Unity and Plurality: Hinduism and the Religions of India in Early European Scholarship

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A body of recent scholarship assumes that because European writers were constrained by a certain notion of what a religion is, they imposed an artificial conceptual unity on the diverse religions they encountered in India. But during the earlier phases of European contact with India, 'religion' had not yet fully undergone the process of reification first analysed by Wilfred Cantwell Smith. A study of descriptions of Indian religions from the sixteenth to the early eighteenth century in the works of Roberto Nobili, Henry Lord, Abraham Roger and Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg demonstrates that there was no simple and straightforward imposition of unity on these religions. The term 'religion' was used, along with others such as 'sect' and 'nation', to analyse the plurality of religious affiliation in India in a manner that was not divorced from Indian self-representations. While the idea of a unified religion, characterised by canonical texts, a common deity and doctrinal uniformity, doubtless played a role in later nineteenth-century constructions of Hinduism, this very idea is presupposed in current critiques of such constructions which deny that Hinduism is a religion on the basis that it lacks the qualities of a religion defined in this way. © 2001 Academic Press

The term 'Hinduism' is . . . a particularly false conception, one that is conspicuously incompatible with any adequate understanding of the religious outlook of Hindus. Even the term 'Hindu' was unknown to the classical Hindus. 'Hinduism' as a concept they certainly did not have. . . . There are Hindus, but there is no Hinduism. (Smith 1991, pp. 63, 65)

Hinduism does not merely fail to be a religion; it is not even a meaningful unit of discourse. (Staal 1989, p. 397)

The creation of Hinduism antedates that of Buddhism. By this, I do not imply that Hinduism existed in India before Buddhism came into being—this claim, after all, is a standard text-book trivium—but that the Europeans created Buddhism after they had created Hinduism. (Balagangadhara 1994, p. 138)

[T]here has never been any one religion—nor even one system of religions—to which the term 'Hindu' can accurately be applied. No one so-called religion, moreover, can lay exclusive claim to or be defined by the term 'Hinduism'. The very notion of the existence of any single religious community by this name one may further argue, has been falsely conceived. (Frykenberg, 1997, p. 82)

In recent scholarship on Indian religions there has emerged a consensus on the inadequacy of the concept 'Hinduism'.[1] 'Hinduism' is assumed by contemporary scholars to be a Western concept, one not found among those who are supposed to adhere to the religion it designates, which religion in fact does not exist, or at least did not exist prior to its invention by European scholars. None of these claims will be challenged here.[2] Rather, it will be accepted that, like the term 'religion', Hinduism 'is solely the creation of the scholar's study' (Smith 1982, p. xi), 'a conceptual tool . . . not to be confused with an ontological category actually existing in reality' (McCutcheon 1997, p. viii). The scholarly consensus extends to the account given of the process by which this concept emerged. It is this account that will be challenged here, including the idea that it first emerged in the colonialist context of the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century and that Jewish and Christian preconceptions about the nature of

religion resulted in a monolithic and distorting reification of Indian religious beliefs and practices.[3]

Richard King's recent account of what he calls 'the modern myth of "Hinduism" ' (see King 1999, pp. 96–117) is representative of the scholarly consensus identified here. King writes that ' "Hindu" in fact only came into provenance among Westerners in the eighteenth century. Previously, the predominant Christian perspective amongst Europeans classified Indian religion under the all-inclusive rubric of Heathenism. On this view there were four major religious groups, Jews, Christians, Mahometans (i.e. Muslims) and Heathens' (King 1999, p. 99; cf. Balagangadhara 1994, p. 111). Although there were references in the eighteenth century to 'the religion of the Gentoos', the term 'Gentoo', like other terms, 'functioned as an alternative to "Heathen" ' (King 1999, p. 100) and therefore did not depart from the prevailing classification of heathenism as one of the four religions of the world. It is not, King argues, 'until the nineteenth century proper that the term "Hinduism" became used as a signifier of a unified, all-embracing and independent religious entity in both Western and Indian circles' (King 1999, p. 100).[4] According to King, 'the key to the West's *initial* postulation of the unity of "Hinduism" derives from the Judaeo–Christian presuppositions of the Orientalists and missionaries' and especially their conviction 'that distinctive religions could not coexist without frequent antagonism' and that the 'relatively peaceful coexistence of the various Hindu movements [could not] be explained without some sense of religious unity' (King 1999, p. 105 [italics added]).

King 'highlights two ways in which Western colonisation has contributed to the modern construction of "Hinduism": first by locating the core of Indian religiosity in certain Sanskrit texts (the textualisation of Indian religion), and second by an implicit (and sometimes explicit) tendency to define Indian religion in terms of a normative paradigm of religion based upon contemporary Western understandings of the Judaeo–Christian traditions' (King 1999, p. 101). While both of these factors influenced the later development of the concept of Hinduism, their role in the first emergence of the concept is less significant. For European writers from the sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century, the paradigm of religion identified by King had yet to become normative, and we ought not to assume that it constrained their understanding of Hinduism.[5] Rather, the earliest modern European writers on Hinduism were fully cognisant of religious diversity in India, and the idea of Hinduism as a pan-Indian religion—an idea that does not begin to emerge until the early eighteenth century—owes more to Indian self-representations and the evolving European conceptual grasp of India as a coherent geographical entity than to the imposition of Jewish or Christian presuppositions about the nature of religion.

