Neo-Hinduism emerged as a revitalization movement in India's encounter with the West. In recent years it has become increasingly aggressive. One branch has stressed Hindu spirituality and has sent missionaries to evangelize the world. The other has become political, seeking to establish Hindutva, a Hindu nation, and to persecute Christians as followers of a foreign religion. Around the world, Indian immigrants have established Hindu communities and spread their faith. This resurgence of Hinduism as an active formal religion challenges Christians to rethink their mission to Hindus and the Hindu world.

Holy men declared Sunday, 6 December 1992, auspicious, and more than 300,000 people gathered that day in Ayodhya, a pilgrim town north of Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, India. Most wore the saffron color of Hindu nationalism. At midday, they broke down the police barricades around a mosque, reportedly built on the ruins of the temple that marks Rama's birthplace, and hammered it to the ground. The construction of a new Rama temple was to begin that evening. Violence triggered by the demolition killed 1,700 people across the subcontinent. Supporters justified the action as the liberation of Hindu sacred space to unify the nation. Critics decried it as communalism—the antagonistic mobilization of one religious community against another—as an attack on Indian civil society.

This event is symbolic of the emergence of Hindu nationalism in India that defines the nation in terms of ethnicity and religion, and appeals to primordial loyalties deeper than the political affiliations of Nehru's crumbling secular democratic state. It has also led to a growing crisis of governability that invites the use of violence to achieve political ends.

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Definitions of "Hinduism"

How do we account for this explosion of Hindu nationalism, and where is Hinduism headed in the twenty-first century? Before we can answer these questions, we must first define Hinduism. S. Radhakrishnan writes, "Hinduism is the way of life characteristic of an entire people, it is a culture more than a creed. It permeates every aspect of the individual's public and private life." As one author puts it, "Hinduism has grown like some gigantic Banyan tree, with numerous spreading branches that put down their own roots, and yet remained, however tenuously, attached to the main trunk." (cited in Klostermaier 1989:56) Jawaharlal Nehru writes,

Hinduism, as a faith, is vague, amorphous, many-sided, all things to all men. It is hardly possible to define it, or indeed to say definitely whether it is a religion or not, in the usual sense of the word. In its present form, and even in the past, it embraces many beliefs and practices, from the highest to the lowest, often opposed to or contradicting each other (Nehru 1946:75)

The term Hindu has been used in at least five ways. The first definition is geographic. It was given to India by the invaders of India—the Turk, Persian, and Arab Muslims, and the British rulers. Hindu was the Persian word for Indian and was originally used for peoples living beyond the Indus River (Ludden 1996:7). Consequently, Muslims were divided into Arab Muslims (who could trace their descent from West Asia) and Hindu Muslims (native converts). Similarly, the British referred to European and Hindu Christians. This practice of equating things Indian with the term Hindu has caused endless confusion, obliterating lines between religious and geopolitical realities.

The second definition, sometimes referred to as Brahmanical Hinduism, is socioreligious. Hindus here meant the religious order rooted in the caste system that emerged by the tenth century BC. In India this is known as sanatana dharma, or "eternal religion," and refers to a highly sophisticated worldview for categorizing all of life. Robert Frykenberg notes,

[Brahmanical Hinduism] lumped all mankind into a single category and then subdivided this category into a color-coded system of separate species and subspecies, genera and subgenera, and then ranked these hierarchically according to innate (biological, cultural, and ritual) capacities and qualities (1993:527)

The result was a religious community made up of diverse castes organized in a single hierarchy based on notions of purity and pollution associated with blood and ritual. This socioreligious system emerged as the Brahmans spread their religious hegemony as ritual masters over much of India. This meaning of Hinduism has become so pervasive and deeply entrenched that it remains the dominant force in rural Indian life today, despite numerous attempts to destroy it.

Brahmanical Hinduism is not a monolithic religion concerned with ultimate truth and codified in formal doctrines and central institutions. It is the social cement that teaches humans how to live in a community by putting the community above individuals (Mangalwadi 1997:44). It is a worldview that incorporates different religious communities (sampradayas)—each with its own gods, beliefs, and practices—into a single hierarchical social system based on the concepts of purity and pollution.
Central to this worldview are the themes of *ekajivam* (all life is one), *karma* (the law of rewards and fateful action), *dharma* (religious duty), *samsara* (the cycle of rebirth), and *moksha* (release from the cycle of rebirths). These themes were hammered out in the encounter between Brahminism, with its emphasis on caste and ritual, and the Sramanas, with their stress on ascetic yogic praxis (Pandit 1998:5-7).

The Brahmanical worldview found expression in four ranked ritual categories (*varnas*)—Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra—which were divided into the countless caste groups (*jatis*) that form the primary basis of Hindu social identity. Each Hindu person’s identity is ritually located by religious duties appropriate for one’s specific social status, ritual status, and age (one’s *varnashramadharma*). Religious practices revolve around many different deities (*devas*), sectarian traditions (*sampradayas*), and teachers (*gurus*) that form centers of personal devotion and affective religious affiliation. As David Ludden notes, “The ideas that define [Brahmanical] Hinduism as a religion, therefore, deeply discourage the formation of a collective Hindu religious identity among believers and practitioners. Hindu identity is multiple, by definition . . .” (1996:7). Many Indians, however, have no place in Brahmanical Hinduism. Tribals living in the mountains and forests and untouchables in the villages are outside its pale. So, too, are Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Others, namely, the once-born Sudras, are second-class citizens in the community.

