Representing Idols, Idolizing Representations: Interpreting Hindu Images
from the
Nineteenth Century to the Early Twentieth Century

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ABSTRACT

Representing Idols, Idolizing Representations: Interpreting Hindu Images from the Nineteenth Century to the Early Twentieth Century

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At various points in history and in different geographical locations, the Hindu image has been signified and re-signified by Hindus and others. Hindu images serve a multitude of purposes – functioning politically, socially and religiously. To formulate an accurate social history or cultural biography of the Hindu image, it is necessary to examine the means, by which it travels, as well as the reception, placement and context of the object at various points on the route. It is my contention that while the trajectories that the images have traveled provide a significant cultural biography, it is discourse that not only paves the path it follows, but also gives the image significance. Using Foucauldian and postcolonial theories of representation that highlight avenues of knowledge production, this dissertation provides a social history of the Hindu image from the early nineteenth century until the early twentieth century in an Indian and Euro-American context. By examining texts produced by Orientalists, missionaries, art critics, Hindu reformers and Hindu nationalists, this dissertation will demonstrate how the Hindu image is signified through a series of discursive battles. Through these interactions we can trace the differing forms of the Hindu image as God, idol, art, and symbol. The overall aim of this dissertation is to demonstrate that the Hindu image does not have an essentialized meaning; rather it is the various textual strategies that construct the image's meaning and usage. While the materiality of the image is fundamental, it is the narrative that defines

and sustains its existence – in effect, it is discourse that works to determine its form and

function.

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For Appa and Amma

List Of Figures

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION- FORMING FUNCTION: CREATING THE HINDU IMAGE

Of these imaginary beings, which have bodies and inhabit place, the images are only copies. By consecration they become, in some sense, the residence of the divinities they represent. Thus by a double accommodation; - by created gods in the first place, and images of them in the second, a mode of worship is instituted, suited to the gross conceptions and sinful dispositions of men. Still the worshipper believes in one Supreme God; but that idol worship, is all that is compatible with his present condition and all that is indispensable to ultimate felicity. Ask the most gross idolater while he is bending before his idol, concerning the object of his worship, and he will point his finger, and lift his eye to heaven, and say, "My God and yours are one. The way of worship is different. My idols are God's servants. This is the way of our fathers- the way appointed for Hindoos." (Nott 1817, 10)

Descend we know from the aspirations of philosophy to the religion of the ignorant. At the very outset, I may tell you that there is no *polytheism* in India. In every temple, if one stands by and listens, one will find the worshippers applying all the attributes of God, including omnipresence, to the images. It is not polytheism, nor would the name henotheism explain the situation. "the rose called by any other name would smell as sweet." Names are not explanations (Vivekananda 1995, I:15)

One need only look around the streets of most Indian cities and see the road-side shrines, image-laden sweet shops or dashboard-mounted deities to ascertain that the relationship of Hindus with their religious imagery is one of great intimacy and importance. However, to represent Hindu imagery solely within this everyday devotional context would be to disregard the complex history and relationship between Hindus and the divine image. Images serve a multitude of purposes – functioning politically, socially and religiously. Generally speaking, we tend to assume that the religious image will follow a role and itinerary dictated by scriptural norms. In *Lives of Indian Images*, Richard Davis comprehensively demonstrates how religious images have lives of their

own, with shifting possibilities in terms of their function and identity. Combining Igor Kopytoff's "cultural biographical" method of studying objects in society, and the notion of "interpretive communities" premised upon reader-response literary theory as articulated by Stanley Fish, Davis constructs Indian images as "fundamentally social beings whose identities are not fixed once and for all at the moment of fabrication, but are repeatedly made and remade through interactions with humans" (1997, 8). For Fish, the phrase "interpretive communities" refers to groups who interpret text – or in the case of Davis' work and this thesis, Indian objects – in a similar ways since members of the group share a cultural framework and "interpretive strategies" (Davis 1997, 8).

Kopytoff suggests that "[a] culturally informed economic biography of an object would look at it as a culturally constructed entity, endowed with culturally specific meanings, and classified and reclassified into culturally constituted categories" (1986, 68). While this type of analysis is more than adequate to trace the lives of specific religious images, I would like to consider the more general category of Hindu imagery as a whole rather than following the trajectory of a specific image. In order to do this I turn to the method formulated by Arjun Appadurai of analyzing the social life of things, which complements Kopytoff's cultural biography approach. Appadurai suggests looking at "classes or types of things," so that we may "look at longer-term shifts (...) and larger-scale dynamics that transcend the biographies of particular members of that class or type," enabling the documentation of structural and social relationships (1986, 34). For Appadurai, the significance of the commodity is not only inscribed in its actual form but also through avenues of distribution. Although human actors assign meaning to the product, we have to look at "things in motion," at the paths and circuits that they take and

make, in order to comprehend cultural contexts and meanings (1986, 5). To formulate an accurate social history or cultural biography of the Hindu image, it is necessary to examine the means by which it travels, as well as the reception and location of the item at various points on the circuit.

It is my contention that while the trajectories that the images have traveled provide a significant cultural biography, it is discourse that not only paves the path it follows, but also gives the image its form and function. Using Foucauldian and postcolonial theories of representation that highlight avenues of knowledge production, this dissertation will provide a social history of the Hindu image from the early nineteenth century until the early twentieth century in the Indian and Euro-American contexts.

According to Foucault, the object (which he refers to as the subject), is produced through discourse. Discourse in this case signifies more than a simple narrative or description; it is the manner through which knowledge is produced, a system of representation. This system of representation varies in differing contexts, providing a means of understanding a particular object in a specific historical instance. Foucault argues that discourse consists not of a singular narrative but of a multitude of texts produced in varying sections of society. If these discursive elements are produced by common institutional apparatuses or factions of society and refer to a singular object, this results in what Foucault called a discursive formation. Discursive formations enable the sustenance of the "regime of truth," which creates reality and meaning in a self referential manner. [1] Ronald Inden discusses a similar notion in his book *Imagining India*. He posits

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[1] An example of a regime of truth pertinent to this dissertation is Edward Said's exposition of Orientalism. For Said, "Orientalism was a library or archive of information commonly and, in some of its aspects,

the notion of "imperial formations," which are "universalizing discourses,...ontologies,

and epistemologies, produced in complex polities at their upper reaches by those persons

and institutions who claim to speak with authority" (1990, 36). In studies on Asia, the

most significant "discursive formation" or "imperial formation" is Orientalism, which

will be discussed in greater detail throughout the dissertation.

Although I will be using Foucault's exposition of discourse and discursive

formations, unlike Foucault – who maintains that the object's existence is wholly

discursive – I am positing the existence of an embodied object. The Hindu image is an

actual tangible object. It has a material form, although it requires a discursive form(ation)

as a support for comprehending it. As David Morgan writes in *The Sacred Gaze:*

Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice:

> People and objects exist as material realities that may not be reduced to social
> circumstances. But neither does their significance emanate from within them as
> from essence. To investigate an image as a social reality means to regard its
> significance as the result of both its original production and its ongoing history of
> reception (Morgan 2005, 32).

Morgan goes on further to say that: "An image is an object to be interpreted – and

every description of one is a form of interpretation" (2005, 36). According to Ronald

Inden, Indological discourse contains two distinct elements: a descriptive aspect and

commentative aspect (1990, 38). The commentative aspect of texts is arguably the most

important means of transmitting information about and creating meaning for the Hindu

image, which in turn leads to further constructions and interpretations. As will be

demonstrated in the following five chapters, the Hindu image was signified and re-

signified through a series of discursive battles. I argue that although the materiality of the

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unanimously held. What bound the archive together was a family of ideas and a unifying set of values
proven in various ways to be effective" (1978, 41).

image is fundamental, it is the narrative that defines and sustains its existence – in effect, it is discourse that works to determine its form and function.

I begin the first chapter, "The Struggle for Form: The Image of God", of this dissertation with a historical examination of the emergence of image worship in Hinduism. The introduction of image worship required a series of complex negotiations that included struggles over status, economics and theology. The second part of the chapter examines the relationship of the image to the divine in the contexts of Śaiva Siddhānta and Śrīvaiṣṇava traditions. On the basis of these two examples, it becomes evident that the connection between the image and God is not uniform throughout Hinduism. In the Śaiva Siddhānta tradition the image serves as a vessel into which divine energy is evoked while for Śrīvaiṣṇavas the image is actually God. But for both these schools, the role of ritual in transforming an object into a divine image is critical. The texts of each tradition, and particularly the commentarial literature provide the formation for understanding the divine image and its power.

The relationship of God to the image is negated in the writings of the missionaries. In chapter 2, "Monsters, Dead Wood and False Gods: Western Perceptions of the Hindu Image" – I investigate Orientalist, colonial and missionary writings concerning the image. These ideas about Hindu images presented in these texts not only influenced Hindu perceptions but also provided the framework for the eventual reception of these images in the West. The knowledge base that underwrote the economic, political and religious endeavors of the British had been acquired in the preceding century through the academic discipline of Orientalism. Through the work of the Orientalist William Jones, it is possible to see how the archive of information about India and Hinduism

began to be built up. During the early nineteenth century, missionary narratives contributed to this textual universe. Missionaries such as William Ward defined the divine image as an 'idol,' making it subject to Christian apprehensions of idolatry.

Chapter 3 – "Four Footed Beasts and Creepy Things": Idols, Idolatry and Iconoclasts" – begins with an exposition of Protestant views of idolatry. By examining passages from the Bible, we find the textual basis for the negative view of the Hindu image, upon which the Protestant missionaries elaborated further. During the early nineteenth century we also see the emergence of Hindu reform movements in Bengal. Rammohun Roy – considered the "father of modern India" – believed, as did the Orientalists and missionaries, that Hinduism was in a state of decay and that the pratice of idolatry was both a symptom and a cause for this degeneracy. However, for Rammohun, idolatry is not confined solely to Hinduism.

Leaving India, in chapter 4, "The Idol Goes West", I trace the Hindu image's entry into England. Here we examine how the context of display at World Fairs and museums provides the form and function of the image. In the second part of the chapter, I discuss how Vivekananda brought Hinduism to America, altering the perception of it as a primitive idolatrous religion and presenting it as a highly spiritual and tolerant philosophical system. The final part of the chapter discusses the writings of E.B. Havell who introduced a positive valuation of Hindu art as a spiritually aesthetic tradition. For Havell the Hindu image was not God but rather a symbol of God.

The significance of the Hindu image as a symbol becomes apparent in the fifth and final chapter of the dissertation. In "Sacrifice, Sedition and Serials: The Goddess as a Political Symbol", I discuss the repositioning of Hindu imagery – more specifically the

Goddess Kālī – as a symbol for Indian nationalist movements in the early twentieth

century. Not only do we see the religious image being re-signified as a political tool, but

we also see the emergence of new forms of discourse in the genre of fiction that construct

Kālī's form and function. Both the British and the Hindu nationalists used the image of

Kālī to further their causes. While fiction was used to substantiate British rule of India, it

was also used to mobilize Indians to revolt against it and fight for self-rule. The novel

Ānandamath by Bankimchandra Chatterjee posited the Goddess as a symbol of the entire

Indian nation. Nationalist leaders like Aurobindo Ghose and Bipinchandra Pal drew

upon this symbolism and used the Goddess as a icon for secret societies attempting to

free India from British rule. Religion and politics become intertwined in the image of the

Goddess.

By examining both colonial British and indigenous Hindu discourse we are able

to develop a deeper understanding of how Hindu divine images acquire meanings. It is

important to realize that while many discursive formations exist at a given time they do

not necessarily remain mutually exclusive. Following Foucault's concept of discursive

formation, a comprehensive analysis examines not only what each group of texts say

about the significance of Hindu images from one particular perspective, but also how the

texts interact to produce new or competing discourses. Through these interactions we can

trace the differing forms of the Hindu image as God, idol, art, and symbol. The overall

aim of this dissertation is to demonstrate that the Hindu image does not have an

essentialized meaning; rather it is the various textual strategies that construct the image's

form and function. This is not simply to say that the image has multiple meanings, but

that the articulation and interpretation of those meanings is correlational.

CHAPTER 1
THE STRUGGLE FOR FORM: THE IMAGE OF GOD

The ubiquitous nature of Hindu imagery in India would appear to suggest a long-standing and stable theology of the divine image. However, as is clear from the diversity of liturgical practices and of the perspectives of various schools of Indian philosophy, the traditions of divine representation in Hinduism follow a complicated and often disjunctive road and have required continual negotiation and reiteration. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to provide a comprehensive history of the role and conceptualization of images in Hindu liturgy and philosophy; it is for this reason that following a survey of the early history of image worship, I restrict my study, in the present chapter, to the nature of the image as presented in Śaiva Siddhānta and Śrīvaisṇavism. These two schools of Hinduism provide two differing views concerning the nature of God and his/her relationship to a concrete form or image. The investigation of the Hindu image requires more than a study of the actual material object, but requires also an examination of the discursive formations surrounding the context, usage and location of its existence, since different temporal and geographical frames present differing theologies and practices. Further, discrepancies exist not only among the various schools, but also within the texts and practices of a single school or tradition. Any study of images in Hinduism must acknowledge this and view these systems as fluid, and constantly shifting in practice and interpretation.

1.1: Brief History of the Introduction of the Image in Hindu Liturgical Practice

Given the fact that Hinduism today is so filled with images and icons of gods and goddesses, it is hard to believe that at one point in history, the dominant priestly circle resisted the introduction of images into worship. But various writings from the ancient and medieval periods make it apparent that there was strong resistance and a long process of both negotiation and remonstration prior to the acceptance of the usage of images in everyday worship. Some scholars have argued that the introduction of images into the Hindu religion followed a vertical model where the practices of the lower groups infiltrated into those of the higher ones. [1] This is what Peter Brown refers to as the a "two-tiered model" where change is brought about by "continuous upward pressure" from the masses on the religious elite which leads to the adopting of popular practices in order to satisfy the peoples' needs.[2] In the Indian context, this process may be framed within the Dravidian-Aryan model where an "indigenous village Dravidian culture" encountered the "dominant Aryan culture" and introduced these practices into the "pure" religion of the Aryans. [3] However this explanation is limited and simplistic, as well as incorrect, as we will soon see. It restricts the process of religious change to a clash of cultures and therefore provides a one-dimensional view of the transition from the

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[1] Kane lists this as one of the possible reasons for the introduction of image worship and the erection of temples. He offers three principal views: 1) that image worship was derived from sudras and Dravidian tribes and absorbed in the brahmanical cults; (2) that the making of images was copied from the Buddhists; and (3) that this practice was a natural and spontaneous growth (1974, 710-711).

[2] Brown makes this point with regard to the popularity of the cult of saints in Latin Christianity during late antiquity (Brown 1981, 16-18). Gregory Schopen (1988-89) also takes up this point in the context of Indian Buddhist image worship in his article, "Of Monks, Nuns, and 'Vulgar' Practices: The Introduction of the Image Cult into Indian Buddhism," where he demonstrates that it was monks and nuns who were most concerned with setting up images, and not the "masses".

[3] For further discussion of the Aryan-Dravidian theory see Bryant 2001.

aniconic to the iconic.[4] The acceptance of image worship was a long and complicated process, that required years of negotiation and was often met with open hostility. Following the work of von Stietencron (2005) and Davis (2001), I would argue that the transition into image worship was brought about by members of the same caste, the Brahmins, who initially resisted its usage. And as Phyllis Granoff explains, most of the story will be discovered by 'reading between the lines' of the texts to discover some of the intricacies and problems that resulted when a group deliberately sought to construct new rituals or impose its own rituals on a sphere originally not its own" (2006). In other words, when examining the texts we should not only look at overt restriction of image worship, but also to texts and practices which negotiate and defend the introduction of the practice. Further, in order to gauge the time frame of the introduction of iconolatry, it is necessary to examine texts where images are not even spoken of.

Scholars have commented that during Vedic times there was no image worship (Gonda 1965, Jamison 1991; Kane 1968-75). Max Muller expressed the conception that Peter Brown refers to as the two-tiered system, when he stated: "The religion of the Vedas knew no idols. The worship of idols in India is a secondary formation, a later degradation of more primitive worship of ideal gods..." (cited in Banerjea 1956, 46). This argument was reiterated by Kane when he concluded that: "One can say without much fear of contradiction that the religious practices among the higher strata of the Vedic Aryans did not include the worship of images in the house or temple" (1968-75, 2:707). Stephanie Jamison points out a distinction between Vedic religion and temple Hinduism that does not render the former conducive to image worship. She suggests that

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[4] While the word aniconic can be used to signify a non-anthropomorphic representation of divinity, I am using it in the more general sense as the rejection or avoidance of the representation of divinity.

because Vedic religion is a "portable religion" there were no permanent structures to house images (1991, 16-17). People in the time of the *Ṛg Veda* were likely nomadic, and their worship practices were sacrificial and involved the recitation of *mantras*. The deities worshipped, such as Indra, Agni and Varuṇa, were considered abstract functions of natural phenomena or cosmic processes or as powers that enabled the communication with the divine (Kane 1968-75, 2:706). They were limited in their functions and often served as messengers, as in the case of Agni who would take the sacrificial food up to heaven. The Vedas did not concentrate on their bodily forms or attributes, which may lead to the conclusion that anthropomorphic representation did not play a significant role in Vedic Hinduism. However, from certain passages in the *Ṛg Veda*, it is arguable that descriptions indicate a corporeal construction of the Vedic gods.[5] For example Indra is described as *tuvigrīva* (with a powerful and thick neck) and *vapodara* (having a big belly) (*Ṛg Veda* VIII.17.8: cited in Kane 1968-75, 2: 706). While there is no concrete evidence of image worship, there also isn't any prohibition of it. What is missing from the Vedic corpus is any form of liturgy where images are involved. Even the *Saṃhitās* and the early *Brāhmaṇas*, which deal in large part with ritual, do not mention anything that can be interpreted as image worship.

