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For Whom Does Hinduism Speak?

[Hrdayananda Dasa Goswami](#)

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In this essay Hrdayananda Dasa Goswami (H.J. Resnick) explains where the term 'Hindu' originates from. He asks for whom does the term 'Hindu' speak and who can speak for the 'Hindus'. To which of the multitude of widely differing worldviews does this term apply? What are the implications of accepting 'Hindu' as a designation? Hrdayananda Dasa Goswami also looks at the history of the word and discovers how and where it came into common use by scholars and by the 'Hindus' themselves.

Introduction

In his remarkable work, *India and Europe*, Wilhelm Halbfass notes that, '... the critical, historical and often reductive work of Western Indologists has met with passionate rejection by conservative Hinduism and been seen as part of a strategy of Western domination and suppression.' (p. 259)

One consequence of the rising political, intellectual and religious self-confidence and self-assertion of contemporary India, especially its Hindu majority, is the Indian attempt to reclaim from the Western academy the right to 'objectively' and 'authoritatively', if not 'scientifically', explain itself and its history to the world. There is frequent tension between those who would defend with a learned voice Hinduism's traditional, scripture-based self-history, and those who seek to explain India by the standards of Western humanistic scholarship, under the various rubrics of Indology, South Asian Languages/Literatures/Civilisation, Anthropology, Hindu Studies, History of India, etc.

From this dialectic tension arose the challenging and much debated question: 'Who speaks for Hinduism?' In English, 'to speak *for*' often means to speak 'on behalf of; as the agent of; on the part of.' In this sense, we may easily concede that Hindus, like members of any community, have a right to designate and authorise those who may speak 'on behalf of,' or 'as the agent of', their group.

On the other hand, 'Who may speak *about* Hinduism?' is a more complex question. In a legal context, within a free society, anyone may, as long as they do not commit slander, libel etc. However, the relevant question, in spirit, would seem to be, 'Who can speak objectively, authoritatively, meaningfully *about* Hinduism?' Clearly, some scholars believe that one who speaks objectively *about* anything, truly speaks *for* that thing, since such fair, accurate speech best *represents* the truth of what a thing is. In the 'hard sciences' rocks, rivers, and even reptiles hardly speak *for* themselves in the sense of learned discourse. Hence the scientist speaks *for* them. To the extent that scholars in the humanities have sought to ape the 'hard sciences' (and the extent is not meagre), there has been a palpable tendency to speak *for* what are perceived as 'pre-scientific' communities, even as one speaks *about* them. Of course, we are all aware that such a philosophically naive position has undergone much stimulating criticism in recent decades. So without dredging up the murky aspects of the Orientalist legacy, suffice it to

say that many, though certainly not all, Western scholars have believed and asserted their ability to speak more objectively, and thus more authoritatively, *about* Hinduism, than those recognised within the Hindu community as reliable spokespersons, and this has created quite a ruckus among Hindus both in India and abroad.

My point here is not simply that Western academic types are the bogey-persons of Indian studies. Indeed, much Western scholarship about India, both now and in the past, has been excellent and invaluable. Rather, I wish to argue that many claiming to represent and speak *for* Hinduism, from *within* Hinduism, have themselves appropriated the voice of groups within the Hindu complex in a way that is analogous to the Orientalist appropriation of the Hindu voice. Thus in response to the question, 'Who speaks for Hinduism?' I raise the question, 'For *whom* does Hinduism speak?' I do so not only as a scholar of Vaisnavism, but also as one who has lived as a Gaudiya Vaisnava for about thirty years. (1)

I will argue below that in early Vaisnava, and indeed Vedic, religious discourse and polemics, the term and concept 'Hindu' is unknown. Later, in contact with the Muslim rulers of India, Vaisnavas become 'Hindu' for the outsider, the foreigner, but not for themselves, nor among themselves. Finally, in the last few centuries, the 'modern' period of contact with the West, the term 'Hindu' emerged as an all-embracing *internal* term that, for the first time, sought to define and contain followers of the *Vedas*, *for* and *among* themselves. I shall make the further claim that the attempt of spokespersons of a modern, generic *Hinduism* to speak for the Vaisnava tradition distorts that tradition and brings in its wake other kinds of harm to the ancient spiritual wisdom of India.