For these reasons it is significant that most other accounts of the European invention of Hinduism begin, as King's does, in the late eighteenth century, making only passing references to what went before. Brian K. Smith writes that 'As a discrete Indic religion among others . . . "Hinduism" was probably first imagined by the British in the early part of the nineteenth century to describe (and create and control) an enormously complex configuration of people and their traditions found in the South Asian subcontinent' (Smith 1987, p. 35). Robert Frykenberg attributes the 'newly-coined concept of Hinduism' to 'scholars in the Enlightenment from Nathaniel Brassey Halhed and William Jones . . . to Max Müller' (Frykenberg 1997, p. 86). Ronald Inden locates the invention of Hinduism in nineteenth-century European works (see Inden 1990, p. 86), and his account makes no reference to earlier sources. Inden spells out what Smith alludes to in saying that 'Hinduism' was imagined in part in order to control

South Asians: 'the formation of Indological discourse made it possible' for 'European scholars, traders, and administrators to appropriate the power of Indians (not only the ''masses'', but also the ''elite'') to act for themselves' (Inden 1986, p. 403). Although P. J. Marshall notes that 'English writers in the second half of the eighteenth century were heirs to over two hundred years of attempts by Europeans to interpret Hinduism' (Marshall 1970, p. 29), he tends to project eighteenth-century views of Hinduism onto earlier accounts. For example, of the authors[6] of the texts he excerpts, he states that 'As Europeans have always tended to do, they created Hinduism in their own image' (Marshall 1970, p. 43). He does not attend to the earlier works, noting that 'published accounts of India [which] appeared in Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries . . . do not seem to have received very much public notice' (Marshall 1970, p. 2). Likewise, of the twenty-one essays in a recent collection entitled *Representing Hinduism* (Dalmia and Stietencron 1995), only three discuss representations prior to the nineteenth century, only two of those are concerned with European representations, and one of these two is primarily concerned with representations of caste rather than of Hinduism as such (see Dharampal-Frick 1995). The remaining essay is by Heinrich von Stietencron (1995), one of several in which he has outlined the origin of the concept of 'Hinduism'.[7]

Stietencron departs somewhat from the scholarly consensus which locates the emergence of the idea of Hinduism as a unitary religion in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, for he stresses the dependence of the concept on earlier European visions of the religions of humanity. He is right to consider these earlier works. I will argue that it is in these works, particularly those from the first decades of the eighteenth century, that something like the modern concept of Hinduism first emerges. However, while Inden, Marshall and others tend, by ignoring them, to assimilate seventeenth- and early-eighteenth century European accounts of Hinduism to later works, and hence also to the colonial context in which those later works were produced, Stietencron comprehensively assimilates the concept of Hinduism in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writers to the theological concept of heathenism of earlier centuries. He argues that 'although the term ''Hinduism'' came into common use as late as the nineteenth century, the underlying concept of a unity of Indian religion was already in existence in the West before that religion was actually encountered by European missionaries and traders. . . . The concept . . . was present in Europe throughout the Middle Ages and it was totally independent of any concrete knowledge about India' (Stietencron 1995, p. 72). The concept to which Stietencron refers is 'heathenism' in the fourfold classification which King mentions: 'European missionaries and traders who settled down on the shores of India from 1598 [*sic*] onwards . . . knew for certain that the entire population of the world was divided into four major religious systems or laws, namely, *lex christiana*, *les iudaica, lex mahometana* and *lex gentilium*, i.e. the religious norms and doctrines of the Christians, the Jews, the Moslem and the heathen' (Stietencron 1995, pp. 73–4). From the early missionaries' view of the religion of Indian heathens came the idea that it was *one* single Hindu religion with which one had to do. The later provision of the name Hinduism, which first gave it a conceptual identity, merely cemented what had long been the most important premise of scholarly research on Indian religions (see Stietencron 1988, p. 149). Like King, Stietencron argues that since early European writers on Hinduism

> were used to the Christian tradition of an absolute claim for only one truth, of a
> powerful church dominating society, and consequently of fierce religious and social

> confrontation with members of other creeds, they were *unable* even to conceive of such religious liberality as would give members of the same society the freedom, by individual choice, to practice the religion they like. (Stietencron 1997, p. 37 [italics added])

The conviction of King and Stietencron that Christian presuppositions made it impossible for European writers to perceive religious plurality in India appears to blind them to the places where, as will be shown, they describe and analyse such plurality.

Stietencron argues that the dominance of the idea of a single unified heathen religion in India meant that 'striking differences within this heathen religion had to be treated as sectarian differences. There was no other possibility. For that they could be treated as different ''religions'' was precluded in advance by the general conception of the four religions of humankind' (Stietencron 1988, pp. 127–8). Of course, there was in principle another possibility, namely, that the general conception of the four religions of humankind might be abandoned. Although Stietencron concedes that '[s]ome of the early missionaries, like Roberto Nobili, were interested in the language and culture of the Indian heathen', he insists that

> they knew for certain that what they saw was one of the hitherto unknown sects of heathendom, and whatever differences they could gradually detect within this sect were attributed to further splitting up into subsects. It never occurred to them that they might have to do with different faiths because their conceptual framework regarding the religions of this world had no room for any new creed other than the superstitious creed of the followers of Satan; and the apparent contradictions within this world–wide system of the heathen only confirmed their belief that Satan had created the baffling variety of superstitious cults precisely in order to confuse and enslave these poor, ill–guided people in the snares of delusion. As late as the first quarter of the eighteenth century when Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg wrote his famous book on the Malabarian heathendom this was still the world view of European missionaries. (Stietencron 1995, pp. 74–5)

Stietencron's choice of Nobili and Ziegenbalg as exemplars of missionaries compelled by the fourfold classification to treat Hinduism as a single religion is particularly interesting. A close examination of Nobili's writings on Hinduism will demonstrate that not all early European missionaries treated Hinduism as a single religion. And it is in the works of Ziegenbalg that a sense of Hinduism as a single, pan–Indian religion begins to emerge—not on the basis of a preconceived idea of Indian heathenism but from attention to the ways in which Indians classified their own traditions. The idea of Hinduism as a unified tradition emerges not from the idea of heathenism within the fourfold classification but from engagement with Indians' own ideas of their religious adherence.