The third definition of Hinduism is a product of the West’s encounter with the Indian civilization. Edward Said (1978) points out that as British rule spread in India in the nineteenth century, European scholars, painters, novelists, journalists, and museum curators became enamored with the ancient Indian philosophies and began departments of Oriental Studies in which they systematically created compelling images of Hindus for Western audiences. They learned Sanskrit and collaborated with Indian scholars to translate and publicize the *Vedas* and other sacred texts, which had been largely forgotten in India. They defined Hinduism in terms of these ancient texts, and Hindus were depicted as mysterious, exotic, sensual, despotic, traditional, and irrational in their fervent religiosity. India became known in the West as “a land saturated with religion; its people . . . obsessed with the destiny and status of man in the hereafter” (Wallbank 1978:25). In other words, Europeans invented Hinduism as a coherent, unified religious tradition that stood as its ideological other in the Orient (Ludden 1996:9) and used it to justify Western imperialism because it brought modernization and progress.

The fourth definition of the term *Hindu* is political. Traditionally, Hindu kings regulated local temples and shrines that had endowed, tax-free lands (*innam bhumi*) that generated large amounts of wealth and struggles for control. As the British Raj expanded its rule over “British India,” it soon found itself responsible for maintaining the temples, and organizing and funding the temple rituals. British officials often found themselves as government representatives participating in temple rites. This led to the codification of an official “Hinduism” run by the British Raj. Under British rule, *Hindu* became a category of people who were not Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains, Parsis, or Buddhists.

The fifth definition of Hinduism is religious. Sometimes referred to as Neo-Hinduism, it is, like India itself, the creation of the British Raj. It is the child born out of the encounter of Indian religious philosophy with Enlightenment and Christian thought. I will use the term *Hindu* in this sense.
Neo-Hinduism

The last decades of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century saw the emergence of new forms of Hinduism as Indians responded to the confrontation of Christianity and Enlightenment thought. To understand these I will draw on A. F. C. Wallace's theory of revitalization (1956). According to Wallace, revitalization movements arise when traditional worldviews are threatened by external changes. They are the people's attempts to find meaning in life in the face of external challenge and growing anomie.

Wallace argues that when cultures and religions are overrun by more powerful ones, the people respond in several ways (see Figure 1). The first response is "conversion movements" (acculturation) in which people change their allegiances to the new ideology. When the British conquered India and introduced Enlightenment thought, some Indians, generally from high Hindu castes, adopted a modern secular scientific worldview and became scientists, doctors, and lawyers. When missionaries brought the gospel, others, mostly untouchables and tribals who had no status in the old Brahmanical order, became Christians in Western-based churches.

A second response is "accommodation movements" in which people adopt many of the elements of the new religion or ideology, but reinterpret these in terms of their old categories and logic. In India this was seen in the rise of the Brahmo Samaj (Fellowship of Believers of the One True God) and the Prarthana Samaj (Fellowship of Prayer) reform movements that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They called for a radical transformation of Brahmanical Hinduism by submitting Hindu scriptures and teachings to the test of rationality and Christian ethics. The result was a synthesis of Vedic idealism, Islamic monotheism, and Christian morality. The caste system, untouchability, idolatry, wife burning, and blood sacrifices were condemned. Reason was enthroned. These movements failed however to produce a viable synthesis that would attract orthodox religious leaders and the common people.

According to Wallace, a third response to cultural collision is "revitalization movements." These look to the past and seek to revive it through a new synthesis
based on the old religious worldview, but accommodating sufficiently to survive in the new context. In India these are the movements such as the Arya Samaj and the Rama Krishna Mission that gave birth to Neo-Hindu fundamentalist movements.\textsuperscript{7}

Neo-Hinduism, as we know it, is the result of India's encounter with Enlightenment and Christian thought. Indian scholars were inspired by the recognition given to the Vedas and Upanishads by the West. They created religious doctrines and institutions based on the old texts, long forgotten in traditional Hinduism, and organized Neo-Hinduism as a modern, formal "high" religion. They rejected undesirable customs, such as idolatry and untouchability, as degenerate accretions to the pure Vedic religion. They popularized their teaching by linking these to the great epics, the \textit{Mahabharata} (with its \textit{Bhagavad Gita}) and the \textit{Ramayanam}, which are at the heart of popular Hinduism. These movements also emerged out of the success of Christianity in winning untouchables. Many Hindu leaders became extremely anxious about the landslide of the lower sections of Hindu society to Christianity, a "foreign religion."

