



# 8

## Historical Continuity and Colonial Disruption

A major cause of the distortions discussed in the foregoing chapters has been the lack of adequate study of early texts and pre-colonial Indian thinkers. Such a study would show that there has been a historical continuity of thought along with vibrant debate, controversy and innovation.

A recent book by Jonardan Ganeri, the *Lost Age of Reason: Philosophy in Early Modern India 1450-1700*, shows this vibrant flow of Indian thought prior to colonial times, and demonstrates India's own variety of modernity, which included the use of logic and reasoning. Ganeri draws on historical sources to show the contentious nature of Indian discourse. He argues that it did not freeze or reify, and that such discourse was established well before colonialism.

This chapter will show the following:

- There has been a notion of integral unity deeply ingrained in the various Indian texts from the earliest times, even when they

offer diverse perspectives. Indian thought prior to colonialism exhibited both continuity and change. A consolidation into what we now call 'Hinduism' took place *prior* to colonialism.

- Colonial Indology was driven by Europe's internal quest to digest Sanskrit and its texts into European history without contradicting Christian monotheism. Indologists thus selectively appropriated whatever Indian ideas fitted into their own narratives and rejected what did not. This intervention disrupted the historical continuity of Indian thought and positioned Indologists as the 'pioneers'.
- Postmodernist thought in many ways continues this digestion and disruption even though its stated purpose is exactly the opposite.
- Swami Vivekananda's innovations were based mainly on pre-colonial sources within Hinduism and were not based on Western ideas.

This chapter will demonstrate that there was a wealth of internal resources to bring change without having to depend on colonial imports. In fact, rather than seeing colonialism as a force of innovation, it would be more accurate to see it as a disruptive force.

The integral unity underlying various Indian systems has been experienced in different ways depending on the state of the experiencer, and these experiences have been articulated as a plethora of ideas. It is natural, therefore, that the multiple accounts given by different individuals can appear to be fragmented. Nevertheless, the oldest literature is clear that all these views refer to the same unity.<sup>1</sup>

In the next four sections, I will demonstrate the integral unity in multiple ways:<sup>2</sup>

- A variety of sacred texts and practices emphasize this unity.
- A dynamic of insiders and outsiders using the terms 'astika' and 'nastika' adds further clarity to the unity sought by various schools in their own ways.
- The category 'samgraha' refers to this integral unity and this is not to be confused with what I will explain as synthetic unity.
- Multiple thinkers have developed their own formal or informal systems showing coherence and unity. Each thinker tends to

organize them as a hierarchy in order of preference; but all of the systems fit into the structure.

## Integral unity in the sacred texts

The Rig Veda is a compilation of experiences attributed to ten rishi families, each representing a particular view of the same unity. When the Vedic literature proliferated into dozens of 'shakhas' (branches or schools of study), other rishis gave us lists of sacred texts and explained their mutual relationships. In subsequent times, we encounter charts in which the hundreds of Vedic shakhas are likened to the branches of the same Vedavriksha (Vedic tree).

Within the Vedic literature itself, the texts frequently note the diversity of practices; nonetheless, they always explain the underlying unity of devatas and their varying forms of worship. For instance, the Kanva Satapatha Brahmana 2.7.1.7 says that all the other names of deities used are subsumed within 'Agni' and are therefore redundant. Rather than rejecting any devatas, the passage considers them as extra designations of Agni.<sup>3</sup> The Katha school of Yajurveda, too, says that the four horns of the bull described in the famous mantra 'chatvaari shringaa...' are the four Vedas.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, Aitareya Aranyaka 3.2.3.12 says that the same Brahman is seen in the earth, heaven, air, space, water, herbs, trees, the moon, constellations and in all beings.

The early Upanishads give a long list of sacred texts as having emerged from the same divine breath. The later Upanishads also assimilated Samkhya, Yoga, Shaiva and Vaishnava elements into the Vedic tradition. Clearly, the authors of these texts convey their common origins and hence their common central teachings.

Later on, the Purva Mimamsa sutras and the Vedanta sutras arrived as yet another way to articulate all the texts as a coherent system, by combining the texts belonging to diverse Vedic shakhas.<sup>5</sup> The various Parishishtas (appendices) to the texts falling under the umbrella of Vedic literature even show a marked tendency to include non-Vedic practices and take this unity further. Thus, throughout the Vedic literature, there is a tendency to constantly bring together the multiple views and practices.

Manu declares that the customs peculiar to the various regions, castes and families may be followed if the Veda does not provide any specific guidance on those matters. In this manner, the unity also subsumes the diversity among sub-cultures. This approach to holding diverse groups together has been a signature quality of Hinduism.

The same unity is also found in the Mahabharata. It explains that the various darshanas (worldviews) are organically related to each other, and that they enunciate the same truth in different words. Examples of this outlook in the Mahabharata are paraphrased in the following statements:<sup>6</sup>

There is no knowledge superior to Samkhya and no strength superior to Yoga. Both of them have the same goal, and both have been regarded as systems that can take us beyond death. (Mahabharata 12.316.2)

Only they who are ignorant consider these two systems as separate. But upon mental reflection, we have reached the conclusion they are both one and the same. (Mahabharata 12.316.3)

The followers of Yoga believe in perceiving the truth directly, whereas the followers of Samkhya believe in reaching definite conclusions through the study of scriptures. Both these views appear to be truthful to me. (Mahabharata 12.300.7)

The Samkhya, Yoga, Aranyakas of the Vedas and Pancharatra are one, and are parts of one another. (Mahabharata 12.348.81cd-82ab)

The Mahabharata goes beyond the Vedic literature and amalgamates four other genres – Samkhya, Yoga, Pancharatra and Pashupata into a matrix of interrelated, complementary and authoritative texts alongside the Vedas. The worshippers of Vishnu greatly promoted the organic unity across various strands of traditions that were not explicitly based on the Vedas.<sup>7</sup>

It is well known that the Bhagavad Gita itself is teaching integral unity. The idea that these differing philosophies are merely diverse expressions of the same underlying reality is explained in great detail by Sri Krishna to Uddhava in the Shrimad Bhagavata Purana, Book XI.

This unity in dharmic traditions is further advanced in the Puranas, which also bring Tantras and other traditions under the umbrella of

Hinduism. The older Puranas are without Tantric influences, but the later ones assimilate Tantra in their teachings in accordance with the assimilative tendency of Hinduism. Not surprisingly, therefore, the Puranas have often been referred to as a great vehicle bringing diversity together.<sup>8</sup>

## The dynamics of insiders and outsiders

Another way to understand the unity of Hinduism is by examining the categories of 'astika' and 'nastika'. These terms were deployed by movements that sought internal unity and philosophical coherence while at the same time positioning themselves as being at the centre of this unity. The very existence of these old philosophical categories indicates that people who later called themselves Hindus were aware of their collective unity and coherence regardless of whether or not they used the name 'Hindu' for their identity.