One of the first pieces of solid textual evidence of image worship comes from the work of the famous Sanskrit grammarian Pāṇinī (~5th B.C.E.).[6] Pāṇinī's *Jīvikārthe cāpaṇye* (5.3.99) is, according to von Stietencron:

> ...intended to regulate the formation of the names of divine images. To some of them the suffix –*ka* is added, to others it is not; and with the latter deals this *sūtra*.

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[5] For more examples see Kane. P.V. 1968, 206. & Salmond, Noel. 2004, 16-17.
[6] Pāṇinī also makes reference to Śiva and Śaiva worship. In Pantañjali's *Mahābhāṣya* on Pāṇinī (2nd B.C.E), he describes devotees of Śiva as wearing animal skins and carrying an iron lance representing his God.

>From the commentators we know Pāṇinī's rule is based on a distinction of images which are meant for sale and others which were worshipped and cared for by custodians called *devalaka*. The rule applies to the latter. These images can be fixed in a shrine (*acala*) or carried from place to place (*cala*). In both cases they are meant for worship (*pūjārthe*) and are a source of livelihood (*jīvikā*) to their custodians who receive the gifts of the devotees. The *devalakas* show the images and act as *pūjārīs*, but they do not sell them: their images are not for sale (*apaṇya*) Such images according Pāṇinī, would be named as *Śiva* or *Skanda* (the example is taken from *Patañjali*) without the suffix *-ka*. Opposed to these are images which were displayed for sale. They too were a means of livelihood for their owners, but these owners kept them only for trade, not for worship (*pūjārthe*). Such images would be called *Śivaka* or *Skandaka* (2005, 55-56).

The fact that Pāṇinī wrote about this linguistic distinction illustrates three things: (1) images were being used in religious practice during this time; (2) certain groups earned a living from both service to and the sale of religious images and (3) this form of worship was connected with new gods such as Śiva and Skanda, rather than the gods of the Vedic pantheon. Thus, it would appear that this new mode of worship had not necessarily overtaken the Vedic mode of worship, but was offering different liturgical practices directed at gods and goddesses who were not part of the Vedic pantheon.

The fact that priests made money from these images was cause for great disdain among the more orthodox Vedic Brahmins. The image-worshipping priests are referred to in a derogatory manner in many texts beginning with Pāṇinī . These texts admonished the image priests for the fact that they handled money. The terminology referring to the image priests indicates how they were viewed. They were called as by Pāṇinī "*devalaka*" or "fallen priest", the same word that was used for the Śūdra caretakers of images, and were considered as *patita* – fallen from the rank of Brahmin to a Śūdra (Granoff 2006; von Steitencron 2005, 57). This classification of image-worshipping Brahmins as "fallen priests" would continue well into the medieval period, demonstrating that the introduction of images into Hindu ritual was a long and complicated process. The *Manu*

smṛti, one of the most significant texts for brahmanical Hinduism, compiled in the

beginning of the Common Era, compares the *devalaka* to people such as merchants who

sell services for money and states that therefore they should be excluded from traditional

śrāddha and *saṃskāra* rites.

> Doctors, priests who attend on idols, people who sell meat and people who
> support themselves by trade are to be excluded from offerings to the gods and
> ancestors (3.152: Doniger 1991, 59). [7]

Kallūka, commenting on the word *devalaka* and its usage in Manu 3.152, alleges that

such priests serve their deities only for the sake of profit and not religion (von Steitencron

2005, 59). In many *purāṇic* accounts we find disparaging stories about priests who care

for the temples. The *Śiva Purāṇa* (chapter 13) speaks of the origin of the priests called

baṭukas who worship the liṅga. Their lineage is traced back to a Brahmin who had

sexual intercourse and did not bathe before worshipping Śiva on Śivarātri, thereby

violating the laws of purity. Śiva's consort, Gaurī feels sorry for him and adopts him and

Śiva proclaims that all descendents of this "fallen" Brahmin are to worship the liṅga

(Granoff 2000, 6-7). While the worship of images is increasingly referred to in the law

books and *purāṇic* accounts, these texts continue to stigmatize the priests involved in the

practice.

It would be too simplistic to say that these attacks were based solely on

economics and that the financial gain enjoyed by image priests was the only basis for the

antagonism of the orthodox Brahmins. It is likely that the resistance was equally due to

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[7] While the *Manu smṛti* situates the image priests as lower than the more traditional priests, it does in other
sections proclaim the sacrality of images. In 4.39, Manu states: "When he [the *brahmacārin*] encounters a
mound of earth, a cow, an image of god, a priest, clarified butter, honey, a crossroads, or famous trees he
should circumambulate them to the right, clockwise" (Doniger 1991, 78).Given that Manu mentions the
images as sacred, it is apparent that they were in usage during his time (second century BCE .- second
century CE).

the fact that the introduction of images altered the character of the religion itself and changed the status of the Vedic priest (Davis 2001; Granoff 1998; von Steitencron 2005).

In the Vedic structure of "public" worship, a priest summoned a god to the sacrifice or the deity remained in heaven where Agni transported offerings and prayers. With the introduction of images, the god resided in a place permanently and was accessible. No intermediary was necessary; the god could be encountered without the skills of a ritual specialist. For the Vedic Brahmin whose status was dependent upon his ritual skill, images would be seen as threatening as his services would no longer be required. Von Stietencron argues that this loss of status was one of the main causes for the rupture within the priestly caste (2005). The reasons that accusations of greed and economic motivation were brought forward stemmed from this loss of status and consequent loss of employment brought about by a shift in ritual practices.

As evidenced by Manu 3.152, at the turn of the Common Era, orthodox Brahmins sought to protect their role and status by avoiding certain rituals and holding on to others, such as the *śraddha* and *saṃskāra* rites.[8] In this way, Vedic priests could retain some sort of participation and control in the developing liturgy.

The negotiation for prominence in the ritual spectrum, coupled with apprehension and enmity towards the priests who tended the images, is displayed by orthodox Brahmin priests in the medieval *māhātmya* texts, a group of texts associated with the *Purāṇas*. In her analysis of several of these texts, Phyllis Granoff demonstrates that the orthodox

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[8] *Saṃskāra* rituals mark rites of passages that demarcate a Hindu's entrance into a new realm, state or stage of life. The actual number of *saṃskāras* varies according to different texts, but generally it is standardized at sixteen. Broadly they are classified into rites associated with the prenatal stage, birth, youth, marriage and death. *Śraddha* rites are part of the final *saṃskāra*, the last sacrifice (antyeṣṭi), the death rituals. During the period immediately following death, the deceased's family is in a high state of pollution until the *śraddha* is performed. See Flood 1996, 207.

priests sought to distinguish themselves from the image and temple priests, while

maintaining authority over the more esoteric and fundamental functions associated with

worship (1998). Given the range of liturgical roles, the nature of sacrality in terms of

geographical space and physical representation was contested. The *Prabhāsamāhātmya*

demonstrates the problematic role of orthodox priests in image worship through a

discussion between Viśvakarman (the divine architect), Soma (the moon) and Kauśika

(the leader of the Brahmins). Chapter 23 of the text tells of the building of a temple in

order to house a linga. In order to cure himself of a disease inflicted on him by a curse,

Soma worships Śiva, who tells him to consecrate a linga with the help of Viśvakarman.

The narrative details the preparations necessary to render a space acceptable for such a

sacred object. Beginning with the erection of several enclosures for sacrifice and

maṇḍapas, structures are built for various priests who will participate in the sacrifice (37-

100). Verse 23.120 introduces an aspect that carries great significance for this discussion,

stating that: "the linga to be installed is to be set up on top of an underground linga. The

god Brahmā is the only one who can see this underground linga" (Granoff 1998, 3). It is

only after the sacrifice is completed and Soma has been cured that he asks Viśvakarman

to build a temple for the linga. (24.56). He entrusts the temple to the Brahmins, and in

return for providing them with material means, Soma asks them to care for the

consecrated linga in the newly built temple. Kauśika responds to this request by stating:

> In every respect we applaud what the moon, King of the twice-born, has
> instructed us. We will do everything requested of us, but first we beg you to hear
> this small point we would like to make. If we were to worship according to the
> rules of worshipping images in temples, busying ourselves with the leavings of
> the offerings to Śiva, then we would lose our caste status, something which is
> abhorred by the orthodox śruti and smṛti texts. And śruti and smṛti are the two
> greatest commands of the god Rudra himself; what fool would transgress them,
> even if he were threatened with death? We bring joy to the entire world by

performing sacrifices according to the rules of the śruti into the fire, which is the mouth of the gods (24.84-88, Granoff 1998, 5).

This passage demonstrates that in order to keep their caste status, orthodox Brahmins must engage only in sacrifice as prescribed by the rules of the Vedas; it is clear that the worship of images results in loss of status. In order to obey Soma, however, Kauśika proposes that the image be tended by priests who were originally demons but were slain by Śiva and Viṣṇu, and hence reborn into the families of brahmarṣis, "sages who are Brahmins by birth" (Granoff 1998, 6). Not only is the lower status of priests who tend images established through this narrative, but so are the functions of both groups. Since there exists an invisible linga underneath the physical linga, the relinquishing of the visible linga to the "demon priests", left the orthodox priests with responsibility for the more primordial and subtle aspects of divinity, illustrating not only a hierarchical construction of priestly duty, but also demonstrating the various conceptualizations of divinity that were emerging historically.

As we have seen, the Vedas make no reference to icons or images representing god(s) (Banerjea 1956, Gonda 1965, Jamison 1991).The interaction between human and divine (outside the domestic sphere) took place through *yajña* (sacrifice) that was officiated over by Vedic Brahmin priests. The Vedic gods possessed limited functionality and were not considered all-pervasive or transcendent. It is only in the texts known as the *Upaniṣads* (7th-6th BCE) that speculations regarding the character of sacrifice and the nature of god were discussed, eventually altering liturgical practices and concepts of the divine. The *Upaniṣads* exalted a supreme unknown that was located outside worldly limitation. The absolute – *Brahman* – was without form (*nirguṇa*), without beginning or end and was unchanging and all pervading. The Upaniṣads and later

the monist philosophical schools developed a "negative theological vocabulary to

approximate the abstract Absolute" (Davis 2001, 111). [9] Within this construction, the

Vedic gods no longer occupied places of importance. The Vedic deities were simple

finite beings subject to the cosmic cycle and involved in worldly activities, unlike the all-

pervading *Brahman* who existed apart from this realm. According to Kane a shift from

devayajña to *devapūjā* began to occur:

> When Vedic sacrifices became less and less prevalent owing to various causes
> (particularly because of the doctrine of ahiṁsā, the various upāsānas and the
> philosophy of the Absolute set forth in the Upaniṣads), there arose the cult of the
> worship of images. Originally, it was not so universal or elaborate as it became in
> medieval and modern times (1974, 712).

But the shift to images did not follow the *Upaniṣadic* concept of God so easily. How

could a formless all pervading God be represented by an image which clearly depicts

form and restricts the God to an icon? The texts and theology of the new theists solved

this problem by declaring that God had two forms of being – both with form (*saguṇa*)

and without form (*nirguṇa*) – and they supported their assertion by citing various

passages from the *Upaniṣads*. Śaṅkara (c.788-820 CE), the famous proponent of the

monist school of Advaita Vedānta, or non- dual tradition, based his philosophy on two

major postulates: (1) the highest being (*Brahman*) is beyond attributes and description

and (2) reality (*Brahman*) is one, and realization of the ultimate reality (*Brahman*)

precludes any separation from God (*Brahman*) and the soul. The supposition that

Brahman was without attributes, raised some issues regarding devotionalism (*bhakti*).

The two- tiered model of comprehension was hierarchical in that there was a lower and

higher understanding of Brahman. The higher level, or *nirguṇa* aspect of *Brahman*

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[9] The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* conceptualizes Brahman as *neti neti* – "not this, not this" – due to the fact
that human language and ideology is incapable of describing this Ultimate Reality.

involved no imagery, whereas the lower level, where distinctions exist, was that of

saguṇa. The two-tiered system offered a model not only for the representation of the

divine, but also for the knowledge (*jñāna*) required to comprehend the ineffable nature of

God. For Śaṅkara, the *saguṇa* aspect was to be used simply as a tool to realize the

formless aspect of God; it required a lower level of understanding and was ultimately a

function of ignorance (*avidyā*) since anything other than *Brahman* was mere illusion

(*māyā*). In terms of devotion (*bhakti*) to *saguṇa Brahman* as Īśvara (the Lord), a

knowledgeable person (*jñāni*) recognizes that this distinction is ultimately false, and thus

realizes the eventual inefficacy of devotional images (Malakovsky 1997, 545).

However, by appropriating the vocabulary of the *Upaniṣads*, and Śaṅkara's

interpretation of ideas from the Vedic corpus, the new theistic schools of Hindu thought

and practice advanced claims that Śiva or Viṣṇu was the all pervading *Brahman* who had

taken form to act in the world and to provide access to his worshippers.

> One god was considered as supreme Lord, encompassing within himself all
> aspects and functions of all other gods. He could be directly approached for all
> needs and aims of life, of which salvation or final release gradually attained
> importance. The earlier emphasis on the god's actions and functions within an
> overwhelming world experienced by man, shifted towards an emphasis on man's
> thoughts, emotions and actions in relations to a transcendental reality which could
> be experienced as a personal god. The image made his presence both visible and
> permanent (von Steitencron 2005, 62)

While certain *Upaniṣads* spoke of the two forms theoretically, the question

remained as how this would translate literally. The *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, a

Pāñcarātra text, (5-7th CE) is one of the most important texts in terms of its detailed

description of the construction of temples and images and the information it presents

regarding image worship. The *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* highlights the problem of a

formless all pervasive god being worshipped in a body of visible form. Chapter 46 addresses this concern:

> You have said that god is devoid of qualities like color, taste and odor; devoid of touch or sound. How can he then have a physical form? Mārkandeya replied, "The Highest soul has two forms, one that is his original form and one his transformed (or derived) form. The form that cannot be seen is called his original form. The form that has a sensible physical dimension is called the transformed form. The whole world is in fact his transformed form. His transformed form is the only form that can be worshipped or can be the object of meditation. One should worship the highest soul in the proper way; it is difficult for mortals, who themselves have bodies, to worship something that is unmanifest. For that reason, of his own free will, the highest soul in his various appearances displays a sensible form which can be seen; the other gods do the same." (translated in Granoff 2001, 24).

This text alludes to the fact that God can be approached through his visible form, but this form is inferior to the "original" form which is inaccessible to worship. It should be noted however, that the *purānic* stories and the inscriptional evidence indicate a rejection of such a hierarchy, clearly indicating that the image is fully God.

The textual evidence shows that the Vedic priest eventually began functioning in temple activities. It would appear that it was a gradual process. The sixth century *Brhatsamhitā* of Varāhamihira indicates that various priests occupied different roles in relation to the temple images.

> Varāhamihira describes the consecration of images in which Brahmins play a role; they recite mantras and are honored by the traditional daksinā or gift for their services. But he then tells us:
> "Know that the priests are as follows: for Visnu, the Bhāgāvatas; for the sun, the Magas; for Śiva, twice-born who smear themselves with ashes; for the mothers, those who know the rites of the mandala; for Brahma, the Brahmins..." (Granoff, 2000, 16).

This suggests that the Vedic Brahmins were now participating in the temple rituals, as well as following their more traditional occupations, but that their activities were restricted to the consecration ritual. From the eighth century onward, resources were

employed for the construction of temples that housed Śiva, Viṣṇu and the Saptamātṛkā (the seven mothers), even as the Vedic Brahmins continued to receive support for the performance of sacrifices (Davis 2001, 109).

With the exception of contemporary times, the early medieval period (700-1200 ce) is arguably the most image-saturated era in Hindu India. One would imagine that by this time image worship no longer had to be defended, but although the practice was considered legitimate, the debates continued. In addition, the acceptance of the image as the object of worship, led to further discussions about the nature of God in terms of the issue of whether the image was God itself or simply a vessel into which God's presence was invoked. I will take up this discussion in the following sections in the context of the Śaiva Siddhānta and Śrīvaiṣṇava schools of Hindu thought.

1.2: Are You There God?

1.2.1: The Āgamas

The examination of Śaiva Siddhānta and Śrīvaiṣṇavism involves a study of the textual genres associated with the schools. The Āgamas, literally 'that which has come down', are texts composed by humans (although they are said to have originated from God) that contain philosophical, devotional, mythological and ritual elements. Jan Gonda states that the Āgamas "mainly teach *sādhana*, that is, how to realize practically the truths of religion" (1977, 2). Āgamas are concerned with ritual, rather than serving an exclusively doctrinal purpose. The word Āgama is often taken to specifically denote the early texts of the Śaivas, whereas the texts dealing with Viṣṇu are termed Saṃhitās. Both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava Āgamas were considered to be comprised of four sections (*pādas*), but although the Āgamas are divided into what appears to be apodictic sections, the categories are

amorphous and often permeate one another.[10] This may reflect in large part to the fact that these subdivisions were established in later times in an attempt to codify and categorize the content of the Āgamas.