Although there are many ways in which one might classify the development of the term 'Hindu' in South Asia, I will sketch that process in three historical stages, as mentioned above. First, though, it is necessary to reveal a few essential facts about the word *hindu*.

'Hindu' is not found in the Hindu scriptures, the *Vedas*, which are written in Sanskrit

Why is this important? Although the task of defining Hinduism has proved elusive, historically the acceptance of the Sanskrit *Vedas* as sacred scripture has served as a bedrock standard for a true Hindu. Buddhism and Jainism, though born on Indian soil, are not included within the endless variety of Hindu doctrines and practices, chiefly because both these traditions rejected the supreme authority of the *Vedas*. Indeed, in the legal definition of Hinduism, given by the Indian Supreme Court in 1966, the first criterion is 'Acceptance of the *Vedas* with reverence as the highest authority in religious and philosophic matters.' We thus have an unusual situation in which one becomes a Hindu by accepting the authority of scriptures that do not recognise the word 'Hindu'.

'Hindu' is not a Sanskrit word

It is of further significance that *hindu* is not a Sanskrit word. Early Vedic literature often uses the term *Arya* to designate the true and noble followers of Vedic culture. And as Halbfass points out:

'... language is a central criterion for the definition of the Aryan. It is essential for preserving his ritual power and identity against the *mlecchas* [foreigners, barbarians]. The continuity of the tradition, the identity and stability of the Aryan *dharma*, depends on its linguistic vehicle, the Sanskrit language... ' (p. 178)

Yet so totally absent is the word *hindu* from traditional Sanskrit literature, that in his well-known work, *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, the great Oxford Sanskritist A.A. Macdonell mentioned the word *hindu* only once - and that was in order to give the standard, geographic explanation of the term's origin:

'The Sindhu (now Sindh), which in Sanskrit simply means the 'river', as the western boundary of the Aryan settlements, suggested to the nations of antiquity which first came into contact with them in that quarter, a name for the whole peninsula. Adopted in the form of *Indos*, the word gave rise to the Greek appellation *India* as the country of the Indus. It was borrowed by the ancient Persians as *hindu*, which is used in the *Avesta* as a name of the country itself. More accurate is the modern Persian designation *Hindustan*, 'Land of the Indus', a name properly applying only to that part of the peninsula which lies between the Himalaya and the Vindhya range [roughly North to Central India]' (Munshirama, 1972, p. 142).

The term 'Hindu' in historical *krsna-bhakti*

The earliest canonical expressions of *krsna-bhakti*, devotion to Krsna, are found in such literatures as the *Mahabharata* and its appendix *Hari-vamsa*, and in the *Visnu Purana* and the *Bhagavata Purana*. The foundational scripture for devotion to the Lord as King Rama is Valmiki's *Ramayana*. In none of these texts do we find the word *hindu*. The language of all of the above texts is Sanskrit.

Even as late as the tenth and eleventh centuries of the common era, we find this term entirely absent in essential Vaisnava devotional, philosophical and apologetic writings. We shall illustrate this by briefly considering the works of two great *acaryas* (spiritual leaders/teachers) of the Sri Vaisnava tradition of Southeast India, surely one of the most historically important Vaisnava 'denominations'.

Yamunacarya, born around 916 CE, 'is the first Vaisnava *acarya* whose works are extant' (Narayanan 59). This important figure wrote a philosophical treatise called *Agama-pramanyam*, 'a fierce defense of the agamic literature' (ibid. 60). Concerning the hard-fought debate of that time between the Tamil Vaisnavas and the Smarta-brahmanas, 'Yamuna, our source', says the late Professor van Buitenen, referring to the *Agama-pramanyam*, 'is an unimpeachable authority. Here we have not a sectarian text speaking in pious and traditional platitudes about wicked adversaries, but a Bhagavata with a fine mind who seeks to enumerate, and subsequently to invalidate, very precisely the traditional arguments of the Smartas against the less-than-respectable Bhagavatas.' (van Buitenen, pp. 26-27).