The importance of these categories is evident when one examines how these terms were used over time. The terms 'astika' and 'nastika' have had a wide range of meanings: astika is someone who says 'there is' while the nastika says 'there is not'. What is being affirmed or denied is left open and this allows each thinker to be creative. These terms are elastic and dynamic, and not easily translated into English.

It is too simplistic to equate astika and nastika with theist and atheist, respectively, because there were atheistic schools that some people considered astika. Nor can we equate astika with those who necessarily affirm the Vedas. The exact criteria for belonging to these categories varied from one classifier to another. These terms served to stratify various philosophical positions as per a given thinker's priorities. While the astika concept consolidated the 'insiders' of a metaphysical system, the nastika concept helped create a boundary to delineate the 'outsiders'. There was tension and creative renegotiation between rival viewpoints, leading to new systems for expressing the unity.

The nature of this rivalry must be contrasted with the sectarian history of the West because of two significant factors that were absent in India, and this absence created a space that made the flux and dynamism possible:

- In the Indian context, there is no totalizing, absolute history of prophets and revelations that serves as the litmus test of the kind that dominates a given Abrahamic religion. Consequently, Indian systems did not carry the burden of having to reconcile their latest ideas with a standard, canonized, non-negotiable history.
- There was no continuous central ecclesiastical institutional authority with judicial or quasi-judicial powers to adjudicate and enforce theological truth, at least not for any sustained period and not over any large portion of the population.

Along with this absence of closed-minded forces, there has been a unifying base to which Hindus could refer, an underlying structure which, again, I like to think of as an open architecture. Rival schools had ongoing serious debates with one another based on a common vocabulary and similar metaphysical quests. Here was an active ecosystem which nurtured numerous theories of varying lifespans. These movements often merged, bifurcated, competed, died or evolved in their shared intellectual soil. The *astika/nastika* distinction comes as close as anything to defining the boundaries of these shared assumptions. These schools were never dogmatic or policed since their positions were always debatable and subject to change.

Regardless of how specifically these categories were used, the *astikas* were traditionally mentioned as praiseworthy whereas *nastikas* were seen as a threat. Branding someone as a *nastika* was considered derogatory. Naturally, many Buddhists and Jains considered themselves *astika*, while defining *nastika* as some disqualifier applicable to others. The mere fact that such a line was drawn, even though subject to change, proves my point about the quest for a coherent sense of collective self.

A popular criterion for the definition was to identify the *astika* as affirming the ritual authority of the Vedas. However, this earlier ritualistic meaning of *yajna* expanded when the emphasis moved from the performer of correct *rituals* to the holder of correct *views*. Manu had his own criteria and he defined a *nastika* as any twice-born who disregards *sruti* and *smriti* on the basis of logic; such an individual, he felt, should be excluded by the righteous and considered a reviler of the Vedas.<sup>9</sup> This definition itself triggered debate and was later superseded.

Sanskrit grammarians often regarded 'astika' as someone who believed in an afterlife. Yet another example is Medhatithi (a ninth-century commentator from the south) who defined astika as one who 'affirms the value of ritual'.

The unifying tendencies in what we now call Hinduism is clearly evident at the time of Adi Shankara. His teachings championed the Smartha tradition that brings together three major streams: followers of Shiva, Shakti and Vishnu. This tradition worships these divine forms as well as Ganesh and Surya. After Shankara's death, his own followers incorporated the rival schools into a 'Vedic family' which also included the Samkhya and Yoga systems. This happened despite the fact that each of these schools zealously promoted itself.

A number of venerable sages subsequently played an important role in the consolidation and crystallization of the astikas as a well-bounded category, including Madhva (fourteenth century), Madhusudana Sarasvati (sixteenth century) and Vijnanabhikshu (sixteenth century). Madhva was important not only because he was a minister of the powerful Vijayanagara Empire, but also because he became the head of the Sringeri Peetham founded by Shankara. The goal of each of these thinkers was to organize, classify and rank different philosophies in their own preferred order of merit, thereby showing them to be part of the astika family. It is fair to say that, by the sixteenth century, the notion of astika had crystallized and solidified to correspond roughly to today's Hinduism and nastika meant Buddhists, Jains and materialists. This sense of being a Hindu continues to this day.

Many intellectuals within the Hindu family developed their own organizing principles in which all astika schools were neatly arranged in a hierarchy. Even though the specific organization differed, there emerged a consensus that astika was one who affirms the Vedas as the highest source of truth. Each group formulated its own prioritization among the various astika systems. For instance, Madhusudana espoused Advaita Vedanta as the highest level of his hierarchy, while Vijnanabhikshu espoused Bhedabheda Vedanta, but both shared the desire to reconcile all the astika schools. Thus, Hinduism moved towards an expanded sense of astika with more schools of thought and lineages gradually being absorbed into it. This process required selectively co-opting

from those who had been rejected previously, and admitting some of their ideas into the hierarchy of legitimate means for advancement.

Despite all the apparent contradictions among the astikas, they were widely regarded as sharing in the cosmic unity expressed by the dharmic traditions as a whole. The astika/nastika evolution was the mechanism by which innovative Hindus have brought into harmony the terminology and ideas of many systems into common frameworks.

This method of the evolution of ideas is not a problem for the dharma traditions. The history-centric religions are another matter, for they operate by a single standard involving the historical record. Criteria for compliance are hard, and policing is both constant and ecclesiastically sanctioned. The whole dogmatic enterprise would fall apart if there were flexibility of the kind found in dharma.

## Samgraha: Harmonious organization of diversity

I will now explain how the integral unity of Hinduism differs from what I have called a synthetic unity. For this, I will use the term '*samgraha*' (sam + graha = holding together in harmony a diverse collection of entities, ideas or persons). The term samgraha (along with an ancillary process called samavesha) is an important non-translatable Sanskrit term. We cannot replace it with 'inclusion' or 'inclusivism' as the English equivalent. If the term 'unity' is used as an English equivalent for samgraha, this form of unity should be described with the adjective 'integral', as I do in my works.

Typically, samgraha may be understood as a collective perspective or viewpoint that facilitates comprehension of an entity, an idea or a person across time.<sup>10</sup> Samgraha texts are collections of texts under one cover that contain a variety of perspectives on a given topic from a large number of fields – ranging from Ayurveda to Yoga. Thus, there exists Vagbhata's Ashtanga-samgraha (also Ashtangahridayam samgraha) and also Vijnanabhikshu's Yogasara-samgraha. As used in Hindu philosophy, the term does not refer to any random collection of entities, but to disparate entities sharing a unity that is deep. I find it a nice way to communicate what we often refer to as the unity-in-diversity of Hinduism.



Loka-samgraha is the samgraha of diverse communities (lokas) held together in a dynamic equilibrium. The notion of dynamic equilibrium is important because these entities are not fixed in some permanent location. In the Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna is advised to promote loka-samgraha through the yogas of karma, bhakti and jnana, meaning that he should harmonize these and not put them in mutual tension.