Successful revitalization movements, in the long run, tend to move in one of two directions. Some become increasingly spiritual in nature, detached from the sociopolitical arena in which they exist. Others become increasingly politicized as they seek to wrestle power from the dominant power around them. Both of these trends are evident in the Hindu revitalization movements.

\textit{Spiritualized Hinduism}

One stream of Neo-Hinduism has increasingly stressed the spiritual nature of Hinduism. This has its roots in the work of Dayananda (1824-1883), Ramakrishna (1836-1886), Vivekananda (1863-1902), and the Theosophists. Swami Dayananda Sarasvati founded the Arya Samaj (1875) to defend and to reform Hinduism. His watchword was "back to the Vedas," and he argued that the Vedas were monotheistic and lent no support to idol worship. He wanted to removed Christianity and Islam from India and make Hinduism the only religion of India (Klostermaier 1989:391). He opposed Christian mission and sought to win Christians and Muslims to Hinduism through evangelism and reconversions. K. David notes that he became "the spearhead of a dynamic type of Hinduism unifying all sections of Hindu society and attempting to bring to light the inherent vitality of Hinduism" (1979:178).

The Ramakrishna Mission was established on the death of its founder Ramakrishna (1834-1886) and carried forward by his disciples, most notably Vivekananda (1863-1902). Vivekananda stressed traditional Hindu values. He combined strong \textit{bhakti} (devotional) and tantric (esoteric) strains in an emphasis on the mystical experience of the oneness of all religions through visions, not only of Hindu deities, but also of Jesus and Allah. Vivekananda addressed the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, Illinois, in 1893, arguing that Hinduism alone can claim to be the universal religion of the world because it is not built around the life of historical persons, but around eternal and universal principles. He returned to India as a recognized champion of Hindu self-pride and gave stimulus for the national revival of Hinduism.

Another key figure in the Hindu revival was Annie Besant. She was a disappointed Christian who tried to bring all religions together using the Vedanta doctrine of karma, rebirth, and yoga. She worked in the Indian National Congress and found-
ed the Central College of Benares, which later became Hindu University.

Today, Neo-Hinduism as a religious movement is centered around the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), the World Council of Hindus that coordinates the activities of Neo-Hindu movements and monitors orthodoxy (see Figure 2). Leaders in the spiritualized Hinduism reject political Hindu movements as not truly Hindu.

### HINDU ORGANIZATIONS (Santana Dharma)
- Arya Samaj, Ginnmaya Mission, Gitananda Ashram (Italy), Hindu Students Council, Hindu Temple Society of North America, International Swaminarayan Satsang (ISSO), Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam, Nityananda Institute, Ramakrishna Mission (New York), Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Saiva Siddhanta Church, Swaminarayan Hindu Mission (BSS), Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP)

### QUASI-HINDU ORGANIZATIONS
- Yoga Vedanta
  - Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Divine Life Society, Ramanasram (Ramana Maharshi), Siddha Yoga Dham (Chidvalasananda), Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centers
- Social Service and/or Universalism
  - Ananda Marga, Gayatri Pariwar, M.A.Ashram (Mata Amritanandamayi), Sadhu Vaswani Mission, Integral Yoga Institute (Satchidananda), Satya Sai Baba, Self-Realization Fellowship, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar

### NON-HINDU NEW RELIGIONS OR NON-RELIGIONS
- Brahma Kumaris, ISKCON, Transcendental Meditation, Veerashaivite

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**Figure 2. Global Hindu Organizations** *(Chinmayananda 1998:33)*

One of the popular manifestations of Neo-Hinduism is the spread of “guruism.” A great many charismatic Hindu gurus have major audiences in India and have attracted Western followers. Among them are Ramana Maharishi (1870-1950), Sri Aurobindo (advocate of integral yoga, 1872-1950), Swami Muktananda (exponent of Kashmir Shaivism, 1908-1982), Swami Sivananda (founder of the Divine Life Society, died 1964), Ma Anandamayi (considered by many to be a living deity), Satya Sai Baba, Rajaneesh, and Bala Yogi. Throughout India today, the veneration of sadhus and saints is central to popular Hinduism.

Another manifestation of spiritual Neo-Hinduism is the growing prominence of temples, festivals, and pilgrimages. Brahmanical Hinduism is rooted in the home where purohits conducted the life cycle and caste rites. Modern popular Hinduism has moved into the public arena where it is the purview of temple pujaris and religious leaders who organize temple worship, parades, festivals, and religious fairs. Large temples are being revived as centers of religious tourism, attracting large numbers of pilgrims who take bus tours to visit famous shrines. The celebration of nationwide Hindu festivals is increasing, and different communities and neighborhoods compete to demonstrate their religious fervor.

### Politicized Hinduism

The second stream in Neo-Hinduism has become increasingly political in nature. In 1909 Pandit Malaviya founded the Hindu Mahasabha, which soon devel-
oped into a right-wing Hindu political party. In 1925, Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, a member of the Hindu Mahasabha, founded the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu religious movement, which rejected cultural diversity and advocated the reorganization of the nation built on the principles of Hindu nationalism. In 1931, a young revolutionary at Benares Hindu University, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, was recruited by the RSS. In 1940, he became its leader. In his book, *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?* Savarkar (1969) popularized his concept of Hindutva or Hindudom. He argues that Aryans who came to the Indian sub-continent were a nation because they shared a geographical unity, racial features, and a common culture. He set out to create a Hindu national identity in which he hoped to make the RSS and Hindu society identical (Mangalwadi 1997, 289).