In this debate, neither the protagonist nor his theological adversary ever use the term 'Hindu' or 'Hinduism'. What is perhaps more remarkable is that in Dr Narayanan's authoritative history of the Sri Vaisnava tradition, the word

'Hindu' or 'Hinduism' does not even appear in her index. In other words, it is possible for a distinguished scholar to write the history of an important 'Hindu' denomination without using the word 'Hindu' in her book.

In his own theological and philosophical struggles with the Buddhists, Sankara seeks, along with the Mimamsakas, to demonstrate the authority of the *Vedas*. And in his debates with the Mimamsakas, the rhetorical goal is to demonstrate that one's own community is *vaidika*, Vedic, and has best understood the message of the *Vedas*. Later, the illustrious Ramanuja made powerful arguments against the teachings of Sankara in favour of a personal God. Again, the discourse aims to prove that one group is truly *vaidika*, and that the members of one's soteriological group will actually achieve the highest *moksa*, liberation. In all of these historically seminal, intellectually sophisticated and religiously crucial debates, we do not find the term *hindu*.

The middle stage of 'Hindu' discourse

As in earlier Sanskrit texts, so in the Gaudiya Vaisnava Sanskrit texts of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries we do not find the word 'Hindu.' In the Gaudiya-Vaisnava Bengali texts of the same period, 'Hindu' does appear but only for, and usually by, the *yavana-mleccha*, i.e. the Muslim, who is outside the sacred culture of the *Vedas*. Joseph O'Connell introduces his article, *The word 'Hindu' in Gaudiya Vaisnava texts*, as follows:

A survey of three Sanskrit and ten Bengali hagiographic texts from early sixteenth to late eighteenth centuries discloses nearly fifty passages (all in the Bengali texts) in which the word 'Hindu' appears. Most occurrences are in episodes of strained relationships between Hindus and *yavanas* or *mlecchas*, as the Muslims are called. The strains are usually resolved satisfactorily. *The word 'Hindu' never appears in a purely intra-communal Hindu context and has no significance in the central religious concerns of the texts, the expositions of bhakti.* (emphasis mine) ... there is to be found no explicit discussion of what 'Hindu' or 'Hindu dharma' means in any of the texts surveyed. ... there is no example of an abstract term which might be translated as Hindu-ness or Hinduism (e.g. *hindutva*) ... (pp. 340, 342)

'Furthermore, it is interesting to note how often it is in the mouth of a non-Hindu that the word 'Hindu' is placed by the writers' (ibid. p. 341).

O'Connell further observes:

'It was over against a group of people or type of people considered both foreign and barbarous (and often violent, as expressions like *kala-jabana*, "Death-Yavana", indicate) that the self-awareness of the Vaisnavas as Hindus was fashioned' (p. 342).

About this same period and phenomenon, Halbfass writes, 'In this climate of 'sectarian' strife and search for identity (i.e. the Gaudiya Vaisnava and Vallabhiya 'proselytising'), the word 'Hindu', which so far had been used by foreigners, specifically Muslims, was first employed by the Hindus themselves' (p. 192).

Thus whereas in the early period, 'Hindu' is not a factor either within internal Vaisnava discourse, nor in discourse with the 'other', we find that in the middle period, and specifically in tight contact with the governing Muslims, the Gaudiya Vaisnavas, and presumably other groups as well, employ the Muslim term 'Hindu' self-referentially, but only in dialogue with or about the ruling, and dangerous, Muslims.