1.2.2: Śaiva Siddhānta

Although positing a date for the origination of Śaiva Siddhānta is perilous, it emerged as a distinct school of Śaivism around the ninth century throughout India and developed particularly in Tamil Nadu.[11] The literary canon of Śaiva Siddhānta in Tamil Nadu consists of the Āgamas, the *paddhatis* (literally "footprints", which attempt to clarify the ritual and philosophical elements of the Āgamas), and Tamil texts such as Meykaṇṭār's *Civañānapōtam* composed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[12] The Śaivāgamic canon is said to consist of 28 *mūlāgamas* or root treatises, and 197 *upāgāma* or subsidiary treatises. The texts concentrate primarily on ritual practices and delineate also the ceremonies and specificities needed to organize, construct and enliven the Śaiva temple. The main goal of these texts, it would appear, is to guide the initiate through a series of proper procedures and rites towards Śiva or liberation. Despite the abundance of various Āgamic texts, the Śaiva canon is traditionally viewed as unitary in doctrinal,

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[10] 1) Jñāna Pāda- Knowledge section which deals with theology, cosmology, the nature of God and the Universe which provides access to liberation (*mokṣa, mukti*)

2) Yoga Pāda -- concentration or meditation (*upāsana*) especially by means of *mantra* (sacred sound).

3) Kriyā Pāda- the "action" for proper maintenance of the temple as a liturgical place, including all activities associated with the construction of the temple from laying the foundation to the installation of the images.

4) Caryā pāda- appropriate codes of conduct of performance for initiation (*dīkṣā*), daily ritual (*pūjā*) and festivals (*utsava*).

The Jñāna and Yoga pādas are brief and incompletely preserved in most cases. It is the caryā pāda and kriyā pāda which receive the most attention as they deal with the practical aspects of ritual. (Gonda. 1977, Neevel Jr. 1977.)

[11] In present times Śaiva Siddhānta flourishes in parts of South India and Sri Lanka.

[12] The *Civañānapōtam* was the first exposition of Śaiva Siddhānta theology composed in Tamil. Even though Sanskrit remained the dominant language for ritual practices in Śaiva Siddhānta, Tamil became the prevailing language for theology.

ritual and theological scope due to the fact that all these texts are said to originate from the one supreme source, Śiva, and as such are "fully authoritative, as no other scriptures (including the Vedas) could be" (Brunner 1992, 5) . The knowledge imparted by the Āgamas is supposed to have initially existed as undifferentiated sound free from dualities or divisions (Padoux 1992, 51). However, over the course of time, the knowledge passed through human channels.

> During the process of emission (sṛṣṭi) by which all things become differentiated, Śiva divides this unitary and subtle knowledge into a number of versions, and in so doing transforms it into form (śabdarūpa) accessible to lower categories of beings. He emits it, according to some texts, in a series of "streams" (strotas) that issue from the five faces of Sadāśiva. The differentiated verbal versions of the originally unitary jñāna are then passed on to a number of divine authors, who in turn pass them on to others. Eventually the āgamas reach the ears of humans, a momentous event. The first human auditors of the āgamas are always ṛṣis, sages portrayed as the most highly accomplished of all humans (Davis 2000, 10-11).

The process of transmission implies a successive degradation in terms of purity but also an accretion of textual form. Over the course of time, some texts have been lost, and others subject to modification. The Āgamas contain a truly heterogeneous group of teachings that are far from unified, although they all expound Śiva as the highest state of being.

In order to bridge some of these differences and establish a cohesive body of thought, paddhatis were produced from the tenth century onwards. The paddhatis were ritual manuals based on the Śaiva Āgamas. These texts – and the commentaries on the Āgamas composed at the same time – had profound impact on the interpretation of the Āgamas and liturgical practice and theology, as certain elements were elucidated and others ignored. The paddhatis did not claim to be the words of Śiva; rather their task was to illuminate the views of the Śaiva Siddhānta tradition and to refute all that was deemed

non-conducive to the spiritual aspirant. The *paddhatis* enabled the Śaiva masters to omit what was discordant to the tradition, while adding what was deemed deficient (Brunner 1992, 15). Through the *paddhatis*, Śaiva masters were able to reconcile seemingly inconsistent philosophical views and ritual practices, while at the same time creating "something new as much as old" (Davis 2000, 17).

Through the efforts of the *paddhati* authors, the various texts of the Āgamas were amalgamated into a cohesive system of knowledge and ritual action that provided a framework for the Śaiva Siddhānta tradition. The *paddhatis*, not the Āgamas, themselves, became the referent for practice and knowledge for the priests and lay followers of Śaiva Siddhānta.[13]

1.2.3: Image and the Nature of God in Śaiva Siddhānta

In order to receive worship Śiva is said to be of two levels: one, the ultimate, undifferentiated and the second, differentiated. Śiva in his highest conceptualization as Paramaśiva (the highest Śiva) is unmanifest (*avyakta*), transcendent, formless, and *niṣkala* (without parts). In *The Elements of Hindu Iconography*, Rao states: "In the nishkalā state the Supreme Being has no beginning, no limit or boundary and is pervading everywhere, is indestructible, incomparable, extremely subtle and supreme, and is unknowable by any mode of proof" (1997, 362). At this level he is indescribable and inconceivable in human thought, and hence unable to be worshipped directly. The second level of Śiva, *sakala* (with form), allows humans to access a part of Śiva in

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[13] Aghoraśiva's *Kriyākramadyotikā* (mid 12th C) became one of the most popular texts used to articulate temple ritual in the Śaiva Siddhānta tradition. Incorporating the works of commentators on the Āgamas and other *paddhati* authors such as Sadyojyoti, Bhojadeva, Rāmakaṇṭha and Nārāyaṇakaṇṭha, Aghoraśiva formulated a cogent articulation of the Śaiva Siddhānta thought and practice. The *Somaśambhupaddhati* composed in the 11th C, which will I refer to in later sections, addressed rituals to be performed by the individual practioner.

manifest form (*vyatka*). Śiva in his *sakala* form is accessible to the human devotee.[14] This is necessary because, according Aghoraśiva, "[i]t is only to the extent that You possess a visible form that one is able to approach You. The intellect cannot approach something lacking any visible form." (*dīpikā* of Aghoraśiva on *Mṛgendrāgama* 3.8-9, quoted in Davis 2000, 112). The tangible forms that Śiva takes can be seen as fragmentary manifestations, only a partial representation of the pervasiveness of Paramaśiva that exists for the purpose of human worship, since Paramaśiva is limitless, indescribable and immeasurable. Śiva's numerous forms are given in the Āgamas, however it is the form of Sadāśiva (*sakalaniṣkala*) that is seen as the most efficacious differentiated form of Siva that acts as the bridge between the *niṣkala* and *sakala* levels of Śiva. The *Śaivāgamaparibhāṣāmañjarī*, a sixteenth century compendium of Śaiva doctrine compiled by Vedajñāna states that Śiva has three *tattvas* (realities) (3.54b): (1) Śiva who is the *niṣkala* (2) Maheśa who is *sakala*, and (3) Sadāśiva, a combination of Śiva and Maheśa, *sakalaniṣkala* (Dagens 1979, 112).[15] The body possessed by Sadāśiva during worship cannot be understood in terms of human notions of embodiment. It is a body of sound, created by *mantras* and must be understood symbolically or metaphorically.[16] Although Sadāśiva has a tangible representation (see **figure 1.1**), it must be conceived of as a physical support for the power of Śiva. At a concrete level Sadāśiva is a linga made

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[14] For a list of different *sakala* manifestations of Śiva, see Rao 1997.

[15] The Ajita Āgama, (Paṭala 1 st.25-32) describes the dual nature of Brahman, as being: (1) beyond form and word and (2) Consisting or being defined by word- Sadāśiva (Bhatt 1964,3-4). Maheśa is the tangible manifestation of Śiva in anthropomorphic form, that is the creator of all the other gods and mârtis (images of god).

[16] This is similar to the notion of divinity expressed through the Śrīvidyā ("Auspicious Wisdom") school, a goddess centered Tantric tradition, where the body of the Goddess Lalitā Tripurasundarī is constructed through the *pañcadaśākṣarī* mantra consisting of fifteen syllables or the *ṣoṣaśākṣarī*, the sixteen syllable mantra. See Brooks 1992.

up of five faces, which represents the allegorical body of Siva.[17] And although these actual physical representations of Sadāśiva are rare in present times, this form is visualized (*bhāvanā*), according to the Kāmikāgama (4.4.329-34) as having five faces and ten arms.

> One should meditate that Sadāśiva has five faces, ten arms, and three eyes [in each face]. Crystal in color and calm, he has a crescent moon at his crest, and his hair is fastened with a snake. His seat is a lion-throne made of mantras, and he sits atop a white lotus. Ornamented with bracelets, earrings, necklaces, the auspicious thread, waistbands, upper-arm bracelets, golden bracelets and chest bands, he is a lovely, tranquil, smiling sixteen-year-old. In his right hands he holds trident, axe, sword, thunderbolt, and fire; the *mūdra* of security and the noose, along with the bell, snake, and hook, are in his five left hands (quoted in Davis 2000, 116).[18]

The body of Sadāśiva is constructed onto the undifferentiated linga through elaborate *mantric* ritual practices that enable this visualization of Śiva to be the closest approximation of Śiva in the material world. The ritual processes enable the invocation of Siva to summon him into the physical support. The process of invocation (*āvāhana*) is compared in the Āgamas to the enlivening of the human body by the soul. Once the linga is empowered through the process of *āvāhana*, Śiva manifests himself in that particular

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[17] The imagery of Sadāśiva is important to examine both for iconographical and ritual purposes. Sadāśiva is composed of the five faces of Śiva, which illustrate his all pervasiveness through the activities he performs. Śiva is said to perform five main functions that are associated with the five faces of Sadāśiva.

1) The top, hidden face is Īśāna associated with the function of grace (*anugraha*) which Śiva bestows on his devotees
2) The Eastern face is Tatpuruṣa which is associated with the veiling (*tirobhāva*) which Śiva performs in order to hide the soul's true nature
3) The Southern face is Aghora, which performs the function of re-absorption (*samāhara*). This deals with the process of destruction
4) The Northern face is Vāma which performs the function of maintenance (*sthiti*),
5) The Western face is Sadyojāta which performs the function of emission (*sṛṣṭi*) which deals with the process of creation

The Āgamas are also associated with Sadāśiva as they are said to be revealed from each of his faces. The process of emission of the Āgamas is similar to process of creation as they were first revealed by undifferentiated sound (Nada) and were transformed into audible sound (śabda) and revealed down a lineage originating from Śiva to lesser emanations and then finally to the sages. Each Āgama is said to make a part of the body of Śivajñāna i.e. Kāmikāgama is Śiva's feet. (Davis 2000).

[18] See also Rao 1997, 372.

location.[19] During the rite of *āvāhana* God is conceived of as a mass of energy (*śakti*) that transubstantiates, through *mantra* the presence of Paramaśiva within, *sakala* Śiva. Brunner states that *āvāhana* is an invitation for Paramaśiva to inhabit a material image through a body of *mantra* that allows the energy of God to be "condensed" and "allow[s] him to be shifted,..., and brought into the place where one wishes him to be" (1998, 12). The rite of *āvāhana* not only involves the actual invocation of God, but also requires the establishment of a suitable receptacle for the presence of God. It is not the object that is the recipient of worship but rather the presence of Śiva.

The first step of *āvāhana* involves the fabrication of the divine throne (*divyāsana*), thereby creating an appropriate place for the ritual body to sit. Once the throne has been fabricated through visualization and *mantra* from the ground up, the worshipper then constructs the ritual body of Sadāśiva through visualization and *mantra*. The Ajitāgama states, "[w]hen he has visualized the embodiment, the worshipper should invoke it onto that previously described throne of Śiva, using the flowers cupped in his hands and the MŪRTI mantra" (20.164-65, quoted by Davis 2000, 126). The next stage of *āvāhana* is to actually summon Paramaśiva into the receptacle, and thereby enliven the image. Richard Davis observes the two-fold nature of the process stating that "[it] alters the character of his [Śiva's] presence from latent to active, and it changes the worshipper's awareness of Śiva's presence, disclosing what was previously concealed" (2000, 120).

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[19] Although Paramaśiva is omnipresent, the rite of invocation is said to enhance his presence, establishing a "marked" presence (*visiṣṭa samnidhana*). The Kāmikāgama likens the process of invocation to the presence of fire in wood, stating: "As fire, though present in a tree from its root to its tip, may become manifest in one place, just so the manifestation of consciousness in one place does not contradict its pervasiveness. Just as fire is made to arise in wood by rubbing it and so on. Śiva is manifested through the power of mantras and through devotion" (4.355, 352 quoted by Davis 2000, 19)

The Āgamas list innumerable items that may function as the physical support of Śiva including but not limited to sketches, stones, fire and trees (*Kāmikāgama* 4.270-72, quoted in Davis 2000, 120). However, the value of the support differs according to its nature, where the more subtle or *sūkṣma* supports are considered superior to the gross or *sthūla* ones. The *sthūla* forms of Śiva are categorized according to a three-fold schema as: (1) *niṣkala* – undifferentiated, without form (2) *sakala* –differentiated, with form and (3) *sakalaniṣkala*- both differentiated and undifferentiated, with and without form. The *niṣkala* form of Śiva is represented in the material world through a cylindrical object known as the linga (see fig 1.2). Before a material object can be become a suitable permanent support for the presence of God, it must undergo the ritual of *pratiṣṭhā*, or establishment, where divine power is infused into the material object.[20] Ramachandran Rao states that the Śaivāgamas explain *pratiṣṭhā* as the juxtaposition of "pure consciousness (Śiva) and primordial action (Śakti)" (1994, 3). The *Somaśambhupaddhati* 1.1 describes *linga pratiṣṭhā* as the unification of the *śakti* (the *pīṭha*) with Śiva (the linga) through *mantra* (Brunner 1998, 2).[21]

The *Somaśambhupaddhati* explains that *pratiṣṭhā* is what holds the divine here in place and discusses how God's essence may be embodied in concrete objects (Brunner 1998, vii). Somaśambhu outlines the preparatory rites that have to be done before the actual material fabrication of the linga, *pīṭha* and associated objects. These rites are of

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[20] This is not necessary in the case of impermanent supports such as those listed in Kāmikāgama 4.270-72 or svyambhū (self-arising) lingas.

[21] Brunner translates: "Le *pīṭha* est Śakti, le *liṅga* est Śiva, et l'installation est leur union au moyen des *mantra* de Śiva" (1982,2.) The *Somaśambhupaddhati* was written around the 11th century. It was written primarily for personal rites and deals with daily, occasional and optional rituals According to Brunner the rites represented in the *Somaśambhupaddhati* would have been practiced within "un maṭha, avec ses dépendences naturelles, dont au moins un temple de Śiva (peut-être d'autres)" (xxxi). Although it is not intended for temple ritual, but rather for private ritual this text provides invaluable information regarding the relationship between image and god. The fourth volume of Brunner's edition is especially important as it deals primarily with *pratiṣṭhā*, one of the "optional rituals".

great importance, because through these rites mundane objects are transformed into *mūrti,* or divine images, charged through *nyāsa,* visualization and *mantra* (Brunner 1998, xii).

Although the objective of *pratiṣṭhā* in Śaiva Siddhānta is to render the object a suitable support for the presence of Śiva, it simply provides the foundation for the presence and does not guarantee that the presence of the deity will reside there permanently. It would appear that even after the *pratiṣṭhā* ritual is performed the divine presence must be invited (*āvāhana*), as discussed earlier. At the conclusion of worship, the presence is dismissed though the ritual of *visarjana,* requiring that the whole process of invocation be performed each time worship commences.[22]

1.2.4: Śrīvaiṣṇavas

The Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition which developed in South India emphasizes, as its appellation demonstrates, devotion to Viṣṇu and his consort Śrī or Lakṣmī. The designation Śrīvaiṣṇava highlights the importance of Śrī or Lakṣmī: Viṣṇu's consort who acts as a mediator for Viṣṇu's grace. It is through the grace of Viṣṇu that the devotee is able to reach *vaikuṇṭha* (heaven), and hence liberation (*mokṣa*). The textual material used by the Śrīvaiṣṇava community includes the Sanskrit scriptures of the Vedas, Pāñcarātra and Vaikhānasa Saṃhitās (Āgamas), the writings of the Ācāryas in Sanskrit and Maṇipravāla and also the Tamil devotional songs of the Āḻvārs.[23] The Śrīvaiṣṇavas held the poems of the Āḻvārs to be on par with the Sanskrit Vedas, and this twofold system came to be known as *Ubhaya Vedānta* or dual Vedānta (Carman and Narayanan 1989, 3).

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[22] Both Granoff 2004 and Brunner 1992 discuss these processes.
[23] The twelve Āḻvārs (7th to 9th century) are poet-saints who composed hymns of devotion to Viṣṇu in Tamil.

The Pāñcarātra Saṃhitās emphasize Viṣṇu's emanations (*vyūha*) and include traditional Vedic notions, as well as doctrines and rites not belonging to the dominant Sanskrit Brahmanical tradition, since these Āgamic texts incorporate distinctly Tamil practices.

Of great importance to the school is the lineage of spiritual teachers or Ācāryas, theologians who functioned as the interpreters of the tradition. The first of the Ācāryas was Nāthamuni (10th C), who is often seen as the founder of Śrīvaiṣṇavism. Nāthamuni's writings developed a theology by interpreting the songs of the Āḷvārs, Vedānta, *Bhagavad Gītā, Pāñcarātra Āgama* and the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. The next Ācārya was Nathamuni's grandson, Yāmuna who is celebrated for establishing the Pāñcarātra ritual on the same level as orthodox Brahamnical rites (Neevel 1977). Following Yāmuna is the most famous Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācārya, Rāmānuja, whose traditional dates are 1017-1137.

The commentaries of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas on the aforementioned texts functioned in a manner similar to the *paddhatis* in the Śaiva Siddhānta tradition. They both functioned to bring together inconsistent practices and theologies into a seeming coherent tradition. One of the major theological goals of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas was to highlight a connection to Vedic material and re-emphasize Vedic theology in terms of the Tamil tradition (Clooney 1986, 28). Like the *paddhati* authors, the Ācāryas excluded, repeated and highlighted specific citations to support their interpretations and theology thereby supplementing older commentaries by preceding Ācāryas and creating the fundamentals of the emerging Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition. These commentaries not only elucidated the writings of previous Ācāryas, but also functioned as manuals of interpretation; they served to teach the community to understand and interpret narratives.