The central vision of the RSS is Hindutva, a Hindu theocratic state. To achieve its goal, the RSS uses a uniform system of socialization to shape all people into one collective identity and Hindu nation. M. S. Golwalkar states,

> The training that is imparted every day in the *shakha* [a local unit of the RSS] imparts that spirit of identification and well-concerted actions. It gives the individual the necessary incentive to rub away his angularities, to behave in a spirit of oneness with the rest of his brethren in society and fall in line with the organized and disciplined way of life by adjusting himself to the varied outlooks of other minds. The persons assembling there learn to obey a single command (cited in Jaffrelot 1996, 534).

The RSS has announced its intention to use political power to control educational institutions run by religious minorities so that these become the mediums for its own propaganda (Mangalwadi 1997, 296). While claiming not to be a political party, it has spawned a great number of front organizations, such as the Bharatiya Mazur Sabha, a trade union, and Vishwa Hindu Parishad, a religious organization. The movement has millions of highly disciplined members spread all over India and abroad and is the driving force behind the modern Hindu revitalization movement.

How does the Hindutva movement deal with cultural and religious pluralism in India, a self-declared secular pluralist nation? Sadhvi Riothambra, a leader in the movement, says,

> Wherever I go, I say, Muslims, live and prosper among us. Live like milk and sugar. If two pills of sugar are dissolved in a quintal of milk, the milk becomes sweet! But what can be done if our Muslim brother is not behaving like sugar in the milk? Is it our fault if he seems bent upon becoming a lemon in the milk? He wants the milk to curdle. I say to him, “Come to your senses. The value of milk increases after it becomes sour. It becomes cheese. But the world knows the fate of lemon. It is cut, squeezed dry, and then thrown on the garbage heap” (cited by Kakkar in Basu and Subrahmanyam 1996, 223-224).

Hindutva rules out any possibility of Indian Hindus, Muslims, and Christians living together in harmony and as equals. Golwalkar, one of the architects of the ideology, writes,

> The foreign races in Hindustan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no ideas...
but those of glorification of the Hindu race and culture or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment—not even citizens rights (Golwalkar 1939: 62)

According to Sarkar, Hindutva is a Brahmanical reaction to the threats to upper caste dominance raised by lower caste, tribal, peasant, and women’s movements, and by the social mobility facilitated by democratic secular politics and economic planning. Its strength is its appeal to all those for whom Mother India is a reality, which includes landowners, industrialists, shopowners, college and high school teachers, and small entrepreneurs, as well as the large masses who live in rural and small-town India who feel that the present elite is much too Western-oriented and forgetful of India’s own cultural and spiritual heritage. Bhartiya Janwadi Aghadi argues, if there is one explosive idea that is setting the agenda for India today, it is Hindutva. Hindutva has nothing to do with spirituality, but everything to do with political economy. It has very little to do with Hinduism, but everything to do with an aggressive form of cultural nationalism. It appears to be connected with India’s past, but is actually an omen of the future. For some, Hindutva heralds the age of India’s renaissance. For others, it reflects India’s march towards fascism (cited in Mangalwadi 1997: 277).

Hindutva is a totalitarian ideology because it aspires to fill the whole space occupied by society and because it seeks to endow individuals with the selflessness ideal of total submission (ekchalak anuvartita) to the ascetic leader (pracharak). It rejects a transcendent God and demands that Indians worship Mother India and make nationalism the source of all other values.

The RSS is the parent body and force behind the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), “The Indian People’s Party,” which is seeking to gain control of the nation and, through it, the people of India by appealing to cultural nationalism. The BJP emerged as a dominant political force after 1989 when the control that Congress exercised in the country based on patronage networks between local leaders and the central government collapsed. That collapse left a political vacuum in the ideological basis for allocation and use of power. Made up primarily of militant upper-caste members, the BJP entered the arena and over the years gained power and widespread appeal. It emerged as the largest party in the 1996 election. Its first attempt to form the Indian government lasted less than two weeks, but in 1998 it returned to power and began to implement its agenda for the nation. It is commonly allied with Shiv Sena and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), which are made up mainly of militant lower-caste people. It is also affiliated with the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sang (BMS), the second largest trade union in the country.

The BJP argues that Gandhianism, communism, and modernism have failed, and that only Hindutva can keep the country together. While most of BJP’s rivals are losing political appeal, the Hindu nationalism movement is gaining strength and acceptability in a wider constituency, such as the lower castes in Uttar Pradesh, the Sikhs who hate Congress, and the non-resident Indians.