Although the term loka-samgraha explicitly occurs only twice in the Gita (BG 3. 20 and 3. 25), there are several other terms or phrases that implicitly refer to it throughout. The expression 'samah sarveshu bhuteshu' (cultivating an attitude of equanimity towards all beings, in BG 18.54), for instance, connotes a deeper sense of interconnectedness; 'atmaupamya' connotes application of the standard to all others as would be applicable to oneself (BG 6.32). In other words, it is acknowledged that there exists a deeper unity beneath the diversity. The Gita also uses the term 'samya' to denote even-mindedness towards all people (BG 5.19 and 6.33). Those who see the world and others through a vision characterized by samya are praised in the Gita as 'samadarshinah' (BG 5.18). The foundation of such equal vision is also to be found in the Vedanta tenet that the same self (atman) resides in each being (interconnectedness).

With this brief background, I wish to explain how synthetic unity differs from this notion of integral unity. When writing the first edition of *Indra's Net*, I included Andrew Nicholson's book (Nicholson, 2010) for my literature review and for citation purposes, because of its alluring title, *Unifying Hinduism*. I was intrigued that a Westerner would break ranks with those who held that Hinduism had lacked unity prior to British colonialism. Nicholson's promise of understanding unity seemed appealing to me, because I (incorrectly) assumed he meant integral unity. Hence, I referenced many of his ideas and arguments, *naming him as a source about thirty times* within the space of a dozen pages in my book.

But more recently, I have realized that what Nicholson tries to establish is not integral unity, which is the *original and inherent* unity within sanatana dharma. Contrary to integral unity, his thesis suggests that before the late medieval period, the dharma thinkers did *not* depict themselves as part of a unified tradition. According to him, it was between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries when certain thinkers

began to put together a unity that was *absent* earlier. I find this directly contradicting my idea of integral unity which cannot be a relatively recent development. He seems to claim that the Hindu unification project was an afterthought starting in the past few centuries only, and that this project was later used by 'Hindu nationalists' in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries leading to what we now call 'Hinduism'. Therefore, by implication, Hinduism as such lacks philosophical unity in its core and the unity is only a recent development at only a superficial level. His idea of Hinduism's unity is that it was the result of a relatively recent *historical* process; hence the unity is *not inherent* in the cosmology. The date when Hinduism was supposedly 'manufactured' (as claimed by many of his peers) gets pushed back a few centuries in his approach. I call this view a synthetic unity, a unity achieved by gluing things together that in fact were separate.

My contention has always been that the unity of sanatana dharma (now commonly known as Hinduism) has *always* been built into the tradition from its Vedic origins. If I were to accept Nicholson's view that this unity was constructed by some men only in the medieval era, it would undermine my entire thesis of integral unity as being the metaphysical bedrock of Hindu dharma.

In the first edition of this book, I did introduce the notion of samgraha and samavesha that are developed extensively in the Bhagavad Gita and in other samgraha texts. However, I did not use them as centrally as I intend to do now. Nicholson prefers to use the term 'doxography' instead of samgraha. But a doxography includes elements from the past, classical era (including dead ones) that may or may not be integrally unified. They could be separately existing and artificially brought together. I have decided to go back to the traditional Sanskrit term 'samgraha' to emphasize the underlying unity.

## The ubiquity of samgraha texts throughout history

Hindu scholars did not gloss over the differences between their own philosophy and that of their adversaries. They argued fiercely with one another. However, they shared the categories, frameworks and

the ultimate goal of moksha. The intense polemical disputes between different Hindu philosophies and modes of worship enhanced their mutual understanding of one another and led to cross-borrowings. The worship of deities like Dattatreya might be seen as an attempt to reconcile the competing worship of Shiva and Vishnu. I have already mentioned the tradition that Adi Shankara promulgated, called the Panchayatana puja of the Smarta Hindus, in which there is worship of all the five (sometimes six) major deities of Hinduism.<sup>11</sup>

There exist numerous samgraha texts that describe the various 'vidyas' or branches of learning, thereby treating the different genres of Hindu literatures as parts of a whole. The authors of these texts show a clear preference for cross-references among diverse systems, even while privileging their own views over others. In the post-Mahabharata times, some of these texts were authored by Buddhist and Jain scholars such as Bhavaviveka and Haribhadra, respectively. In addition to formal compendiums, other genres of literature such as plays also provide attempts to project the integral unity of dharma in the first and the early second millennium.

In these samgraha texts, some ideas were rejected outright in the interest of the unity of everything else, while other ideas were typically placed in a hierarchy with some preferred over others. It was also recognized that these diverse systems were akin to different facets of the same polished diamond, and therefore complemented one another.

The earliest compendium enumerating, ranking and discussing different systems could be the Madhyamakahrdaya-karika of Bhavaviveka (sixth century), at least among the texts that survive today. Along with the various systems of Buddhist philosophy, it describes the Vedic systems of Samkhya, Vaisheshika, Mimamsa and Vedanta. The description of Vedanta is shown to be similar to Madhyamaka Buddhism.<sup>12</sup>

Then came Jayanta Bhatta (ninth century CE), a follower of Nyaya, who defended the validity of the various branches of literature, arguing that all the four Vedas are equal in authority, and the Smritis, Puranas and Itihasas are also authoritative because they are based on the Vedas. Moreover, the Shaiva as well as the Vaishnava Agamas are seen as authoritative because they are recognized by rishis, and because their

teachings are consistent with the Vedic doctrines.<sup>13</sup> He felt that this unity of the different shastras is not simply theoretical, but has practical implications in one's spiritual seeking.

Another important classification was the Shaddarshana-samucchaya by Haribhadra (somewhere between the fifth and eighth centuries). He defined astika as someone who believes in an afterlife. Conversely, a nastika was someone who denied any existence after physical death. Using this criterion, Haribhadra enumerated six schools in the astika category: Jain, Buddhist, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya and Mimamsa. Charvaka, on the other hand, was branded as nastika. Of all the astika systems, he considered only his own Jain system to be perfect, but he is highly respectful of the other Hindu and Buddhist systems of thought.

Haribhadra's definition has nothing to do with theism or Vedas. He lived in the era when there was a proliferation of Puranas, Tantra, Shaivism, Vaishnavism and early bhakti movements. Born a Brahmin, he later became a Jain monk. As a prolific writer on many subjects including catalogues that summarized the philosophical positions of others, he is considered a highly reliable source of various philosophical positions prevalent at that time. Haribhadra illustrates that it was common for thinkers to organize the various schools' positions into a hierarchy of grades of truth. The boundaries were soft and porous.