Francis Clooney explains the function of commentary with regard to the *Tiruvāymoli*, the

most important collection of Tamil Vaiṣṇava poems, stating:

> The Śrīvaiṣṇava commentaries comprise a single complex conversation among
> like-minded devotees; it is proper to think of each of these early commentaries as
> the incorporation and amplification of earlier commentaries, in an atmosphere
> largely devoid of interpretive and doctrinal differences. To read the commentaries
> entails tracing the various contractions and expansions of this single discourse,
> learning its language and style, habits and shorthand; it is a matter of becoming
> familiar, in a way, a part of the family (1986, 35).

In order for these texts (commentaries on the songs of the Āḻvārs, Vedānta, *Bhagavad*

Gītā, Pāñcarātra Āgama and the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*) to gain authority, the expertise of the

Ācāryas and the theology of the Śrīvaiṣṇavas had to be established and equated with the

Vedic tradition. In the concluding section of his article, "Nammāḻāvar's Glorious

Tiruvallavāl: An Exploration in the Methods and Goals of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Commentary",

Francis Clooney summarizes the goals of Periyavāccāṉpiḷḷai's commentary on the

Tiruvāymoli (1991, 275). Two points about the nature of commentary are especially

relevant for my study. First, the use of citation within the commentaries written by the

Ācāryas serves not only to legitimate the Ācārya's interpretation within a historical

tradition, but also, I would argue, enables certain texts and concepts to be highlighted and

contextualized within a developing theology. Commentaries enabled philosophical

interpretation and contextualization of texts that were seemingly descriptive, which leads

to the second point. The context always remained open-ended, allowing future

commentators to add to the already existing material in light of clarification or evolving

theologies within the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition.

Because of his commentary on the *Brahma-sūtras*, Rāmānuja is also known as

"The Creator of the Commentary" (*Bhāṣyakāra*) (Narayanan 1987, 39). Rāmānuja

proposed a qualified non-dual (*viśiṣṭādvaita*) conceptualization of God, and his task in

some ways was to refute the *advaita* philosophy of Śaṅkara. Discussions similar to

Śaṅkara's rhetoric regarding the inability to approach a transcendent, formless god were

being rehearsed in the Vaiṣṇava saṃhitās, such as the *Viṣṇusaṃhitā* (XXIX,51-57),

which states:

> Without form, how can God be meditated upon? If (He is) without any form,
> where will the mind fix itself? When there is nothing for the mind to attach itself
> to, it will slip away from meditation or will glide into a state of slumber.
> Therefore the wise will meditate on some form, remembering, however, that the
> form is a superimposition and not reality (quoted in Eck 1998,45).

The image in this instance provided a focal point for meditation, but is not a true

representation of the Absolute reality. The image provides a means (*upāya*) to liberation,

a tool that enables the devotee to prevent his/her mind from wandering so that he or she

can attain liberation from the cycle of birth and death (*saṃsāra*). Rāmānuja's exposition

of *viśiṣṭādvaita* outlines the relationship between matter (*acit*), sentient beings (*cit*) and

Brahman. Contrary to Śaṅkara, who maintained that everything other than Brahman had

only a dependent reality, Rāmānuja asserted that *acit* and *cit* were absolutely real and

were related to Brahman. Brahman, the independent Absolute in *viśiṣṭādvaita* philosophy

is equated with Viṣṇu as Nārāyaṇa. Qualified non-dualism maintains the distinction

between matter, sentient beings and Brahman, and asserts that matter and sentient beings

are inherently dependent on *Brahman* for their existence, but also claims that they are

inseparable attributes (*apṛthaksiddha-viśeṣaṇa*) of *Brahman*. Reality is thus tripartite,

even as *Brahman* is singular – qualified by the dependent nature of *cit* and *acit*.

1.2.5: Image and the Nature of God in Śrīvaiṣṇavism

The Śrīvaiṣṇavas differentiate between two aspects of God, the unmanifest and manifest. The first aspect, the unmanifest, is the all-pervasive aspect that is the inner controller of the entire universe and cosmos. In the second aspect, Viṣṇu takes on his own divine forms that are manifested in five different ways. The first of these forms is the *para* or supreme form of Viṣṇu who is sitting in *vaikuṇṭha* or heaven. In this form Viṣṇu is timeless and unchanging. The second form is the *vyūha* or emanation, which consists of three primary emanations: *saṃkarṣaṇa* (creation), *pradyumna* (maintenance) and *aniruddha* (destruction). This triple form of Viṣṇu is depicted in temples by Viṣṇu lying on Anantaśeṣa on the sea of milk (see figure 1.3). *Avatāra* or *vibhava* is the third form of Viṣṇu. This refers to the manifestations of Viṣṇu that appear on earth during certain times at particular places. They are said to be partial incarnations of Viṣṇu such as Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, who appear when *dharma* (moral order) is being threatened. The fourth form is Viṣṇu who resides in the hearts of his devotes, known as *antaryāmin* or *hārda*, the inner controller. The final and most concrete form of Viṣṇu for the Śrīvaiṣṇavas, and the most relevant to our discussion, is the *arcāvātara*, which is not simply a symbol, partial or localized manifestation of Viṣṇu, but the supreme God himself who has agreed to be present on earth as he is in heaven.[24] According to Śrīvaiṣṇava theology, each of these four types of manifestations is associated with a particular posture or form and spatial location. Vasudha Narayanan summarizes the

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[24] It should be noted that Rāmānuja does not discuss the worship of *mūrti* or *arcā* directly, but does posit the notion of god incarnated in an image in his commentary on the *Brahmasūtra* 1.1.21 in his *Śrī Bhāṣya* (Young 1978).

representations, postures and locations in a table which I have reproduced below (1985, 55):

Posture	Forms of Viṣṇu	Location
sitting	*para*	*vaikuṇṭha*
reclining	*vyūha*	'Sea of Milk'
striding	*vibhava*	earth
standing	*hārda*	the human heart

The fifth form is the *arcā*, in which Viṣṇu is fully present (*pātīpūrṇa*). Unlike the previously mentioned emanations which are bound temporally and geographically, the *arcāvatāra* is the complete form of Viṣṇu in the all-pervading sense. According to the Pāñcarātra texts the *arcāvātara* is classified according to whether it is moveable or immovable.[25] The moveable *arcās* are further sub-divided. The *utsava mūrti* is the image of God usually made of metal that is used for particular rituals, during festivals and processions. The second category of the moveable image is the *śalagrama*, a small dark stone, which is a non-anthropomorphic representation of Viṣṇu, and is typically present in domestic altars (see fig1.4). The immoveable image is normally the primary image housed in the *garbha gṛha* (womb chamber, central shrine) in Vaiṣṇava temples. It is further classified into types according to whether it appears to divine beings (*divya*), to holy people (*ārṣa*), to humans (*mānuṣa*), to devotees of Viṣṇu, or as a spontaneous manifestation (Narayanan 1985, 56).

This notion that the *arcā* embodies the completeness of God is taken up by the Ācāryas. Piḷḷai Lokācārya explains that the "*arcāvātara* denotes [Viṣṇu's] state of permanently abiding in the temples and in the houses, of coming close [to man] in objects

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[25] *Bhagavata Tantra* Chap 4:886-80, *Sirprasnasmahita* Chap 14, 1-2, *Īśvarasaṃhitā* chapter 17, 338. (Young 1978 fn 5, 282)

which are attractive to people, without restrictions of space, time, or privileged persons

unlike the special manifestations" (*Tattvatraya, sūtra* 200, quoted in Hardy 1977, 127).

In the *Śrīvacanabhūsana*, Piḷḷai Lokācārya states that the only suitable object for full

surrender (*prapatti*) is the *arcāvatara* (Sūtra 34, quoted in Young 1978, 157). The idea of

prapatti, surrendering to or taking refuge in God, is one of the central tenets of

Śrīvaiṣṇavism. To facilitate this process, God must be available to the devotee,

highlighting another important aspect of Śrīvaiṣṇavism, *saulabhya*, the concept of God's

accessibility for worship. The existence of the *arcā* means that God is available at all

times to be viewed in a tangible form (*rūpa*).

> Taking off his perfection and relinquishing his total freedom, he abides in it [the *arcā*] by showing great love even to those who do not love him (*Śrīvacanabhūsana, sūtra* 38 quoted in Hardy 1977, 129).
>
> Hiding his own lordship, he pretends to be ignorant, powerless, without independent will; becoming enslaved to boundless compassion, he grants all that is desired (*Tattvatraya, sūtra* 202, quoted in Hardy 1977, 129).

The *arcāvātara* dwells in the image that appears to be created by human hands.

According to the Śrīvaiṣṇavas, the ritual of *pratiṣṭhā* transforms the stone or metal of the

divine image into an incandescent pure substance known as *śuddha sattva*. The *arcā* is

converted from an inanimate material object into the transcendent God. The *śuddha*

sattva is deemed to be the "opposite of matter composed of the three *guṇas*"; it is instead

"composed of the purest *sattva*" (Nayar 1992, 110). Because of this, the Śrīvaiṣṇava

ritual of *pratiṣṭhā* has a different significance from that in Śaiva Siddhānta. Whereas the

Śaiva Siddhāntins are establishing a support for the energy of God, the Śrīvaiṣṇavas are

actually transforming the material substance into God. The transformation involves the change from *prakṛta* (material) to *aprakṛta* (immaterial). The *Padma Saṃhitā* states:

> Although Hari (God) is the soul (*ātmā*) of all beings born, he draws near (specially) to dwell in images (*pratimā*) by virtue (*vīrya*) and the greatness (*māhātmya*) of the mantras and the *guru* of the founder (*sthāpaka*). People entreat Hari in this form for all their wishes. Hence the significance of this consecration rite (*pratiṣṭhā*). Just as fire permeates (objects) without burning (them) but appears, burns, and becomes otherwise useful when evoked by the attrition of two pieces of wood, so does Viṣṇu, the All-Pervader, though invisible to uncultivated men, becomes visible in the statue ('symbol', *pratikṛti*) by the authority (*gaurava*) of the holder of the *mantra*. Install therefore Viṣṇu by means of statues made by sculptors according to the rules laid down by the *śāstras* (3.26 quoted in Gonda 1977, 76).

The major difference between the Śrīvaiṣṇavas and the Śaiva Siddhāntins revolves around the actual materiality of the image, and whether or not the image is truth divine or simply a vessel for divine energy. However the ritual of transformation or of infusing the object with divine energy using *mantra* is similar in both traditions. The *Īśvara Saṃhitā*, provides an account of the ritual under the heading Pratiṣṭhāvidhāna, "The Procedure of Sanctification Ceremonies" (VIII, 168-344a):

> the *ācārya* goes to the place where the idol is to be installed, measures with strings, digs a pit in a spot marked off as "*Brahmā*" (347-357), places the pedestal on top of a cache of deposited articles (358-380), and brings the prepared idols of the Lord and His consorts to the spot from their bed of grains (381-398). When all has been prepared, the icon is fixed on a pedestal and *mantras* are repeated (399-402). Thereupon, the icon is washed with water which has been reserved, and after this regular worship may be commenced (403-411) (summarized in Smith 1975, 78).

The Adhikāranirūpaṇa section of the *Pauṣkara- saṃhitā*, one of the earlier Saṃhitās, illustrates the prominence and vital significance of *mantra* in a dialogue between Pauṣkara and Bhagavān:

> For those not living in a place naturally sanctified by God's presence or by holy objects, Pauṣkara asks how their place can be sanctified. Bhagavān replies that any place can be made holy by invoking holy *mantras* and investing the place, by

virtue of the *mantras*, with holy power (3-14). A proper object [*dravya*] must be used as a medium for invoking the *mantras'* power, and only certain persons are competent to sanctify [*pratiṣṭhā*] such objects (15-46) (XXXVIII, 3-46, Smith 1979, 290-291).

The *Pauṣkara- saṃhitā* goes on to explain that only a qualified artisan using the proper materials should construct the idol (72-84), but states that any errors may be remedied through the recitation of *mantras*.

> Evil effects that are inevitable due to the above-mentioned defects may be warded off by the chanting of *mantras* and the celebration of *homas* to restore the purity of the affected items- so long as they are done by competent persons (148-169) There follow then the instructions on how to construct the *mantra*, how properly to employ it in situations when pacification of untoward effects threaten (170-282). The efficacy of *mantras* when pronounced in certain specific time periods increases, and these specific auspicious periods are mentioned (283-294) (XXXVIII, 148-282, summarizeed in Smith 1979, 291).

For the Śrīvaiṣṇava school specifically, the ritual of *pratiṣṭhā* provides a context for the discussion of the fullness of God in image form in the commentarial literature and *saṃhitas*. One of the major issues revolved around the contention that God already inhabited the *prakṛta* object so that *pratiṣṭhā* was unnecessary. However this position was countered by the argument that, in order to establish his full presence (*pātīpūrṇa*), that is his embodiment as *arcāvātara*, *pratiṣṭhā* was required to divinize the matter; to transform it from *prakṛti* to *śuddha sattva* (Young 1978, 178). According to the *Padma saṃhitā*, *pratiṣṭhā* is explained as follows: "*Tiṣṭhā* means a standing place or location, while *pra* means with greatness. Thus, while God is always present everywhere, we invoke Him, especially for purposes of worship, to be present in all His greatness for all time in one particular place or object" (26:2-7 quoted in Young 1978, 297).

1.3: Sound, Sight and the Immaterial: Concluding Remarks

The Śaiva Siddhānta and Śrīvaiṣṇava schools of Hinduism hold conflicting

theories about the embodiment of God. For the Śaiva Siddhāntin, Śiva is never fully

present in the image, the image is simple a vessel to hold Śiva's energy in partial form.

On the other hand, the Śrīvaiṣṇavas herald the superior nature of the image or *arcāvatāra*

of God, as being a complete and fully present emanation of Viṣṇu. However, while the

differences may be apparent in the official theology of the schools there are points of

similarity when we examine the devotional aspect of Śaiva Siddhānta and Śrīvaiṣṇavism.

The focus of this chapter has been on interpretations of tangible representations of God,

but to end the discussion of the nature of God at this point would be premature and

incomplete. In order to gain a fuller understanding, it is necessary to consider what

Richard Davis terms the "devotional eye" (1997) or what Indira Peterson terms "the

aesthetic of devotion" (1991, 96).

The poems and songs of the Vaiṣṇava poet saints, the Āḻvārs, and the Śaivite

saints, the Nāyanārs, were compiled into canons, the *Nālāyira-Tivviyap-pirapantam* (four

thousand divine compositions) and the *Tirumurai* (sacred text) respectively, during the

tenth and eleventh centuries. These poems described Viṣṇu and Śiva as abiding in

shrines in various places in Tamil Nadu. While their descriptions of the two gods

correspond to some extent to the iconographical models present in South Indian temples

during the medieval period, the poets concentrated on particular elements of the image,

and in most cases linked them to the transcendent aspects of God. The object of

description was not in fact the physical icon, but the nature of God himself. Indira

Peterson writes, "we encounter a poetic iconography in which selection of detail is

governed not by the canons of temple sculpture but by the aesthetic of devotion" (1989,

96). This view is not problematic for the Vaiṣṇava for whom the *arcā* is the actual full

presence of the transcendent God, but from a Śaiva perspective there are potential

difficulties. [26] As we have seen, Śaiva Siddhāntins viewed the icon as a vessel for God's

energy that only offered a glimpse of the partial presence of God; thus it maintained a

separation between Śiva as differentiated and undifferentiated. The concept of the

devotional eye expressed in the poetry of the Nāyaṉārs seems to transcend the distinction

and offers an insight into Śaiva apprehensions of the totality of Siva. Campantar, a

seventh-century poet saint, writes of the living God at Tiruparankundram, not restricted

to the liṅga, but related also to his other manifestations (such as his form as

Ardhanarīśvara – "the lord who is half woman") and, more importantly, to the primordial

transcendent energy, depicted through the myth of liṅgodbhava (see figure 1.5): [27]

Paraṅkuṉru is the shrine
of the Lord who shares his body
with the girl who plays with a ball,
the god who rose
as a splendid column of light,
whose greatness was beyond the grasp
even of Māl who in a single stride
once spanned the whole earth,
and the ancient god who emerged
from his bright navel
and gave the sacred Vedas to the world.(trans in Peterson 1989, 127).

[26] It should be noted, however, that the Āḷvārs do not use the term *arcāvatara* or its Tamil equivalent in any of their poems.
[27] In this myth a giant pillar of light emerges in front of Viṣṇu and Brāhma. Viṣṇu takes the form of the boar, Varāha, and digs under the earth to discern the root of the pillar. Brāhma, on his swan flies into the heavens to see where the pillar ends. Having discovered no beginning or end they return, at which point Śiva steps out asserting his supremacy as he is without beginning or ending.

The devotional eye does not view the image of god in the temple as simply a partial emanation of God, but rather envisions it as a gateway to see the fullness and totality of Him, thereby fusing image and god (Davis 1997, 37).

What this chapter highlights is the complex processes and negotiations apparent in the relationship between God and image, rehearsed through commentarial narratives. The examples of Śaiva Siddhānta and Śrīvaiṣṇavism demonstrate that the interpretation of the image varies, with the alternative views that the icon is actually God, or that it is a vessel into which he is invoked. Further, as evidenced by ritual texts concerned with the establishment of the temple image or *mūla mūrti*, it becomes apparent even if an image "looks like" God, this is not enough to make it suitable as an embodiment of God's presence. The image must first be transformed through a series of rituals that involve a transfer of energy or an actual transubstantiation, which rituals depend not solely the visual but on sound and vibration. This process is explicitly outlined in the written commentaries and interpretations, which demonstrate there is nothing essentially divine about the mūrti, and which show instead how divinity is constructed ritually and discursively. In the next chapter, I will examine how Orientalist and missionary discursive formations provide new meanings for the mūrti – now re-signified as "idol."