Roberto Nobili: 'hi populi unum habeant civilem cultum, religionem vero multiplicem'

Nobili's works on Hinduism[8] were not written to inform Europe about the religions of India, except insofar as such knowledge served the real purpose of these works, which was to justify the practice of 'accommodation' or 'adaptation' in the Madurai mission which he had founded (or re–founded) in 1606. Nobili, following to some extent the principles of the Jesuit mission in China of Matteo Ricci, allowed Brahman converts to continue in certain practices which, he argued, were only signs of 'a certain social and political rank' and were not implicated in 'idolatry' (Rajamanickam 1971, p. 103).[9] The

denunciation of these practices by his fellow Jesuit, Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso, provoked the so-called 'Malabar rites' controversy.[10] Nobili's position in the controversy presupposed that 'there is a norm by which we can distinguish between social actions and the purely religious' (*'quod regulam, qua dignosci debent, quae sint apud hos Indos politica et quae sacra'* [Rajamanickam 1971, pp. 154–5]). Nobili was thus already concerned with questions of definition in regard to Indian or Hindu religious belief and practice. In the course of his argument in the *Narratio Fundamentorum* (1619), his most important treatise in defence of his position, he develops an explicit account of three kinds of religious differences—itself enough to refute the view that all early European missionaries in India treated Hinduism as a single religion.

The context is Nobili's third reason (of twelve) for the proposition that 'the thread and the tuft are social, not religious, insignia' (*'Lineam et Curuminum non inter superstitiosa, sed inter politica esse'* [Rajamanickam 1971, pp. 86–7]):

> There are among these gentiles, several sects, which entirely disagree with one another in the question of religion and adoration of the divinity. Now when these sects are so antagonistic to one another they cannot possibly have one common religious emblem. Therefore the string and tuft, which are used by all these sects in common, cannot be the emblem of any of those sects in particular. (Rajamanickam 1971, p. 93)

Nobili considers an objection of 'a certain gentleman', Fr Andrea Buccerio, who had criticised an earlier treatise of Nobili on this subject. Buccerio 'tried to upset this argument, saying: these gentile sects, although contrary to one another, agree in one thing, and thus may have a common sign. If you ask: in what do they agree? He answers: in that they all worship, not the true God, but the idols; hence, the string is the badge of idols in common' (Rajamanickam 1971, p. 93). Nobili states that 'this way of arguing is no answer' to his initial claim, giving four reasons, the last of which is that

> an emblem which various sects use to signify their religious tenets serves also, morally speaking, to distinguish these sects from one another. I say morally speaking, because, though it is physically possible, it is not actually done. To take an example: will the Christians, the Jews and the Turks ever choose a common emblem to signify that they all believe in one God? But whatever it will be elsewhere, among our gentiles, it is inconceivable; for their sects are so opposed to one another, that one sect will refuse to use a word, which perfectly applies to its divinity, if it is already used by another sect. . . . These gentile sects are so opposed to one another that it is impossible for them to agree together even in matters so light as words, even though these words are applicable to this or that god. If so, what reason have you to believe that these sects will agree in having one common emblem? The conclusion is inevitable, that the string is not a religious emblem, for if it were, it would not be worn by sects so opposed to one another. (Rajamanickam 1971, p. 95)

In expounding his point, Nobili sets out an explicit account of three kinds of religious differences, identifying the kind of differences found among religions in India as the most fundamental of these:

> In this connection let me call to mind what doctors are wont to teach. Three kinds of differences exist. The first is when, in one and the same sect, various modes of life may be found. Thus we have in the Christian religion various Religious families [*in una Christiana religione variae Religiosorum virorum familiae*]; of course these can use a common symbol of their faith, because they are of one faith [*protestativum propter unitatem fidei*]. The second is when a sect differs from another in such a way that, although they differ in some essential point, they can still use the same denomination. Thus heretics differ from Catholics, yet they are called by the same name Christian

[*huiusmodi est oppugnantia haereticorum cum Christiana et catholica religione, quibus tamen remanet commune nomen Christianum*] and use the same Christian symbols, as baptism, the cross, etc. The third is when each sect adores a god peculiar to itself. Now, it is concerning this last case that I said: it is morally impossible that these sects agree in a common religious symbol. For every act of worship is addressed to a determinate god [*nam cum religionis actus versetur circa Deum determinatum*]; but if the god is indeterminate, that is, if it is not this or that god in particular, the act of worship will also be indeterminate, and consequently there cannot be any one definite religious emblem. *Now, it is this last kind of difference which is to be found among the sects of the people here* [*Atque haec contrarietas in sectis huius gentis reperitur*—i.e. not like Christian religious families or even heretical sects]. Therefore the strong cannot possibly be a symbol of divinity common to all. (Rajamanickam 1971, pp. 95–7 [italics added])

When Nobili writes that 'these people follow one common way of life, but many religions',[11] it is thus clear that he means that among Hindus who use the thread and tuft there are religious differences which go beyond the religious differences between Catholics and other Christians, and even beyond that between 'the Christians, the Jews and the Turks [who] . . . all believe in one God' (Rajamanickam 1971, p. 95).[12] Nobili certainly perceives similarities among the Hindus,[13] but the requirements of his theological argument on the Malabar rites lead him to insist on the fundamental nature of their religious differences.[14] Ironically, then, insofar as his theological preconceptions influenced his view of Hinduism, they, far from leading him to conceive of Hinduism as a single religion divided into different sects, had in his case precisely the opposite effect. Of course, his view of the Hindus as adhering to a number of different religions emerges not only from his theological preconceptions but also from his direct engagement with members of the religions he identified.

Although Nobili continues to use the term 'sect' to refer to different religious groups, it is clear that for him this term does not indicate their participation in a single overarching religion which can be signified by a single common emblem. Rather, he does not appear to have drawn the rigid distinction between religion and sect implied in Stietencron's account of his work. The same is true of other writers of this period who, like Nobili, refer to a plurality of religions in India. The Chaplain to the English East India Company at Surat in the 1620s, Henry Lord, refers both to 'the sect of the Banians' and to 'the Banian religion', as well as to the 'sect' and 'the religion of the Parsses'. Far from treating Indian heathenism as a single monolithic religion, Lord distinguishes different religions and groups within religions at every level.[15] In general, European authors prior to the eighteenth century treat Indian religion on a regional basis—either, within the sequential narrative of travel accounts in which the author proceeds from place to place, describing religious beliefs and practices along with other noteworthy features of the physical and cultural landscape, or, as in the works of writers such as Lord and the Dutch Chaplain Abraham Roger, describing the religion of a particular region in which they spent an extended period of time. Thus the subtitle of Roger's 1651 work, *De Open-Deure tot het Verborgen Heydendom*, offers a description of 'the life and manners, the religion and divine service of the Bramins who dwell on the Coromandel coast and the surrounding country', that is, the area in which he lived from 1632 to 1642.[16] Although the term 'religion' (*Religie*) appears in the subtitle of the posthumously published work, Roger rarely uses this term or its derivative *religieus*. Instead, he uses *Gods-dienst* and *Godsdienstigh*.[17] In the first half of the seventeenth century *Gods-dienst* was to some extent synonymous with *Religie*, but *Religie* itself had not yet fully acquired the meaning that 'religion' and its equivalents have today. While the *De Veritate Religionis Christianae* (1627) of Hugo de Groot (Grotius) had appeared in