The most famous of the Hindu samgrahas is the Sarvadarshana-samgraha of Madhva (fourteenth century).<sup>14</sup> The author enjoyed the patronage of the Kings of the Vijayanagara Empire and was the head of the Shankara Matha of Shringeri.<sup>15</sup> The list of systems in this samgraha is very impressive, and the analysis is sophisticated. Often in such works, the order in which the systems are explained corresponds approximately to the author's own order of preference. Another such compendium from the Advaita tradition is the Prasthanabheda of Madhusudana Sarasvati (sixteenth to seventeenth centuries) in which he tries to incorporate all the major branches of Hindu learning into the model of fourteen vidyas. He organized them into different levels of a unified hierarchy.<sup>16</sup>

The Sarvasiddhanta-samgraha is also a samgraha text that describes fourteen different schools of philosophy, including the philosophy of the Mahabharata. The text makes the interesting observation that teachings

of Hiranyagarbha regarding the mind and the pranas are entirely consistent with the teachings of Vedanta. Hiranyagarbha is often regarded as the first teacher of Yoga in the Hindu tradition, and it is significant to note that the author considers the Yoga of Hiranyagarbha to be in agreement with Advaita Vedanta, whereas the same is not true of the Yoga of Patanjali, which is treated in a separate chapter. His work clearly gives a hierarchical list of the fourteen systems in the author's order of preference.<sup>17</sup>

The Prapanchahridaya is a relatively unknown but a unique and marvellous compendium of dharmic literature that was published on the basis of manuscripts from Kerala.<sup>18</sup> The author of this text is unknown, but it seems to be fairly ancient because it does not name too many authorities after the time of Adi Shankara. Additionally, it gives a lot of detailed information on the contents and names of numerous Vedic recensions and other texts that have been lost for almost a millennium. The author seems to have been a Vaishnava follower of Adi Shankara.<sup>19</sup> This text describes the entire corpus of dharmic literature known at the time, including Hindu, Buddhist, Jain and charvaka.

The Sarvamata-samgraha is a relatively late, anonymous samgraha presumably written by a follower of Adi Shankara. It is yet another impressive compendium of systems across the spectrum, including the systems of rival schools. Like most such compilations, it organizes all the systems into a hierarchy of preference according to the author's own lens.<sup>20</sup>

A remarkable exercise in demonstrating the unity of the various, seemingly conflicting Hindu systems was attempted by Vijnanabhikshu (around the sixteenth century). He espoused a specific variety of Bhedabheda Vedanta in which Yoga, Samkhya and Vedanta were all valid philosophies, but from different contexts. He explains how all systems culminate into yoga at the highest level: 'Just as all the rivers, beginning with the Ganga, exist as parts of the ocean, so too the philosophical systems, beginning with the Samkhya, exist entirely as parts of this Yoga system.'<sup>21</sup> He treats various Hindu systems as parts of the greater whole which is yoga.

Vijnanabhikshu's work is amongst the common ones studied extensively by Indian scholars.<sup>22</sup> Arguably the most significant studies

were by Surendranath Dasgupta (1940, pp. 445-495) and Srivastavya (1960). The importance of the former is evident from the fact that even the recent compendium on Bhedabheda Vedanta (Aggarwal and Potter: 2013) merely reproduces verbatim Dasgupta's summary. Practically all later works on Vijnanabhikshu draw heavily from the writings of Dasgupta and Srivastavya, and my own analysis does the same.<sup>23</sup>

The Mahabharata mentions two varieties of Samkhya – one in which Brahman plays no role in moksha, and the other in which moksha is impossible without realizing Brahman.<sup>24</sup> When combined with the testimony from the older Puranas, it is reasonable to conclude that theism was not foreign to ancient Samkhya. Vijnanabhikshu was merely following the ancient tradition when he tried to reconcile Samkhya with Vedanta.<sup>25</sup> He started with the premise that the Puranas, the Yogabhashya and the Vedanta Sutras were compositions by the same person, Vyasa; hence, he saw no contradiction between Yoga and Vedanta. Secondly, Samkhya as described in the Puranas was theistic and presented as a very respectable philosophy. He supported his arguments by quoting the Puranas copiously to demonstrate that the three systems were complementary to each other, and that they all led to moksha.

Vijnanabhikshu said there are two paths to final liberation. The path of knowledge (jnana) offered by Samkhya and Vedanta leads to jivanmukti (liberated state in the body); but the follower endures the body during the remainder of his life. However, the path of yoga as described in the Vishnu Purana destroys prarabdha (past life karma) and bypasses jivanmukti.<sup>26</sup> He advocated yoga as practice, but at the same time he appreciated Vedanta's method of inquiry into the nature of Brahman, and Samkhya's technique of discrimination between purusha (being, self) and prakriti (nature, matter).

The central teachings of these three systems are complementary to each other and they function in different contexts. Vedanta dealt with the nature of Brahman, Samkhya primarily dealt with the nature of Prakriti and Purusha, and Yoga taught how the knowledge of Prakriti, Purusha and Brahman could be experienced empirically within oneself leading to moksha. In this way, Vijnanabhikshu argued that these three primary systems were not mutually contradictory; rather, they added

value to each other. They were each authoritative in their respective areas of emphasis. He refers to each of these three systems as 'in our own shastra', and 'in our view' while commenting on all of them.

He could mix and match all three systems and did not see them in contradiction. He believed that the terms 'purusha' and 'jivatman', although from different traditional texts, are synonyms, as are 'kaivalya' and 'moksha'. They were merely meant to serve different kinds of persons. He did not start a new school but merely organized and classified other schools, and showed the approximate equivalences and correspondences among them. Vijnanabhikshu is a good example (but not the only one by far) to illustrate that there was continuity in Hinduism prior to colonialism. He and his sixteenth-century contemporaries were precursors to an evolution of Hinduism that culminated in Vivekananda's movement. This was not a break from the past, nor was it based on imported ideas. It brought many streams together in a creative manner.

Vijnanabhikshu did not restrict himself merely to these three systems in his project of a unified theory of the six orthodox darshanas. He adopted the same strategy (that each of these systems focuses on its own different domain in a complementary manner while developing their central teachings) to argue that Nyaya, Vaisheshika and Purva Mimamsa are also consistent with the other three. He said that these three minor systems are valid because their central teachings enable a beginner to understand that the jiva is separate from the body. These three minor systems were meant for individuals who had not yet given up their ego in the performance of karma. Once the aspirant has understood this preliminary teaching, he can graduate to the next triad of Samkhya-Vedanta-Yoga matrix which teach that jiva is not the 'doer'. When the six darshanas are seen from such a perspective, they are no longer contradictory. Rather, each one of them serves its intended purpose in a coherent system.

His writings were influential in understanding Hinduism both in the West and in India. Because European Indologists have often lacked the depth of understanding, they have found Vijnanabhikshu to be a convenient 'quick source' to understand Hindu unity. This is why he became a good source for Indologists such as T.H. Colebrooke

(1765-1837), A.E. Gough (1845-1915), Paul Deussen (1845-1919) and Richard Garbe (1857-1927). Unfortunately, given the political power of colonial Indology, these Westerners assumed they had become the intellectual inheritors of Vijnanabhikshu, i.e., the new authorities. As is often the case when Westerners immerse themselves into Indian ideas, some colonial Indologists positioned themselves in the footsteps of thinkers like Vijnanabhikshu and thereby tried to dominate Sanskrit studies and its texts.