CHAPTER 2
MONSTERS, DEAD WOOD AND FALSE GODS: WESTERN PERCEPTIONS OF THE HINDU IMAGE

> For though superstition may at a distance seem gorgeous, something attractive to the eye, they will find when closely inspected she presents features of the most disgusting deformity. Her mein is ghastly, her aspect savage, her air ferocious; her voice appalling; and her shout harrows upon the soul with pangs so thrilling, that her companion, *death* alone can equal them. (Moor 1841-45, i-ii)

The West's encounter with Indian gods can be dated back to Marco Polo in the thirteenth century (1254-1324) where India figured only fleetingly in his travels, as China was the main focus of his explorations. Marco Polo's interest in India stemmed from the belief that India was one of the wealthiest countries in the world, capable of providing an endless supply of spices, rich textiles and gold. He gives us only a fragmentary image of Indian culture. Writing about the Coromandel coast of South India, he observes:

> they have certain abbeys in which are gods and goddesses to whom many young girls are consecrated; their fathers and mothers presenting them to that idol for which they entertain the greatest devotion. And when the nuns [monks tr.] of a convent desire to make a feast to their gods, they send for all those consecrated damsels and make them sing and dance before the idol with great festivity. (Quoted in Mitter 1992, 3)

Early Western information about India and its images was derived primarily from the accounts of travelers to the subcontinent whose main motives for the expedition were commercial. When cultural elements were observed they were viewed in terms of stereotypes drawn from a classical and medieval literary tradition that produced 'fictionalized truths,' representing Hindu Gods as monstrous, magical, eroticized, multi-limbed and bizarre supernatural beings (Mitter 1992, 6). Initially these monsters of India were considered harmless, but eventually, around the sixteenth century, they acquired more nefarious connotations within the framework of the Christian church's doctrine that all non-Judeo-Christian religions belonged to the realm of the devil, literally demonizing

Hindu imagery and locating it in a Christian paradigm of good versus evil. [1] As Partha

Mitter notes these "...two traditions, the classical one of the monstrous races and the

Christian one of demons, converged..." (Mitter 1992, 10). It is only in the mid-

seventeenth century that the monster stereotype begun to dissipate, although not to

disappear altogether, as we will see in the following pages. From the mid-eighteenth

century onwards, more "scientific" attitudes affecting perceptions of the Hindu image

emerged, as a result of the attempt to record, categorize and systemize information with a

view to discover the origins of Hinduism and its mythology (Mitter 1992, 106).

During the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, much information regarding

the religious practices of this 'primitive religion' (Hinduism) was disseminated to

England in the form of novels, letters to newspapers, pamphlets and "first hand"

missionary accounts. Hinduism was perceived as not only morally deficient, but truly

horrible, as attested by the numerous accounts of idolatry, human sacrifice and lascivious

sexuality. Missionary narratives were fraught with disquisitions of detestable rituals and

descriptions of vengeful, blood thirsty and libidinous deities. It is through these

representations that we can trace an emergent trajectory of the social and moral

perceptions of Hindu imagery in the European world. Although the physical removal of

religious objects, as "souvenirs", mementos or gifts, had began in much earlier trade

encounters, it can be argued that the construction of notions of the significance of these

divine images in the West springs primarily from the textual narrative disseminated by

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[1] Due to increased travel to India and the publication of the *Itinerio* of Ludovico di Varthema, who traveled in South India between 1503 to 1508, the association between Hindu gods and the devil became customary. Varthema's description of the "king of Calicut" and his chapel depicted the gods of Hinduism as devils: "... And the king of Calicut keeps his Deumo in his chapel in his palace, in this wise; this chapels..., with doors covered with devils carved in relief. In the midst of this chapel there is a devil made of metal, placed in a seat also made of metal. The said devil has a crown made like that of the papal kingdom, with three crowns; it also has four horns and four teeth with a very large mouth, nose and the most terrible eyes... All the pictures around the said chapel are those of devils..." (Quoted in Mitter 1992, 17).

eighteenth and nineteenth-century visitors, missionaries, Orientalists and colonial

administrators. Their accounts of observation and testimonials formed an archive of

information, creating a repository that enabled the understanding of India and Hinduism.

Part of the British project in India in the nineteenth century included collecting

and classifying Indian objects in order to produce some semblance of Indian history that

resembled that being constructed for Europe. As part of this system of categorization,

value was assigned to certain objects and decisions were made about what was to be

taken from India and housed in English museums and private collections, as artifact,

archaeological art object, memento or souvenir (Cohn 1992, 302). Initially Hindu idols

were excluded from the category of art, seen as devoid of any aesthetic value, and Hindu

religious images were captured rather than collected in order to demonstrate the victory

of Christianity over Hinduism. The London Missionary Society housed idols in its

"Missionary Museum" under "trophies" to display its booty, "the idols given up by their

former worshippers from a full conviction of the folly and sin of idolatry" (quoted in

Davis 1997, 168). William Ward, a Christian missionary, whom we will discuss in

greater detail in the following pages, suggested that the idols be kept not as objects of

adoration nor as loot (officially, the British government did not pillage colonized

religious institutions), but rather as artifacts that would facilitate a greater understanding

of Hinduism.

> The author would recommend, that a SOCIETY should be formed, either in
> Calcutta or London, for improving our knowledge of the *History, Literature,* and
> *Mythology* of the Hindoos; - that after collecting sufficient funds this Society
> should purchase an estate, and erect a *Pantheon,* which should receive the images
> of the most eminent of the gods, cut in marble- a *Museum* to receive all the
> curiosities of India, and a *Library* to perpetuate its literature. (Ward 1970 (1822)
> I: clxix).

The acquisition of scientific knowledge about India and Hinduism began in the

eighteenth century through the academic discipline of Orientalism, which produced

specific understandings of the Eastern world in meaningful terms within the framework

of Western attitudes. The connection between Orientalist scholarship and missionary

activities, despite their seemingly different aims, must be viewed in relation to the

colonial and imperial enterprise that fueled the upsurge in travel to the subcontinent.

Colonial, missionary and academic endeavors were based on similar premises that shaped

the character of the interaction between Britain and India.

2.1: Orientalism and Orientalists – Constructing a Regime of Truth

> Orientalism is a style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological
> distinctions made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident."
> Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists,
> philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have
> accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for
> elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts
> concerning the Orient, its peoples, customs, "mind," destiny and so on (Said
> 1994, 2).

Simply put, Orientalism is the study of Eastern culture, politics, language and

society by Western scholars based on the perceived dissimilarity between the East and

the West. But, as Edward Said has demonstrated in *Orientalism*, the process of acquiring

knowledge to support this distinction was far from straightforward. Said's discussion

focuses on the relationship between the West and Islam, but much of Said's argument is

valid in the Indian context. Taking the late eighteenth century as an approximate starting

point for institutionalized Orientalism, Said argues that the relationship between the

Orient and the Occident is a multifarious relationship of domination, power and "varying

degrees of a complex hegemony" (1994, 5). At the crux of this relationship is not merely

the system of knowledge or representations produced but rather the system of knowledge

production itself. Orientalism then, was the discourse by which the Orient was produced

and managed socially, politically, religiously and ideologically. It would be easy to

assign the Western perception of the Orient to the realm of mere fantasy, but to do so

would be to ignore the complex theoretical framework and practical application that

structured the colonial interaction. The undergirding edifice of Orientalism is power,

power to construct the very object it speaks of and the power to produce a "regime of

truth". Truth becomes the legitimating factor of the knowledge that is created, since to

have knowledge of something is to have the power to bring it into existence and dominate

it. As Said asserts, " It is Europe that articulates the Orient; this articulation is the

prerogative, not of a puppet master, but of a genuine creator, whose life giving power

represents, animates and constitutes the otherwise silent and dangerous space beyond

familiar boundaries" (1994, 57). The creation of knowledge involves choices about what

becomes representative of truth, and what is discarded, not only in a purely dismissive

sense, but in a fashion that allows the pursuit of knowledge to be tailored onto a desired

composite. The authority to produce or discover truth is regulated, not by the statements

or images themselves, but through the location of statements and images within an

epistemological structure, itself the source of authority. Implicit within the positing of

truth and authority is power, which gives suppositions veracity.

> The important thing here, I believe, is that truth isn't outside power,… Truth is a
> thing of this world; it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint.
> And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its
> 'general politics' of truth; that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and
> makes function as true, the mechanisms and instances which it accepts and makes
> function as true, the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish
> true and false statements, the means which enable one to distinguish true and false
> statements by which each is sanctioned… the status of those who are charged
> with saying what counts as true. (Foucault 1980, 131).

The structure that governed Orientalism functioned as a filter that constrained

information pertaining to the Orient and the Oriental.[2] In the eighteenth century the

Orient was defined as a place of barbarism, lasciviousness and violence; the Oriental was

depraved, lewd, primitive and childlike. The use of the stereotype, as Bhabha illustrates,

allowed the colonizers "to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on

the basis of racial origination, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of

administration and instruction" (Bhabha 1994, 70). Once the colonial archetype had been

accepted, it was possible to outline a course of action to govern and understand "the

natives" through the technique of what I refer to as "formulaic observation". This was

observation in the sense that it involved perception and experience, but it was primarily

an apprehension framed by texts, confined within parameters dictated by previous

accounts that constrained the possibility of observation. The Oriental universe was, for

the colonialist , a "textual universe" that set limits on what was to be seen and known,

permitting objects to be designated in terms of the recognizable Western categories that

muted the threat of the unknown (Said 1994, 52). It was these texts, produced by

Orientalists, that contained facts, the truths which established the character and essence of

the "oriental" (Said 1994). Thus acquiring truth became a process of educated

judiciousness, taking as fundamental other Orientalist narratives, produced according to

Western society's "regime of truth" – which was in the beginning perhaps based on the

reading of "Oriental texts", or the visual examination of Oriental artifacts. But such

immediate apprehension was displaced by the authority of Orientalism to establish and

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[2] The constraints implemented by this discourse have a simultaneous limiting and productive effect on the systems of knowledge in question. While there were definite limits placed on the object of study, they operated in a manner that restricted how the object was to be perceived rather than on the actual tangible object itself. Concurrently, these limits functioned as the lens through which research was conducted and produced.

translate the originary, providing a precedent for what is to be learned and an affiliation which legitimated the research and provided the paradigms within the field of study. This process is similar to the function of commentaries in the Hindu tradition that established authority, authenticity and methods of interpretation, discussed in the previous chapter.

For Orientalists in India, the task of selecting and systematically recording information began to be undertaken on a large scale beginning in the mid-eighteenth century. Once the item, behaviour or text had been categorized and recorded, it served as fact, allowing subsequent research on the topic to refer to the classification, rather than to an actual object or person. This process involved the repetition or re-presentation of previous writings expressed as quotations or citations from an already existing narrative. Orientalists had nothing new to "discover" – rather their task was to emphasize "facts" contained in an ever self-reinforcing textual archive of information.

The predominant belief among Orientalists was that the Oriental civilization was in a period of decay, having fallen from a period of high civilization. This attitude justified the whole colonial endeavour under an ethic of care. In the later colonial and Orientalist context, the Oriental was constructed as a helpless child in need of paternalistic care from the colonizers (Narayan 1995; Said 1994). Paternalistic caring occurs when the "care giver" belongs to the more powerful and privileged strata of society. This differs from other care situations where the responsibility for care has traditionally belonged to the more subordinated and oppressed parts of society (Held 1995). However in the case of paternalistic caring, it is the more powerful members who bear this responsibility. Constructing the colonial "other" as inferior justified the need for paternalistic care or rule by the superior "subject". It is possible to establish a link

with regard to the motivations that inspired the economic, academic and missionary components of travel through the polemic of the White Man's Burden.

The current period of decay, outlined by the Orientalists and evoking a paternalistic sentiment, underwrote an agenda to bring the Oriental societies in line with the modern world.

> The colonial notion of "the white man's burden" included both a sense of obligation to confer the benefits of western civilization on the colonized, and a sense of being burdened with the responsibility to do so – an obligation and responsibility rooted in a sense of being agents who had a world historic mission to bring the light of civilization and progress to others inhabiting "areas of darkness" (Narayan 1995, 135).

Implicit within this attitude is the notion of cultural imperialism that elevated Western ideals of culture, society and religion over all others.

The collusion of Orientalism and colonialism and the white man's burden was further solidified in the nineteenth century with Protestant notions of salvation. As Peter van de Veer demonstrates, "Protestant conceptions of guilt and atonement, of "the few elect," of God's grace were transformed in conceptions of progress, of grace extended to all inhabitants of the world, the 'white man's burden'" (van der Veer 2001, 25).

2.1.1: Sir William Jones

While much information had previously been filtered through the lens of fiction and fantasy it was only in the eighteenth century that a more systematic body of information was collected and recorded to become the basis of Western scholarship dealing with India. At the forefront of this endeavour was Sir William Jones (1746-94), perhaps the best known Indian Orientalist reflected by his epithet "Oriental Jones". Jones' writings and translations were to become the backbone for understanding

numerous aspects of India, ranging from political structure to poetry, serving as a foundation for Orientalist Indian knowledge.

The scope of Orientalist scholarship was not limited to an academic inquiry for the straightforward goal of acquiring knowledge. Orientalism was born out of a political situation in which scholarship and colonial endeavors were entwined – in the scholar-administrator. Political and intellectual interests were interwoven in a complex cogitation that functioned to provide a reciprocated type of authority. The establishment of the colonial government and the production of Orientalist knowledge came to be inextricably connected during the governorship of Warren Hastings (1732-1818), himself a Persian linguist, who saw the value for government in being able to comprehend Sanskrit, as an alternative to reliance on Brahmins who were seen as jealous and biased (Teignmouth 1805, 245). The production of Orientalist knowledge for the sake of the state is demonstrated by the establishment of the legal system in India under the British. Hastings decreed in his Judicial plan of 1772 that " in all suits regarding inheritance, marriage, caste, and other religious institutions, the laws of the Koran with respect to Mahometans and those of the *Shaster* with respect to Gentoos shall be invariably adhered to" (quoted in Rocher 1993). In the institution of Indian law intended to serve the interests of the native public, the assumption was that a system of law existed in indigenous texts and that this system was intelligible to the British legislative community by resorting to these texts. In 1773 Hastings commissioned an English translation of the Hindu legal texts by Nathanial Brassey Halhed, which was published in 1776 under the title *A Code of Gentoo Laws*. Twenty two years later, Sir William Jones proposed that another such translation be made – it was published after Jones' death, by Henry Thomas

Colebrooke (1796- 98) appearing under the title, *A Digest of Hindu Law on Contracts and Successions*. Both these treatises were published to facilitate the operation of judicial structures, becoming part of the Orientalist archive, as was the case for other ancient and classical Hindu scriptural or textual sources.

Jones was born in London in 1746 and acquired proficiency in a number of languages including Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Arabic and Persian. It was only later on in India that he learned Sanskrit in order to perform his administrative duties as a Judge of the Supreme Court in Calcutta in 1783. The understanding of Sanskrit became of paramount importance for Jones. In the *Memoirs of the Life, Writings, and Correspondences of Sir William Jones* compiled by Lord Teignmouth with his own commentary, Teignmouth writes, regarding Jones' attitudes toward Sanskrit:

> That knowledge of this ancient tongue would be of greatest utility, in enabling him to discharge with confidence and satisfaction to himself, the duties of a judge; and he soon discovered, what subsequent experience fully confirmed, that no reliance could be placed on the opinions or interpretation of the professors of Hindu law, unless he were qualified to examine their authorities and quotations, and detect their errors and misrepresentations. On the other hand, he knew that all attempts to explore the religion or literature of India, through any other medium than a knowledge of Sanskrit, must be imperfect and unsatisfactory; it was evident, that the most erroneous and discordant opinions on theses subjects, had been circulated by the ignorance of those which had collected their information from oral communication only, and that the pictures exhibited in Europe of the religion and literature of India, could only be compared to maps constructed by the natives, in which every position is distorted, all proportion violated (1805, 248).

Jones believed that the only way to study India was through its Sanskrit texts, which he regarded as authentic, uncontaminated sources. As a lawyer, he knew the value and importance of original documents and records, and as a scholar and man of science, he disdained the idea of amusing the learned world with secondary information on

subjects which had greatly interested their curiosity, when he had the means of access to the original sources (Teignmouth 1805, 248).

During his time in India, Jones translated various Sanskrit works, including *Sakuntala*, a play by Kalidasa, and *The Institutes of Hindu Law: or, the Ordinances of Menu* (which were completed after his death). Jones founded the earliest Oriental society for Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit translation. And Jones' knowledge of multiple languages led to his most significant contribution to Orientalist studies, his "discovery/creation" of the Indo-European language family. Jones documented the resemblance between Latin, Greek and Sanskrit, suggesting the possibility of a common antecedent which led not only to comparative linguistics, but a comparative mythology which Jones linked between Christianity and Hinduism. As a result of these inquiries, Jones felt that in its interaction with India, Europe was not encountering an alien culture, but rather Europe's own culture in its archaic form. In his seminal essay, "On the Gods of Greece, Italy and India", he wrote:

> We cannot justly conclude, by arguments preceding the proof of facts, that one idolatrous people must have borrowed their deities, rites, and tenets from another; since Gods of all shapes and dimensions may be framed by the boundless powers of imagination, or by the frauds and follies of men, in countries never connected; but when all features of resemblance, too strong to be accidental, or observable in different systems of polytheism, without fancy or prejudice to colour them and improve their likeness, we can scarce help believing, that some connection has immemorially subsisted between several nations, who have adopted them: it is my design to point out such a resemblance between the popular worship of the old Greeks and Italians and that of the Hindus; nor can there be room to doubt of a great familiarity between their strange religions and that of Egypt, China, Persia... From all this, if it be satisfactorily proved, we may infer a general union or affinity between the most distinguished inhabitants of all the primitive world, at the time when they deviated, as they did too early deviate, from the rational adoration of the only true God (1799:229-30)

This conclusion enabled the location of Indian customs in the familiar temporal

schematic of the Europeans, which was at this time – in its ancient reaches – primarily a

Biblical history:

> This epitome of the first *Indian* History, that is now extant, appears to me very
> curious and very important; for the story, through whimsically dressed up in the
> form of an allegory, seems to prove a primeval tradition in this country of the
> *universal deluge* described by MOSES, and fixes consequently the *time*, when the
> genuine *Hindu* Chronology actually begins. (Jones 1799: 241-242)

Jones contrasts Christianity which had progressed from polytheism and idolatry to its

current monotheistic biblical form, with Hinduism which had remained stagnant in its

deviation from an original "rational adoration of the only true God" (1799: 229-30).

