaniment of a variety of pyrotechnics appropriate for such a triumph over death and impermanence. Wilson raises the question whether Gotami's life can be appropriated by and within a feminist interpretative frame. In discussing the complex and rather problematic status of feminism when boundaries of race, culture and religion are taken into account, Wilson resists the temptation to classify Gotami in a conventional feminist framework as a female Buddha. But Wilson still does argue for the legitimacy of a feminist approach to Gotami's life; this feminist appropriation is not exclusive and instead must be supplemented by an understanding of the boundedness of Gotami's life within a patriarchal culture and society. If Schmalz and Pinch describe appropriation, Wilson engages in the process of appropriation itself by probing its boundaries and reflecting upon its utility and relevance.

## RESISTANCES

Resistance is often undertaken against an actual or threatened appropriation. And so, resistance is defined in one sense by its object. Indeed, what is crucial is how the object of resistance is construed, for such a construal reveals the underlying vision that is to be protected, restored, or changed. But resistance is often more than an interpretation of the status quo. Mohandas Gandhi, for example, resisted British imperialism in order to jump into the future—often by means of an imagined Indian past. Resistance is also defined by its context and methods. As Michel de Certeau (1990) and James Scott (1985) remind us, elites—whether religious or economic—often possess place. "Place" is a stable and defensible position such as a state, a home, or academic institutes and classrooms. Those with the perspective and resources granted by place can engage in long-term resistance, informed by carefully considered strategies and buttressed by resources that can be safely expended. Those with no place—without a country, a home, or a stable academic position—must engage in tactical forms of resistance that opportunistically seize the moment.

### *Overview*

Indian and Western materials have often been appropriated and deployed in a variety of resistances. Popularizers like Bede Griffiths (2004) and Fritjof Capra (1975) both have drawn upon idealized or idiosyncratic visions of Hinduism to resist Western secular modernity. More effective and persuasive, however, were the efforts of the African American civil rights movement to appropriate Gandhian understandings of nonviolent resistance in its struggle against American racism. Within India, one finds the appropriation of foreign forms of religiosity (such as Christianity and Islam) as a mode of resistance among Dalits to Brahmanical Hinduism. Likewise, the appropriation and redeployment of Western derived forms of Marxism has been an exceedingly influential form of resistance in India, both as conventional political expression and as insurgency. If appropriations can be directed toward using and manipulating boundaries, they can also be directed to resisting them.

Of course, just as appropriations can contribute to resistance, they may also become the object of resistance. In such cases, the position of those who resist is central to understanding the ensuing dynamics of contestation. For example, resistance to British imperialism, the conflict between India and Pakistan, the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party, as well as assertions of agency by South Asia women and Dalits, all are informed by the different opportunities afforded by either having a stable position to defend or trying to create a place where none existed before. Within the field of the academic studies of South Asian religions, tenured Western scholars, of course, have the power of place. Ethnographic informants, however, often do not have a place of equivalent power—and so they may resist tactically by choosing the ground of resistance and asserting agency through avoidance or by “poaching” the work of those whom they “inform.” Those with place can sometimes ignore the impact of subtle and situational forms of resistance, since they can often afford to return to the safety of place once the work is complete. But sometimes those who rely upon place are drawn into a dynamic in which they too must respond tactically and contextually. The same dynamic can also apply to interpreting texts, especially when there are more linguistically skilled or authoritative interpreters of texts upon whom the scholar must rely. In a context of resistance when two opposing groups have place and resources, the result is often open warfare, with no one claiming to be the “aggressor.”

### *Part Three*

Part III of *Engaging South Asian Religions* examines the issue of resistance. Concerns for aggression stand at the forefront of James Laine’s contribution “Resisting My Attackers, Resisting my Defenders.” Writing in the wake of the vandalization of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in Pune associated with protests against one

of his books, James Laine initially speaks of the resistance to this work on the Hindu king Shivaji among cadres of the Shiv Sena, a particularly powerful political party in Maharashtra. But Laine moves to reflect upon how he himself is trapped between paradigms that value either iconoclasm or orthodoxy. Laine's work has been appropriated to serve a variety of very disparate forms of resistance employed by Brahmans, Marathas, and academics shaped by contemporary trends in Western approaches to South Asian narratives and peoples. Within this context, Laine finds that he must resist not only his attackers but also his defenders. Resistance thus is not straightforward or seamless. Instead, resistance depends upon shifting boundaries and strategies of appropriation that challenge, as Laine states, "bland pieties about insiders and outsiders."

In "Resisting Assimilation," Shahzad Bashir reflects upon his own experience in negotiating perceptions of "insider" versus "outsider." Bashir speaks as an American-based scholar of Pakistani origin who finds himself curiously deprived of place when researching the Nurbakhshi sect in Baltistan. In resisting the Nurbakhshis' attempt to appropriate his research into their own intra-Islamic polemics, Bashir argues for a final incompatibility of academic and religiously informed scholarship—although Bashir soon learns that his work has indeed been appropriated in a particularly striking way. In reflecting on his work with the Nurbakhshis, Bashir finds that in some ways asserting a boundary is the most appropriate and honest form of resistance, while also finding that his own scholarly voice functions in ways that are uncomfortably similar to his Nurbakhshi informants and interlocutors. As James Laine discovered when confronting more aggressive forms of disagreement over the tone and uses of scholarly research, Shahzad Bashir comes to understand that resistance is not always engaged along the fault lines or fissures that one would initially expect.

Like Bashir and Laine, Paul Courtright reflects on a variety of resistances by the community that claims a special connection to the focus of his scholarly research. In "Climbing through Paradigms," Courtright reviews the reaction to the republication of his study of the Hindu god Ganesh, reactions that, in their most extreme form, included threats of violence. At issue was Courtright's use of Freudian psychoanalytic themes and method to argue for a strong Oedipal dynamic in Hindu representations of the son of Shiva and Parvati. Courtright understands this resistance as emblematic of a dispute over who has authority to speak for a religious tradition. Within such a framework, "offense of sentiment" becomes a powerful trope and rallying cry for communities that resist their portrayals by others. In characterizing the dispute surrounding his work as a clash of paradigms, Courtright argues for the scholar's responsibility to interpret and critique, not in the interest of destruction or disrespect but in an effort to learn and understand.

The essays by Laine, Bashir, and Courtright join the theme of resistance to boundaries and appropriations. All three scholars speak from a defined position as members of the Western academy. Their scholarly work thus carries a particular

authority from its professional “boundedness”—an authority that could be interpreted to threaten or supercede that of the religious tradition under study. Resistance to their work, or the poaching of it in Shahzad Bashir’s case, reflects the concern that the power and authority have been appropriated away from the religious tradition under study. Resistances thus seek to undermine or negate the scholar’s authority and thus collapse the boundary that separates scholars of religion from the traditions they seek to study. The outcome of this process can be a more aggressive assertion and hardening of boundaries. But new paradigms of engagement, contestation, and knowing may also develop and be put into practice. As a result, boundaries will be reconfigured, setting in motion another series of appropriations and resistances.

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