an earlier, poetic form as *Bewys van den Waren Godsdienst is ses Boecken gestelt* (1622), Wilfred Cantwell Smith comments that even in the prose, Latin version, the transition to the modern sense of religion 'is not yet complete: [de Groot's] position set forth under that title is about three-quarters of the way or more along a road leading from "the genuineness of Christian religiousness" to "the truth of the Christian religion" ' (Smith 1991, p. 39). There is therefore reason to believe that when Roger, who left Holland in 1630, speaks of 'den Gods-dienst der Bramines', we should not read into his work a more reified sense of 'religion'.[18] Roger's work demonstrates that, far from the religious beliefs and practices of India being forced into a preconceived mould of an objectified heathen 'religion', the concept 'religion', and the concept which will later be named 'Hinduism', were developing in tandem in the seventeenth century.

A further reason that we find no real conceptual grasp of Hinduism as a single, pan-Indian religion prior to the eighteenth century is that writers on Hinduism in this period have no concept of India in anything like its modern sense. Of the European conception of India as a geographical entity, Matthew Edney notes that prior to the eighteenth century European maps framed India in three distinct ways:

> Beginning in the early 1500s, general maps showed the traditional region of the Indies, from the Indus to Indochina. The subcontinent was, of course, a prominent feature of those maps, but it was not their focus. Later, in the sixteenth century, Europeans began to produce maps that framed only the peninsula south of the river Krishna, the area of their principal involvement. The third framing developed early in the seventeenth century and focused on the polity of the Mughal empire. These maps emphasised the seat of Mughal power in the northern plains. They also included the Mughal territories west of the Indus: the Punjab, the Hindu Kush, and on occasion Afghanistan. They omitted the peninsula. (Edney 1997, pp. 4–5)

Maps which merged the latter two regional framings to produce a map of 'the entire region usually considered to be India *per se*' began to appear in the first decades of the eighteenth century. Edney reproduces 'one of the first maps to show all of South Asia in its modern conception', published in 1717 (Edney 1997, pp. 7–8). He argues, however, that it was only 'during the 1760s and the 1770s that the two regional framings completely merged to create a conception of India as a region. . . . It is in [James Rennell's] highly influential maps that we find the establishment of India as a meaningful, if still ambiguous, geographical entity' (Edney 1997, p. 9).[19] Likewise it was not until the first decades of the eighteenth century that the idea of a Hinduism as a pan-Indian religion began to emerge in the works of Ziegenbalg and other European authors.[20] As the European conceptual grasp of India as a geographical entity consolidated, so too did the concept of Hinduism. Thus William Robertson, in his account of 'the religious tenets and practices of the Indians' which appears as the appendix to his last work, *An Historical Disquisition concerning the Knowledge which the Ancients had of India* (1791)[21]—itself inspired by his reading of James Rennell's *Memoir*—presents Hinduism as 'the national religion' of India, 'publicly established in all the extensive countries stretching from the Banks of the Indus to Cape Comorin' (Robertson 1791, pp. 321, 302).

Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg: 'Denn es sind unter diesen Heiden zwei Hauptreligionen, nämlich Tschiwéns Religion und Wischtnus Religion: Diese aber sind in viele Religionen zertheilet'

At first sight Ziegenbalg appears to conform to the conventional fourfold classification of the religions of the world. His first major work on Hinduism, the *Malabarisches*

Heidenthum, begins with the assertion that 'all the inhabitants of the whole Earth are divided into four main religions [*Hauptreligionen*], thus there are Jews, Christians, Mahometans and heathens' (Caland 1926, p. 9).[22] The heathens make up the largest of these four main religions, but they 'are however not uniform, rather although they all have one father, namely the Devil, they have nevertheless divided themselves into many different sects. For different gods are worshipped by the African heathens, others by the American heathens, and yet others by the East Indian heathens, [they] are also very much different from one another in their teachings'. Furthermore, the East Indian heathens 'are once again divided into different sects, among which [the sect of] those who are called Malabarians by the Europeans is one of the largest' (Caland 1926, p. 10). This Malabarian heathenism, the subject of Ziegenbalg's book, 'is spread far and wide in India' stretching from Ceylon to Bengal and 'deep within the Mogul realm' (Caland 1926, p. 23). Ziegenbalg's sense of the geographical spread of 'Malabarian heathenism' is clearly a step in the direction of the conception of Hinduism as what King calls 'a unified, all-embracing and independent religious entity' (King 1999, p. 100). When Ziegenbalg adds that 'this whole extensive heathenism is divided into two primary main sects [*Hauptsecten*]', which he identifies as Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism ('Tschiwasámeiam' and 'Wischtnusameiam', i.e. *civacamayam* (Skt. *śivasamaya*) and *viṣṇucamayam* (Skt. *viṣṇusamaya*), he appears to conform precisely to Stietencron's claim that the early missionaries deduced a single heathen religion from the fourfold classification and were unable to conceive of difference within that religion in other than sectarian terms.

