Chapter 1

Hindu-Christian Encounter and Identity Constructions in Colonial India: Historical Overview

Introduction

The objective of this chapter consists in locating Upadhyay’s notion of Hindu-Catholicism in the wider context of Hindu-Christian encounter in colonial India. The question of identity, both Hindu and Christian, looms large in the meeting of these two religious traditions, which began to take place amidst unprecedented social and political upheavals of the nineteenth century colonial India. The colonial matrix played, directly or indirectly, a significant role in the way Christian and Hindu intellectuals interpreted their own traditions and the traditions of each other. In tracing the complex contours of this encounter, three sets of questions which guide our investigation may be formulated as follows: What are the representational idioms used by the Orientalists which had a considerable impact on the interpretations of Hinduism? What sorts of representational idioms were used by the Christians, which involved contestations in the moral, epistemic and social realms? What were the Hindu responses to the Christian critique of their religious beliefs and practices?

While this encounter has many shades and nuances, the focus of this chapter is limited to the epistemic and cultural dimensions that have a bearing on our investigation into Upadhyay’s Hindu-Christian synthesis. The method followed in this chapter, namely, macro analysis, enables us to pay attention to the broader socio-cultural context of the specific elements under study, namely, Upadhyay’s notion of Hindu-Christianity. This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section focuses on the Orientalist investigations and constructions of Hinduism. The second section delineates the Christian representations of Hinduism which entails moral, epistemic and social contestations. The third section delineates the Hindu response to Christianity which began to crystallize from the early decades of the nineteenth century.
1. Orientalist Constructions of Hinduism

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the reports of the missionaries remained the main source of information about India in Europe which generated considerable interest among European intellectuals about the beliefs and forms of Hinduism.\(^1\) However, at this point in time, they did not have any access to the primary textual sources of Hinduism which remained ‘hidden’ from the European gaze. One of the chief reasons for this is the fact that Europeans who knew Sanskrit, the chief language of the Hindu sacred scripture, were extremely limited. The European mastery of Sanskrit had to wait until the tail end of the eighteenth century, that is, till a group of young British East India Company\(^2\) administrators began a systematic investigation into the Hindu textual sources.

1.1 Colonialism and Cultural Policies

Warren Hastings\(^3\) who assumed the Governorship of Bengal in 1772 initiated a series of cultural policies which had a long-term impact. Till Hastings took charge of the administration, the knowledge of the Company officials, who were only anxious to ‘shake the pagoda tree’\(^4\) and collect what profit they could muster, about India and its people was extremely limited. He realized that the British colonial supremacy in the subcontinent would be possible only if the British understood Indian culture and religious practices.\(^5\) Hastings, a patron of Indian culture, set about to make the British administrators more acquainted with Indian history, culture, and social customs. Hastings knew “that the quickest route to the heart of a people is through the language of the country and had accordingly proficiency in

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\(^2\) Founded on 31 December 1600, and chartered by Queen Elizabeth, the English company was one among several European trading ventures that sought to tap the riches of the ‘East.’ Central to the enduring strength of the company was its organization as a joint-stock enterprise which allowed merchants to share risk of trade, and enabled them to raise further funds as needed. The access to resources provided by the company structure made the English a formidable competitor as they confronted India’s indigenous families. See, Barbara D. Metcalf and Thomas R. Metcalf, *A Concise History of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 43.

\(^3\) Warren Hastings (1732-1818) joined the East India Company’s service in 1750 and served as resident at the court of Murshidabad (Bengal) from 1757 to 1760 and as governor-general (1772-85). On his return to England, he was impeached in the House of Commons for his arbitrary methods of governance. After a prolonged trial, Hastings was acquitted in 1795. Barbara D. Metcalf, and Thomas R. Metcalf, *A Concise History of India*, 298.


Bengali and Urdu, besides a fair acquaintance with Persian, the language of the Mughal court.\(^6\)

In 1772 Hastings began to reorganize the affairs of the Company in general and the judicial system in particular.\(^7\) Two basic ideas formed Hastings’ approach to the shaping of legal system in India. First, Hastings believed that there existed in India a fixed body of laws and codes which had been set down by the ‘law givers.’ But over a period of time these laws and codes had become corrupted by accretions, interpretations and commentaries. Hastings wanted to restore these ‘original’ texts in its pristine purity. Secondly, Hastings believed that there existed distinct and separate codes of law for Hindus and for Muslims.\(^8\) Hastings drafted a proposal in 1773 for the establishment of a professorship of Persian at Oxford University and urged the civil servants to study Persian and Hindustani (Urdu) in England before coming to India.\(^9\) Given Hastings’ background and knowledge of the subcontinent, ‘he was predisposed toward a new cultural policy in which he aimed at creating an Orientalized service elite competent in Indian languages and responsive to Indian traditions.’\(^10\)

In order to translate his ideas and policies into concrete form, Hastings turned to the younger men recently arrived in India among whom were Charles Wilkins, Nathaniel Halhed, Jonathan Duncan and a few years later, William Jones.\(^11\) This group of men eventually became the pioneers of Indological studies and the Orientalist knowledge thus generated served as the foundation both for the modern Indological scholarship and for government

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\(^9\) At the time of Hastings as well as during the first half of the nineteenth century Persian was important because it was the language of diplomacy, administration, and the courts of law. In 1790 Cornwallis provided holding the title of writer (the lowest rank in the Company service) with an additional 30 rupees a month to engage a munshi or tutor to teach him Persian. See, David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*, p. 18, n. 28 and 29.


\(^11\) Wilkins came to Bengal in 1770 and Halhed and Duncan took up their jobs in Bengal in 1772. William Jones came to Bengal a decade later, in 1783. See, David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*, 19.
policies of later Anglicist administration. The first Orientalists were eighteenth and
nineteenth century scholars who translated the writings of ‘the Orient’ into European
languages, based on the assumption that effective colonial conquest required knowledge of
the conquered peoples. The Orientalist movement, which was the result of the cultural
policies adopted by Warren Hastings, involved young scholarly administrators who learned
Sanskrit and other Indian languages. During the formative period of Indology the British
Orientalists initiated the study of Indic texts of antiquity, indeed, with the help of Indian
collaborators. Based on their research and investigations of these texts, the British
Orientalists began the interpretation of India.

1.2 British Orientalism and Hinduism
In 1776 Hastings organized a panel of pandits to compile a Code of Hindu Laws with a view
of recovering the ancient laws and codes of Hindus. Hastings wanted to provide the British
judges with a clear and undisputed corpus of laws, which he hoped would eliminate the
conflicting sources and rival interpretations quoted by pandits appointed by the government.
This was done by Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, the Supreme Court Judge, who mastered
Bengali, Persian and Sanskrit after his arrival in India in 1772. Halhed was instrumental in
composing the Hindu laws with the help of Sanskrit pandits. A committee of eleven pandits
had worked with Halhed from 1773-75 on the ‘digest of Hindu laws’ and it was published in

12 Rosane Rocher, “British Orientalism in the Eighteenth Century: The Dialectics of Knowledge and
Government,” Orientalism and the Postcolonial predicament: Perspectives on South Asia, eds., Carol
Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994) 216.

13 Some clarification regarding the terms ‘Orientalists’ and ‘Orientalism’ may be fruitful right at the outset. As
Romila Thapar has pointed out, “[T]he term Orientalist was used in the wider sense of scholars interested in
Asia, and the term Indologist referred to those interested only in India. However, the more generally used term
even for the latter was ‘Orientalists…” Romila Thapar, Interpretations of Ancient Indian History,” pp. 1-25 in
Ancient Indian Social History (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1978) n. 4, p. 23. It is in the wider sense the term
Orientalists is used in the thesis; thus those philosophers like Hegel and Marx who have reflected and written
substantially about India are included as Orientalists. Moreover, the terms ‘Orientalist’ and ‘Orientalism’ used
here have retained hegemonic connotations associated with Edward Said’s “Orientalism.” Briefly stated,
‘Orientalism’ in Saidian sense denotes Western discourses about the ‘Orient’ which sought to essentialize and
dominate the East. In other words, Orientalism in Saidian sense exemplifies stereotypes created and
popularized by Western powers with a view of controlling, ruling and managing the Orient. See, Edward Said,

14 The procedure was somewhat cumbersome. The pandits first picked out the sentences from various originals
in the Sanskrit legal decisions on different topics. Then, as no Englishman could understand Sanskrit at that
time, these passages were translated into Persian and from Persian they were further translated into English.

1776 as *A Code of Gentoo Laws* through a complicated process of translation, that is, from Sanskrit, through an oral Bengali version, into Persian, and then Persian into English.\(^{16}\)

One of the first employees of the Company to acquire a knowledge of Sanskrit was Charles Wilkins (1749-1836) who learned it in Varanasi and Hastings was so impressed with his mastery that he invited Wilkins to Calcutta. Wilkins' publications include an English translation of the *Bhagavat Gita* (1785), the first Sanskrit work translated directly into a European language, the *Hitopadesa* (1787), the *Sakuntala* episode from *Mahabharata* (1795), and *Sanskrit Grammar* (1808). Jonathan Duncan (1756-1811) became proficient in Persian, Bengali and Sanskrit and contributed scholarly articles in the * Asiatick Researches*. In 1791 he proposed the establishment of a 'Hindu College' at Varanasi for the 'preservation and cultivation of the Laws, Literature and Religion of that nation at this Center of their Faith.'\(^{17}\)

Among the early Orientalists, the most significant contributions were made by William Jones (1746-1794), who was instrumental in the establishment of the Asiatic Society of Bengal on 15 January, 1784.\(^{18}\) In an essay which was read out during the 'Third Anniversary Discourse' to the Asiatic Society on 2 February 1786, Jones made a path-breaking suggestion that languages are related because of common descent from an earlier language rather than due to borrowings or coincidence to explain similar inflections and etymologies. In this discourse, which had focused on India, Jones provided a clear formulation of the relationships between Indo-European languages, showing them as a 'family.' He further suggested the possibility that the ancestral language, the shared link between Indo-European languages, (possibly an Indo-European language) no longer existed. This formulation, namely, the kinship between Indo-European languages, can be considered one of the most significant contributions of Jones to the nascent field of Indology. This is what Jones said:

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\(^{16}\) Kate Teltscher, *India Inscribed: European and British Writings on India 1600-1800* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999) 196.