Yet another kind of evidence of Hindus' awareness of unity is that the bibliographies of the manuscripts preserved in the libraries of Hindu ascetics or rulers show how painstakingly these libraries collected the Hindu sources of inspiration at a single location. For instance, we have the list of a library established in Varanasi in the seventeenth century by Kavindracharya Saraswati.<sup>27</sup> Many manuscripts bearing Kavindracharya's personal signature are still scattered in various parts of India after the library in Varanasi was dismantled. This list makes it obvious that its compiler was very familiar with all the genres of Hindu literature. He had a clear idea of which texts were Hindu and which ones were not, because he excluded all Abrahamic scriptures.

This unifying tendency is not restricted to Sanskrit literature alone; we do find similar examples in the vernacular languages. Numerous Vaishnava texts exist wherein the author collects biographies of dozens of saints and thereby effectively defines the borders of dharma. Within the category of bhakti saints is a subcategory of Nirguna bhakti that is exemplified by Kabir, Dadu, Nanak and many others. Composite collections of the writings of saints often include both Saguna and Nirguna bhakti works. Even the Guru Granth Sahib of the Sikhs has elements of Saguna bhakti, demonstrating that there is no sharp boundary between the two streams of the bhakti movement.

It is clear from the foregoing that Hindu thinkers have perceived the different branches not as mutually antagonistic and irreconcilable, but as complementary. The diverse systems comprise a hierarchical arrangement of the multiple ways of accessing the same unity. In other words, Hinduism is a cohesive and internally coherent tradition.<sup>28</sup>

What is noteworthy is that even though many of the compilers of the samgrahas engaged in polemics with rival Hindu schools, they



practically ignored the Abrahamic religions. This remained the case even when Christians and Muslims were living in their midst. This demonstrates that Hindu scholars saw a kinship with other Hindu systems in a way they did not see with the Abrahamic systems.<sup>29</sup>

In more recent times, Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1873 CE), too, reconciled the six systems of Hindu philosophy in his magnum opus, *Satyarth Prakash*, using a strategy similar to Vijnanabhikshu's.

## Swami Vivekananda follows his tradition's footsteps

The foregoing overview shows that Vivekananda's project was in many ways a continuation of what prior Hindu thinkers were already doing. He treated separately each of the traditional four expressions of yoga that are also explained in the Bhagavad Gita – raja, bhakti, karma and jnana – but kept them on an equal plane, as four options that can be mixed and matched by an individual rather than seeing them in an absolute hierarchy. He felt that yoga was compatible with Vedanta. The former he saw as a practical technique that confirmed spiritual liberation (or self-realization recorded by the rishis in the Veda) through personal experience (anubhava); the latter he saw as the standard of reference for self-realization in line with Vedic testimony (sruti-pramana). Like many of his Hindu predecessors, he considered Vedanta, Samkhya and Yoga as complementary paths. Each of them could lead to the goal of reuniting the individual self with Brahman. His own system, called Practical Vedanta, was largely based on Bhedabheda Vedanta.

We can summarize the unification of pre-colonial Hinduism in the following manner: Hindu scholars frequently composed their own coherent explanation of dharma by drawing upon the underlying common core of various traditions. This tendency towards unification was an iterative process wherein diverse systems were subsumed progressively, first under the umbrella of the Veda, and later, under that of Vedanta or bhakti.

Swami Vivekananda was an heir to this long and distinguished tradition of unification. Therefore, I argue that the charge that Vivekananda was influenced by colonial scholars in his construction

of Hinduism (or 'Neo-Hinduism') is patently *false*. He had a long and sophisticated tradition of his own to draw upon.

## The colonial disruption

What I have shown thus far in this chapter is that long before the colonial influence in India, there were thinkers who were comparing various Hindu schools and integrating them in novel ways to develop unified Hindu thought. I shall now show how the continuity of the Hindu tradition and the dynamic equilibrium among Indian thinkers were severely disrupted by colonial interventions.

Underlying this disruption were several factors. A great deal of colonial understanding of India was shaped by the European need to use India as raw material to formulate arguments for their *internal* intra-European debates. Some of these debates concerned the problem of pantheism, the pagan assumption of the complete immanence of divinity in the world of nature – which was seen as a major threat to Christian monotheism. There was a strong desire to prove that the origins of European culture were 'pure' and free from the taint of 'nature worship'.

Europeans had begun to believe that their own ancestors were Aryans who spoke Sanskrit, but at the same time these ancestors could not be seen as pantheists. On the one hand, the worthy progenitors of Europeans had to be Sanskrit-speaking Aryans so as to prove their superiority as a race. Nonetheless, they had to be shown to be not pantheistic, so as to protect and ensure their Christian identity. Hinduism presented a problem in that it had both pantheist *and* 'Aryan' aspects, as per the Europeans' understanding. This complexity and contradiction could only be resolved by interpreting Hinduism in such a way that it would conform to the European quest for identity.

One of the effects of using the European lens in dissecting Indian thought was to render rigid the various Indian philosophies, as though they were mutually exclusive and irreconcilable. The fossilizing of the six 'schools' of Indian thought helped to break up Indian culture into static, manageable pieces that could be taken out of context, played

one against the other, and selectively appropriated or rejected. The end result was that what was considered worthy and useful could be 'digested' into the West or controlled by it. The project of digesting Hinduism into Western universalism thus requires seeing Hinduism as an incoherent collection of fragments and contradictions that can be dealt with as isolated parts. Later on, Indian ideas were mapped onto postmodern concepts, which further distorted Hinduism's portrayal.

**Figure 3**

*Causes of these distortions*

1. European lenses mapping India onto pantheism and Aryan theory
2. Rigid classification into 'Indian schools of thought'
3. Post-modern mappings
4. Lack of attention to pre-colonial sources



*Results*

1. Digestion into Western Universalism
2. Reduction of Hinduism and stereotyping of Hindus
3. Post-modernist mappings leading to distortions

Figure 3 shows the four colonial causes of distortions and the three consequences of this. I will elaborate on some of these below.

### *European debates: Are the Hindus Aryans or Pantheists?*

Many European Indologists believed that a race referred to as the 'Aryans' shaped both Indian and Western prehistory. These Aryans were assumed to be monotheistic, thus providing Christianity with a sort of ancient warrant. Their language was Sanskrit, and they were seen as Europeans who had migrated to India and also formed the precursors of what we now call Hinduism. Sanskrit was regarded as the mother of the Indo-European family of languages, and hence the ancestral

language of Europeans. Classical India was thus made to fit neatly into the quest for the origin of European bloodlines. Indology became a central part of Europe's enterprise to discover its *own* prehistory.<sup>30</sup>

But this picture created a serious theological problem. In the nineteenth century, the pantheism debate (called 'Pantheismusstreit') had become central in European intellectual life. The earliest and most highly appreciated Sanskrit works – considered by many Europeans to be far superior to the Western theological classics – were the Vedas and other texts of Hinduism. These were seen as pantheistic in their theology and practices and hence incompatible with the monotheism of Christianity.