The true picture, however, is more complex. Later in *Malabarisches Heidenthum*, Ziegenbalg uses the term *Hauptreligion* to refer to Śaivism and to Vaiṣṇavism (see Caland 1926, p. 26), and in his other major work on Hinduism, the *Genealogie der Malabarischen Götter*, he writes that the Malabarians 'have forged many different *religions*, among which there are in particular two main *religions*: the Sivamatha of the Sivabhaktas and the Vischnumatha of the Vischnubhaktas' (Germann 1867, pp. 34–5 [italics added]). Among the other religions of the Indians, he refers to Jainism and to Buddhism as separate religions. Commenting on a reference to *camaners* in a letter from a Śaivite correspond-ent, the missionary writes that the 'Schámmaner were a nation who, apart from the two main religions mentioned so far, had a separate religion'.[23] In the *Genealogie* Ziegenbalg quotes at length from another of his correspondents, who writes that '[t]here were formerly two nations called Buddhists and Samaners. These had a pernicious religion and were purely evil sects. They blasphemed Viṣṇu's and Śiva's religion and compelled all Malabars to adopt their religion'. The followers of these religions are said by the Vaiṣṇavite author of this letter to have rejected caste and to have blasphemed books on theology. He concludes that 'their religion had no similarity either to our Malabarian, or to the Moorish, or to the Christian religion, but rather was a destruction of all religions'.[24] Elsewhere Ziegenbalg lists Buddhists and Jains along with Mīmāṁsakas, mlecchas and two other groups difficult to identify as the six 'other religious sects' regarded as heterodox by the Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas (see Caland 1926, p. 29). Other letters to the missionaries cited in the *Genealogie* or published in the *Halle Berichte*, a series of reports from the mission, confirm the impression that while Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas extend some degree of mutual recognition, they regard Buddhists and Jains as belonging to entirely separate religions. This, then, is the basis for Ziegenbalg's claim that among the many religions of the Indians, the two *Hauptreligionen* are Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism, while the degree of similarity and mutual recognition between them allows him to treat them as 'sects' of a wider religious entity when he is considering 'Malabarian heathenism' as a whole.

Ziegenbalg's concern in the *Genealogie* is with the relation of the gods, and not of their devotees, to one another. Nevertheless, his analysis of religious adherence is consistent with that of *Malabarisches Heidenthum*, although the focus on the gods in the *Genealogie* leads him to prefer the term 'religion' for Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism and to reserve the term 'sect' for their subdivisions. Thus he remarks of Śaivism that '[t]his religion is divided into different sects' (Germann 1867, p. 35). In one of the annotations to the 'Correspondentz', we find the term religion extended still further and applied to the subsects of Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism: 'There are among these heathens two main-religions [*Hauptreligionen*], namely Śiva's religion and Viṣṇu's religion. These, however, are divided into many *religions*' (Liebau 1998, p. 90 [italics added]). The context here is an equivocal answer to the missionary's question, 'Whether the Malabarian Law constitutes only *one* Religion, or is divided into many sects?' (Liebau 1998, pp. 89f.), examination of which will demonstrate the extent to which Ziegenbalg's reduction of these 'many religions' to two *Hauptreligionen* is based on the perceptions of his Tamil correspondents. Although the writer begins by stating that 'our religion is sub-divided into different sects', of which he enumerates seven, he concludes with the claim that 'the law is not more than one law, but the sects are manifold' (Liebau 1998, pp. 90, 94). Moreover, while seven sects are listed, according to the author of the letter, the first three sects (the *civavētam*, *vīracaivam* and *ciḻāmatakārer*) may all be 'named with one word, *Tscháivamadam* [*caivamatam*, Skt. *Śaivamata*] or *Tscháivakalám* [*caivaku-lam*]' (Liebau 1998, p. 93). Likewise the other four (the *viṣṇuvētam*, *tattuvvatikāraṉ*, *nāmaperumāḻvētam* and the 'Tscháinermadám'[25]) 'all belong to Viṣṇu's religion and are different only in their way of worship' (Liebau 1998, p. 94). Thus the seven mentioned sects[26] are reduced to two main groupings, Śaivite and Vaiṣṇavite. The reduction of the manifold sects to two main religions is also set out explicitly by the missionary annotator of the 'Correspondentz'. Commenting on the first of the seven sects, the missionary writes:

> *Civavētem* is the religion of those who honour Śiva and all the gods who are of Iśvara's family, as the highest gods, in which religion there exist yet many other sects, which the correspondent does not touch upon here. There are among these heathens two main-religions [*Hauptreligionen*], namely Śiva's religion and Viṣṇu's religion. These, however, are divided into many religions. (Liebau 1998, p. 90)

Thus the annotator of the 'Correspondentz' employs the categorial framework of *Heidentum* and the *Genealogie*: the two main religions [*Hauptreligionen*] recognised by the Malabarians are subdivided into groups which may be described either as 'religions' in their own right or as 'sects' of the particular *Hauptreligion* of which they are a part. The 'Malabarische Correspondentz' and the letters from Hindus quoted in the *Genealogie* demonstrate the degree to which Ziegenbalg has derived that framework from his Tamil informants.[27] Not only are Tamils enabled to speak for themselves in print in Europe for the first time,[28] but they also are able to dictate to some extent the terms on which they are represented. The publication of their letters, together with the annotations to them, allows us to observe how the missionary worked with his sources to build up a picture of Indian religions.

Gita Dharampal-Frick characterises Ziegenbalg's 'interchangeable use of the terms "religion" and "sect"' as 'unsystematic' (Dharampal-Frick 1994, p. 359). While it is clear that, like Nobili, Ziegenbalg does not draw a rigid distinction between the terms, nevertheless, when seen in the appropriate context, his use of these terms is to some degree consistent. The object of *Malabarisches Heidenthum*, Ziegenbalg's first major

work, is the 'Malabarian heathenism' and in the title and introductory passages of the work Ziegenbalg treats it as a single religion, divided into two great sects ('Vornehme haupt Secten'). These sects are distinguished from each other by, above all, the gods that are the focus of their worship. When discussing these gods in the *Genealogie*, Ziegenbalg makes his primary unit of analysis the group that takes each god as 'the highest being', i.e., Vaiṣṇavites and Śaivites. While he usually refers to them as 'religions' in their own right, he notes that they are also subdivisions of a larger entity and are themselves divided into groups which he describes as 'sects'. When discussing the subgroups listed by his Tamil correspondent, he acknowledges that in relation to each other the sects of Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism may be treated as religions. Just as writers at this time in Europe might speak of both 'the Catholic religion' or 'the Protestant religion' and 'the Christian religion' (cf. Smith 1991, p. 41), so Ziegenbalg speaks of both 'Viṣṇu's religion' or 'Śiva's religion' and 'Malabarian heathenism'. Dharampal-Frick concludes that Ziegenbalg's 'view of things is not very far from Stietencron's view of the different religious groupings of the sub–continent' (Dharampal-Frick 1994, pp. 359–60). But it is in fact very far indeed from Stietencron's account of early European constructions of Hinduism as emerging from 'the westerners' preconceived notion that it was *one* religion they were dealing with' (Stietencron 1997, p. 37).