\(^{18}\) The Asiatic Society of Bengal had its first meeting on 15 January, 1784 and it was attended by twenty nine British administrators and scholars; Jones accepted the unanimous election as its president, a post he held till his death. In his preliminary Discourse, Jones brought in the issue of including learned Indians among its members, but it was not acceptable to his fellow Britons. Peter H. Salus, "Preface," *Sir William Jones: A Reader*, ed. Satya S. Pachori (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993) 6.
The Sanscrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity both in roots of verbs and in the form of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which perhaps, no longer exists; there is a similar reason, though not quite so forcible, for supposing that both the Gothick and Celtick, though blended with a very different idiom, had the same origin with the Sanscrit; and old Persian might be added to the same family...¹⁹

This oft-quoted statement might look somewhat commonsensical to us today but in the eighteenth century such an assertion was maverick and revolutionary, almost bordering on cultural heresy, to say the least.²⁰ In 1786 Jones translated *Hitopadesa* and his translation of Kalidasa’s *Shakuntala* appeared in 1788 and it had considerable impact on Western literature. In 1789 Jayadeva’s *Gita Govinda*, a lyrical drama about the love story of Krishna and Radha was translated by Jones. As Codrington notes, through these translations of Indic texts, Indian literature was made accessible to European scholars and found a warm welcome, especially among the German Romanticists.²¹ In 1788 Jones became the editor of *Asiatick Researches* in which scholarly essays were published and these research articles aroused considerable intellectual curiosity in Europe about the existence and current ‘discoveries’ regarding Sanskrit literature and Aryan culture.

Jones died on 27 April, 1794 and his place was taken by H. T. Colebrooke (1765-1837) whose scholarly reputation was reinforced by his pioneering research and erudite articles. Within the span of two years (1797-98) Colebrooke published a four volume translation entitled ‘A Digest of Hindu law on Contracts and Successions,’ a project originally started by Jones. In 1805 Colebrooke published his research on Vedas titled “Essay on the Vedas, or Sacred Writings of the Hindus.” Though he did not translate the Vedas (this was done fifty years later by Max Muller) the significance of Colebrook’s contribution consists in his effort in analyzing the general contents, and placing the Vedas as dating prior to the age of the


²⁰ Jones’ proposal was radical because the classical languages, i.e., Greek and Latin, were the basis of all non-Biblical wisdom for European scholarship toward the end of the eighteenth century and it was upon the grammars of these two Classical languages that Renaissance linguistics was founded. Against such background, for Jones to declare that Sanskrit was on a level with Greek and Latin, more ancient than either, but related to both, was certainly revolutionary. Peter H. Salus, “Preface,” *Sir William Jones: A Reader*, ed., Satya S. Pachori, 7.

Puranas. With the study of the Vedic literature, Colebrooke, like Jones before him, propounded the notion of the 'golden age' of Aryan past. Kopf writes: "Far more than Jones, Colebrooke concentrated his research upon Vedic India, and by the end of his career, he had devised a new composite image of the Indo-Aryan period as an age of gold."22

Apart from the Asiatic Society, the college of Fort William in Calcutta played an important institutional role in Indological research. In 1800 Governor General Wellesley established the college of Fort William as a training center for those Company servants with a view of imparting an understanding of Indian culture.23 Apart from fostering the teaching of oriental languages, the college was also had as its objective to extricate the Company servants from the 'habitual indolence, dissipation and licentious indulgence' which were the 'natural consequence' of living in close proximity to the 'peculiar depravity of the people of India.'24 The College employed a number of British scholars along with traditional pandits and Munshis as Sanskrit and Persian instructors. William Carey, a Baptist missionary was appointed to teach 'Hindu popular languages' which was considered a peripheral post at that time. The three year course 'included what were considered as the three classic languages of India (Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit), six modern languages (Hindustani, Bengali, Telugu, Marathi, Tamil and Kannada), and Indian law.'25

The State sponsored Orientalism in colonial India was not to last very long. It began to decline in the fourth decade of the nineteenth century because of the pressure exerted by lobbies such as the Utilitarians and Evangelicals for reforms and the 'Anglicist' policies in educational field. Though the State sponsored Orientalism declined, Orientalists continued their Indological research within colonial context as well as in Europe. In contrast to the sympathetic approach of the Orientalists towards Hinduism, Utilitarians and the Evangelicals had engaged in a severe criticism of Hindu beliefs and practices. In the nineteenth century there was a considerable interest in Europe and in America about India and its ancient

literature and as a result of such interest oriental faculties and new oriental centers were established in various universities.26

1.3 Romanticism and Idealized Hinduism
The British Orientalist scholarship made available Hindu sacred texts to the European audience. In the second half of the eighteenth century Europe the cultural movement known as Romanticism took a special interest in the Indological studies. The Romantic Movement, in its cultural form, focused on Volkgeist or 'the particular genius' of the people, and nourished the supreme value of popular traditions.27 The Romantic interest in India was closely related to the radical critique of the deficiencies of European 'present' which had been characterized as the preoccupation with the merely useful, the calculable, rational, the loss of faith and the loss of enthusiasm. The remedy, for the Romanticists, was to be found in the wisdom of the Orient, especially, India.28 Germany, though politically not connected with India, undertook Indological research and produced works of exceptional quality and became leaders in the study of Sanskrit language and literature.29

Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), a pioneer in the Romantic Movement, initiated a new awareness and passion for India. It was through the translations of Wilkins’ Bhagavat Gita and Hitopadesa and Jones’ Sakuntala, which had become increasingly available in Germany that Herder came into contact with India. Herder, who had a sympathetic approach to Indians, propounded a glorified view of 'childlike Indians.' For him, the Orient was in the infant state, and thus innocent and pure, and with unexhausted potential. In Herders' thinking, Hellenism was adolescence and Rome reflected adulthood. In fact, the Orient represents Europe's own childhood. He considered the Orient as the cradle of mankind where the 'human spirit'

26 Asian Academy with Sanskrit specialization was established in Russia at St. Petersburg in 1810; Chair of Sanskrit was instituted at the University of Bonn in 1818; the first Chair of Sanskrit was created at Oxford in 1823; in the United States of America, Yale University began Indological studies in 1814 and John Hopkins University created a Chair of Sanskrit in 1878; In Leipzig University (Germany) a Chair for Indology had been established in 1841; A Chair of Sanskrit was started at the University of Leyden (Holland) in 1865; École des Hautes Études began Indological studies in France in 1868; Italy established Chair of oriental studies in 1870. See for details, D. P. Singhal, India and World Civilization, Vol. II, 209-225.


28 W. Halfblass, India and Europe: An Essay in Philosophical Understanding, 83.

29 Some of these scholars, like Marx and Hegel, are not Indologists in the strict sense of the term; they are thinkers and philosophers who had considerable interest in India and its antiquity.
received the first forms of wisdom and virtue. The fact that he did not have any personal knowledge did not deter Herder from painting an idealized image of the Hindus:

The Hindus are the gentlest branch of humanity. They do not with pleasure offend anything that lives; they honour that which gives life and nourish themselves with the most innocent of foods, milk, rice, the fruits of the tress, the healthy herbs which their motherland dispenses...Moderation and calm, a soft feeling and a silent depth of the soul characterize their work and their pleasure, their morals and mythology, their arts and even their endurance under the most extreme yoke of humanity.¹⁰

Frederich Schlegel (1772-1829), another key figure in German Romantic Movement, expressed the characteristically Romantic yearning for the spiritual guidance from the East in the context of the radical political and social changes occurring as Europe entered the modern era. Schlegel learnt Sanskrit from Alexander Hamilton, an Englishman who was kept in detention during the hostilities between France and England. As a philologist, he was fascinated by the beauty, antiquity, and philosophical clarity of Sanskrit. In 1808 Schlegel published a book entitled *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians* which contained a depiction of Indian mythology, and the doctrines of emanation and transmigration. In the final section of the book Schlegel wrote about his anthropological ideas about a new master race which had formed in northern India before marching towards the West to establish empires and to civilize Europe. In his view, all famous nations of high cultural achievements came from this one stock, and their colonies were all one people ultimately deriving from Indian origin.³¹ Here we have the foundation of the Aryan race theory and Aryan supremacy which was to have immense impact not only in ethnology but also in the nationalist discourses of Europe and later, in India.

Max Müller (1823-1900), one of the best known Indologists of the Romantic tradition, contributed immensely to popularize Indic texts through prolific writings. One of the major projects of Max Muller had been the publication of the *Sacred Books of the East* in fifty volumes which he initiated at the International Congress of Orientalists in 1874. This series consists in the translations of Indic, Islamic and Chinese religious literature and out of fifty,

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¹⁰ W. Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Philosophical Understanding*, 70.