Working with what Trautmann (1997, 2006) has termed Mosaic Ethnology, Jones locates

the Indian/Hindu race with Noah's son Ham, the Arabian Race with Shem and the

Tartarian race with Japheth. Isaac Newton's *Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms Amended*

(1728), surmised that the lineage of Ham and Japheth had fallen into polytheism and

idolatry immediately, as did a large group derived from Shem, with the exception of

those who became Israel and preserved the teachings of the one true God (Lincoln

2002,12-13). Jones disagreed with this maintaining that initially all of the descendants of

the sons of Noah had preserved the teachings of the one true God, but that within a few

generations, the offspring of Ham and Japheth – the Tartars and Hindus – fell to idolatry.

"On the Gods of Greece, Italy and India" provided a comparative schema highlighting the

connection between myth, history and revelation which was to be become useful in the

understanding of Hinduism for colonial and missionary authorities, by establishing a

basis for the belief that Hindus stood apart from the "only true God". The unadulterated

monotheism that Jones sought to recover had not disappeared completely from Hindu

civilization. Vestiges could be found in the earliest philosophy embodied in the Vedas

and the *Upaniṣads*. Once Jones discovered in the *Upaniṣads* evidence of the adoration of

the one true God, a narrative of loss naturally it became of the utmost importance for

Jones, and other Orientalists to examine history in order to restore India to a glorious past

through the recovery of the one true God. This attitude and ideology was also adopted by

missionaries and Hindu reformers.

2.2: The Missions

For India yet one blessing is in store:
The Gospel's splendour shines on Ganga's store
To India's realms though first the love of gain
Led the rich fleets of Britons o'er the main,
And through ambition she extends her sway,
Through the vast plains for Indus to Cathay,

Yet gracious Heaven the human passions guides
From selfish aims to higher views besides.
Where ardent Thomas brought the word divine,
And martyred occupies an honoured shrine,
Now Christian Bishops heathen converts lease,

Through the pure doctrines of the Gospel's creed.
With favouring eyes may gracious Heav'n look down,
And full success these institutions crown!
May heathen priests their idol temples quit,
And true religion learn from Holy Writ!

Britain's role in India began primarily as a commercial pursuit with the East India

Company's interests in India as a source of economic gain.[3] And although missionary

activity was not explicitly forbidden, the Company required that all visitors, including

missionaries have a license to remain on the territory. Given that the Company was quite

unreceptive to missionary activities in order to maintain its policy of non-interference in

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[3] The East India Company established trading posts in Bombay and Madras in 1610-11.

local customs, it was assumed that no permits would be obtained (Stanley 1990, 98).[4]

Prior to 1813 England had a policy of religious neutrality, which meant that missionary

activity was prohibited at an official level. In fact, in 1793, the British parliament

proclaimed that the "Hindus had as good system of faith and morals as most people and it

would be madness to attempt their conversion" (Mayhew 1988, 26). This hostility

towards missionary activity and acceptance of the Hindu religion was deemed a necessity

so as to not upset the fruitful economic endeavors of the East India Company. However

in the 1790s, interest in missionization abroad developed, fuelled by stories of decadent

moral practices and human suffering (Stanley 1990; Van der Veer 2001).[5] Having failed

in 1793 to revise the East India Company Charter of religious neutrality, William

Wilberforce[6] using the issue of satī [7], accumulated nearly half a million signatures in

England in support of the introduction of Christianity to India.[8] In 1813 Clause XXXII,

as stipulated by the British Parliament, removed the restrictions on all missionary activity

allowing British missionaries the freedom to spread Christianity in India.[9] Many

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[4] The East India Company was concerned with the effect missionaries would have on their financial gains in India, but the company's charter of 1698 (the Chaplain Clause) pledged support to evangelical ventures. These activities were restricted to providing a chaplain for their employees stationed in India. See Mayhew, 1988.

[5] Charles Grant who had acquired a fortune in the silk trade in Madras was appointed by Governor General Cornwallis in 1787, to the East India Company's board of trade. Upon his return to England in 1790, Grant became one of the leading figures in Evangelical movement. In 1789, Grant successfully campaigned to allow five clergymen, including Claudius Buchan, to serve in India as Chaplains to the East India Company. Grant was elected to the board of the Company in 1794, and was instrumental in lobbying for the insertion of the "pious-clause".

[6] Wilberforce along with Thorton and Macaulay was one of the leaders of the evangelical Clapham sect, English social reformers active from c.1790-1830.

[7] Satī is the burning of the widow along with her dead husband on the funeral pyre

[8] While during the nineteenth century, the majority of missions were Protestant, Jesuit missions to India began in the 13th century. The first Roman Catholic mission from Portugal arrived in India in the sixteenth century, See Pennington, 2005; Stanley1990; Van der Veer. 2001.

[9] The 'pious-clause", which was to tend to the "moral improvement" of India was passed due in large part to the efforts of Wilberforce who quoted company officials, historians and missionaries such as William Carey, Joshua Marshman, and William Ward. See Kaye 1966, 643-644. Wilberforce states of India in *The Substance of the Speeches of William Wilberforce, Esq., on the clauses in the East India Bill for permitting the Religious Instruction and Moral Improvement of the Natives of the British Dominions in India*, 1813,

missionary societies emerged with the mandate to save the souls of their fellow human

beings in India.[10]

In 1792, William Carey, a Baptist missionary who spent 41 years in India,

outlined the duty of Christians in an essay entitled, "An Enquiry into the Obligations of

Christians to Use Means for the Conversions of the Heathens". [11] He begins by stating:

> Our Lord Jesus Christ, a little before his departure, commissioned his apostles to
> Go, and teach all nations; or as another Evangelist expresses it, Go into all the
> world, and preach the gospel to every creature. This commission was as
> extensive as possible, and laid them under obligation to disperse themselves into
> every country of the habitable globe, and preach to all the inhabitants, without
> exception or limitation.

Carey's essay goes on to attempt to motivate his fellow Christians, whom he perceived as

failing to fulfill their duties as Christians, thinking the Bible's word applied only to the

apostles and assuming that Christian duty was simply restricted to their own countrymen.

15-17, that: "the common sense of mankind, in this country at least, is not to be so outraged; and in truth, we find the morals and manners of the natives as such as we might have been led to expect from a knowledge of the dark and degrading superstitions, as well as of the political bondage, under which they have been so long bowed. To which I may add, that, such is the nature of their institutions and customs, that not religion only, but common humanity, should prompt us to exert all legitimate methods for producing the discontinuance of them" (quoted in Marshall 1968, 188). The "white man's burden" figured prominently in the passing of this clause as evidenced from *Papers Respecting the Negotiation for a renewal of the East India Company's exclusive Privileges*, 1813, 276-278. 'The Protestant Society for the Protection of Religious Liberty', proposed seven resolutions including: "That as men, as Britons, and as Christians, this Committee continues to regard with anguish and horror, the moral depression and religious ignorance of very many millions of immortal beings, who people the plains of India, subject to British power. That their 'hearts are pained' at the fearful penances, licentious rites, female degradation, human sacrifices, and horrible infanticide, which there prevail: and that, convinced by history, observation, and experience, that Christianity would afford inestimable benefits, and that their diffusion is practicable, wise, and imperative, they cannot but preserve eminently to desire its speedy and universal promulgation throughout the regions of the East" (Marshall 1968, 26-27).

The passing of this clause was not unanimously supported and a negative view of Hindu customs was not held by all British nationals. John Scott-Warring, a Bengal officer wrote of the high moral character and excellence of religious doctrines of the Hindus (1808). Thomas Twining, a proprietor of the East India Company, spoke in *A Letter to the Chairman of the East India Company on the danger of interfering in the religious opinions of India* (1807) of the political perils of missionary activity in India (Marshall, 1968, 28-29).

[10] Societies such as the London Missionary School and the Church Missionary Society, added to the previously established Serampore Missions. See Pennington, 2005; Stanley. 1990: Van der Veer, 2001. The insertion of the "pious-clause" in 1813 was a catalyst from the days of Warren Hasting and Orientalist scholarship to the Evangelism of Charles Grant.

[11] Carey and his family landed in India in 1793. He settled in Calcutta and spent much of his time translating the Bible into many different languages. See Stanley 1990.

Alexander Duff from the Church of Scotland Mission made similar pleas to his fellow

Christians, to spread the word of God.

> ...[W]e would, with our whole heart and strength and soul, call upon all who
> profess to be disciples of the Lord Jesus, to come forward now "to the help of the
> Lord,-to the help of the Lord against the mighty." We call upon you by that
> wondrous scheme for the redemption of a ruined world, which from all eternity
> engaged the counsels of the Godhead, to compassionate the poor dying perishing
> heathen;-not to allow the Prince of Darkness any longer to trample on his
> miserable victims without control, or drag them as unresisting captives along the
> broad road that leadeth to perdition. We call upon you by the miseries of earth,
> the torments of hell, the joys of heaven; by all that the savior has done and
> suffered, in His vicarious obedience and agony and bloody sweat,-to come forth
> now and be instrumental in erecting the standard of the cross...(1839, 258).

Much of the literature of these times spoke not only of the unredeemed spiritual condition

but also of the hardship and deplorable conditions plaguing the inhabitants of the

subcontinent.

Developing alongside and building upon Orientalist discourse was a more overtly

Christian missionary discourse motivated by Protestant notions of a duty of redemption.

Once the missionary ban was lifted by the British government, India was saturated with

missionaries who sought to spread the gospel and fulfill their Christian obligation to

spread the word of the Lord. While the Jesuits had been a presence in India since the

thirteenth century, the Portuguese had attempted forceful conversions in the sixteenth

century, and the Catholic church had made arrangements to minister to the European

Christians in India now it was the turn of the Protestants, armed with the knowledge of

the decayed state of India and Hinduism, unearthed by the Orientalists, whose missions

resulted in an enormous body of literature describing Hindu practices.

The missionaries did not have military backing behind them, but due to the fact they

were of the same race as the colonial administrators, they were perceived by the Indians

as possessing a similar authority. An extensive range of materials such as letters, sermons, pamphlets and newspaper articles were produced. Initially, interest revolved around ethical and moral issues concerning the soul of the Hindu and the need for conversion. Lata Mani shows how Baptist missionaries implemented a two fold approach to the preaching of the gospel which involved first, the "critical denunciation of indigenous religion", and second, "the exhortation of the superior merits of Christ" (Mani 1998, 91). The denunciation of indigenous religion involved the spouting of propaganda to the Hindus about their own religion.

At the forefront of the missionary narratives were examples of what were considered to be barbaric activities, which were viewed as the direct result of idolatry. The main practices that the missionaries particularly targeted were human sacrifice, *satī*, infanticide, and lascivious rituals. As idolatry was seen as the reason for all the other so-called barbaric practices, it became the unifying principle that explained the perplexing heterogeneity of religion in the subcontinent. Missionary writing of the 19th century identified idolatry as the source of all the tribulations faced by Hinduism and India;

> Notwithstanding all that has been written about the myriotheitic idolatry of India, no pen has adequately depicted all the hideousness and grossness of the monstrous system. It has well described by one who knew it, as "Satan's masterpiece of ingenuity for the entanglement of souls," and as " the most stupendous fortress and citadel of ancient error and idolatry now in the world (Hastie 1882, 30).

> So far then from the Hindu idolatry being harmless, it has ever been, and in these progressive days of light, it still is, the one chief cause of all the demoralisation and degradation of India. It had consecrated and encouraged every conceivable form of licentiousness, falsehood, injustice cruelty, robbery, murder (Hastie 1882, 33).

> But however ruinous may be the effects which their idolatry produces upon their constitutions as individuals, upon their civil relations, and upon their public institutions, far more dreadful are its effects upon their morals. From gods who

are represented as selfish, cruel, malicious and tyrannical;- who are held up, in the very shasters, as monsters of vice, of debauchery, murder, rapine, and all kinds of abomination;- who are perpetually engaged in broils and quarrels, invading each other's rights, and thwarting each other's purposes, delighting in mischief and demanding worship which is polluting and degrading; what can we expect to find in lives, the principles and the dispositions of their votaries. Nothing surely but their own images reflected;- nothing but an imitation of all their villainies and their crimes (Cambell 1839, 33) [12]

The manifest effect of idolatry in this country, as held up to thousands of Christian spectators, is an immersion into the grossest moral darkness, and a universal corruption of manners. The Hindoo is taught, that the image is really God, and the heaviest judgments are denounced against him, if he dare to suspect that the image is nothing more than the elements of which it is composed (Ward 1822, xcix)

2.2.1: William Ward (1769-1823)

Along with William Carey, and Joshua Marshman, William Ward was one of the three British Baptist missionaries known as the Serampore Trio[13]. In 1811 William Ward published *An Account of the Writings, Religion, and Manners, of the Hindoos: Including Translations From Their Principal Works In Four Volumes*, which quickly became a textbook of sorts for the Evangelical efforts for conversion and reform.

William Ward was a journalist, bookseller and publisher before and offered his help as a printer to William Carey to aid in the production of the Christian scriptures in Indian vernacular, which ended up being Ward's main occupation. However, it is Ward's

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[12] William Cambell, a Christian missionary goes as far as to cite idolatry as the reason why India has been the victim of several centuries of corruption, invasion and occupation from various forces, stating that "[i]t is impossible to look at the political degeneracy of India, without grief and sorrow, and not to regard idolatry as the cause of its degradation" (Cambell 1839, 33). Cambell unequivocally sees the "calamities" of India as a punishment from God stating that: "Her idolatry was the first, and most important reason. These armies were only the instruments of executing upon her, the wrath and vengeance of the Almighty. These wild and destructive invasions, were only a means of visiting upon her idols, upon her temples, and upon her people, the punishment due to their iniquities and their crimes. The Lord put her into the furnace of his wrath-not for seventy-but for seven hundred years; he sent upon her one storm of vengeance after another to humble her for idolatry, and rebellions" (Cambell 1839, 33).

[13] Serampore was a Danish colony, north of Calcutta. Since it was a Danish colony the trio was allowed to minister and were not governed by the restrictions of the East India Company. The Serampore Trio are renowned for numerous reasons in both the evangelical as well as the Orientalist field most notably for their translation of indigenous scriptures into English, as well as the Bible into Indian vernacular.

four volume exposition of the customs and manners of Hindus that is his main legacy.

Ward's text was a collection on his observations on Hindu popular practices and

translations of manuscripts. These became a critical part of the defining the religion of

the subcontinent.

Ward's narrative can be analyzed with reference to Ronald Inden's distinction

between the 'descriptive' and the 'commentative' present in Indological discourses.

> The descriptive aspect of an Indological account is that which claims to represent the thoughts and acts of Indians to the reader. The commentative aspects of an account is its frame, often isolable in distinct passages. It represents those same thoughts and actions by characterizing them, by indicating their general nature or essence (2000 (1990) 38-39).

While little information is available about the of writing of Ward's *Account*, it is

known from a letter he wrote to Andrew Fuller of the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS)

that the production of the volumes took several years of research.

> I have been for the last five or six years employed in a work on *the religion and manners of the Hindoos*. It has been my desire to render it the most authentic and complete account that has been given on the subject. I have had the assistance of Brother Carey in every proof-sheet; and his opinion and mine is in almost every particular the same. He and Brother Marshman think the work would be read in England (Quoted in Mani 1998, 124).

This paragraph provides an indication of the intended purpose of the book and Ward's

sense of it's significance. He situates his observations as "authentic" and "complete",

giving the reader the impression that everything contained in the volumes is descriptive

of Hinduism as a whole. Ward's text as a description of Hinduism in its totality, and

Ward's contention that the information he presents is authentic, strengthens his narrative

as objective and complete. This attitude can be observed in Ward's preface to the

volumes first published in 1811, where he writes:

> With regard to the facts here stated, the author's acquaintance with the Bengalee language, and his familiar intercourse with the natives of all castes, enable him to speak with certainty. He has often perceived the errors of writers on Hindoo customs, but declining the unpleasant task of exposing their mistakes, he has contented himself with laying before the public simple facts (1811, iii)

> An ingenuous and unprejudiced enquirer wishes only for authenticated facts: and to such an enquirer, it is hoped, this work will be acceptable (1811, iv)

Ward situates himself as an impartial observer when he locates himself as an "ingenuous and unprejudiced enquirer" who "wishes only for authenticated facts". Ward's engagement with native Hindus seems to have consisted of interactions with the head Pundit Mrityunjay Vidyalankar of the College of Fort William. Rather than being a co-author Vidyalankar's role seems to have been restricted to the category of informant.[14] It is Ward who creates and certifies reliable knowledge through his own translation, selection and interpretation of the material provided to him (Mani 1998, 125).[15] This process is similar to the transformation of raw materials into refined products.[16] Lata Mani discusses this process as one of "excavation", in which "[t]he verb 'extracted,' with its connotations of a purposive expropriation of raw material for use with another product..." indicates alteration and a new creation for European consumption (1998, 126). Ward's selection of observations and choice of texts to translate were intended to reinforce a sensationalized perception of Hinduism.