Conclusion

The use of the terms 'religion' and 'sect' in Ziegenbalg and other early European writers indicates that we should be wary of reading a highly reified concept of 'religion' into their works. The concept of religion was itself still developing in this period, and not least as a result of the study of Indian religions and the challenges of definition that they posed.[29] It is precisely this process of development in the conception of religion that is ignored by writers like King, who decry the 'tendency to define Indian religion in terms of a normative paradigm of religion based upon contemporary Western understandings of the Judaeo-Christian traditions' (King 1999, p. 101). For King, this normative paradigm includes such familiar elements of Western religions as authoritative texts, an ecclesiastical hierarchy, doctrinal uniformity and above all an exclusivist claim to truth (see King 1999, p. 105). But King and Stietencron deny that Hinduism is a religion in terms of the same normative paradigm that they detect in the writers they criticise. Hinduism fails to be a religion for Stietencron because:

> There is hardly a single important teaching in 'Hinduism' which can be shown to be valid for all Hindus, much less a comprehensive set of teachings. . . . Most important: the god whom one Hindu adores with full devotion as the supreme deity and as the only Lord of the universe—that same god may be considered inferior or even totally insignificant in the eyes of another Hindu. . . . Moreover the different religious groups use entirely different sets of holy scriptures said to be revealed by their highest god. They worship with different rituals and with different prayers, and they have, in some essential points, different views of cosmogony, anthropology and of the nature of salvation. (Stietencron 1997, pp. 36–7)

At the same time Stietencron is prepared to identify Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Śāktism as religions because 'there would be essential common features in each of these religions. Founders of Hindu religions could, in some cases, be traced. Kṛṣṇa could be regarded as such, Kakulīśa maybe. . . . For each of the literate religions there would exist a corpus of recognised holy scriptures. . . . Members of each religion would adore the same deity as the Highest Being and Lord of the universe' (Stietencron 1997, p. 47). Thus

Stietencron's proposed definition of religions as '*corporately shared systems* of world explanation and values' based on 'a belief in the existence of superhuman beings or powers' and including 'human actions directly related to these systems (1997, p. 45) appears in practice to amount to religions sharing a founder, a body of texts and a deity. By contrast, King considers some more sophisticated defences of the unified nature of Hinduism—for example, Julius Lipner's attempt to define Hinduism in a non-essentialist manner as 'an open construct . . . an intrinsically plural phenomenon' (Lipner 1996, p. 112) and Wilhelm Halbfass's identification of 'the elusive yet undeniable coherence of Hinduism . . . its peculiar unity-in-diversity' in the term 'dharma' (Halbfass 1988, p. 333; see King 1999, pp. 108–10). Nevertheless, King concludes that 'Hinduism' is 'inappropriate as a term denoting the heterogeneity of ''Hindu'' religiosity in the precolonial era', finding evidence of heterogeneity in 'the lack of an orthodoxy, of an ecclesiastical structure, or indeed of any distinctive feature that might point to the postulation of a single Hindu religion' (King 1999, pp. 111, 105).

Thus the argument put forward by King and Stietencron for denying that Hinduism may appropriately be called a religion depends upon a particular monothetic definition of a religion, a definition that requires elements such as doctrinal orthodoxy and a common deity. The terms 'Hinduism' and 'religion' do not, however, require monothetic definition in order to be useful analytic tools. Moreover, the conception of Hinduism in the minds of early European writers on Indian religions did not result from their slavishly and unconsciously applying this kind of definition to an Indian religiosity which their theological preconceptions forced them to perceive as unified. Rather, Indian religiosity was initially conceived, as in the work of Nobili, as consisting of a plurality of religions. Somewhat later writers such as Ziegenbalg formed a view of Indian religion as a collection of different religious groupings characterised by a range of degrees of affinity with one another. For Ziegenbalg, at least, it is possible to demonstrate that he arrived at this conclusion in part on the basis of what Indians themselves reported about their religious affiliation.

Notes

1 See also Fitzgerald 1990; King 1999; Larson 1995; and Stietencron 1988, 1995 and 1997. Lorenzen (1999) and Smith (1998) have offered a contrary view.

2 Both the factual basis and the significance of some of these claims can be challenged. For example, regarding the absence of the term among those supposed to adhere to the religion it designates, O'Connell (1973), Wagle (1997) and Lorenzen (1999) provide some evidence of an emergent Hindu identity in the context of strained relations with Muslims. Ninian Smart has questioned the relevance of such absences: 'The non-traditional nature of western terms does not *by itself* mean that there is a distorting reification. ''Gamesmanship'' is of fairly recent coinage, but gamesmanship preceded the coinage (hence the success of the coinage)' (Smart 1974, p. 46).

3 I am grateful to Julius Lipner, Robert Segal and an anonymous referee for *Religion* for their comments on earlier drafts of this article.

4 The term 'Hindooism' in fact appears in the late eighteenth century. It is used by Charles Grant in a letter to John Thomas written in the early months of 1787: 'In case of converting any of the Natives, as soon as they renounce Hindooism, they must suffer a dreadful excommunication in civil life, unless they are under the immediate protection of the English' (quoted in Morris 1904, p. 105). Grant also uses the term in his 'Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain, particularly with respect to Morals, and on the means of Improving It. Written chiefly in the year 1792' (first published in 1797, republished in *Parliamentary Papers*, 1812–13, X, Paper 282, pp. 1–112). I am grateful to Geoffrey Oddie for drawing my attention to Grant's use of the term.