³¹ As Goodrick-Clarke points out, the 'new anthropology of the gifted white European races was completed by 1819, when Friedrich Schlegel applied the term *Aryan* to this as yet anonymous Indic-Nordic master race.' Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Hitler’s Priestess: Savitri Devi, the Hindu-Aryan Myth, and Neo-Nazism* (New York and London: New York University press, 1988) 32.
thirty volumes are devoted to Indic texts alone. The publication of Indic texts was objected to by the orthodox Brahmins who banned the printed book on the ground that the sacred books had been published by a 'barbarian' (mleccha). At a meeting of the Brahmins at Poona, Max Müller's Rig-Veda edition was read by a non-Brahmin as the Brahmins themselves did not wish to be defiled by touching the book.\(^{32}\)

It is important to note that in spite of his admiration and love for India, Max Müller never visited the country and chose to gaze at India from the confines of his 'German Workshop.' Evidences suggest that the 'real' India might have destroyed the glorified image he carried in his mind. Keshub Chunder Sen who visited him at his home in Oxford asked Müller why he did not visit the holy city of Ganges and Max Müller's reply was: "I feel I am always in Benares. I love to imagine this house as Benares. I do not desire to see the geographical Benares with my physical eye. My idea of that city is so high that I cannot risk disillusionment."\(^{33}\) In his essay on Dwarkanath Tagore, Müller wrote: "My India was not on the surface, but lay many centuries beneath it; and as to paying a globetrotter's visit to Calcutta and Bombay I might as well walk through Oxford Street and Bond Street."\(^{34}\) Müller was fascinated by India's golden past 'which he reconstructed from the Sacred Books of the East, but was not concerned with India in the present, and its population of living Indians. His voluminous output helped to construct a 'textual India' to be studied, dissected, and compared by scholars in their European libraries.\(^{35}\)

1.4 Orientalism and Textualized Hinduism

The Orientalist investigations into India and its past had some significant consequences. The Orientalist textual production contributed significantly to the establishment of a discursive formation known as 'Orientalism' which entailed a hegemonic 'epistemological space.' It would be somewhat simplistic to assume that the Orientalists were neutral, objective investigators into India's past. They were active collaborators in the hegemonic project of


\(^{33}\) Quoted by Heimo Rau, "Friedrich Max Müller- The Man and his Life," 9.

\(^{34}\) Heimo Rau, "Friedrich Max Müller- The Man and his Life," 9.

classifying and codifying the ‘Orient’ with a view of controlling it. Cohn describes the larger nexus between Orientalist textual production and colonial hegemony:

Seen as corpus, these texts signal the invasion of an epistemological space occupied by a great number of diverse Indian scholars, intellectuals, teachers, scribes, priests, lawyers, officials, merchants, and bankers, whose knowledge as well as they themselves were to be converted into instruments of colonial rule. They were now to become part of the army of babus, clerks, interpreters, sub-inspectors, munshis, pandits, quazis, vakils, schoolmasters, amins, sharistadars, tahsildars, deshmukhs, daroghas, and mamlatdars who, under the scrutiny and supervision of the white sahibs, ran the everyday affairs of the Raj.36

From the perspective of our investigation it must be noted that both forms of Orientalism (Early British and Romantic) had some very significant influence on the way Hinduism came to be interpreted both in India and abroad. Firstly, in their quest to understand India and its past Orientalists like Wilkins, Halhed, Jones, Colebrooke and Muller focused on Hindu sacred texts with a conviction that these texts were indeed accurate guides to the culture and society of the Hindus.37 Secondly, though Hinduism is located in the combination of oral and written texts, the Orientalist scholarly attention was almost exclusively focused on a particular form of textualized Hinduism or Sanskritic Hinduism. As Gauri Viswanathan has noted, although “Sanskritic Hinduism was far from representative of the worship of diverse peoples, it was made to define a whole range of heterogeneous practices that were then lumped together to constitute a single religious tradition termed “Hinduism”.”38 Thirdly, Orientalists like Max Müller propounded the notion of Brahmanic Hinduism as the true form of Hinduism which lay buried beneath layers of accretions and distortions. A corollary to this postulation consisted in the view that the Aryan Brahmins are the creators and custodians of Indian culture. According to Romila Thapar, given their cultural presuppositions, ‘Orientalism encouraged a Brahmanical view of early Indian society and anthropologists... have tended to see Indian society and religion from the perspective of Brahmanical texts.’39

Fourthly, the acceptance of a textual view of India by the Orientalists led to a picture of Indian society as being static, timeless, and spaceless and this view can be seen in the writings of Jones, Hegel, Karl Marx and Muller. For most of these Orientalists modernity had emerged in Europe from the age of Darkness, through Renaissance and Enlightenment into Modern Age. But for the Orientalists and Western historians, this transition never took place in India. For these thinkers, India remained unchanged, constrained by the social institutions that defined it, namely, the caste, village community and oriental despotism. It is also important to note that some of these Orientalist categories were incorporated into the late nineteenth century Indian nationalist discourse.

2. Christian Appraisal of Hinduism
The second significant aspect of the Hindu-Christian encounter is the Christian Appraisal of Hinduism. Initially, the East Indian Company did not allow any missionary activities within their territories fearing that it might harm Company's trading interests. A group of influential men in the East Indian Company held the view that the British ought to be cautious in their policies towards India. This group was Orientalist sympathizers who did not desire any hasty administrative changes and measures in India. As firm believers in the non-interference in the lives and religious beliefs of Indian subjects, they warned about the dangers of missionary activities. On several Board meetings they voiced their opposition in allowing missionary activities in the territories of the Company for the fear that it might harm the British

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41 During the debates in the Court of Directors of the East India Company at the time of the renewal of the Company's charter in 1793 Mr. Lushington, who had made large fortune in India, expressed his conviction that the missionaries would 'prove utterly destructive of the Company's interests, if not wholly annihilate their power in Hindustan; that so far from wishing that they might make converts of ten, fifty, or a hundred thousand natives of any degree of character, he should lament such a circumstance as the most serious and fatal disaster that could happen... The moment that even took place in India, there was an end of British supremacy. J. C. Marshman, The Life and Times of Carey, Marshman and Ward (1859) Vol. I, p. 44, Quoted in Stephen Neill, Colonialism and Christian Missions, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966) 85.

42 Thomas Twining, who had worked in India, wrote to the Chairman of the Court of Directors of the East India Company in 1807 that 'there is not, in the world, a people more jealous and tenacious of their religious opinions and ceremonies, than the native inhabitants of the East. Sir, the people of India are not a political, but a religious people. In this respect they differ, I fear, from the inhabitants of this country. They think as much of their religion, as we of our Constitution... As long s we continue to govern India in the mild and tolerant spirit of Christianity, we may govern it with ease: but if ever that fatal day shall arrive, when religious innovation shall set her foot in that country, indignation will spread from one end of Hindostan to the other; and the arms of fifty million of people will drive us from that portion of the globe, with as much ease as the sand of the desert is scattered by the wind.' P. J. Marshall, ed., Problems of the Empire: Britain and India 1757-1813 (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968) 189-90.
interests. Numerous missionaries, both British and American, landed in India, only to be expelled by the Company authorities. This policy was reversed by the Act of Parliament in 1813 which was occasioned, among other things, by the growing clout of a pressure group back in London belonging to the Evangelical persuasion. This section focuses on three contestations involved in the Hindu-Christian encounter, namely, moral, epistemic and social contestations.

2.1 Evangelicals: Moral Contestations
In the first decades of the nineteenth century several missionary societies were founded in Britain which included the well-known London Missionary Society and the Church Missionary Society. Some of these Societies with considerable evangelical spirit urged the British government to take an active interest in the evangelization of the non-Christians in British colonies. The Evangelicals were strict Protestants who held strong views about moral standards and religious observances. The Evangelicals 'had a horror of idolatry and India was the land of idolatry par excellence. They had a thirst for souls and here were millions rushing to perdition without a chance of Christian salvation.'

While giving evidence before a House of Commons Select Committee of Enquiry into the affairs of the East India Company on 17 April 1832 Sir John Malcolm, Indian administrator and Governor of Bombay (1826-1832), said: 'In our precipitate attempts to improve the condition of the people, we have often proceeded without sufficient knowledge... I have been led, by what I have seen, to apprehend as much danger from political as from religious zealots. If the latter at times create alarm to the natives from infringing their superstitious observances and religion, the former unsettle their minds by the introduction of principles and forms of administration foreign to their usage... We should proceed with much caution, for the natives never appear to forget that we are strangers...'


Much earlier, the Society for Promoting Christian knowledge (SPCK) was founded in 1698 whose chief activities were the distribution of prayer books, tracts and the bible to the poor. In 1701, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) was founded to provide spiritual instruction to the Crowns' agents in the Americas. Brian K. Pennington, Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians and the Colonial Construction of Religion (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 27-30.

Pennington locates the missionary movement within the context of the social conditions of Britain. According to him, in the mid-eighteenth century 'many Christians and social reformers were already offering a hand as well to the dark interior of Britain, seeking to improve the coarse lives of the factory workers, the coal minor, and the street peddler. As this concern for the working poor and the destitute extended to foreigners under British influence, the missionary movement was born.' Brian K. Pennington, Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians and the Colonial Construction of Religion (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 27.

two aims: to abolish the slave trade and to open up India to missionary activity. Slavery was widely practiced both by the British and Indians; the East India Company itself owned slaves who worked for the military and for the estates. The main spokesmen for the Evangelical group, among others, were William Wilberforce and Charles Grant. The Evangelicals saw 'the miraculous subjugation of India by a handful of English' to be the work of divine providence and they took it upon themselves as their duty to civilize the conquered people through the introduction of Western culture. Such Evangelical thinking is reflected in the speech given in 1813 by William Wilberforce:

Are we so little aware of the vast superiority even of European laws and institutions, and far more of British institutions, over those of Asia, as not to be prepared to predict with confidence, that the Indian community which should have exchanged its dark and bloody superstitions for the genial influence of Christian light and truth, would have experienced such an increase of civil order and security, of social pleasures and domestic comforts, as to be desirous of preserving the blessings it should have acquired; and can we doubt that it would be bound even by the ties of gratitude to those (the British) who have been the honoured instruments of communicating them?