The BJP projects itself as a deeply moralistic party. It rejects the secularism of the modern nation state, and the lack of social, ethical, and personal values in the Western-style democratic politics. It upholds the myth that Hinduism is moral and
tolerant, and that Islam and Christianity are alien and intolerant. It argues that only a 
nationalism rooted in the Hindu concept of Raja-Dharma—the Hindu statecraft 
based on the righteous ruler that is tolerant of all communities and religions—can 
keep India together.\textsuperscript{15} From this perspective, the destruction of the Babri Masjid sym­
bolized the removal of a foreign religiocultural invasion and a restoration of the original Hinduism. Since the BJP-led coalition assumed power in 1997, there has been 
a significant increase in violence against Christians, and Christians have been warned 
not to abuse the hospitality that Hindus have extended to them.\textsuperscript{16} There has been a 
shift from a more or less peaceful co-existence of different religious and ethnic com­
unities to a polity of hegemony and dominance, and from a polity of rational dis­
course to the argument of threat and violence.

The BJP, RSS, and VHP appeal to the traditional values and concerns of popular 
Hindu culture and use religious symbols and emotive issues—such as cow-slaugh­
ter—to mobilize the masses. They organize religious festivals involving public par­
ticipation and culminating in processions through communally charged cities to 
intensify pressure on the state and to show that all space is Hindu space. They argue 
that to deny Hindus the right to use public space for religiopolitical ends is seen as anti-Hindu.

The challenge of the BJP is not so much its present political clout but its chal­
lenge of the notion of the secular state and its redefinition of the nature of the nation. 
After Independence in 1947, India declared itself a secular civil state built on the 
Western notion of a contract between the state and the people as individuals. The BJP 
is now seeking to redefine the basis of the state in terms of communal entities, argu­
ing that the government has a contract with the different constituent communities, not 
with individuals. The BJP argues that in the nation, culturally diverse people cannot 
live together as equals. It favors a strong, centralized state based on cultural nation­
alism in which the safeguards of minority rights are eliminated and the interests of 
the Hindu majority rule.

This intrusion of what was thought to be matters of the private sphere into the 
public domain has created a crisis in the nature of the Indian state which has to do 
with the redefinition of Indian civil social space and who will be allowed to partici­
pate. The contract is no longer between the state and individuals, but between the 
state and religious communities. The public discourse is no longer that of party pol­
itics based on ideology and class, but on communal parties based on religion, ethnic­
ity, and caste.\textsuperscript{17} This has led to the resurgence of Hindu and Muslim fundamentalisms.

Hindutva has particular appeal to the multitudes of Indians caught between their 
traditional past and the forces of modernity and globalization. It is a local reaction 
that provides many Indians a familiar “home” in the midst of a strange new world that 
provides them with little meaning and security. On the other hand, Hindutva runs 
against the current of globalism and its global communication, electronic market, and 
democratic secularism (Friedman 1999). The BJP, however, is caught between these 
two forces—to mobilize Indians with their own sense of identity or to participate as 
a nation in the global world. This tension is seen in the politicking for the recent elec­
tions. In a recent editorial, the \textit{Deccan Chronicle Online} (14 June 1999) noted that 
the BJP is doing all it can to remain in power, and, to do so, it must win the support 
of the Dalits and the Muslims. Consequently, it is rapidly discarding the original ide­
ological framework that underlies Hindutva.
Hindus of the Diaspora

Over the past centuries, Indians have moved outside the subcontinent. By the third century, Indians were trading with Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, and other parts of East Africa. In the eleventh century, the Cholas (Tamil princes) conquered the great Indonesian empire of Sri Vijaya and established outposts of Hinduism in Bali and other parts of Indonesia. Following the close of the slave trade, plantation owners (sugar, tea, and coffee) and public works contractors (railroads, roads, harbors, and jails) around the world needed a new source of cheap labor. They found it in India in the indentured system that replaced slavery. Starting in the early nineteenth century and continuing up to the 1920s, tens of thousands of Indians were transported to British colonies and protectorates, including Fiji, Malaya, Mauritius, Ceylon, East African Protectorate (Kenya), Rhodesia, Natal, Cape Colony, Transvaal, and the West Indies (Jamaica, Trinidad, Martinique, and British Guiana), and settled in Indian labor colonies. Those who volunteered to go were promised a livelihood, the prospect of getting rich in five to ten years, and passage back to India. The indentured labor system, however, kept them poor, and few ever returned to India. After World War II, many professionals and businesspeople found new opportunities in Britain, Canada, Australia, and the United States. An estimated six to seven million Indians now live outside India (see Figure 3).

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Figure 3. Hindus around the World (World Almanac 1999:684, 689)

Hindus of the diaspora brought their religion with them. Hindu temples are common in Fiji, Trinidad, South Africa, Kenya, Surinam, Brazil, Colombia, Australia, and other countries where Indian immigrants have settled. In the past two decades, temples have been built in North America and Europe. Today almost every major city in the United States and Canada boasts a temple, large or small. Since 1985, these have become important centers for pilgrimage for American Hindus. Tirthayatras in cars or planes from one to the next across the country (Tweed and Prothero 1999:293) are organized by the Council of Hindu Temples of North America.