The late or modern stage of 'Hindu' discourse

'The period around 1800, which saw the full establishment of European power and presence in India, also saw the beginnings of modern Indology, i.e. the scientific exploration and objectification of India's past. The combination of these two events, which is more than a temporal coincidence, had a fundamental impact upon Indian attitudes towards themselves and the "other".' (Halbfass, p. 172)

One of the most striking and transparent changes in the 'modern' period since around 1800, is the new use of 'Hindu' as an internal self-identification. Enthusiasm for this development was never unanimous. 'The Arya Samaj tried to replace the word "Hindu" with the ancient term Arya.' R.N. Suryanarayana calls 'Hindu' a 'detestable term ... of which we should be ashamed' (Halbfass, p. 515, fn. 97).

As one might expect, others went to the opposite extreme: 'Some modern Indian nationalists, most notably M.S. Golwalkar and V.D. Savarkar, have argued vehemently that the word 'Hindu' was *not at all* adopted from the Muslims and was *not* originally used by non-Hindus. Instead they claim that it is a genuinely Indian term, reflecting 'the unity, the sublimity, and the specialty' of the Indian people.' (Halbfass, p. 193)

P. Hacker has analysed modern Hinduism in terms of the overlapping categories of 'neo-Hinduism' and 'surviving traditional Hinduism.' Halbfass, who uses these categories, does so with a caveat: 'Hacker's two categories are not mutually exclusive and not always clearly distinguishable. ... it is also possible "that one and the same person combines elements of both ways of thinking."' (Halbfass, p. 220)

For our purpose here, I shall focus on a few of the most distinguished spokespersons of both neo-Hinduism and surviving traditional Hinduism, and show how in each case their idiosyncratic notions of a monolithic Hinduism create significant religious problems for the Vaisnava community, which is, after all, supposed to be a majority component of Hinduism. This will lead directly to consideration of my question, 'For whom does Hinduism speak?' and more specifically to the question, 'Can Hinduism speak for Vaisnavas?'

P. Hacker calls Vivekananda 'the most influential shaper and propagandist of the neo-Hindu spirit' (Halbfass 228). Halbfass sees him as 'one of the leading figures of modern Hindu thought and self-awareness and an exemplary exponent of Hindu self-representation vis-a-vis the West.' It was mentioned earlier that the great Vaisnava theologians, Ramanuja and Madhva, in their Vedanta commentaries, fought against the monistic, *advaita*, interpretation of Sankara. But in the modern period, in the name of a generic 'Hinduism', Vivekananda took up the banner of the *advaita*-

vedanta:

'The sense of identity ... which [Vivekananda] tries to awaken in his fellow Indians ... means, above all, the heritage of Advaita Vedanta, the tradition of Sankara. Ethics, self-confidence, and brotherly love find their true and binding foundation in Advaitic non-dualism' (Halbfass, p. 234).

Or, in Vivekananda's own words,

'That is what we want, and that can only be created, established and strengthened by understanding and realising the ideal of the Advaita, that ideal of the oneness of all. ... to preach the Advaita aspect of the Vedanta is necessary to rouse up the hearts of men, to show them the glory of their souls. It is therefore, that I preach this Advaita ... ' (From Vivekananda's four lectures in London, titled 'Practical Vedanta', III, 190f., quoted by Halbfass, p. 234)

Halbfass adds in his footnote 75 to this quote: 'Vivekananda often encouraged his listeners to see themselves "as God."' Those familiar with Vaisnava thought will instantly understand that the claim to be God is as serious an offense to many Vaisnavas as it would be to many in the Abrahamic traditions.

But Vivekananda is not the only neo-Hindu superstar to promote *advaita-vedanta* as *the* doctrine of Hinduism. Let us next consider the eminent Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Oxford scholar and former President of India.

According to P. Hacker, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan 'seems to be the most typical ... neo-Hindu thinker.'⁽²⁾ Halbfass adds, ' ... it is evident that Radhakrishnan has been a most successful spokesman of neo-Hinduism in the West, and that he has produced some of the most memorable and persuasive formulations of neo-Vedantic thought.'