The Evangelicals felt the moral obligation for the ethical, social and intellectual development of the colonized Indian subjects. Charles Grant, an evangelical, had worked in India, became influential in the Council of the East India Company. In a lengthy policy paper “Observations on state of society among the Asiatic subjects of Great Britain, particularly with respects to morals; and on the means of improving it” [1796] (hereafter, ‘Observations’), Grant outlined his perspectives on India in opposition to the prevailing Orientalist cultural policy adopted by Warren Hastings which respected Indian customs, laws and religions. The ‘Observations’ not only presented the agenda for reforms in India, but also offered a legitimization for colonial rule in India. This text also shows emerging concerns of Evangelicalism in the context of Enlightenment rationalism which sought to discredit Christianity and biblical tradition. Grant saw a connection between French Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire and the English

51 Jacob S. Dharmaraj, Colonialism and Christian Mission: Postcolonial Reflections, 44.
Orientalists like Jones who portrayed Hinduism in a glowing light. He criticized scholars who had never visited India and "Europeans who, not having resided in Asia, are acquainted only with a few detached features of the Indian character." In "Observations," Grant directed his criticism against the Orientalists about their portrayal of India:

It has suited the views of some philosophers to represent that people as amiable and respectable; and a few late travelers have chosen rather to place some softer traits of their character in an engaging light, than to give a just delineation of the whole. The generality, however, of those who have written concerning Hindostan, appear to have concurred in affirming what foreign residents there have generally thought, nay, what the natives themselves freely acknowledge of each other, that they are a people exceedingly depraved.

Grant insisted on the absolute difference in morality between the British and the natives of India: "In the worst parts of Europe, there are no doubt great numbers of men who are sincere, upright, and conscientious. In Bengal, a man of real veracity and integrity is a great phenomenon." In utter contrast to the Orientalists, Grant dwells at some length on the moral depravity of the people in question: that they are lacking in truth, honesty, and good faith. In his estimation, Indians and Europeans stand poles apart in their respective morality and this difference, for Grant who does not hide his racist thinking, is "analogous to the difference of the natural colour of the two races." For him, the edifice of Hindu law "is the work of a crafty and imperious priesthood, who feigned a divine revelation and appointment, to invest their own order, in perpetuity, with the most absolute empire over the civil state of the Hindoos, as well as over their minds." This sense of civilizing mission is reflected in "Observations":

The true cure of darkness is, the introduction of light. The Hindoos err, because they are ignorant and their errors have never fairly been laid before them. The communication of our light and knowledge to them, would prove the best remedy for their disorders; and this remedy is proposed from a full conviction that if judiciously

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and patiently applied it would have a great and happy effects upon them, effects honourable and advantageous to us.\(^{59}\)

One of the chief focuses of missionary societies consisted in a severe attack on Hindu idolatry. As Pennington notes, 'the chief adversary of the evangelical missionary was not the implacable Hindu devotee, or even the brahmin priest who kept him in spiritual and physical servitude, but the material object of Hindu devotion itself.'\(^{60}\) Even before the evangelicals came into the scene the European travelers in their writings had portrayed India as the land of 'idolaters.'\(^{61}\) Technological breakthrough such as lithography\(^{62}\) in the early part of the nineteenth century helped in the mass production of pictures of deities in India and the proliferation of images became a particular concern in missionary accounts which stigmatized what they saw as Hindu fetishism.\(^{63}\)

Against the background of the sympathetic Orientalist portrayal of Hinduism, Baptist missionary William Ward's writings stand in utter contrast. His book *A View of the History, Literature and Religion of the Hindoos*, (first published in 1815) which is meant as a survey

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\(^{61}\) According to Ralph Fitch, a seventeenth century British traveler, the chief idols of the Hindoos are ‘blacke and evill favoured, their mouths monstrous, their ears gilded, and full of jewels, their teeth and eyes gold, silver and glasse, some having one thing in their handes and some another.’ See, William Foster, “Ralph Fitch,” in *Early Travels in India 1583-1619* (London: Oxford University Press, 1921) 23. According to Tavernier, another well known traveler who visited India in the seventeenth century wrote that ‘the idolaters have no union among themselves, and that superstition has introduced so strange a diversity of opinions and customs that they never agree with one another.’ See, V. Ball, trans., *Travels in India by Jean-Baptiste Tavernier: Translated from the original French Edition of 1676 with a biographical sketch of the Author, Notes, Appendices*, ed., William Crooke, Vol. II (Reprint, New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1977) 141-42.

\(^{62}\) The original lithographic process was invented by Alois Senefelder in Munich in 1798. The design was applied to the fine limestone block used in the process with any greasy substance like wax and fixed in the stone which was then damped with water and greasy ink applied which leaves a reverse image on the paper pressed on the stone for printing. Lithography was first used in India in the 1820s. Christopher Pinney, *Photos of the Gods: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004) 14.

\(^{63}\) London Missionary Society Tract describes the idol making as follows: “Benares is the great center of the idol making business; though in all parts of India the trade flourishes. Potters the day through may be seen in the sacred city moulding images of clay for temporary use. Sculptors also may be found producing representations of the gods in stone or marble, carpenters, moreover, make great wooden idols for the temples; and workers in metal- goldsmiths, coppersmiths, and brass-workers- turn out more or less highly-finished specimens in their respective metals.” Rev. John Pool, *The Land of the Idols, or Talks with Young people about India* (London: 1895) pp. 14-15. Quoted by Christopher Pinney, *Photos of the Gods: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004) 15.
of Hindu history and culture, reflect his contempt for much of the Hindu beliefs and practices. Ward, who worked in the Serampore mission, writes in the introductory remarks of the book: "The author has witnessed scenes which can be clothed in no language, and has heard of other abominations practiced in the midst of religious rites, and in the presence of the gods, which, if they could be described, would fill the whole Christian world with disgust and horror." According to Ward, "the characters of the gods, and the licentiousness which prevail at their festivals, and abounds in their popular works, with the enervating nature of the climate, have made the Hindoos the most effeminate and corrupt people on earth." He adds that 'fidelity to marriage is almost unknown among the Hindoos.' Ward was highly critical of the Orientalists like Halhed and Jones, who composed poems on Hindu gods and translated Indic texts and had sympathies for Hindu beliefs and practices.

2.2 Church-Sanskrit: Epistemic Contestations

Already by the time of De Nobili, the effort to translate Christian truths into Indian categories had begun and there had been some efforts from the part of missionaries to master Sanskrit with a view of understanding the Hindu scriptures and also as a means of disputation and even a refutation of Hindu doctrines. By the nineteenth century there had been a comparatively small corpus of literature which may be termed as 'Church Sanskrit.' Here, 'Church Sanskrit' denotes 'a literature that sought to convey the Christian faith in the medium of Sanskrit' or which sought the Sanskritization of the Christian faith. The adaptation of Church Sanskrit served two purposes: first, it was sought as a medium for translating Christian concepts into the classical linguistic format. Secondly, it was also mediated as a trope for epistemic contestations, namely, in challenging the nexus between


66 According to Ward, Sir William Jones, "whose recommendations of the Holy Scriptures (found in his Bible after his death) has been so often and deservedly quoted, to please his pandit, was accustomed to study the shastras with the image of a Hindoo god placed on his table:-his fine metrical translations of idolatrous hymns are known to every lover of verse." Ward asks further: "Was this not a violation even of the neutrality, and an offence, not only against the gospel, but against theism itself?" Rev. W. Ward, A View of the History, Literature, and Religion of the Hindoos: Vol. I, xcvii.

Brahmanic hegemony and Sanskrit. In this sub-section we shall focus on three people who contributed to Church Sanskrit within the framework of Hindu-Christian encounter.

William Carey (1761-1837), a British Baptist missionary, settled himself in the Danish enclave of Serampore in 1793. As we had already noted, he was appointed as a teacher of Bengali at the Fort William College. In a period when Sanskrit stood at the top of the linguistic ladder and the vernacular languages at the lower rungs, the pandits regarded discourses in the vernaculars as less than dignified. Carey sought the help of pandits like Mrityunjay Vidyalankar of the Fort William College to master Sanskrit. Carey carried an ambivalent attitude towards Sanskrit and the custodians of this language, the Brahmans. For him, Sanskrit symbolized the Brahmanical hegemony and it was this alliance of power which he sought to undermine, among other things, through his translation works. As Young points out, Carey chose to publish his Sanskrit grammar, Ramayana edition, and selected translations of Hindu writings in order to bring to public attention “these mysterious sacred nothings... which have maintained their celebrity so long merely by being kept from the inspection of all but interested Brahmans.”

It is within these epistemic contestations that we need to locate Carey’s linguistic pursuits, especially, that of Sanskrit. The Serampore College which was set up by Carey was designed for two interrelated objectives: first, the formation of competent ‘Christian Pandits’ who would improve Carey’s translations and secondly, the training of apologists who are able to

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69 According to Richard Young, “Carey’s letters and diaries are replete with references to acrimonious encounters with brahmans, whom he compared to “Romish” priests hiding their sacred books behind the veil of an ecclesiastical language.” Richard Fox Young, *Resistant Hinduism: Sanskrit Sources on Anti-Christian Apologetics in Early Nineteenth Century India*, 34.

70 Anand Amaladass and Richard Fox Young contextualize Carey’s antipathy towards Brahmans as follows: “Coming from the class of so-called skilled mechanics (he was a cobbler, as he proudly said, not even a shoemaker), he knew from first hand experience that discrimination based on class is especially unkind to a person of his humble background who had risen above his station in colonial society. Class bias disposed him to regard the indigenous brahman, not only the European variety, as an obstacle to individual freedom and personal development, which his evangelical perspective included literacy, access to scripture, and tolerance of dissent in matters of religion.” Anand Amaladass and Richard Fox Young, “The Authors and Their Works: A Historical Overview of Church Sanskrit,” in *The Indian Christiad*. 32.