In 1979, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, from Sri Lanka and head of a Hawaiian monastic community, started Hinduism Today, a magazine created to strengthen Hindu spirituality in the West. Today it is published in seven editions around the world, including one for North America. Hindi mythological films and videos are part of the mass consumer market, and sadhus run summer camps in the United States and Great Britain.
Hindu Mission to the West

In 1893, Hinduism crashed on Western shores as a viable religion for the West when Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), a Hindu mystic, made a lasting impression on the people attending the World’s Parliament of Religions in Chicago, Illinois, by showing the reasonableness of Hinduism to Americans. The New York Herald wrote, “he is undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions. After hearing him, we felt how foolish it is to send Missionaries to his learned nation” (Zachariah 1994:78). Vivekananda preached Advaita Vedanta, a monistic form of Hinduism, which affirms the oneness of Brahman (God) and Atman (Self), that all religions lead to God and salvation, and that there can be no good without evil or evil without good. He called it sin to call a person a sinner. He founded the Ramakrishna Mission in 1897 and was the first Hindu missionary to America. In 1899 he established the Vedanta Society in New York to attract American adherents through jnana yoga and bhakti yoga, which would become the rallying cry for generations of American Vendantists to come.

Swami Paramahansa Yogananda’s Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF) was the most influential Hindu movement in United States before World War II. Yogananda came to the United States in 1920 and lectured widely. He left an estimated 150,000 devotees in 150 centers. Other gurus to the West include Swami A. C. Bhaktivedanta (1896-1977) and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON or Hari Krishnas); Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and Transcendental Meditation; Bhagawan Sri Rajanesh and spiritual communalism; Baba Ram Dass (the Bostonian psychologist Richard Alpert), the advocate of LSD and “tuning in, turning on and dropping out”; Swami Muktananda (died 1982), prophet of yoga, Guru Mahraj Ji and the Divine Light Mission (284 centers in the United States); and Satya Sai Baba, the red-robed Hindu guru (Chandler 1988).

Today the influence of Hinduism on the West is less obvious and esoteric. Its message is now mainstream in many bookstores and in New Age movements that teach the use of yoga and Transcendental Meditation, touch therapy based on concepts of chakras and energy flows in the body, and tantric eroticism. Above all, Hindu thought plays a central role in challenging the Christian claim that Christ is the only way to salvation.

Missiological Issues

What implications does the changing face of Hinduism have for Christian missions? How should we respond to the growth and resurgent vitality of Hinduism both in India and around the world and its influence on postmodern Western worldviews? Here we can only sketch some broad issues that Christian churches and missions must consider.

Mission in India

What is the Christian mission to India? The reality that must be central to our thinking is the fact that we, the church, are in India. This church struggles with poverty, divisions, and the legacies of colonialism, but it is alive and growing. Two missiological issues in particular relate to this church.

First, the church in India is being persecuted for its faithfulness and witness. Our mission as Christians and as the global church is to stand with Indian Christians in
their suffering at the hand of fundamentalist Hindus and Muslims. We must be more faithful in our prayers for our brothers and sisters, many of them new believers, and let them know that they are not alone. We must make the world aware of their persecution. In a global world, public information is a powerful force in opposing injustice and suffering. We, in the West, must also learn from the church in India, for we lack a theology of persecution, suffering, and the cross, a theology written deeply in the life of the early church.

We must stand with the Indian church leaders as they develop a Christian response to persecution. Indian church leaders point out that from a spiritual perspective, the decisive thing is not what happens to Christians, but how we respond to it. Persecution is an opportunity for the church to reflect on the implications of Jesus’ teaching that we love our enemies. As the local and global church, we must minister to the traumatized victims and recognize that they are the vanguard of Christian presence in India. We must confront the aggressors with the nature and implications of what they are doing and open their eyes to what they are becoming, seeking to bring them to repentance and Christian faith. We are to be meek but not mute. It is as a victim that Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” It is easy for those living in comfort and security to say this, but we must learn from our persecuted brothers and sisters the theology of suffering and the cross. The church in India must also define Christian spirituality in the Indian context. Herbert Hoefer writes, “Spiritual authenticity is the critical issue in the Indian mentality. It’s the issue that lies behind the guru-principle in Hinduism. It is also one of the dissatisfactions with the Western style of training and appointing spiritual leaders for a congregation” (1999:36). In a land that highly values ahimsa, or nonviolence, the Christian response of love and compassion has been a powerful message to many observing the scene.

Second, we must join the church as it develops a meaningful response to Hindutva. It is important that Indians see Christianity in India as truly Indian, not foreign. Indian Christians must model what it means to be citizens in a pluralistic state, showing that they are good citizens who contribute much to India by upholding healthy standards in public life, defending the marginal, the weak, and the powerless.