And what is Radhakrishnan's vision of applied 'Hindu philosophy'?

'Radhakrishnan's very first articles ... already articulate two fundamental themes of his neo-Hindu apologetics: the importance of philosophy for the identity and self-affirmation of modern India, and the significance and potential application of Advaita Vedanta in the area of ethics and social practice.'⁽³⁾

Thus for a Vaisnava, to jump on the neo-Hindu bandwagon often means in practice to directly or indirectly be associated with, if not endorse, a sectarian theological position totally antithetical to Vaisnavism, i.e. the monistic doctrine of the absolute oneness of the soul with an impersonal God. The greatest Vaisnava *acaryas*, Ramanuja, Madhva, Caitanya Mahaprabhu, etc. dedicated significant portions of their lives to opposing this view. It is thus deeply troubling to Vaisnavas that unity among 'Hindus' is often sought under the monistic banner, while simultaneously minimising or denying the great theological divide which for centuries has separated those seeking to love, and those seeking to become, the Absolute Truth.

Having looked at two neo-Hindu thinkers, let us glance at some of the prominent 'surviving, traditional' Hindus. Halbfass calls Vasudeva Sastrin Abhyankara one 'of the greatest traditional pandits' in the modern age, a

learned man who used 'the standards of the *Dharmasastra*', the sacred law-book, in his *Dharma-tattva-nirnaya*. [Ascertaining the Truth of Dharma].(4) Essentially, this work stresses the birthright and the hereditary aspects of Hinduism, with the author determining that Hinduism cannot be approached through mere 'initiation' (*diksa*)(5). (Halbfass 260) Similarly,

'... The *Dharmapradipa*, written by Anantakrsna Sastrin, Sitarama Sastrin, and Srijiva Bhattacharya, three of the leading pandits of their time (the preface is dated December 15, 1937), also bears mention. In this work, questions of 'purification' (*suddhi*) and rehabilitation of Hindus who have joined a 'mleccha religion' (*mleccha-dharma*) or been coerced into giving up their ways of life and belief are discussed in great detail. The conversion of persons who were *born* into a foreign religion is not taken into consideration at all.' (Halbfass 260)

The problems for Vaisnavas with these two versions of 'traditional' Hinduism are as follows:

Several great Vaisnava *acaryas* have historically fought for the right of any person to achieve salvation, and to acquire the status of a spiritual teacher, simply on the basis of *bhakti*, or devotion to God.(6) Indeed, they have fought precisely against the type of orthodox, *smarta*, brahmanism exemplified by the work of Vasudeva Sastrin Abhyankara.

In his article on the *Bhagavata Purana*, perhaps the single most important scripture of the Vaisnavas, Thomas Hopkins points out that one of the main points in 'the religion of the *Bhagavata* [is] the absence of the qualifications based on birth and status that restricted participation in orthodox ceremonies.' (Hopkins, pp. 11-12)

Hopkins goes on to say,

'The *Bhagavata* ... also repeatedly stresses the independence of *bhakti* from all alternative means of salvation. Criticism of orthodoxy does not stop at the theological level. ... Here the primary objective is to refute the idea that a person's birth, social status, or caste membership is of any significance with respect to salvation by means of devotion.'

Equally troubling for Vaisnavas is the *Dharmapradipa*'s indifference to the issue of persons born in other religions that wish to take up *Hindu-dharma*. Gaudiya-Vaisnava movements such as ISKCON are mainly composed of devotees born outside of Hindu families. Much earlier, Sri Caitanya himself installed as His *namacarya*, the 'teacher of the Name', the Muslim-born Haridasa. It is not clear how the *Dharmapradipa* would deal with such conversions. Halbfass is aware of this problem:

'The commitment to the hereditary caste system may be less rigid in the sects than in mainstream 'orthodoxy.' This affects their xenological attitudes. The chosen membership in the religious or soteriological community can be more significant than the hereditary caste membership. Such openness and flexibility is occasionally extended beyond the confines of the Indian world, and even the *mlecchas* are at times recognised as potential members of the soteriological community.' (Halbfass, p. 193)

Conclusion

I have argued that the modern transformation of the term 'Hindu' into an internal, monistically tilted self-definition for the followers of the *Vedas*, is problematic for Vaisnavas, and that 'Hinduism' cannot in all respects speak for Vaisnavism.