71 William Carey, Baptist Missionary Society (London) Ms, Carey to John Sutcliffe, 10 October. C.f., Richard Fox Young, *Resistant Hinduism: Sanskrit Sources on Anti-Christian Apologetics in Early Nineteenth Century India*, 34.
contrast Bible translation with the prevailing systems of Hindu Beliefs. In Carey's scheme 'Hindu literature would be placed in disadvantageous juxtaposition with the Gospel, a task which could be done effectively only by evangelists acquainted with the original sources of both religions.' Carey and others seem to have overstated the scope of the Serampore College in their planning stage: "If this College be conducted with due vigour, it may be made the Christian Benares, and the tide of Sungskritu literature be turned completely on the side of Christianity." Carey's logic for the adaptation of Church Sanskrit consisted in the conviction that this language wielded a powerful influence over people and a replacement of Christian truths in lieu of distorted Hindu doctrines in Sanskrit would bring about the desired evangelical objectives. Carey translated the Bible into Sanskrit (entitled Dharmapustaka) with the help of Mrityunjay Vidyalankar of the Fort William College and many Sanskritic terms originally used in this translation were adopted by other Christians.

William Hodge Mill (1792-1853) arrived in Calcutta in 1821 and he was appointed principal of Bishop's College, the newly built Anglican theological center. Soon after his arrival in India, Mill assessed the importance of Sanskrit and mastered it so well that Mrityunjay Vidyalankar ranks him higher than Jones, Carey, Colebrooke and other Orientalists. Making Bishop's College the centre of his activities, Mill began to find ways and means of


73 Carey's logic runs like this: "To gain the ear of those who are thus deceived it is necessary for them to believe that the speaker has a superior knowledge of the subject. In these circumstances knowledge of Sungskrit is valuable. As the person thus misled, perhaps a Brahmun, deems this a most important part of knowledge, if the advocate of truth be deficient therein, he labours against the hill: presumption is altogether against him." W. Carey, "On Encouraging the cultivation of Sungskrit among the natives of India," Friend of India (quarterly) 2. 139. C.f., Richard Fox Young, *Resistant Hinduism: Sanskrit Sources on Anti-Christian Apologetics in Early Nineteenth Century India*, 35.


75 Carey writes: "The people do not venerate the language for the idolatrous ideas it contains, but the ideas for the dress they wear. What can be more effectual mode of counteracting this influence, than that of depositing ideas of genuine science in this very language, and by dividing the attachment of the people, finally transferring all their regard to those just ideas which it is proposed to inculcate. Instead of pulling down the temple around which the worshippers are assembled, let us displace the idol, and present for the veneration of the people, a new and legitimate object of regard, arrayed in new vestment." W. Carey, "On the importance of Sungskrita to the future improvement of India," Friends of India (monthly) 2. 437. C.f., Richard Fox Young, *Resistant Hinduism: Sanskrit Sources on Anti-Christian Apologetics in Early Nineteenth Century India*, 35.

transcribing the basic Christian tenets and concepts like the Decalogue and the Creeds into Sanskrit. He also intended using these Sanskrit translation of Christian ideas as a medium of dialogue with the pandits. Mill’s approach to Hinduism was somewhat more nuanced than Evangelicals such as Carey; in Mill’s estimation, Hinduism consisted of ‘sublime precepts of spiritual abstractions’ beneath ‘monstrous and demoralizing legends.’

According to Young, Mill ‘utilized Sanskrit and its thought-forms so boldly that his writings rival and often surpass Brahmabandhav Upadhyay’s Hymn to saccidānanda, the only other Christian writing in Sanskrit that is well known in India today.’ H. H. Wilson, a Sanskrit scholar who was associated with Bishop’s College, collaborated with Mill in the “Proposed Version of Theological Terms” which was published in 1824. This work, which attempted to render Christian terms and references in Sanskrit, generated considerable interest and debate among both Christians and Hindus. However, Mill’s magnum opus is Śrīkṛṣṭasangītā which is the life of Christ in Sanskrit was published in 1831. The inspiration for Śrīkṛṣṭasangītā was one of Mill’s pandits, Rāmacandra Vidyābhūṣana, who composed some Sanskrit verses in praise of Jesus in 1828, which the pandit hoped to expand it later to a Purana. These verses began with the lament of a bewildered sisyā (student) due to the conflicting views of his religion and other religions. Rāmacandra’s poem included the response of the guru, a follower of the ‘true scripture’ who shows the path of true salvation. Impressed by the seminal ideas of Rāmacandra, Mill proceeded to complete it with the help of Wilson and the full text became a massive five thousand slokas. As Young notes, this composition is

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77 Young has pointed out the role of Bishop Reginald Heber whose thinking had an influence on Mill. Heber convinced Mill that the confrontation between Hinduism and Christianity was sharpest on the double issue of God’s moral character and the dogma of the Trinity. At Heber’s behest, Mill began translating the Decalogue and three Creeds (Apostle’, Niceno-Constantinopolitan, and Athanasian) which were subsequently published by Bishop’s College in 1823. R. Young, Resistant Hinduism: Sanskrit Sources on Anti-Christian Apologetics in Early Nineteenth Century India, 38.


79 Richard Fox Young, Resistant Hinduism: Sanskrit Sources on Anti-Christian Apologetics in Early Nineteenth Century India, 38.

80 This work is divided into four “books”: The first book is on the Infancy of Jesus with 989 stanzas. The second book deals with the early ministry of Jesus in 23 in 1275 stanzas. Third book focuses on the later ministry of Jesus in 1186 stanzas and the fourth book deals with the passion and glorification of Christ in 1838 stanzas. Altogether the second edition of Mill’s work consists of 5028 stanzas. C.f., Anand Amaladass and Richard Fox Young, The Indian Christiad, 98.
something unique because no other Christian author with the exception of P. C. Devasia
(Kristabhagavatam, 1977), had attempted anything like this in Sanskrit. 

John Muir (1810-1888), a qualified Sanskritist, was one of the high ranking colonial officials
who felt it his duty to lend support to evangelical efforts in India. In what might seem as an
unusual move, Muir wrote a treatise in Sanskrit, the Matapariksha (MP) in 1839, which was
at once an apologetics for Christianity and an appraisal of Hinduism. MP is presented in the
form of a dialogue between a student and a teacher. This remarkable work departs from the
previous missionary writings which attacked Hinduism outright on moral grounds and steers
the debate on an intellectual ground, as indicated in the title MP. In the carefully chosen title,
the term ‘mata’ stands for a set of interconnected ideas of ‘thought’ ‘doctrine,’ ‘creed,’ or
‘religion’ and ‘pariksha’ denotes the test of objective scrutiny.

The ‘objective’ scrutiny of true scripture, for Muir, consists of three principles. The first is
that the founder must have miraculous powers. The ‘teacher’ in MP says: “The true scripture
was given to prophets (bhavisyavādīn), who give live (jīva) to the dead. Those who claimed
authority, but were devoid of such power, were charlatans or simply confused.” The second
proof of true scripture consists in the ‘excellence’ God accords to true scripture. The ‘teacher’n MP says: “God is holy; his scriptures must be holy, too. Other scriptures containing
shameful stories are not divine; they originate from human ignorance.” The third test of true
scripture consists in its ‘universality.’ The ‘teacher’ in MP says: “There is one God, one
human species, and one religion (Dharma). A scripture good for only one race (vamsa)

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81 Richard Fox Young, Resistant Hinduism: Sanskrit Sources on Anti-Christian Apologetics in Early Nineteenth Century India, 43.

82 The Matapariksha is divided into five chapters: Chapter one deals with the “Description of God’s Attributes; Chapter two focuses on “The Necessity of Divine Guidance”; Chapter three deals with the “Description of the Characteristics of the True Religion”; Chapter four focuses on the “Presentation of Christianity” and the final chapter deals with the “Deliberation on the Indian Scriptures.” For the text, see, Muir, Matapariksha: A Sketch of the Argument for Christianity and against Hinduism (Calcutta: Bishop’s College Press, 1839). cf. Richard Fox Young, Resistant Hinduism: Sanskrit Sources on Anti-Christian Apologetics in Early Nineteenth Century India, 73-80.


derives from man, not God." To be sure, in the ‘test’ to determine whether or not the scripture, and by extension, true religion, the scale tilts obviously in Muir’s favour since according to Matapariksha only Christianity is capable of fulfilling these conditions.

2.3 Christianity and Caste: Social Contestations

In Indian Christianity caste factor remained a complex issue in the nineteenth century. In most cases, acceptance of Christianity did not change caste status as such. For instance, from the beginning the Syrian Christians of Kerala found their place as a relatively high caste within the overall social order. But by coming from various caste backgrounds, the Goan Catholics were subsumed into the social stratification which ran parallel to the Hindu caste hierarchy around them. In Goa, Konkan region and Tamil Nadu where the notions of social precedence and beliefs in purity-pollution continued to inform the inter-caste relations, ‘a structure of rights and honours based on caste developed around the celebration of feasts in village churches, analogous to the pattern existing in Hindu temples.’