Third, we must not forget that the central task of evangelizing India is not complete (see Figure 4). There are many regions where the gospel has not been presented intelligibly enough for people to make a meaningful response. We must not come with a sense of Western superiority. We are sinners pointing others to the way of salvation. It is equally colonial to make the decision not to share what we believe to be God’s great news of eternal salvation for fear of being accused of imperialism. It is important that the people themselves make such important decisions. Moreover, truth is never arrogant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>% of World Pop.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>203,033,300</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>473,823,000</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mid-1999</td>
<td>774,080,000</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>786,532,000</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2025</td>
<td>1,020,666,000</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. Growth of Hinduism (Barrett and Johnson 1999:25)
The good news is that the church in India is rapidly gaining a vision of mission. India, today, sends the second largest number of missionaries per country. Many of these go from the South and the North East Frontier to North and Central India. Indian missionaries cannot carry out the full task, but global missionaries must work together with the Indian churches in ministering in India.

Two groups, in particular, are especially responsive to the gospel, tribal societies and the Dalits. Both are marginalized and oppressed by the dominant Hindu society. We must continue ministry among them. The gospel must also be preached to people in the caste system. In the past decade, there has been a growing response among them. Despite persecution and opposition, bearing witness to Christ in India remains the central task of the local and global church.

Mission in the Indian Diaspora

In focusing on Hinduism in India, we often lose sight of the millions of Hindus of the diaspora. They, too, need to hear the gospel, and they are often more open to receive it. For many of them, Hinduism is more a cultural identity than a religious allegiance. Here a partnership between the global church and the Indian church can shape mission outreach that is seen as truly Indian, and not made in the West.

Hindus of the diaspora are not a monolithic group. Those in Bangladesh and Pakistan live in different sociocultural and historical worlds. So too do those living in Nepal, Malaysia, Guyana, Surinam, Sri Lanka, the East Indies, West Africa, Fiji, Europe, and North America. The Christian mission to each of these must be carried out with care and sensitivity.

Mission to the Church in North America and Europe

Finally, we must recognize the impact of Hinduism on the West. Most of our church leaders are little aware of the challenges revitalized Hinduism poses in their communities. Today the post-modern West is increasingly drawing on the Hindu worldview in its reaction to scientism and materialistic reductionism. Hindu beliefs and practices are no longer seen as esoteric and foreign. They have become mainstream in Western business, medicine, entertainment, and sports (Chandler 1988). While maintaining its emphasis on Christian mission around the world, the church in the West must define itself in a pluralistic world, lest it gain the world but lose its own soul.

The church is to live and to proclaim the gospel boldly until the end of this age. In each time and place, it must discern how best to communicate that good news, but the joy of participating in Christ’s mission to the world remains its vision and hope.

Notes

1. In 1984, the Vishva Hindu Parishad (World Council of Hindus) issued a resolution for the “liberation” of three temple sites in north India, at Mathra, Varanasi, and Ayodhya, because (1) these were historical sites in religious life (Ayodhya, the birthplace of Rama), (2) ancient Hindu temples stood there, and (3) Muslims under the Mughals destroyed the temples and built mosques on the foundations. The event at Ayodhya was preceded by a Ratha Yatra, or religious pilgrimage, that went from Somnath to Mumbai, Hyderabad, Nagpur, Indore, Udaipur, Delhi, Lucknow, and Ayodhya.

2. For an excellent analysis of various definitions of “Hinduism,” see Frykenberg (1993).
The Brahmanical (Sanskrit) name for this ranked ordering, varnashramadharma, was devised so long ago that its roots go back at to the Manu Smriti (Dharma Shasta), if not to the Vedas themselves. This worldview came to be regarded as virtually synonymous with sanatana dharma (Eternal Religion based on Cosmic Law), which has no founder, no universal doctrinal creed, and no particular institutional structure. Rather, it is a way of life and a highly developed religious worldview.

These movements include Buddhism led by Gautama Siddhartha, anti-Brahman Adi-Dravida (Tamilnadu), Adivasi (“Aboriginal People”), Islam, Sikhism, Christianity, and Marxism.

India as a nation was formed by British imperialism without any reference to Indian civilization. It was never what it is today in a geographical, demographic, or cultural sense (Ludden 1996:6).

The Brahmo Samaj was founded in 1828 by Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833), sometimes called the Father of Modern India. He was influenced by Christianity, particularly by Unitarians, and rejected idolatry, caste, and transmigration.

India’s Supreme Court has recognized Neo-Hinduism as the legal representative of Hinduism and has defined it as the acknowledgment that the Vedas are the Hindu scriptures, that there are different ways to salvation, and that there are many gods to be worshiped.

Pilgrimage or tirthayatra is an ancient Indian tradition. Hsuan-tsang who traveled in India from A.D. 629 to 645, Alberuni in his famous Kitab-ul-Hind written about A.D. 1030, and Abut Fzl in Ain-I-Akbari, written in A.D. 1593—all conceded the importance of pilgrimage in Hindu tradition. The Tirthayatra in the Mahabharata mentions 270 tirthas—sacred rivers, mountains, forests, and shrines where gods dwell and where seekers go to be purified. The journeys were long and arduous, requiring strength, stamina, and austerities of personal purification—fasting, sleeping on the floor, sexual abstinence, avoidance of the use of vehicles, and walking barefoot.