In her comparative study, *Veda and Torah* [1], Barbara Holdredge notes:

The categories 'Hinduism' and 'Judaism' are themselves problematic ... , for, like the category 'religion', they represent theoretical constructs that attempt to impose unity on a myriad of different religious systems. The complex amalgam termed 'Hinduism' encompasses a variety of 'Hinduisms'. Beginning in the Vedic period and throughout Indian history the orthodox brahminical tradition has been continually challenged by competing traditions and movements - local village traditions, ascetic groups, devotional (*bhakti*) sects, tantric movements, and more recently, modern reform movements. While the centripetal force of brahminical power structures has sought to absorb and domesticate competing currents, the centrifugal force of these countervailing centers of power has persisted, giving rise to that uneasy conglomerate of heterogeneous tendencies which Western scholars term 'Hinduism' (Holdredge, p. 1).

Questions instantly arise:

- (1) Who speaks for this 'uneasy conglomerate of heterogeneous tendencies?'
- (2) For whom does this 'uneasy conglomerate of heterogeneous tendencies' speak?

Where shall we find a simple 'Hindu' who is neither a Vaisnava, nor a Saiva, nor a Sakta, nor a Tantrika, nor a member of a 'local village tradition', nor a *smarta-brahmana*, etc.? If our 'Hindu' agrees not to speak for her or his own tradition, and rather speak for 'Hinduism' *as a whole*, what will the person say?

And yet, we saw that Caitanya himself, the founder of the Gaudiya-Vaisnava movement, did accept the term 'Hindu' for ordinary dealings with the Muslim rulers. We must keep in mind here the common, contrasting Sanskrit philosophical terms: *vyavaharika*, 'relating to ordinary or mundane affairs, usage or practice' and *paramarthika*, 'relating to a spiritual object, or to supreme, essential truth.' It seems fair to say that according to O'Connell's survey of sixteenth to eighteenth century Gaudiya Vaisnava literature, the Vaisnava devotees considered themselves Hindu in a *vyavaharika* sense, but never in a *paramarthika* sense. Indeed, from the *paramarthika* viewpoint, 'Hindu' is simply another *upadhi*, or worldly designation. After all, a Hindu may convert to another religion, but on the spiritual platform, the pure soul, *atman*, can never become anything else in an ontological sense, though the soul may forget its true identity.

Thus two highly revered and canonical works of the Gaudiya Vaisnavas -

Rupa Goswami's *Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu* (1.1.12) and Krsndasa Kaviraja's *Sri Caitanya-caritamrta* (2.19.170) - cite the following verse from the *Narada-pancaratra*(7):

'*Bhakti* (devotion) is said to be service, with the senses, to the Lord of the senses (Hrsikesa, Krsna), which is freed of all "designations" (*upadhi*), and immaculate through dedication to Him.'

Monier-Williams gives these relevant meanings for *upadhi*: 'that which is put in the place of another thing, a substitute ...; anything which may be taken for or has the mere name or appearance of another thing ... , phantom, disguise.' The sense in which the *upadhi*, 'Hindu', is a *vyavaharika* identity for one engaged in self-realisation along Vedantic lines, should be clear upon reflection. Thus the progressive growth of 'Hindu' as a total identity can be understood as the overwhelming of the *paramarthika*, the ultimate spiritual, identity by the worldly, conventional identity. For the spiritualist, this is a problem.