5 Likewise, although an interest in Indian religious texts is evident in the earliest of European writings on Hinduism, the emphasis laid upon them there is less than it was to be from the late

eighteenth century on, when the number of Europeans able to read Sanskrit and other Indian languages began to increase.

6 John Zephaniah Holwell, Alexander Dow, Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, William Hastings, Charles Wilkins and William Jones.

7 For others, see Stietencron 1988 and 1997. In her essay on representations of caste, Dharampal-Frick notes that 'Since scientific theories and scholarly interpretations from the late eighteenth century onwards were highly coloured by intellectual preconceptions, determined to a large extent by the colonialist framework . . . by referring to the historical period prior to the establishment of British rule (i.e., pre-1757) a differently oriented representation of Indian reality may be gained' (Dharampal-Frick 1995, p. 85).

8 The most important of Nobili's works on Hinduism are his *Narratio Fundamentorum quibus Madurensis Missionis Institutum caeptum est et hucusque consisit* [*An exposition of the basic principles which inspired the founding of the Madurai Mission and continue to guide it*. 1619, ed. S. Rajamanickam, trans. J. Pujo, *Adaptation*, Palayamkottai: De Nobili Research Institute, 1971] and *Informatio de quibusdam moribus nationis indicae* [*Information concerning certain Indian customs*. 1613. ed. S. Rajamanickam, trans. Peter Leonard, *Roberto de Nobili on Indian Customs*. Palayamkottai: De Nobili Research Institute, 1972]. All quotations in English from these works are from the translations of J. Pujo and Peter Leonard in Rajamanickam's bilingual editions.

9 The practices included wearing the Brahmanic thread, the *kudumi* or tuft of hair; the use of sandal paste; ablutions; and the use by Hindu women of the *tāli*, a necklace, instead of a ring as a sign of marriage. The issue was initially resolved in favour of Nobili by the 1623 Bull of Gregory XV, *Romanae Sedis Antistes*, but the debate was revived in the first part of the next century and finally went against the Jesuits.

10 On the dispute between Nobili and Fernandes, see Županov 1999.

11 '*hi populi unum habeant civilem cultum, religionem vero multiplicem*' (Rajamanickam 1971, pp. 112/13). Although the phrase translated by Pujo as 'one common way of life, but many religions' can also be translated as 'one common way of life, but a [single] manifold religion', it is clear from Nobili's discussion of religious difference among the Hindus that Pujo's interpretation of this sentence is to be preferred.

12 By contrast, among the Hindus 'each sect adores a god peculiar to itself' (Rajamanickam 1971, p. 97).

13 Županov argues that Nobili saw more uniformity than his opponent Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso, who, Županov writes, 'saw a classifiable diversity where Nobili saw basic uniformity' (Županov 1999, p. 116). Although this statement must be qualified in the light of the sections from the *Narratio Fundamentorum* cited, it does indicate that Nobili was aware of some degree of similarity among the people he described, even if it was limited to the realm of the social.

14 Cf. Nobili's *Informatio de quibusdam moribus nationis indicae*: 'the sect of the Atheists cannot be said to be an unorthodox offspring of the sects of the idolaters. . . . [T]hose sects do not agree in any of their tenets, just as the sects of the Gnanis have nothing in common with these same idolaters' (Rajamanickam 1972, pp. 36–7) The 'Atheists' are Buddhists ('Bauddha matam or Nasticam'). In the *Narratio Fundamentorum* Nobili identifies the 'Gnani' as 'the Vedantam sect called Gnani or Spiritual men' (Rajamanickam 1971, p. 117). However, he places the 'Mayavadis', the 'Tadvavadis' and the 'Visnuvas'—the followers of 'Ciancaraciarier' (Śankarācārya), 'Madhuva' (Madhva) and Ramanuja (Rāmānuja)—among the idolaters.

15 For details, see my edition of Lord's work (Sweetman 1999).

16 This pattern of geographical classification is reflected in seventeenth-century compilations of reports of religions such as Alexander Ross's *Pansebeia, or, A View of All Religions in the World*, first published in 1653. Following his section on the 'religion of the ancient Indians', derived from classical sources, Ross discusses separately the religions of Siam, Pegu [Burma], Bengala, Magor, Cambaia [Gujarat], Goa, Malabar, Narsingar and Bisnagar [Vijayanagara], Japon, the Philippiana Islands, Sumatra and Zeilan [Ceylon] before proceeding to the religion of the ancient Egyptians and then that of the modern Egyptians. For Ross, there are only three basic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Heathenism. All others are made up from these three. Of all the religions, some 'are meerly Heathenish, some Jewish, some meerly Christian, some mixed, either of all, or some of these; Mahometanism is mixed of Judaism, Gentilism, and Arrianism: the Muscovite Religion is, partly Christian, partly Heathenish' (Ross 1696, p. 363). It is no surprise, then, that he reports that the religion professed in Japan is 'the same Gentilism that is professed in the rest of the Indies, with some variation of ceremonies' (Ross 1696, p. 63).

17 *Religie* appears four times in the body of Roger's work. By contrast, *Gods-dienst* appears twenty-three times. *Gods-dienst* is used of both the 'Bramines' and the Eleusians. By contrast, for Christianity we have 'het Christelijcke gheloove' (Caland 1915, p. 14). In chapter V of part one, the phrase 'de Leere der Bramines' is used twice (see Caland 1915, p. 23). Those who edited Roger's work for publication after his death in 1649, especially Andreas Wissowatius in his preface, use *Religie* much more frequently than Roger himself, and may be responsible for its appearance in the title of his work.

18 Thus S. N. Balagangadhara translates Roger's statement 'Ende Overmits daer een Godt is, oock een God-dienst *moet zijn*; soo sullen wy ons gaen begheven tot het ondersoeck' (Caland 1915, p. 112) as follows: 'Because where there is a God, a religion *must exist* too; it is thus that we shall approach our investigation' (Balagangadhara's emphasis). Balagangadhara suggests that this is how 'this missionary [found] out whether religion existed among the Brahmins of Coromandel' and suggests that rather than being based upon empirical research, the conclusion of Roger and those who followed him 'was based upon non-empirical considerations in Augustine and Calvin', that is, on their certainty that there was no nation without a religion (Balagangadhara 1994, pp. 66–7). Roger's statement might better be translated as 'Where there is a God, there must also be worship of God'.