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[14] Michael John Franklin observes "If the new authority of Orientalism was to be firmly founded in the ancient text and its direct translation, its chief instrument was to be co-operation with native informants,..." (2001, ix).

[15] The act of translation is not a simple process where texts in one language are rendered into another. It is imbued as Tejaswini Niranjana demonstrates with issues of "asymmetrical relations of power" that stem from the colonial encounter (1992, 2). Translation is a manner in which the colonized are produced according to the dominant discourse of the colonizer. Interpretation of the text includes the process of interpolation where commentary interjected under the guise of clarification. The narratives selected for translation is pertinent to the endeavour of translation as they enable the construction of the desired representation. Translation never represents the original but rather something that is already known; it is a strategy of containment, where the transmuted narrative is restricted to the perception of the translator.

[16] Gerald Larson's analysis on the appropriation of environmental concepts and ideas by colonists is relevant in this context, when he states "We want,... to appropriate the raw materials so that we can use them for making what we want." See Gerald Larson cited by Pintchman 2000,133

But to know the Hindu idolatry, AS IT IS, a person must wade through the filth of the thirty-six pooranus and other popular books – he must read and hear the modern popular poems and songs – he must follow the bramhun through his midnight orgies, before the image of Kalee, and other goddesses; or he must accompany him to the nightly revels, the jatras, and listen to the filthy dialogues which are rehearsed respecting Krishnu and the daughters of the milkmen; or he must watch him, at midnight, choking, with the mud and water of the Ganges, a wealthy rich citizen, while in the delirium of fever; or, at the same hour, while murdering an unfaithful wife, or a supposed domestic enemy; burning the body before it is cold, and washing the blood from his hands in the sacred steam of the Ganges; or he must look at the bramhun, hurrying the trembling half-dead widow round the funeral pile, and throwing her, like a log of wood, by the side of the loathsome carcase of her dead husband... (1970 (1822) I: cxi).

The *Account of Hindoos* in its successive editions underwent several changes in the tone expressed by Ward, which have been traced by Lata Mani. Mani demonstrates Ward's shift from "modesty" to "authority" in the prefaces of the 1811 and 1822 editions. In the 1811 edition Ward's relationship to his material is of a rather tentative character; he states that the volumes "contain imperfections, and that persons possessing more leisure, had they possessed his information, would have presented to the public a work more worthy of their approbation" (1811, I: iii). The preface continues in the apologetic tone, maintaining that his goal was to provide facts and not opinions regarding Indian society. The 1822 edition presents a definite contrast in tenor. Ward's hesitancy to voice his opinions on contemporary popular Hinduism is replaced by forceful expositions on what he deems to be necessary corrective measures to ensure India's well being.

It must have been to accomplish some very important moral change in the Eastern world, that so vast an empire as is comprised in British India, containing nearly One Hundred Millions of people, should have been placed under the dominion of one of the smallest portions of the civilized world, and that the other extremity of the globe. This opinion, which is entertained unquestionably by every enlightened philanthropist, is greatly strengthened, when we consider the long-degraded state of India (1822, I: xvii).

In this brief paragraph Ward points toward the Orientalist doctrine of historical decay and the necessity of the Empire's role, with the White Man's Burden one of the restoration or creation of a moral society. At the crux of this for Ward and other Protestant missionaries was the system of idol worship that was viewed as the synecdoche for all contemporary Hindu practice. And within this perspective, the locus of all that was most terrible and reprehensible was the Jagannāth temple in Orissa.

2.2.2: Jagannāth

> I have seen the libations of human blood offered to the Moloch of the Heathen World; and an Assembly , not of 2000 only, but of 200,000 falling prostrate before the Idol, and raising acclamations to his name. But the particulars of these scenes cannot be rehearsed before a Christian Assembly. It may suffice to observe, that the two prominent characters of Idolatry are the same which the Scriptures describe-cruelty and lasciviousness-blood and impurity. The fountain-head of this Superstition in India is the Temple of Juggernaut.[17]

The Jagannāth Temple in Orissa quickly became emblematic of human sacrifice, cruelty, blood and death associated with Hinduism – all of which was linked to the wooden image of Jagannāth.[18] Numerous tales and horrifying accounts inundated the public, particularly descriptions of the *Ratra Yatra* at the Jagannāth temple which were mentioned in most missionary accounts of idolatry. The *Rathra Yatra* occurs during the month of June or July, when Jagannāth together with his brother Balarāma and sister Subhadrā are pulled by pilgrims on a tall chariot, to signify Jagannāth's return to Vrindavan. Given that it is an opportunity for people excluded from entering the temple to receive *darśan* (a vision of the deity), this procession was witnessed by thousands of people. According to the missionary accounts, people would throw themselves under the wheels of the chariot with the belief that they would reach salvation. The crushing of

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[17] Extract from sermon preached by Dr. Buchanan before the Church Missionary Society, on the 12th of June, 1810.

[18] Jagannāth is a form of Kriṣṇa whose name means master of the universe.

bodies beneath the wheels of the chariot was interpreted with disgust as human sacrifice by the missionaries. [19]

> ...:-when you think of the day of high festival,- how the "horrid king" is dragged forth from his temple, and mounted on his lofty car in the presence of hundred of thousands that cause the very earth to shake with shouts of "Victory to Juggernath our lord,"- how the officiating high-priest, stationed in front of the elevated idol, commences the public service by a loathsome pantomimic exhibition, accompanied with the utterance of filthy blasphemous songs, to which the vast multitude at intervals respond, not in strains of tuneful melody, but in loud "yells of approbation, united with a kind of hissing applause:"-when you think of the carnage that ensues in the name of sacred offering,- how, as the ponderous machine rolls on, "grafting harsh thunder," one and another of the more enthusiastic votaries throw themselves beneath the wheels, and are instantly crushed to pieces, the infatuated victims of hellish superstition (Duff 1839, 198-199).

The image of Jagannāth encompassed all the negative aspects of image worship and demonstrated the irrationality of idolatry. "The *figure* does not extend below the loins, and it has no hands but two stumps in lieu of arms..., A Christian is almost led to think that it was attempt to see how low idolatry could debase the human mind" (Col. Philip quoted in Peggs 1830, 216). [20] In the accounts of some missionaries, direct observation was replaced by testimony of previous visitors, such as Claudius Buchanan. This citationary style shaped the missionary narrative with earlier accounts serving as guidebooks of sorts for missionaries who made direct observations or, in other cases, allowed the missionary to see what was supposed to be seen without actually seeing it.

The intersection of missionary discourse with official colonial discourse is quite explicit in the case of the Jagannāth temple, since missionaries would often quote East India company official accounts.

> Taken from a book by Mr. A. Stirling, which was laid before the Asiatic Society, and mentioned in their "Transactions' for 1823. It is actually copied from the

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[19] See Newstead 1838, Poynder 1830, Laurie 1850, Buchanan 1812 , Peggs 1830

[20] See Laurie MDCCCL 2; Missionary Papers No.V. *Lady-Day*, 1817, No. XXXVI, Christmas 1824

> Calcutta Government Gazette, of March 17th 1823, and describes a place where thousands of our poor deluded fellow creatures have been destroyed by the influence of malignant superstition. Multitudes make pilgrimages there every year from immense distances, as a matter of merit, by which they hope to obtain salvation; and die of fatigue or starvation on the road. Great numbers used formerly throw themselves under the wheels of the ponderous car of the idol, and be crushed to death, excited by the fanatical idea of performing a work acceptable to their gods. How much do scenes like these illustrate the words of the holy Scripture, "The dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty!" (Newstead 1838, 7).

The relationship between the East India Company and missionaries, however, was less cordial in the matter of the pilgrim tax on visitors to the Jagannāth Temple which the Company had imposed. [21] The fact that the East India Company was profiting from the festivals and pilgrimages was viewed by the missionaries as an endorsement of the 'barbarous' practices that occurred in Orissa. Further, the tax was used to finance temple maintenance and repair, and to support priests and other temple attendants. [22] Letters to newspapers, petitions and pamphlets were published calling to end to what was deemed the support of idolatry. [23]

> The connexion of Britain with idolatry in India chiefly consists in the establishment of the Pilgrim Tax at the Temple of Juggernaut in Orissa, at Gya, and Allahabad; in the reception of the gains of Idolatry from certain temples, and in making annual grants of money for the support of this absurd and cruel system. The nature and, extent, and injurious tendency of these proceedings are developed in this book, and the misery of the deluded pilgrims allured to the shrines of superstition (rendered more celebrated by these regulations and emoluments!) cry loudly to Britain relative to the support of heathen temples, "let them alone" (Peggs 1830 213)[24].

The connection between idolatry and violence and death that had been established in the case of Jagannāth was extended to other Hindu contexts, including the worship of the

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[21] The tax was also collected at Gaya and Allahabad.

[22] See Poynder 1830.

[23] See Laurie, MDCCCL, 2; Newstead 1838, 18; Missionary Papers NoV. Lady Day, 1817.

[24] James Peggs campaigned along with John Poynder to pass a resolution in 1827 dissolving any ties with "British Idolatry". The removal of British officials and cessation of involvement took over twenty years.

goddess Kālī. A second missionary target was the sexual practices supposedly associated with image worship. We have seen in Claudius Buchanan's statement that "the two prominent characters of Idolatry are the same which the Scriptures describe – cruelty and lasciviousness – blood and impurity". [25]

2.2.3 Lascivious Sexuality

> Their fanes with all abominations stored,
> The parts of shame were imaged and adored.
> In sacred rites lascivious damsels ply,
> Thread the led dance, and roll the wanton eye,
> And pious matrons consecrate their charms,
> By prostitution in Brahman's arms.
> Polluted Ganga's sacred waves contain
> Heaps of deserted babes ultimately slain.
> Here artful Brahmins' teach idiot crowd
> Beneath the idol's car to shed their blood.
> There youthful widows, with a ghastly smile,
> In opiate joy ascend the funeral pile (Cooke, 1841, 68)

The lascivious practices and "perverted" idols of Hinduism were never described in detail by the missionaries under the pretext that such descriptions would corrupt and offend the mind of the Christian reader.

> In describing the vanities which the Hindoos worship, I have been obliged to omit, as unsuitable to be mentioned in this place, and indeed in any other place, one of the most common and venerated of the idols [the Linga] which fill their temples and receive their homage (Nott 1817, 21).

This left the reader to his or her own imagination in visualizing these abhorrent practices. Given that the Orient had already been constructed by travellers and previous missionary accounts as a place of lewd sexual practices, there were abundant possibilities. [26] The

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[25] Extract from sermon preached by Dr. Buchanan before the Church Missionary Society, on the 12th of June, 1810

[26] Anne McClintock discusses the sexualization of foreign lands, to which she refers to as the porno-tropics. She states: "For centuries, the uncertain continents—Africa, the Americas, Asia—were figured in European lore as libidinously eroticized. Travelers' tales abounded with visions of the monstrous sexuality

accretion of these texts provided authority for unmentionable realities, allowing the

author to plant the idea of terrible indecency, and leaving what was unsaid for the reader

to imagine.

> Here are those who extol the virtues of the Hindu philosophies and religious
> works, but the truth is that no translator will ever dare to put into English that part
> of Hindu literature which forms the staple food of the Hindu mind, because if he
> did so he would be imprisoned for gross obscenity (private letter lately received
> from a missionary in India, quoted in Macdonald 1895, 438)

> I have been compelled to conclude this work at this stage, chiefly on account of
> the remaining portion of descriptives being of a nature so indecent and
> abominable, that delicacy impels me to cast a mantle on it, lest I should offend the
> modesty of the general reader. (Moor 1814-1845, 215)

The fetishization of the text became the means through which those ideas were

transmitted. Stuart Hall suggests that, "Fetishism, then is a strategy for having it both

ways: for both representing and not representing the tabooed, dangerous or forbidden

object of pleasure and desire" (1998, 2003 268). Textual fetishism worked to construct

an image that was never to be seen or depicted and rarely described, but yet was easily

identifiable to the reader. In this fashion fantasy replaces actuality, and what is pointed to

is only known through what is not represented or discussed. The fascination with the

object is concurrently "indulged and at the same time denied" through the process of

disavowal (Hall 2003, 267). Sexualized Hindu images and lascivious Hindu practices as

visual, observable objects were known through inference and imagination alone.

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of far-off lands, where legend had it, men sported gigantic penises and women consorted with apes,
feminized men's breasts flowed with milk and militarized women lopped theirs off. Renaissance travelers
found an eager and lascivious audience for their spicy tales, so that long before the era of high Victorian
imperialism, Africa and the Americas had become what had become called the porno-tropics for the
European imagination- a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden
sexual desires and fears" (1995, #)

2.3: Privileging the Visual through the Textual: Concluding Remarks

The citationary style of missionary accounts was similar to the approach of the authors of the *paddhatis* and the commentaries written by the Ācāryas since they consulted, in most cases, other *paddhatis* and commentaries. But differences between these two discursive traditions emerge in their theologies of the image. We have seen how for the Ācāryas and Śaiva masters the material image's significance as divine depended on ritual and sound, whereas Christian understandings of the image were grounded solely in the visual and tangible form. The locus of Hinduism for the Christian missionary was the material idol, viewed against the backdrop of Abrahamic injunctions against the fabrication of divine images. The act of seeing "is not an isolated or 'pure' biological or cultural activity. It is part of the entire human sensorium, interwoven with all manner of behaviors and cultural routines" (Morgan 2005, 52). Even though Hindu texts and informants were available to help the European interpret the Hindu image, this became secondary to the Christian analysis which used Biblical scripture as the basis for comprehending the divine image. The paradigm of idolatry became the only feasible mode for interpreting Hindu imagery, and it is this concept which will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3
"FOUR FOOTED BEASTS AND CREEPY THINGS": IDOLS, IDOLATRY AND ICONOCLASTS

The previous chapter demonstrated how Orientalist and missionary discourse constructed the Hindu image as the cause for the ills of Indian society. According to William Ward, "There is another feature in this system of idolatry, which increases its pernicious effects on the public manners. The history of these gods is a highly coloured presentation of their wars, quarrels and licentious intrigues; which are held up in the images, recitations, songs, and dances at the public festivals" (1822, xxxiii). For the administrator and the missionary, such perceived decadence justified the British presence in India. From the colonial and religious perspective, India was in a state of decline and it was the duty of the Englishman to restore the country to a 'civilised' form. Idolatry then, was the representative for all of India's perceived moral, political and economic debasement. The colonial mission, both politically and religiously, was the same on this point, to reform and enlighten Indians to the British monotheistic way of life – to rid India of its idols. The battle against idolatry was not waged solely by British nationals, but was taken up also by Hindu reformers, who located their arguments in the Hindu tradition by surmising that the Hindu scriptures contained their own notion of a transcendent all-knowing God and injunctions against idolatry. Restoration, for the Hindu reformer was different from that of the British Christian agenda, it was based on the re-establishment of Hinduism and Indian society to the Golden Age, described in Hindu scriptures.

This chapter begins with an examination of the concept of idolatry put forth in the Judeo-Christian tradition that informed the reading of Hindu images as idols. With this as background, I will focus in the remainder of the chapter on the English writings of the Hindu reformer Rammohun Roy, who argued against British rule and conversion based on his comprehension of Hinduism as an originally monotheistic religion.

3.1: "Idolatry"

The etymological root of the word Idolatry is the Greek *eidololatreia*, made up of *eidolon* and *latreia*, meaning figure and worship, respectively. Simply put, idolatry refers to the worship of images. As is evidenced by many historical and contemporary usages of the word, the term has a negative connotation which is likely due to the associations with the term "idol". The pejorative implications of this term derive from its usage in the scriptures of ancient Israel, where worship of the idol is linked to the adoration of a false god, contrary to the one true God, and where there are prohibitions against visually depicting divinity.

Accusations of idolatry require that the one true God be defined, and his worship delineated. Idolatry served not only a restrictive process of disqualifying heathen religious practices, but also a prescriptive one, by establishing the existence of the one true God in the discourse of scriptural tradition as elaborated further after the advent of Christianity. For Christians, the idol quickly became a marker of the religious practices of non-Christians, which distinguished them from their pagan forebears; it negotiated the boundary between self and other. As Serge Gruzinski illustrates,

> ...[T]he multiplied presence of the idol constituted a powerful cultural and historical marker, a reference immediately called up other distant but prestigious ones, both ancient and familiar. As the figurative native object lost its strangeness, abandoned its exoticism to become the equivalent of the false image that pagans

adored, the discovered lands entered straight away into a past and a universe that were apparently common to the conqueror and the Indians: that of the image worshippers. (2001, 24). [1]

While Gruzinski's study concerns the Zemi in Mexico, his argument is also valid in the context of Hindu images in India. Initially, as we saw above, travelers to India viewed the images of Indian gods as monsters or demons completely alien to the framework of Christian religion. However, through Orientalist works such as Jones' "Gods of Greece", a link was made between the Hindu gods and the gods of European antiquity, thereby locating them in a Christian history of religions. And although, by the eighteenth or nineteenth century, these beings were no longer regarded as demons and monsters, they were emblems of a false religion that indicated a backward or degenerate society.

In the First Testament of the Hebrew Bible, the prohibition against idols or worshipping other gods is based on God's announcement in the ten commandments that he is a jealous god and will punish those who do not follow this injunction.