Perhaps one evidence that the term 'Hindu' is *vyavaharika*, an *upadhi* of this world, and of the present body, is that it has often been invoked and engaged to foster communal, even ethnic consciousness and at times communal violence. Thus 'Hindu' transforms itself into an ethnic, even a racial, marker, an engine for national pride, in a way that one would not expect from an eternal, spiritual science that, according to the *Bhagavad-gita*, would apply equally to all living beings.

A historical example may serve to illumine this point. When Gaudiya Vaisnavism was taken seriously in Bengal, it tended to counteract the tendency toward communal conflict, as O'Connell has observed:

' ... the Vaisnavas in Bengal did not place their religious commitment in the solidarity of the Hindu people, nor in the sacred ideals, if there were such, common to Hindus. Their religious faith was in Krishna, a mode of faith that in principle a non-Hindu could share ... it would seem, then, either that religiously motivated Hindu communalism is a relatively recent development in Bengal or that the Gaudiya Vaisnavas are atypical. My own opinion is that so long as the Gaudiya Vaisnavas remained the pace-setting religious and literary group in Bengal, i.e. to the turn of the nineteenth century, their point of view prevailed in Bengal well beyond their own movement. With the partial breakdown of Gaudiya-Vaisnava faith, self-assurance and influence in the nineteenth century, due in part to the criticisms by reformers, this Vaisnava resistance to religiously motivated communal consciousness by Hindus was eroded.' (*JOC*, p. 342)

Among the minimum beliefs one must have to be a legal Hindu in India, the Supreme Court includes 'Acceptance of great world rhythm - vast periods of creation, maintenance and dissolution follow each other in endless succession - by all six systems of Hindu philosophy.'

It is fair to say that within the 'vast periods of creation, maintenance and dissolution', the existence of the term 'Hindu' occupies but a geo-blip of time. Missing altogether in Vedic discourse, as well as in later Sanskrit epic, Puranic, and Vedantic disquisitions, the term comes to be used self-referentially in more recent times in vernacular literatures. Even that

limited use is further limited to discourse with or for a hostile 'other'. Finally, in modern times, in contact with the West, 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism', in their various neo- and conservative shapes, emerge as quasi-ethnic, exclusivistic self-references, with and for those believing that the Vedic literature is sacred and authoritative.

This dramatic shift is troubling for those Vaisnavas who take seriously the traditional teachings of the *Bhagavad-gita*, the *Bhagavata Purana* and the devotional version of *Vedanta*, to the effect that every living being is ultimately an eternal servant of a supreme personal God. Vaisnavas are even more unhappy with the constant neo-Hindu subordination of Krsna's personal form to the impersonal, *nirguna* ideal of *advaita-vedanta*. On *paramarthika* issues, a serious Vaisnava would not dream of appointing a generic 'Hindu' as a spokesperson. Thus, in a purely spiritual context, for whom does Hinduism speak?

Notes

(1) In general, Vaisnavas are those who worship Visnu, in His many forms as either Rama, Krsna, Narayana, etc. as the supreme personal God. Scholars regularly estimate that at least two-thirds of 'Hindus' are Vaisnavas. The Gaudiya-Vaisnavasha, which has been a significant religious force in North India, accept Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, who appeared in West Bengal about 500 years ago as Krsna Himself.

(2) Kl. Schr., p. 599.

(3) These very first articles, which he published in 1908, were taken from his master's thesis, with its 'programmatic' title: *The Ethics of Vedanta and Its Metaphysical Presuppositions*.

(4) Poona, 1929 (ASS, vol. 98)

(5) *Dharma-tattva-nirnaya*, 39

(6) One exception to this liberal ethos is the Vaikhanasa community of Southeast India.

(7) Medieval Vaisnava authors, including Madhvacharya and many Gaudiya-Vaisnava scholars, often quote verses from extant works whose surviving recensions no longer show those verses. This can be seen in citations from *Narada-pancaratra*, *Manu-samhita*, various *Puranas*, etc. Many scholars feel that the extant *Narada-pancaratra* is quite corrupt, and I have not personally checked to see if the verse that Rupa and Krsnadasa cite here is found there.

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