The Indologists' charge that Vedanta was pantheistic rested on a crude interpretation of the Advaita principle that 'all is one'. The notion of God's immanence was seen as a dangerous one because it would undermine the exclusivity of history-centric revelation and lead to a new rise of paganism, Christianity's ancient enemy, within. Because pantheism was considered a serious threat, such a view of Vedanta could not be allowed to be part of the idea (or myth) of Aryan purity.<sup>31</sup>

The history of Aryans and their Sanskrit texts in India had to be carefully interpreted so as not to undermine the authority of Christianity. Indologists therefore promulgated the view that Aryans had become corrupted by Indian Brahmins who sneaked pantheism into the originally pure monotheistic philosophy of the Aryan race. So it was proposed that the pre-Aryan Indians had been pantheistic just like all other tribes that were being 'discovered' in the non-European world; furthermore, the Brahmins of India had polluted the pure Aryan invaders, resulting in the unfortunate pantheistic references in Sanskrit texts. This meant that Brahmins had to be vilified as the bad guys, and they've been used as scapegoats ever since.

This opposition to what some saw as a pantheistic Vedanta made the Samkhya metaphysics seem more attractive to many Indologists. They argued that Samkhya was monotheistic and mapped Purusha = Christian God.

Another issue before Indologists was to decide whether Indians were a moral race or not. If Indians were originally atheistic, they

would have had to be inherently immoral, whereas if they had been theistic (especially as per a dualist monotheism which resembles Christianity), they had the moral capacity to understand God, even though, later on, the Brahmins had corrupted them.<sup>32</sup> The questions as to whether Samkhya or Vedanta was older and which was closer to Western monotheism thus had sweeping implications for the history of 'European Aryans' and their relationship to Indians.

Competing Indology camps emerged, each striving to fit all the pieces of the puzzle together. One side believed in the 'indigenous aboriginal origins' of Indian thought while another believed in the 'foreign Aryan origins'. Those who wanted to redeem Indians from the charge of being originally immoral posited that Samkhya was the original system of the foreign Aryans and that it had been polluted by the Brahmins in a subsequent period. Such Eurocentric projections continue to this day. For example, the important Indologist and scholar of Hinduism Gerald Larson supports the theory of European Aryans invading India, and sees Samkhya as the original Indian school of thought and superior to Vedanta.<sup>33</sup>

Indologists who supported the Vedanta camp valorized the monism of Advaita Vedanta because it resembled Kant and Schopenhauer's transcendental idealism. In other words, by mapping onto some Western system it could be digested and thereby rendered non-threatening to the West. This helped Advaita Vedanta get accepted by the colonial administrators and Orientalist scholars as the essence and culmination of Indian philosophical systems. Bhedabheda Vedanta was seen as threatening because its notion of God's immanence was seen as similar to pantheism. Indologists started attributing the rise of Bhedabheda Vedanta to the decline of the true monistic Vedanta of the Upanishads, and also to the contamination from non-Vedic forms of worship in the Puranas and Tantras.

Even though the very same European Indologists had extensively mined Vijnanabhikshu for knowledge, they eventually marginalized him because of this fear of Bhedabheda Vedanta. Advaita Vedanta was thus assigned greater importance. Colonialist historians also marginalized Vijnanabhikshu in order to boost European Indologists

as the eminent thinkers of Indian philosophy. This explains why it is important for them to claim that Vivekananda was borrowing his ideas of Hinduism from European sources. It is a high priority for them to break up the continuity that actually existed from ancient tradition, as I have shown in the foregoing sections of this chapter.

### *Reduction into 'Indian schools of thought'*

A related aspect of European Indology was the overemphasis on the separate strands and lineages of Hinduism. As I have noted, in the pre-colonial period there was no single definition of 'astika' and 'nastika'. Various traditional ways were (and still are) practised by Hindus without any sense of rigid boundaries separating them. However, some scholars have assumed astika/nastika to be fixed, rather than fluid categories, and this in turn has caused Hinduism to be essentialized into binaries of rival schools in a way that makes them seem mutually contradictory. This feeds their claim of Hindu incoherence, discontinuity and fragmentation.

An example of Western reductionism may be found in the Wikipedia entry on 'astika' and 'nastika', which are essentialized as follows: 'By this definition, Nyaya, Vaishesika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa and Vedanta are classified as astika schools; and some schools like Carvaka, Ajivika, Jainism and Buddhism are considered nastika. The distinction is similar to the orthodox/heterodox distinction in the West.'

The giveaway here is in the final sentence: this classification system is described as 'similar to the orthodox/heterodox' distinction in the West. I disagree with this mapping. The dharma traditions do not operate in terms of this orthodox/heterodox binary. There is no institutionally enforced and normative position of 'orthodoxy' in them, nor any absolute history (comparable to the history-centrism of Jesus) with which Indian philosophers are obliged to comply.

Since colonial times, scholars have cranked out one work after another on Vedanta versus Samkhya, and on other 'conflicts' within Hinduism. The effect of this reductionism into separate schools is felt to this day. One fixation of such scholars is to pit sruti against experience, using Shankara as their authority for this division.<sup>34</sup>

Daya Krishna, a recent and very prominent scholar of Indian metaphysics, criticizes the tendency to essentialize Indian thought into 'schools' that are fixed into mutually exclusive cocoons. He writes:

[The schools of Indian philosophy] are treated as something finished and final. No distinction, therefore, is ever made between the thought of an individual thinker and the thought of a school. A school is, in an important sense, an abstraction. It is a logical construction springing out of the writings of a number of thinkers who share a certain similarity of outlook in tackling certain problems. Sāṃkhya, for example, is identified too much with Īśvarakṛṣṇa's work, or Vedānta with the work of Śaṅkara. But this is due to confusion between the thought of an individual thinker and the style of thought which he exemplifies and, to which he contributes in some manner. All that Śaṅkara has written is not strictly Advaita Vedānta. Nor all that Īśvarakṛṣṇa has written, Sāṃkhya. Unless this is realized, writings on Indian philosophy will continuously do injustice either to the complexity of thought of the individual thinker concerned, or to the uniqueness of the style they are writing about.<sup>35</sup>

The Western fixation on 'schools' of Indian thought has, in effect, made them seem frozen, homogenized and isolated. This treatment is a form of reifying different dogmatic points of view and considering them at war against one another in a manner typical in Western history. It makes the different Indian 'schools' appear irreconcilable, and the emphasis has been to prove that these thinkers were each other's enemies.

### *Postmodern and post-colonial distortions*

Postmodernism and post-colonialism have further distorted and fragmented classical Indian thought. The attack on the coherence of Hinduism (and likewise on the unity of India and on other 'big' collectivities and concepts) is a signature of postmodern and post-colonial scholarship, where it typically goes unquestioned. In the laudable effort to take apart and defang large and oppressive entities, armchair academics tend to go on a witch-hunt against any large

metaphysical concept whatsoever. They often do this mechanically and unconsciously, without regard for the differences between their various targets, or for the effects of their views on the ground. Thus, their attacks on the concept of a unified Hinduism with a distinct spiritual mission indirectly support the very Western hegemony they are purportedly combating.