It had been pointed out that there had been a significant difference between the Catholic and Protestant approaches to the caste system. Catholic missionaries who went for the conversion of groups frequently ended up working within the framework of caste. On the other hand, Protestants seem to have much more consistently regarded the caste system as an obstacle to evangelization and attempted to foster individual conversions. Against this background, Forrester’s observation is pertinent: “On the whole the Roman Catholics have all along been fairly consistently favourable towards group conversion and have seldom put as much emphasis on the values of individualism and equality as the Protestants. This has meant of course, that they have tended to be very much more tolerant of the caste system…” Susan Bayly has pointed out in the context of Syrian Christianity and early Catholicism in south India that the ‘Indian Christians did not opt out of the indigenous moral order; on the contrary, the behaviour and social organization of these converts continued to reflect

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perception of caste and rank, honour and ritual precedence which were shared throughout the wider society.\(^{88}\)

Some of the Catholic missionaries had endorsed the caste system as integral part of Hindu social system. For example, Roberto de Nobili accommodated the caste system within the framework of Catholicism. De Nobili himself had adopted a Brahmanical mode of sannyasi way of life; but he knew that other castes had priests of their own who were not necessarily Brahmans. So he created another category of sannyasis known as pandarasamis for the non-Brahman castes. De Nobili got around the problem of caste by adopting the caste practices prevalent in the Hindu society. Abbe Dubois (1766-1848), a Catholic missionary who had worked in South India for nearly thirty years, had the following to say about the caste system:

I believe caste division to be in many respects the *chef-d'oeuvre*, the happiest effort, of Hindu legislation. I am persuaded that it is simply and solely due to the distribution of the people into castes that India did not lapse into a state of barbarism, and that she preserved and perfected the arts and sciences of civilization whilst most other nations of the earth remained in a state of barbarism.\(^{89}\)

Abbe Dubois, whose opinions the British administration took seriously, recommended that Hindu customs and social structures should be left untouched.\(^{90}\) Often the missionary stance in relation to caste involved certain amount of ambiguities and paradoxes. Equally complex was the posture of Christians with regard to the caste system. It was not uncommon from the part of Catholic Church discriminatory practices based on caste considerations. For example, the Synod of Pondicherry (1844) which was held to discuss and examine the state of the apostolic ministry in India focused the possibilities of enhancing educational opportunities for the native youths by setting up schools with a view of fostering vocations to priesthood. The Synod appointed a committee to formulate plans to set up minor seminaries in the diocese. However, a distinction was introduced as to the admission of candidates into the

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\(^{90}\) He wrote the following lines as a warning to Europeans in general and to the British in particular: "Let us take care lest we bring about, by some hasty or imprudent course of action, catastrophes which would reduce the country to a state of anarchy, desolation, and ultimate ruin, for in my humble opinion, the day when the Government attempts to interfere with any of the more important religious and civil usages of the Hindus will be the last of its existence as a political power." Abbe Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, 97.
seminary on the basis of caste. Accordingly, 'outcastes were excluded both from the school and the Seminary.' However, "during the Synod some young missionaries strongly advocated a campaign against castes. No class distinctions were to be admitted in the Churches, they said, and all, even the pariahs, should be raised to the Holy Orders." But local Christians were alarmed by this discussion at the Synod:

The local Christians came to know about the proposals that were being made, and took alarm at them. Immediately they sent a protest to the Fathers assembled in the Synod against the innovations that were being planned. The Bishop tried to pacify them, but he did not succeed in fully dissipating the atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion that had been created.

The Seminary had retained the caste based practices regarding food habits especially in the matter of eating with the European priests. Indeed, food is one of the aspects which figured prominently in the Hindu purity-pollution framework and the Seminary practice was only a mirror of the wider Hindu society. Fr. Jean Le Roux, with a view ending distinctions in the Seminary, met each seminarian and consulted them about their idea of having a common refectory for the Europeans and Indians. The students agreed and on St. Joseph's Day, 1847 began to implement the program of common refectory. However, the situation did not last long; in fact the common refectory program ran into serious trouble:

The Christians came to hear about these changes and looked upon them as a sort of contamination to their children studying in the Seminary. Their protests having met with no attention, they raised a campaign of calumnies against the missionaries. The pagans themselves and the Tamil Press of Madras joined in their protests. A pastoral letter of the Bishop explaining the situation failed to restore peace. The people continued to demand that the professors should stop eating together with the native Christians of Nellitope, near Pondicherry, also rebelled against the missionaries and sent complaints to Rome. Carlo Mercês de Melo, S. J., The Recruitment and Formation of the Native Clergy in India (16th to 19th Century): An Historico-Canonical Study, 324-25.

In 1858 Max Müller reported: "An Indian colonel tells us that it was impossible to keep up military discipline among soldiers who, if their own officers happened to pass by while the privates were cooking their dinner, would throw their mess into the fire, because it had been defiled by the shadow of a European." Max Müller, "Caste," Chips from a German Workshop: Essays on Mythology, Traditions, and Customs, Vol. II (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1868) 301.
students. Their demands were not listened to. The result was that many stopped going
to Church.\footnote{Carlo Mercès de Melo, S. J., \textit{The Recruitment and Formation of the native Clergy in India (16\textsuperscript{th} to 19\textsuperscript{th} Century): An Historico-Canonical Study}, 326.}

It has been pointed out that conversions that took place in the nineteenth and early twentieth
centuries came about because of the converts' desire to move out of the non-egalitarian caste
society of the Hindus into a religious community where they were treated equally. However,
so powerful was the grip of the caste structure that in spite of the attempts of convert groups
to break out of the caste system, society refused to let them. In most cases, converted
Christians from the so called lower castes faced the same disabilities which they wanted to

Not everyone in Christianity was prepared to accept the \textit{status quo} of caste system; in the
nineteenth century some of the Christians did challenge the caste hegemony with the help of
the London Missionary Society. A case in point regarding the challenge to the hegemonic
caste hierarchy was the 'breast cloth' controversy in which the Nadar community had resisted
the upper caste domination. According to the caste rules prevalent at that time Nadar women
were forbidden to cover their breasts or to carry pots on their hips.\footnote{Some of the caste rules applied to Nadars were as follows: Nadars had to keep away from Nambudiri
Brahmans thirty-six paces and twelve paces from Nayars. Nadars could not carry an umbrella, wear shoes or
University Press and Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1989) 158.} Conversions led to some
amount of unrest in the region as the Nadars decided to defy some of the traditional caste
restrictions imposed on them. In 1812 Munro issued an order allowing women converts 'to
cover their bosoms as obtains among Christians among other countries.'\footnote{Robert Hargrave, \textit{The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change} (Berkeley:
University of California, 1969) 59.} In May 1814 Travancore government issued a circular permitting lower-class women, who had converted
to Christianity, to wear a short bodice in the manner of Syrian-Christian and Muslim-Mopilla
women.\footnote{Kenneth Jones, \textit{Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
and Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1989) 159.}

Steps such as these which tilted traditional caste equations led to conflicts between Nadars
and Nayar communities. In 1822 Nadar women wearing breast cloths were humiliated and
abused and sometimes attacked by Hindus who stripped off the upper cloths of Nadar women. Tensions mounted in 1828 with a series of attacks on the Christians and missions. The government of Travancore under pressure issued a ruling on February 3, 1829 which prohibited Nadar women from covering their breasts and reproached the community for seeking help from the missionaries. Nadar Christians continued their demands for reforms and self-determination. Nadar women were assaulted and tensions continued right up to 1859 and troops had to be brought in to restore peace and order. At last, on 26 July 1859 Travancore government issued a royal proclamation in which Nadar women were allowed to cover their breasts.

Several prominent Protestants voiced their opposition to the caste system which they saw as incompatible to the spirit of Christianity. Krishna Mohan Banerjea, a Christian leader and patriot, criticized the caste system in no uncertain terms and blamed India's social and economical woes on the Hindu social structure which divided and sub-divided people, thus depriving the national unity. Banerjea saw the abrogation of caste as the condition for the possibility of national regeneration and he saw Christianity as an antidote to the evils of this stratified social system. Nehemiah Goreh, a Konkani Brahman convert, who was critical of Hindu caste system, said that 'Christianity with caste would be no Christianity at all.' In the nineteenth century, with the help of Christian missionaries, those who are at the periphery "were initiated into a different value-system that afforded them a sense of self-respect vis-à-vis the highly discriminatory Brahminical Hindu societal structure." As Kenneth Jones has pointed out, Christianity filled a role similar to that of other religions such as Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Islam which offered those who were on the social and cultural periphery a way to improve their status and move away from caste based disabilities.

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100 Banerjea wrote: 'If India be destined in the councils of providence to look up on once more among the nations of the earth, it will only be by unlearning the institutions of caste, and by adopting the religion of her present rulers with all its temporal and spiritual blessings.' Krishna Mohan Banerjea, "Caste," Calcutta Review, Vo. XV (1851) pp. 36-75. Quoted by D. B. Forrester, "Indian Christian Attitudes to Caste in the Nineteenth Century," Indian Church History Review, Vol. VIII, No. 2, 1974, 143.


In this sub-section we focused briefly on three significant components in the Hindu-Christian encounter, namely, the Evangelical critique of Hinduism on moral grounds, the epistemic contestations within the framework of Church Sanskrit and the social contestations in relation to caste. These perspectives engaged in the critique of Hinduism in different ways. The evangelical attack on Hinduism (James Mill, Ward) were focused on the moral aspect whereas the proponents of Church Sanskrit (Carey, Mill, Muir) engaged in a new hermeneutics in the critique of Hinduism and brought into forefront a more nuanced approach. The third aspect of the Hindu-Christian encounter (caste) brought into the forefront some of the social concerns of Christianity. In the next section we shall locate the Hindu response to the Christian representational idioms.

3. Hindu Appraisal of Christianity

Hindu attitude towards Christianity varied from outright indictment to a more nuanced accommodation with considerable degree of indifference thrown in between. In the nineteenth century there were at least three types of intellectual responses to the Christian critique of Hinduism. The first type of response saw Christianity as one example of universal religion and sought to construct a rational religion by combining elements of Christianity and Hinduism and this was the approach taken by Rajaram Mohan Roy and the early Brahmo Samaj. The second response consisted in the rebuttal of Christianity by showing the failures and problems of Christian thought and this can be seen in the approaches taken by Dayananda Saraswati. The third approach sought to project Hinduism as a superior religion to Christianity and this perspective can be found in the writings and speeches of Swami Vivekananda. In this sub-section we shall focus briefly on these three typological responses of Hinduism to Christianity, namely the syncretic approach, rebuttal approach, and superiority approach, which took place in the nineteenth century.