19 Rennell's first general map *Hindoostan* was first published in 1782. *Memoir of a Map of Hindoostan* appeared first in 1783, and in subsequent editions in 1785, 1788, 1792 and 1793. See Edney 1997, p. 99.

20 In addition to Ziegenbalg, who will be discussed, the concept was also developing at this time in the works of Nobili's successors in the Jesuit Indian missions. Their sense of the geographical spread of Hinduism, which they owed to their own geographical dispersion in India and to the 'oral tradition and the notes, treatises, memoirs and other manuscript documents by means of which the missionaries transmitted and exchanged their knowledge of the ''terrain'' ' (Murr 1987, II, p. 70), was reinforced by their observations of pilgrimage sites of pan-Indian importance. For example, Guy Tachard noted the large numbers of 'pilgrims who come to Jagrenath [i.e. Jagannātha in Puri] from throughout India' (*Lettres édifiantes et curieuses, écrit des missions étrangères par quelques missionaires de la Compagnie de Jésus*, 34 vols. Paris, 1702–76, vol. XII, p. 433).

21 Geoffrey Carnall suggests that '[j]udging from the manuscript of the Disquisition, the appendix may have been written first, with the narrative as an afterthought' (Carnall 1997, p. 211).

22 Translations into English from Ziegenbalg's works are my own. Although the term *malabarische* suggests the western coast of India, for Ziegenbalg the term does not refer only to this region. In many cases he uses it where we would use Tamil, for example when mentioning his translation of the New Testament into 'die malabarische Sprache' (Caland 1926, p. 11). In others, the range of reference is much wider.

23 *Siebende Continuation des Berichts derer königlichen dänischen Missionarien*. Halle: Zu Verlegung des Waysen-Hauses, 1714, p. 484. The letters from Hindus published in the seventh and eleventh parts of the *Halle Berichte* as the 'Malabarischen Correspondentz' are often assumed to have been chosen, translated and annotated by Ziegenbalg. In his recent edition of some of these letters, Kurt Liebau argues that in fact the translation and annotations are substantially the work of Gründler (see Liebau 1998, pp. 26–7). However, as Liebau acknowledges, Gründler used Ziegenbalg's works on Hinduism for the annotations and would not have dispatched the letters for publication without Ziegenbalg's agreement. Gründler is co-signatory to the preface to the *Genealogie*, described in Metzger's translation as 'Ziegenbalg's Preface'. Even if, as Germann remarks, 'Gründlers Name unter der Vorrede ist nur ein Zeichen collegialer Freundschaft' (Germann 1867, p. x) rather than a recognition of his contribution, his appearance in the preface indicates the degree of co-operation between the authors. We can therefore assume that Ziegenbalg would have identified himself with the position of the annotations regarding Hinduism, although he might not have been responsible for the way in which that position was expressed. The position of the 'Malabarische Correspondentz' is in any case the same as that found in *Malabarisches Heidentum* and *Genealogie*, which were written just prior to and just following, respectively, the annotation of the first batch of letters. I therefore do not attach importance to the question of which of the missionaries was responsible for the annotations and refer to the author of the annotations only as 'the missionary', by which I intend to indicate their joint agency and to avoid the problem of distinguishing their precise contribution.

24   This passage is translated from a manuscript copy of the *Genealogie* (Royal Library, Copenhagen, Ledreborg 424 p. 88) which reads: 'Es waren ehemals zweij *Nationen Búddhergöl* und *Schámanergöl* gennant. Diese hatten eine schädliche *Religion* und machten lauter böse *Secten*. Sie lästerten des *Wischtnums* und *Tschiwens Religion* und zwangen alle übrige *Malabaren*, daß sie ihre *Religion* annehmen müsten. . . . Ihre Religion hatte keine Ähnlichkeit weder mit unserer Malabarischen, noch mit der Mohrischen, noch auch mir der Christlichen *Religion*; sondern sie war ein Verderb aller *Religionen*'. A somewhat altered version appears in Germann's edition of the *Genealogie* Germann 1867, p. 96).

25   Liebau suggests *cainamatam*, or Jainamata, for '*Tscháinermadám*'. We have seen that the Jains are treated as a separate religion by both the missionaries and the authors of letters included in the *Correspondentz* and the *Genealogie*. The '*Tscháinermadám*' are here subsumed under Vaiṣṇavism, both by the Tamil writer and also explicitly by the missionary annotator, who comments: '*Tscháinermadám* ist auch eine Sekte, so zu des *Wischtnums* Religion gehöret' (Liebau 1998, p. 90). The reason appears to be that, unlike the other writers, the author of this letter states his view that the Jains do use the *tirunāmam*, or divine name, and worship Viṣṇu: 'Die *Tscháiner* aus der siebenten Sekte nehmen gleichfalls *Dirunámum* an sich und verehren den *Perumal*' (Liebau 1998, p. 94). Either the identification of the '*Tscháinermadám*' as Jains is incorrect, or Ziegenbalg was unaware that the '*Tscháinermadám*' and the '*Schammaner*' were one and the same.

26   Both the first and the last annotation to the question note that the writer of the letter could have mentioned many more sects: see Liebau 1998, pp. 90, 94.

27   It is worth recalling that much of the *Genealogie* is based upon direct quotation from these and other letters. Moreover, comments in Ziegenbalg's catalogue of his collection of more than a hundred Tamil works and the internal evidence of the work itself suggest that other sections of the *Genealogie* may represent a partial translation of a Tamil text in his collection. Of this text, which he calls *Dirigála Sákkaram* [Tirikālaccakkaram], Ziegenbalg writes, 'This book shows the genealogy of their great gods. . . . Once I had it in mind to translate this work into German but I could not help wondering whether this was really advisable. . . . But I am still keeping my mind open whether or not I should do this translation, so far I am not sure about it myself' (Gaur 1967, pp. 88–9).

28   Albeit translated and edited by Europeans, and in response to questions set by Europeans.

29   For some examples, see Smith 1998, pp. 319–21.

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