Despite the fond hopes of postmodernism, the competition between large collective identities is not fading away; rather, it is intensifying. Postmodern thought has influenced many Indian intellectuals to view their own heritage as incoherent, and further to imagine that all other nations must also blur their identities to the same extent. They do not realize that the sense of incoherence leaves them no place to stand when defending their tradition. Also, the postmodern deconstruction of grand narratives has been vastly asymmetrical with respect to its effects; the deconstruction of the West is less devastating than the deconstruction of the non-West.<sup>36</sup>

Rather than dividing Hinduism into fixed and competing schools to solve the 'problem' of apparent inconsistencies between various strands and lineages, let us be reminded that these apparent inconsistencies, which are actually less profound than many scholars make them appear, can be explored in other ways. There can be many reasons for these differences, including the following:

- Different audiences may be served by different works, including audiences that are followers of rival schools who need to be approached in their own vocabulary. Some works may have been written in response to a specific situation or challenge.
- The 'author' of a given work is not always a single individual, so differences within a text are bound to occur. There are sometimes multiple individuals representing a lineage, and the lineage was systematized only after their time by presenting the sum of their works as though it were that of a single individual. The very notion of an individual author in India differs from that in the West, and composite authorship is frequent.
- When metaphysical systems differ, their soteriological processes



often remain shared partially or entirely. For instance, certain yoga practices are shared across many metaphysical systems. Hence, for instance, Shankara may endorse yoga's benefits and, at the same time, disagree with the dualist metaphysics of Samkhya with which yoga has been coupled. This means we must understand the context in which he disagrees with it and the extent of his disagreement. This would nuance our understanding of his statements that appear contradictory.

- Teachers at times may have wanted to shock students into accepting their approach by appearing to reject something else by way of contrast. Sometimes, for instance, a given meditation technique is rejected because it is associated with an opposing metaphysics, and an alternative is suggested that is similar to the one rejected, but this alternative is couched again in a new metaphysics. Again, Shankara, as we shall see in Chapter 10, provides an example of this.
- Many philosophers assert a unity when they speak of higher states of consciousness, but less so when they are discussing ideas pertaining to ordinary states.

## Challenging the Neo-Hinduism thesis

This chapter has argued that the neo-Hinduism camp is wrong in claiming that Vivekananda copied Western ideas and put them in Sanskrit to make them seem Indian. On the contrary, there had been a vibrant flow of Indian ideas prior to colonialism, and it was the colonialists who disrupted this for their agenda to construct an ancient history for European civilization. Most of Vivekananda's unification of Hinduism was already being carried out long before colonialism, as illustrated in this chapter.

The next chapter will continue my rejoinder by showing that even in the domain of social activism and worldly progress there were pre-colonial Hindu pioneers who provided resources for contemporary Hinduism. Hence, it is inappropriate to credit colonialists as the sole source of Hinduism's social consciousness.

<http://www.dharmacentral.com/forum/content.php?126-Critique-of-Neo-Hinduism> Also see his “The death of traditional Hinduism”, posted at: <http://Hinduism.about.com/od/history/a/neoHinduism.htm>

57 Hatcher, 1999.

58 Sharma, 2000.

59 Sharma, 2000.

60 Hatcher, 1999

61 For example, Shankara’s Brahmasutra 1.3.38 and 1.1.30.

62 Smith, 1998, p. 324.

63 Smith, 1998, p. 324.

64 Smith, 1998, pp. 325-6.

65 Smith, 1998, pp. 325-6.

66 Smith, 1998, pp. 325-6.

67 Smith, 1995, p. 330.

68 Smith, 1995, p. 331.

69 Smith 1995, p. 333.

70 Neusner 1983. p. 235.

71 Gupta, 1974, pp. 28-29.

72 Sweetman, 2003, p. 229.

## 8: Historical Continuity and Colonial Disruption

1 See Rigveda 1.164.46, 2.1.3, 2.1.4; Yajurveda (Mādhyandina) 32.1; Atharvaveda (Shaunaka) 10.7.27. Later ancillary Vedic literature also repeats that the various devas are one in their ontological essence (e.g. Brihaddevata 2.18) and are like ‘limbs’ of the same atman (e.g. Nirukta 7.4).

2 In developing these three sections in this revised edition, I am heavily indebted to Vishal Agarwal and Dr Shrinivas Tilak, who understand the issues being addressed in detail and helped me with extensive Indian references to properly address the subject.

3 See Swaminathan, 1997, p. 175 for further details.

4 Suryakanta, 1981, pp. 25-27.

5 For example, Brahmasutra 3.3.1 says that, ‘Any (particular) conception for meditation (vijñana) imparted in all the Upanishads is the same ...’ (Swami Gambhirananda, 1965, p. 644.)

6 All the references from the Mahabharata in this chapter are from the vulgate edition as published by the Gita Press (Gorakhpur) in seven volumes inclusive of the Harivamsha Purana. The translations are by Vishal Agarwal.

7 For instance, in the Narayaneeyam section of the Mahabharata 12.339.68-69, Vishnu says that he is the same Kapila whom the followers of Samkhya worship, and he is the same Hiranyagarbha who is extolled in the Vedas and in whom the followers of Yoga revel. This great text is full of the knowledge of the four Vedas. The conclusions of the Samkhya and Yoga systems are brought in. It is popularly known as the Pancharatra (Mahabharata 12.339.111). It emerged from the mouth of Narayana, and Narada has preached it subsequently (Mahabharata 12.339.112ab).

8 See Nath, 2001.

9 Manusmriti 2.11.

10 Based on Jain thinker Umasvati's commentary on Tattvarthasutra 1:35. (See Balcerowicz, 2003, pp. 38, 64).

11 The following often quoted verse from the Siva-Mahimnah Stotra of Pushpadanta makes the same point: 'There are different paths (of realization) as enjoined by the three Vedas, Samkhya, Yoga, Pasupata doctrine, and Vaishnava Sastras. Persons following different paths – straight or crooked – according as they consider that this path is best or that one is proper due to the difference in temperaments, reach Thee alone just as rivers enter the ocean.' Translation by Swami Pavitrananda, 1987, p. 15.

12 Gokhale, 1958. Fragments of a Buddhist manuscript called the 'Spitzer Manuscript' dating to around 200 CE also describe several genres of Hindu and Buddhist literature, including giving a list of the Parvans of the Mahabharata in the northwestern recension. This probably is the oldest list of Darshanas contained in a single work. See Franco (2003) for more details.

13 Bhattacharya, 1978, pp. 543-563.

14 The edition recommended is the one by Rishi, 2004.

15 In sixteen chapters, this compendium describes sixteen different philosophies in the following order: 1. Charvaka, 2. Bauddha, 3. Jain, 4. Vishishtadvaita Vedanta of Ramanuja, 5. Dvaita Vedanta of Madhvacharya, 6. Pashupata Darshana of Nakulisha, 7. Shaiva Darshana, 8. Kashmir Shaivism, 9. Raseshvara Darshana, 10. Vaisheshika Darshana, 11. Nyaya Darshana, 12. Purva Mimamsa, 13. Philosophy of Grammar, 14. Samkhya Darshana, 15. Yoga Darshana, 16. Advaita Vedanta.