3.1 Syncretic Approach

Rajaram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) is one of the first modern Hindu thinkers whose writings had a significant impact on Hindu-Christian dialogue within the context of what is usually referred to as 'Indian Renaissance.' He entered Bengal Civil Service and showed himself to be an able administrator and after his retirement Roy settled down in Calcutta and spent his time and energy in social and religious reform programme. As a social reformer, Roy was

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very critical of some of the Hindu practices such as polytheism, idol worship and sati. In his social and religious thinking, Roy was particularly influenced by the unity of God contained in the Upanishads and the moral teachings of Christ as contained in the Sermon on the Mount.

In a letter to his friend Digby, Roy wrote that he found the ‘doctrines of Christ more conducive to moral principles and better adapted for the use of rational beings.’ He adds that Hindus in general are ‘more superstitious and miserable, both in performance of their religious rites, and in their domestic concerns, than the rest of the known nations of the earth.’ In the same letter Roy wrote that his efforts at convincing people about the ‘absurdity of idolatry’ were opposed by ‘their self-interested leaders, the Brahmins.’ Roy seems to have been convinced that ‘Christianity, if properly inculcated, has a greater tendency to improve the moral, and political state of mankind, than any other known religious system.’ Roy wrote in a letter that ‘there is nothing so sublime as the precepts taught by Christ, and that there is nothing equal to the simple doctrine he inculcated.’

To form as a moral basis for his campaigns for the reforms, Roy published a book in 1820 entitled *The Precepts of Jesus,* (TPJ) which was a compilation of extracts from the gospels. Roy wrote in the ‘Introduction’ to TPJ: “I feel persuaded that by separating from the other matters contained in the New Testament, the moral precepts found in that book, these will be more likely to produce the desirable effect of improving the hearts and minds of men of different persuasions and degrees of understanding.” The publication of this book brought Roy into a confrontation with some of the Serampore missionaries who differed with Roy’s portrayal of Christianity. In particular they were uncomfortable with the separation which

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Roy posited between the teachings of Jesus and Christian theology. While Roy recognized Hindu image worship to be irrational and contrary to Upanishadic teachings, for him equally illogical and contrary to the precepts of Jesus was the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, transubstantiation, and atonement through Christ. In Roy’s estimation, both Christianity and Hinduism suffer from prejudices and superstitions and very little could be gained from denunciations based on mutual misrepresentation.¹⁰⁹

The publication of the TPJ resulted in a series of clarifications from Roy’s part as a response to the accusations by the missionaries that he was watering down the person of Jesus. In a clarification, Roy pointed out that ‘the Precepts of Jesus under the denomination of the moral sayings of the New Testament,’ had been taken in its wide sense, ‘as including our conduct to God, to each other and to ourselves.’¹¹⁰ He made clear that there are two propositions which inform the treatise TPJ: (1) That the precepts of Jesus, which teach that love to God is manifested in beneficence towards our fellow-creatures, are a sufficient Guide to Peace and Happiness and (2) That the omnipresent God, who is the only proper object of religious veneration, is one and undivided in person.¹¹¹ Roy further clarified that the only reason for separating the Precepts from the abstruse doctrines and miraculous description of the New Testament stems from the conviction that they [doctrines] ‘are liable to the doubts and disputes of Freethinkers and Anti-Christians, and the latter [miracles] are capable at best of carrying little weight with the natives of this part of the globe, the fabricated tales handed down to them being of a more wonderful nature.’¹¹² The underlying principle of adopting only the ‘Precepts’ and not other aspects (doctrines, miracles) consists in Roy’s appeal to ‘reason’ as the criterion for religious and social practices. It is this appeal to Reason that led Roy to establish the Brahmo Samaj in 1828 with a view of promoting theism and the retrieval religious purity of Hinduism.

3.2 Rebuttal Approach

Up until the nineteenth century encounter or dialogue between Hinduism and Christianity had been minimal in north India. It seems reasonable to suggest that, prior to the eighteenth century, the traditional Hinduism, by and large, had been somewhat indifferent to the presence of Christianity. The Hindu pandits, the chief spokespersons for traditional Hinduism, hardly responded to Christian activities or to the negative portrayal of Hinduism by Christian missionaries during this period. However, by the fourth decade of the nineteenth century some Hindu pandits had begun the defense of Hinduism as well as the refutation of Christian beliefs. From the early decades of the nineteenth century there were several polemical encounters between missionaries and Hindu spokespersons through public debates and through the press. These intra-community debates had intellectual content which centred on the question of religious doctrines, beliefs and practices.\textsuperscript{113}

Prominent in the critical approach was Swami Dayananda, who engaged in a severe indictment of Christianity in his *Satyartha Prakash* (SP) which was published in 1875.\textsuperscript{114} In this book, Christianity, Islam and some Hindu traditions are criticized from the point of view of ‘Vedic Religion,’ which alone for Dayanand is the true religion. Dayanand quotes Genesis (I.3, 4) in SP: “And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light that it was good and God divided the light from the darkness.” Following a literal understanding of the bible, he proceeds to interpret it: “Was the dead inert light able to hear what God said? If so, why cannot the sun, the lamp and the light of fire hear us? The light is dead and inert and therefore cannot hear anyone.” Further Dayanand asks in SP: “Did God only, after he had seen the light, know that the light was good. It appears that He did not know that before hand. Had he known it beforehand, he would not have waited till he had seen it to pronounce it good.” Thus, his conclusion is: “If he did not know it beforehand he


\textsuperscript{114} Chapter XIII of *Satyartha Prakash* is the criticism of Christianity, which is presented in a dialogical format between the author and an imagined Christian but after a few dialogues, Dayanand gives it up and starts quoting directly from the bible and then comments on it. The method followed by Dayanand consists in quoting passages from Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, II Samuel, II Kings, I Chronicles, the Book of Job, Ecclesiastes, Gospels of Mathew, Mark, Luke and John and giving his interpretations of these passages.
could not have been God. Hence the Bible is not the Word of God, nor is God mentioned in it an Omniscient Being.\(^\text{115}\)

According to Dayanand, “in the age when Jesus Christ lived, people were mere savages in a state of poverty, and Christ was also poor like the rest of them, therefore, it is that he prays to God for his daily bread and teaches others to do the same.”\(^\text{116}\) In Dayananda’s opinion Jesus was ‘hot-tempered,’ and ‘behaved like a savage.’\(^\text{117}\) On the words of Jesus during the Last Supper, “Take and eat, this is my body” Dayanand comments: “Can any cultured man ever do such a thing? Only an ignorant savage would do it. No enlightened man would ever call the food of his disciples his flesh nor their drink his blood.”\(^\text{118}\) On the trial and death of Jesus, Dayanand says that “those wicked people treated Jesus very [sic] bad indeed. But Jesus was also to blame[sic], since he pretended to be the Son of God.”\(^\text{119}\) Further he says that Jesus “did not possess any miraculous power nor was he the Son of God, nor was he an enlightened man else he would not have suffered from mental anguish at the time of his death.”\(^\text{120}\) Dayanand tells the ‘Christian’ in the dialogue: “Why don’t you embrace the Vedic religion which is free from all doubts and enlightens one on all points?”\(^\text{121}\) His call to the Christian in SP is: “Come ye Christian, renounce this barbarous religion and embrace the Vedic faith-the religion of light, culture and righteousness. That alone will give you true happiness.”\(^\text{122}\) If evangelicals like Ward and Grant had been rude about Hinduism, Hindu leaders like Dayanand had been equally offensive in their portrayal of Christianity.

### 3.3 Hindu Superiority Approach

The third response was represented in the ideological framework of Swami Vivekananda who argued that Hinduism possessed a far superior form of philosophy and spirituality than Christianity and the religion of the West was a lesser form of universal spirituality found in

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\(^{117}\) Dayanand Saraswati, *The Light of Truth or An English Translation of the Satyarth Prakash*, 627.

\(^{118}\) Dayanand Saraswati, *The Light of Truth or An English Translation of the Satyarth Prakash*, 629.

\(^{119}\) Dayanand Saraswati, *The Light of Truth or An English Translation of the Satyarth Prakash*, 633.

\(^{120}\) Dayanand Saraswati, *The Light of Truth or An English Translation of the Satyarth Prakash*, 633.

\(^{121}\) Dayanand Saraswati, *The Light of Truth or An English Translation of the Satyarth Prakash*, 589.

\(^{122}\) Dayanand Saraswati, *The Light of Truth or An English Translation of the Satyarth Prakash*, 613.
all religions. Vivekananda's address at the Parliament of Religions (Chicago) in 1893 and four years of stay in the West was a turning point in his life. One of the main points highlighted by Vivekananda in Chicago address was the Vedantic doctrine of the divinity of man. Vivekananda was received in India with great reverence after his success in the West, an Indian attitude which anthropologist Agehananda Bharati terms as the 'Pizza Effect.'

Vivekananda, class-mate and one time friend of Upadhyay, propounded the notion, that India as basically spiritual in contrast to the West as Materialistic. Not only is India spiritual in his thinking but also superior to other nations. He says:

If there is any land on this earth that can lay claim to be the blessed Punya Bhumi, to be the land to which all souls on this earth must come to account for karma, the land to which every soul that is wending its way Godward must come to attain its last home, the land where humanity has attained its highest towards gentleness, towards generosity, towards purity, towards calmness, above all the land of introspection and of spirituality - it is India.

As Kenneth Jones points out, Vivekananda's vision of Hinduism was deeply divided between its glorious past and a degenerate present. This idea of Hinduism-golden past and fragmented present- had been present in the thinking of Rammohun Roy and other leaders of the

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123 The rousing welcome in India Vivekananda received after his success in the West is noteworthy because in one of the addresses Vivekananda mentions specifically that before he went to the West nobody in India cared for him and his works: “I did not go to America, as most of you know, for the Parliament of Religions, but this demon of a feeling [he was speaking of patriotic feelings] was in me and within my soul. I traveled twelve years all over India, finding no way to work for my countrymen, and that is why I went to America, most of you know that, who knew me then. Who cared about this Parliament of Religions? Here was my own flesh and blood sinking every day, and who cared for them?” Italics added. See, Vivekananda, “My Plan of Campaign,” My India, Arise, (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, 1993) 31.