The vision of Hindu nationalism emerged following the subjugation of the Hindus by the Mugals and later by a small number of British rulers. Hindu nationalist thinkers from the second half of the nineteenth century tried to understand the inherent political weakness of Hinduism and the fragmentation of the Hindu community. They were impressed by the success of Islam and Christianity to build powerful empires, so they concluded that Hinduism had to serve the cause of nationalism in the Indian context. They were impressed by the coherence of the Muslim and Christian communities, which is the reason for both their unity and their capacity for effective mobilization, and the universal claims of these religions, which stood in contrast to the multiplicity of caste religions in India.

Savarkar based his vision of Hindutva on the Italian political theorist Giuseppe Mazzini (1807-1882) and on Hitler’s view that race is the most important ingredient of a nation (Mangalwadi 1997:284).

The BJP was formerly the Jana Sangh, founded in 1951. The BJP and its allied Hindu organizations—the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Bajrang Dal (the VHP youth organization), Hindu Mahasabha, and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS, founded in 1925)—together are called the Sangh Parivar (brotherhood of interconnected Hindu nationalist groups affiliated with the RSS). These allied organizations represent the effort by the Hindu nation to form a Hindu nation-state based on India’s native culture. The Sangh promotes Hindu majoritarianism, cultural nationalism, and national “unity in diversity” based on its own definitions of India’s Hindu cultural heritage. It blames communalism on minority groups not willing to work under the rule of Hindu culture. M.S. Golwalkar, former head of RSS, declares Muslims, Christians, and Communists (in that order) the major enemies of India and promises they will not be citizens of a Hindu India (Klostermaer 1989:406).

The fact that the BJP is essentially an upper-caste backlash to retain power led to a dilemma when the Backward Classes Commission headed by Bindeshwari Prasad Mandal rec-
ommended stronger affirmative action for the so-called Other Backward Classes. The BJP formally supported the Mandal reforms at the national level, but undermined them at the local level, particularly in places where it relied on upper-caste support (Basu and Subrahmanyan 1996:18).

13. The BJP lost a vote of confidence in May 1999. Elections were scheduled for September. The outcome of the elections in October 1999 enabled the BJP to regain power. The chief battle is between the BJP, which advocates Hindu nationalism, and Congress, which advocates a secular democratic state.

14. This has led in South India to the accusation that Hindutva is the reestablishment of the colonial dominance of the Aryan Brahmanical North over the Dravidian South, and to anti-Hindu, anti-Hindi political movements, such as DMK and Telugu Desham.

15. Deendayal Upadhyaya, leader of the Bharatiya Jan Sang in the 1950s and 1960s, argued that dharma cannot be equated with religion, and the Hindus have never supported the idea of a modern secular state. Hindu kings did not use their power to propagate any particular religion. Rather, they were expected to obey only one dharma, Raja Dharma, namely, to protect the rights of all citizens in their pluralistic societies. Both modern secular politicians and the BJP affirm pluralism. They differ on how to maintain justice in a pluralistic society. Secularists argue that religion must be relegated to the private sphere because it is disruptive. Advocates of Hindutva argue that this renders all religions as meaningless and that it provides no moral basis on which to build a just society.

16. The number of attacks on Christians reported to police rose from 24 in 1997 to 86 in 1998. Valson Thampu notes that Christians have been targeted because they are fewer in number and less vocal than Muslims and because they are known for being peace loving, which is often mistaken for cowardice.

17. This shift began with the institution of reserved seats for Scheduled castes and other minority communities. It was the basis on which the Mandal Commission recommended the use of communalism as the basis for making demands on government. It is not so much that communal parties have become institutionalized, but that community identity is the basis for high-level political activities.

18. In many cases, state-owned Christian churches in England have been declared “redundant” and have been turned over to Hindu communities for use as Hindu temples.

19. Muktananda influenced such notables as Werner Erhard, Jerry Brown, John Denver, Diana Ross, and Marsha Mason and made yoga meditation accessible to and fun for the Hollywood set.

20. In Hinduism there is no sharp line between sacred and secular. It should not surprise us that Swami Beyandonanda, sometimes referred to as “the yogi from Muskogee,” specializes in tantra yoga, speed suffering, and healing cars through autosuggestion. He is said to be a cross between Ram Dass and Häagen-Dazs. He publishes a column in the Sacramento Guide. Once a writer asked, “Dear Swami: What are your thoughts on reincarnation?” He answered, “Dear Ken-Adi: I am a firm believer in reincarnation. I subscribe to the born again Krishna credo, ‘You only go around 60 million times—so grab the gusto.’ ”

21. The most vigorous leadership in countering the persecution of Christians has come from John Dayal, a Catholic and the convener of the United Christian Forum for Human Rights. Recently the National Forum for Reconciliation, Religious Liberty, and Social Justice was organized under the umbrella of the Evangelical Fellowship of India.

22. These are truly cross-cultural missionaries. The European languages are closer to the languages of North India than to those of South India.
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Announcement of Tenure Track Position in Missiology

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