16 See Sarsvati, 1912. These fourteen vidyas were: Four Vedas, Six

Vedangas, Nyaya, Mimamsa, Purana and Dharmashastra. The text argues that the last four were the four 'Upangas' of the Vedas. Furthermore, the Purana Vidya included the Upapuranas, Nyaya included the Vaisheshika Darshana, Mimamsa included Vedanta, and the category of Dharmashastra included also Mahabharata, Ramayana, Samkhya, Yoga, Pashupata and Vaishnava Darshanas. This compilation includes the Agamic traditions. He then lists four Upavedas, to give the final number of vidyas as eighteen. In his other works like the Bhaktirasāmritasindhu, Madhusudana Sarasvati also expended considerable efforts in demonstrating that bhakti was not irreconcilable with the Nirguna Brahman of Advaita Vedanta.

17 Rangacarya, 1983.

18 This text was first published by T. Ganapati Sastri from Trivandrum in 1915. I have used a more modern (2002) reproduction of this original edition.

19 Ibid, Upanga Prakarana, p. 33.

20 Ed. by T. Ganapati Sastri, 1918. The text follows the Advaita worldview to order different systems and place them sequentially into a hierarchy. This was similar to what Swami Vivekananda later followed.

21 Rukmani, 1981, p. 20.

22 Rukmani, 1981 argues that Vijnanabhikshu was influenced by the Navya-Naiyayika thinker, Raghunatha Siromani.

23 Unfortunately, some Western Indologists (such as Andrew Nicholson) pay only lip service to these Indian sources, despite drawing very heavily on their ideas. This is one of the reasons why I have decided to ignore the accounts by Nicholson and have reverted to the earlier sources.

24 The following verses from the Mahabharata illustrate these two varieties of Samkhya: Samkhya has been regarded as the best knowledge – have no doubt in this regard. In Samkhya, the imperishable, immovable, perfect and eternal Brahman alone has been described (Mahābhārata 12.301.101). They who have attained the siddhis of Yoga and also they who have the infinite knowledge of Samkhya too praise His good qualities alone (Mahābhārata 12.301.105cd). Jivatman is budhyamāna, Prakriti is apratibuddha (Mahābhārata 12.308.3-4). The twenty-fifth that is the great soul knows the unmanifest Prakriti and therefore the soul is referred to as budhyamāna, but it does not know the twenty-sixth (Paramātman) that is without any taint, enlightened, unknowable and eternal. But He knows well the twenty-fifth (soul) and the twenty-fourth (Prakriti) (Mahābhārata 12.308.6-7). When this soul acquires a supreme intellect that is pure, free from all taint, then it is able to see the

twenty-sixth and abides in the Supreme Soul's state of enlightenment. In that state, the soul transcends the Prakriti which undergoes creation and destruction (Mahābhārata 12.308.10cd-11). Different from the twenty-fifth (Prakriti), I am the twenty-sixth (Paramātman). I am that which is the eternal, never grows old, is endowed with knowledge and ... just by constantly thinking in this way, the soul becomes like Paramātman, there is no doubt in this. (Mahābhārata 12.308.16) The soul sees this inanimate creation only through the light of the enlightened twenty-sixth Brahman, but even then the soul does not know Brahman. The Samkhya and the Vedic scriptures declare that it is this ignorance of the soul which gives it the multiplicity of bondages (in various bodies) (Mahābhārata 12.308.17). The scholars of Yoga claim the superiority of their system over Samkhya by arguing that how can Moksha be obtained without recourse to Īshvara (Mahābhārata 12.300.3). But the scholarly and wise followers of Samkhya argue for the superiority of their method by saying that only he becomes liberated upon death who understands the fate of all creation and then becomes detached from this world. Through the study of Samkhya, one understands perfectly that everything is ephemeral. No other way can lead to Moksha. And because Samkhya teaches this, it alone is the philosophy of liberation (Mokshadarshana) (Mahābhārata 12.300.4-5).

25 My discussion on Vijnanabhikshu's unifying strategy is largely derived from Srivastavya (1969, pp. 92-98) and Ram (1995, pp. 167-169).

26 Vishnu Purana, 6.7.35.

27 Sastry, 1921.

28 To quote Lorenzen (1999): 'Whatever the reason for the scholarly acceptance of the idea that there was no religious self-identity before 1800, the evidence against this view in the vernacular Hindu literature is clear and abundant. The bulk of this evidence takes the form of texts composed by the popular poet-singers of North India, most of them members of non-Brahmin castes. This literature does precisely what Sanskrit literature refuses to do: it establishes a Hindu religious identity through the process of mutual self-definition with a contrasting Muslim Other. In practice, there can be no Hindu identity unless this is defined by contrast against an Other. Without the Muslim (or some other non-Hindu), Hindus can only be Vaishnavas, Saivas, Smartas or the like. The presence of the Other is a necessary pre-requisite for an active recognition of what the different Hindu sects and schools hold in common.'

29 A notable example is that of Vachaspati Mishra (tenth century), who wrote works on all of the six Hindu darshanans with great sympathy, as if he

believed in the respective teachings of all of them. And yet, he did not try to gloss over their differences. However, he did not include the Abrahamic systems.

30 The stakes were high, as the theories proposed resulted in assigning an internal hierarchy among Germans, English, French and other Europeans. Sanskrit and its civilization became a pawn in this game of identity politics among Europeans.

31 Herling, 2006, gives a good account of this debate as it related to the German understanding of the Bhagavad Gita.

32 For various reasons, many modern commentators assume Samkhya was always atheistic. Some find that God is superfluous in the system. Others want Samkhya to function as an analogue to Darwin's theory of evolution, a rigorous school which was not other-worldly. Yet others such as Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya are Marxist historians who want to show a thriving atheistic tradition.

33 Larson, 1995, pp. 142-2, p. 58.

34 It is important to note that sruti is often trumped by smriti if the context so demands. For example, women's property rights and marriage age changed against the sruti, as per A.S. Altekar, 'The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization'. Delhi, Motilal Banarsidas, 1995, pp. 353-4.

35 Krishna 1991, p. 14.

36 Studies that avoid using the categories of 'dharma' or the 'West' (accusing them of being essentialist) invariably fall into this trap, crippling any further efforts to understand the intended objects of their gaze, and ultimately reinforcing the status quo of Western domination. My work steers clear of the infinitely regressive trap of postmodern nihilism; it does not permit outlying exceptions to negate the overwhelming salience of characteristic features in either civilization, Indian or Western.

## 9: Traditional Foundations of Social Consciousness

1 Gupta, 1974, p. 27.

2 Gupta, 1974, p. 27.

3 Gupta, 1974, p. 27.

4 Gupta, 1974, p. 28.

5 Gupta, 1974, p. 44.