124 Before the turn of the twentieth century, pizza was the simple, unleavened hot bread, the staple of the farmers in Sicily and Calabria, the South Italian areas from which virtually all American Italians came. Before that time pizza was not known outside that area, and in other part of Italy the pizza was looked down upon as the food of country bumpkins. In the American habitat, however, the pizza was embellished by many additions with Cheese, mozzarella, anchovies on top. In the early decades of twentieth century, around World War I, it returned to Italy where it became a highly respected, popular, all-Italian article of food. Thus, after the transfiguration of the humble Italian pizza in the US, it became a sophisticated, universally accepted food in Italy. Analogically, many cultural items, (yoga, Hindu teachings, Indian dance etc) were thought to be unworthy and inutile by urban Hindus until these goods acquired name and fame in the West, through such agents such as the Hindu renaissance, Swami Vivekananda, and Sri Aurobindo etc., and they are now sought out, respected, and absorbed into modern urban Hindu ways. Further examples are the movies of Satyajit Ray such as Pather Panchali, and Aparajita; they were complete flops in India until they became famous in the West; now these movies are shown and highly acclaimed in India- through the pizza-effect. Agehananda Bharati, Hindu Views and Ways and the Hindu-Muslim Interface: An Anthropological Assessment (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1981) pp. 21-22 &. 96.

nineteenth century. These thinkers, as with Vivekananda, were quite uncomfortable with idolatry, ritualism and superstitious beliefs which were prevalent in India. Vivekananda consistently spoke about the lack of vigour, and superstitious ideas as the cause of India's present degeneration. As an antidote to this present unfortunate situation, Vivekananda offered a set of complex and interrelated ideas.

One of the key ideas used by him to instill a sense of hope and pride in his audiences was the portrayal of India's past as 'golden,' and the secret of this golden past, for Vivekananda, is the 'spirituality' of the sages of antiquity: "Here is the same India whose soil has been trodden by the feet of the greatest sages that ever lived. Here first sprang up inquiries into the nature of man, and into the internal world." The antidote to the present degeneration for him consists in purifying the undesired 'germs' from the bloodstream of the national life: "It is when the national body is weak that all sorts of disease germs, in the political state of the race or in its social state, in its educational or intellectual state, crowd into the system and produce disease." For Vivekananda, the remedy for the present decay of India lies in going back to the 'spirituality' of the sages, which defines the very identity of India. For him, 'our national strength, nay, our national life is in our religion.'

In Vivekananda's vision, spiritual solution is not just limited to the problems of India but to the entire world and he sees the mission of India within this context as something vital: "This is the land from whence, like tidal waves, spirituality and philosophy have again and again rushed out and deluged the world and this is the land from whence once more such tides must proceed in order to bring life and vigour into the decaying races of mankind." Firmly convinced that 'India's gift to the world is the light spiritual,' Vivekananda consistently spoke of India's spiritual 'conquest' of the world and against the backdrop of Hindu revivalism the time looked favorable: "Every thing looks propitious, and Indian thought,

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126 Kenneth W. Jones, *Socio-religious reform movements in British India*, 44.
philosophical and spiritual, must once more go over and conquer the world.”132 He forges a connection between a vigorous national life and the conquest of the world: “The only condition of national life, of awakened and vigorous national life, is the conquest of the world by Indian thought.”133 Thus, his call to Indians was this: “Up India, and conquer the world with your spirituality.”134 Vivekananda saw this mission to the world as having the cohesive power to unite India.

Within the framework of the spiritual primacy of India, Vivekananda says that the West needs to learn from the East: “When the Occident wants to learn about the spirit, about God, about the soul, about the meaning and mystery of this universe, he must sit at the foot of the Orient to learn.”135 According to Vivekananda, “Christianity, although good and glorious in many respects, has been imperfectly understood and is, as understood hitherto, found to be insufficient.”136 Dismissing the claim that “Christianity is the only universal religion, Vivekananda says that “it is Vedanta, and Vedanta alone that can become the universal religion of man, and that no other is fitted for the role.”137 In his estimation, “Christianity with all its boasted civilization is but a collection of little bits of Indian thought. Ours is the religion of which Buddhism with all its greatness is a rebel child, and of which Christianity is a very patchy imitation.”138

According to Vivekananda, the “great limitation Christians have is that they do not heed other manifestations of God besides Christ. He was a manifestation of God, so was Buddha, so were some others, and there will be hundreds of others.”139 Within the framework of Advaita Vedanta Vivekananda relativizes Jesus’s salvific role: “It is blasphemy to think that

if Jesus had never been born, humanity would not have been saved. It is horrible to forget thus the divinity in human nature, a divinity that must come out. We are the greatest God that ever was or ever will be. Christs and Buddhas are but waves on the boundless ocean which I am.”\(^{140}\) He dismissed the missionary attacks of Hinduism: “The less the missionaries talk of immorality, infanticide, and the evils of the Hindu marriage system, the better for them. There may be actual pictures of some countries before which all the imaginary missionary pictures of the Hindu society will fade away into light.”\(^{141}\)

The Orientalists had indeed projected India as ‘religious’ and ‘spiritual’ and the emerging nationalism of the late nineteenth century appropriated and used it in the creation of a distinct ‘Indian’ identity. As Sunil Khilnani notes,

Most Indian intellectuals accepted - and strove to twist to their advantage - the colonialists’ point that India’s distinctive identity and strength lay in its spiritual attributes. Indians could not compete with the ‘outer’ domain of economic prowess and material production; their control over their own destinies was to be had in the “inner” domains of religious and family life.\(^{142}\)

Some of these stereotype ‘images’ about India as being ‘spiritual’ have become part of the common parlance and political ideologies. Whether these Orientalist and nationalist readings of Indian past can be taken at its face value, or whether such projections has any historical justifications, is another question. In this context, historian Romila Thapars’ observation is pertinent:

Indians in the pre-eighteenth century never claimed that they were more spiritual than other peoples, or that the Indian way of life was concerned solely with things spiritual. The ideal of the earlier texts that the best life on earth is a balance between dharma, artha, and karma, shows a healthy unconcern for any obsession with either the spiritual or the material.\(^{143}\)

In concluding this sub-section, it is important to note that most of the Hindu intellectuals did not accept Christianity’s claim that it is the sole mediator of salvation. Some of the central


claims of Christianity, as we have seen, had been dismissed by Hindu intellectuals. Most of these Hindu leaders, though critical of some of the aspects which they considered as irrational and superstitious, saw their religion as something inherently valuable, and therefore, worth preserving.

**Conclusion**

We may summarize the major perspectives of this chapter as follows. Firstly, The Orientalist constructions of Hinduism, both in its British and German variations, entail essentialization of a religious phenomenon which is diverse and heterogeneous. Given the textual primacy with which the Orientalists proceeded to investigate India and its past gave a peculiar twist to the interpretation of Hinduism, making it one dimensional in the sense that it paved the way for the perception of Hinduism as monolithic and created solely by the Aryans. A corollary to this hermeneutics was the projection of the Vedic period as the ‘golden’ age of Hinduism. What has been compromised in this essentialist view is the significant internal diversity, regional variations and the popular Hinduism which has very little to do with the classical form. These Orientalist constructions, which were incorporated into the network of educational textbooks and the print media, did affect the perceptions about Hinduism in a significant manner in the nineteenth century.

Secondly, in the Hindu-Christian encounter, the evangelical portrayal of Hinduism in the negative light rests on some important assumptions. In order to understand the missionary zeal of evangelicals it is important to note the underlying theological notions with which they carried out their mission. According to the prevalent theology of the time the view that, ‘there is no salvation outside the Church,’ was the moving force behind the missionary endeavors evangelicals who firmly believed that unless one is baptized one cannot be saved; within such theology those who are not baptized are destined for eternal damnation. Within such theological framework they saw Christianity as the one ‘true’ religion and they were only too eager to refute the ‘errors’ of paganism. However, as we have noted, such an understanding also contributed to attitudes marked by intolerance towards Hinduism and its cultural forms. Within the context of Hindu-Christian encounter in the nineteenth century, Christian attitude towards caste system had not been uniform; it changed from place to place and from region to region. It would appear that the Catholic Church was less inclined to challenge the traditional caste system than the Protestants.
Thirdly, though the Hindu response to Christianity assumed various shades, the Hindu intelligentsia hardly conceded the claims of Christian superiority. One type of response accepted some of the moral principles of Christianity as conducive to much needed social and religious restructuring of Hinduism. This group also tried to forge a syncretic form of religion by combining positive elements of Hinduism and Christianity. The second group of Hindu intellectuals saw Christianity as alien and inadequate form of religion. The third kind of response saw Hinduism as far superior to Christianity. Most of these leaders, who accepted some of the Christian criticism, wanted to put their own house in order by bringing reforms in the social and religious realms. Hinduism has been undergoing unprecedented changes in the colonial context and some of the colonial administrative policies in the social sector raised questions and discussions about Hindu identity.\(^{144}\)

To conclude, the Hindu-Christian encounter, with all its claims and counter-claims, was predominantly marked with confrontational over-tones. Christian claims of moral, religious, and intellectual superiority were countered by equal claims of superiority by Hindu intellectuals. On the one hand, the nineteenth century Hinduism is beset with unprecedented social and cultural changes which initiated debates about Hindu identity. On the other hand, Christianity, which projected itself as the indispensable mediator for salvation, is seen by the majority of Hindus as an alien religion in terms of its categories, thought-forms, structures, doctrines and way of life. It is into this world of Hindu-Christian contestations that Brahmabandhab Upadhyay made his entry with the proposal of a synthesis in terms of Hindu-Catholicism.

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