> You shall have no other gods before me
> You shall not make for yourself an idol in the
> Form of anything in heaven above or in the waters below. You
> shall not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the LORD your God, am a
> jealous God, punishing the children.... (Exodus 20:4) [2]

In the New Testament, idolatry, did not refer exclusively to the offence of image worship but rather encompassed a range of other undesirable activities. The early Christians believed that those who forgot the one true God in favour of false images of the divine were plunged into the depths of base desire and immoral behavior. These deplorable

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[1] For information regarding attitudes toward the pagan practices of ancient Britain and a discussion of anti-Catholic rhetoric in 19th century Britain see Pennington 2005, 65-72.

[2] This is the opening of the ten commandments, which appear also at Deuteronomy 5:6-21

effects of image worship are already familiar to us from the nineteenth-century missionary condemnation of Hindu image worship as conducive to violence and sinful sexuality. Such assessments drew on the Biblical passage by Paul in Romans I:18-32, who decreed:

> For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal for images made to look like mortal man and birds, and animals, and reptiles.
> Therefore God gave them up in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the creator...
> Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another...
> Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of the God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice (21-29).

Paul's condemnation of those engaged in the manufacturing and worshipping of images shows God turning away from their folly and pride, allowing them to be caught up in a vicious cycle of immorality and sinful behavior.

> Turn we our eyes to India's bigot plains,
> Where gross idolatry triumph reigns.
>
> ...
>
> Ere history began in ancient times,
> A dark religion ruled in Eastern climes.
> In sculptured temples learned Brahmins reigned,
> And verse refined their sacred laws contained,
> And Highly gifted poets poured along
> The swelling torrent of the varied song.
> Hence incense worthy of God ascends,
> And next to earth its groveling vapour bends.
> Thus with sublimest thoughts, that raise on high
> The raptur'd soul converse with the sky,
> Romantic legends strangest scenes display,

> Where Gods of forms grotesque in wild adventures
> stray (Croke 1841, 28)

While India was romanticized, the image worship that was encountered in India was considered to be of the most extended and heinous nature, and soon placed the subcontinent in the forefront of missionary rescue efforts. William Ward categorized Hinduism as the "most PUERILE, IMPURE, AND BLOODY OF ANY SYSTEM OF IDOLATRY THAT WAS EVER ESTABLISHED ON EARTH" (1922 (1997) I:clxix). Idolatry in India was comprehended, for the most part, in a literal sense as the veneration of material images as God, precluding the possibility of symbolic or other meanings.

> What, you exclaim, do you really believe that, with you own hands, you can, out of wood and straw and clay, fabricate a god; before which you may fall down and worship? (Duff 1839, 225). [3]

The materiality of the image meant that it was subject to decay and eventual physical disintegration, an overt signifier of its corruption and falsehood (Halbertal and Margalit 1992, 11). The missionaries concentrated on not only the perishability of the materials from which the idols were fabricated but also on the fact that the images were constructed by humans. [4]

> The idols which the merchant-benefactor delighted to honour, were deposited with great caution in an empty-room. They were fresh from the hand of the cunning workman, who had ingeniously transformed the unwieldy block of stone into the similitude of a god! (Nisbet 1830. 4)

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[3] Duff is echoing Isaiah 44:12-17 which discusses how blacksmiths and carpenters fabricate the idols, not God.

[4] The second commandment prohibits both the construction and worship of divine images.
> You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them;... (Deut. 5:8-9)

To these great Gods a far inferior host.
Their various qualities and functions boast:
And men, and animals, earth, sea and skies,
With ruling powers the Hindu creed supplies.
Each has his station, each his system guides,
Each o'er his part of nature's works presides

Thus mere abstractions of the mind became
Realities, and gained a substance, and a name:
And plastic Fancy opened all her stores,
To body forth their attributes, and powers.
And Gods, created by their sculptor's hand,
In brazen metaphors terrific stand. (Croke 1841,31)

Although it was acknowledged by the missionaries that the *Śāstras* contained rules for

the fabrication of images, those who made them were thought to have been corrupted by

greed, and their disinterest in the scriptural basis for image-making stripped their efforts

of any real spiritual legitimacy. Duff alludes to this when he states: "There is an

abundance of image makers by profession. And alas, in a city like Calcutta, the craft of

image making is by far the most lucrative and unfluctuating of all crafts" (1839, 222)

> If ever man could construct a material image of God, it would be only possible if
> he showed the pattern of Himself on the highest mount of inspiration. But the
> Hindoo idol maker has had no such vision, and does not even claim to have had it.
> Hence he can only draw the form of imagery out of himself his subjective moods
> of feeling or aspiration, and not the known transcendent, divine reality. The idol is
> but an external reflection of the spiritual life of the idolator. (Hastie 1882, 17).

While the missionaries were aware that the ceremony of *pratiṣṭhā* was required to enliven

the image with divine presence, they questioned its efficacy and legitimacy.

> The consecration of an image is accompanied with a number of ceremonies. The
> most singular of which is conveying sight and life to the image for which
> appropriate formulas, with prayers, invite the deity to come and dwell in it. After
> this ceremony, the image become sacred, and is carefully guarded from every
> offensive approach. The shastrus contain directions for making idols, and the
> forms of meditation used in worship contain a description of each idol: but in
> many instances these forms are disregarded, and the proprietor, though compelled
> to preserve the identity of the image, indulges in his own fancy (Ward 1822, cxi-
> cxii).

> It is their firm persuasion, that by means of the ceremonies and incantations, the mass of rude matter has been actually transubstantiated, into the very substance of the deity itself. According to either view of the subject, whether more or less rational, the image is believed to be truly animated by divinity,- to be a real and proper and legitimate object of worship. (Duff 1839, 228)

The transubstantiation of the idol raised the question as to whether the worship was

directed towards the material object, a clear violation of the second commandment, or the

indwelling spirit that was invoked through the ceremonies. Missionaries and Orientalists

had translated various Hindu texts pointing to the existence of an abstract all

encompassing God. William Jones had identified the Vedas as containing a primitive

form of monotheism. But for missionaries, the only manner in which to worship the true

God was through the gospel of Jesus Christ, and thus they tended to dismiss alternate

views of the divine or justifications for image worship provided by Hindus.

> I have repeatedly conversed with learned Hindoos on the use of idols in worship; the best account I have ever received may amount to this. God is everywhere; this allowed, but his spirituality perplexes the mind. To collect and fix the ideas on the object of adoration, therefore, an image is chosen; into which image, by the power of incantations, the deity is imagined to be drawn. Hence in dedicating the image, they call upon the god to come and dwell in it. I have urged in reply, that if this were the whole end to be answered, an image might do, but that I saw amongst them many sorts of idols. To this the brahmun says, "God has made himself known in these forms, and directed theses various images to be made, that men may be fascinated and drawn to the love of worship; that none of these images are intended to exhibit the natural perfections of Gods, but his actions when incarnated; and that images are only necessary while men continue in a rude state, and may be laid aside by those who can attain to devotion by means of rational speculation". This is the best apology I obtained for the worship of idols. Yet, surely, instead of elevating the mind, and carrying it to a Being so glorious as God, images debase a subject so sublime, and destroy all reverence for Him who is "glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders." Images of God are therefore highly offensive, and their makers and worshippers justly expose themselves to the cutting reproof of Isaiah. "To whom then will ye liken God? Or what likeness will ye compare to him? Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: all nations before him as nothing, and vanity" (Ward 1822, xcvi-xcvii).

Through these narratives we see the first step toward the inclusion of an indigenous voice

in missionary accounts, albeit quoted by the missionary. [5] It is apparent nonetheless that

the Hindu community engaged in a dialogue with missionaries and sought to explain the

practice of image worship to those who challenged it.

> The question has frequently been agitated in India among the European residents whether or not Hindus are idolaters in the sense of believing that the idol they worship is very god. It may be answered, 'Yes and No.' The cultured classes do not believe they are very God; ... For this belief the educated classes are responsible. While repudiating any interest in regard for idols, they have frequently said to me: 'Idols are the alphabet of religion. You teach the human mind by a system of symbols that represent sounds. They have little connection with the abstract ideas, but before you can convey complex thoughts to others at a distance you must acquire these symbols. You get beyond them in knowledge, but you cannot do without them. All thought requires words in which to frame itself, and these words are composed of letters. In the same way we give the ignorant, who cannot grasp abstract truths, nor rise to the realization of the spirituality of God, elementary symbols. Idolatry is for them' (Ewen 1890 83).

This argument made by the "educated" Hindu cannot be regarded as simply a reaction to

missionary discourse since, as we have seen in Chapter One, image worship had for many

centuries been debated, and the two-tier system had basis in Hindu as well as in the

philosophical and theological commentaries. However, this justification of idolatry struck

the missionaries as hypocritical and reinforced the colonial perception of the mass of

Hindus as childlike.

> It is alleged by the most plausible apologist of Hinduism that although educated men can dispense with the idol and yet be religious, the common uneducated people cannot; and hence it would neither be safe nor wise to withdraw from them this support of their lower spiritual life. Thus do these advocates of idolatry find a prudential and even a psychological justification for their religious expediency. Or, as it was once strikingly put by Sir Radha Kanta Deb, by far the greatest representative of the Sobha Bazaar family-"As you Europeans give *dolls* to *your* children, so do we Hindoos give these *idols* to our children, to uneducated women and common people, who cannot do without them' – but adding with an

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[5] Lata Mani asserts that "Indigenous accounts were rarely reported" and when they are limited "to summarizing their [missionary] own arguments (1998, 89).

expressive smile – "we do not really worship them ourselves." This conscious yielding of such leaders to idolatry is, then, at best, but a kindly *accommodation* to the popular prejudice and ignorance, and is even ultimately grounded upon the supposed *necessity* of their intellectual limitations. (Hastie 1882, 11)

The indigenous voice regarding image worship was not restricted to paraphrased narrative in missionary discourse, but also emerged in commentary written in English and Indian vernacular by Hindu reformers. Emerging simultaneously alongside the missionary and colonial discourse was the discourse of the colonized, which highlighted the complex relationship between the colonizers and the indigenous population. The interaction between these two groups was not a simple one of dominant and dominated but one of compromise, struggle, disjunction and compliance. The interplay of colonial and indigenous discourses produced continuously shifting knowledges that were at sometimes contradictory but in other times, congruent.

The early nineteenth century saw the emergence of a Hindu reform movement in Bengal calling to an end to what were deemed as degenerate practices associated with Hinduism while at the same time arguing for self-rule and less colonial interference in indigenous matters. The *bhadralok* (respectable people) of colonial Bengal were elite Hindu men of all castes[6] who had achieved a certain level of economic success. Seen often as contributing to the reform movement, the *bhadralok,* differentiated themselves from the lower classes or *chottalok* (little people) of Indian society, and the British colonizers. The issue of *satī* (widow burning) occupied a principal position for reformers during the Hindu renaissance. At the vanguard of this movement was Rammohun Roy, the founder of the Brahmo Samāj, often lauded as the "Father of Modern India".

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[6] The majority of the *bhadralok* was Brahmin.

3.2: Rammohun Roy (1772-1833)[7]

Born in Radhanagar, Birdwan district in Bengal in 1772, Rammohun's parents

were orthodox Brahmins of the highest *Kulin* lineage. During his childhood Rammohun

learned Arabic and Persian in Patna where he encountered not only the Qu'ran but also

Euclid and Aristotle. After some travels and the death of his father in 1803, Rammohun

began to work in the civil service with the British, where he met John Digby, the

Collector at Rangpur who was to become a friend and literary confidant. According to

the preface of his work *An Abridgement of the Vedanta* (1817), Rammohun began

learning English in 1796 and became one of the first indigenous translators of classical

Sanskrit Hindu sources into English. Rammohun, a devout monotheist, believed that

Hinduism was in a degenerate state and that the main cause of this condition was idolatry

which he regarded as a system that had destroyed "the texture of society" (Rammohun

1945, II: 60).[8] He argued in a manner reminiscent of the Christian missionaries that

social abuses such as *sati*, among other forms of homicide and illicit sexual practices

were the direct result of idol worship. He wrote in the introduction to his translation of

the *Mundaka Upanisad*:

> The public will, I hope, be assured that nothing but the natural inclination of the
> ignorant towards the worship of objects resembling their own nature, and to the
> external forms of rites palpable to their grosser senses joined to the self interested
> motives of their pretended guides, has rendered the generality of the Hindoo
> community (in defiance of their sacred books) devoted to idol-worship, the
> source of prejudice and superstition and of the total destruction of the moral

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[7] Noel Salmond has written extensively on Rammohun Roy and Dayananda Sarasvati with respect their stance on iconoclasm in the Hindu tradition. Building on Salmond's findings, my research attempts to situate the discourse produced by Rammohun in relation to the narratives produced by Orientalists and missionaries.

[8] See also Rammohun 1945, II: 13,14, 24, 48, 51, 92, 105.

principle, as countenancing criminal intercourse, suicide, female murder , and human sacrifice (1945 II: 1).

As in the discourse produced by missionaries and Orientalists, Rammohun saw Hinduism as being in a state of decay. For Rammohun, Hindus had lost sight of the original sacred philosophy that was contained in the Vedas and *Upaniṣads* and confused the true Hindu religion with "custom and fashion" (1945, II: 23). Rammohun writes of this deviation in the preface of the *Translation of the Kuth-Opanishud of the Ujoor-Ved* with reference to what he perceived as the primordial monotheistic Hindu system evidenced in the *Upaniṣads*.

> A great body of my countrymen, possessed of good understandings, and not much fettered with prejudices, being perfectly satisfied with the truth of the doctrines contained in this and other works, already laid by me before them, and the gross errors of the puerile system of idol-worship which they were led to follow, have altered their religious conduct in a manner becoming the dignity of human beings; while the advocates of idolatry and their misguided followers, over whose opinions prejudice and obstinacy prevail rather than good sense and judgment, prefer custom and fashion to the authorities of their scriptures, and therefore continue, under the form of religious devotion, to practise a system which destroys, to the utmost degree, the natural texture of society, and prescribes crimes of the most heinous nature, which even savage nations would blush to commit, unless compelled by the most urgent necessity (1945, II: 23).

The adherence to "the fruit of vulgar caprice" is in discord with what Rammohun considers "divine faith", which originates from "spiritual authorities and correct reasoning" (1945, II: 48).

The pervasiveness of idolatry was due in large part, in Rammohun's view to the corruption of Brahmin priests.

> Many learned Brahmans are perfectly aware of the absurdity of idolatry, and are well informed of the nature of the purer form of worship. But as in the rites, ceremonies, and festivals of idolatry, they find the source of their comforts and fortune, they not only fail to protect idol-worship from all attacks, but even advance and encourage it to the utmost of their power, by keeping the knowledge of their scriptures concealed from the rest of the people (1945 II: 44).

William Jones had made similar assertions in his poem, "Hymn to Lachsmi", where he attributes the delusion of idolatry to the manipulation of the priestly class:

> Oh! bid the patient Hindu rise and live.
> His erring mind, that wizard lore beguiles
>   Clouded by priestly wiles,
> To senseless nature bows for nature's GOD.
> Now, stretch' o'er ocean's vast from happier isles,
> He sees the wand of empire, not the rod... (Works XIII:298)

Jones's verse highlights three important beliefs that the British held concerning image worship in India. First, that idolatry involves the worship of false gods and not the true transcendental God. Secondly, that idolatry is perpetuated in large part by the Brahmin priests. And finally, that India will be liberated from its erroneous beliefs by the British Empire – a point contested by Rammohun.

In contrast to the missionaries, the true God for Rammohun is not the one found in the Bible but rather the God of the Vedas, who is described by him as: "the sole regulator of the Universe" who "is but one, who is omnipresent, far surpassing our powers of comprehension; above external sense; and whose worship is the chief duty of mankind and the sole cause of the eternal beatitude" (1945, II: 41).[9] Rammohun goes on to say "that all that bear figure and appellation are interventions" (1945, II:41). Drawing on Hindu precedents but also echoing some Christian discourse, he contends that ignorant and uneducated people require a material form in order to worship God. He brings forward passages found in the *Purānas* and *Tantras* that support such a construction of

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[9] Rammohun states in the preface to his translation of Ishopanishad that, "The most learned Vyasa shows, in his work of the Vedanta, that all the texts of the Veda, with one consent, prove but the Divinity of that Being, who is out of the reach of comprehension and beyond all description" (1945 11:41).

the validity of the image [10], and claims that other passages which contradict this view are

not to be taken literally (1945,II: 42).

Rammohun is not persuaded by Hindu interpretations that conceptualize the

image as a means to reach a transcendent God. He addresses this point in the Preface of

The Translation of the Ishopanishad of the Yajur-Veda:

> Some Europeans, imbued with high principles of liberality, but unacquainted with
> the ritual part of Hindu idolatry, are disposed to palliate it by an interpretation
> which, though plausible, is by no means well founded. They are willing to
> imagine, that the idols which the Hindus worship, are not viewed by them in the
> light of gods or real personifications of the divine attributes, but merely as
> instruments for raising their minds to the contemplation of those attributes which
> are restively represented by different figures. I have frequently had occasion to
> remark, that many Hindus also who are conversant with the English language,
> finding this interpretation more plausible apology for idolatry than any with
> which they are furnished by their own guides, do not fail to avail themselves of it,
> though in repugnance both to their faith and to their practice (1945 II: 44)

According to Rammohun the worship by Hindus of idols is not done in a symbolic

manner, but they worship the actual material object as God having over the ages, lost

sight of the transcendent God (1945, II: 45). Rammohun supports his claim that Hindus

regard the idol as God through an exposition of the ritual of *prāṇa- pratiṣṭhā.*

> Neither do they regard the images of those gods merely in the light of instruments
> for elevating the mind to the conception of the supposed being, they are simply in
> themselves made objects of worship. For whatever Hindu purchases an idol in the
> market, or constructs one with his own hands, or who has one made under his
> own superintendence, it is his invariable practice to perform certain ceremonies
> called Prana-Pratistha, or the endowment of animation, by which he believes that

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[10] Rammohun writes in the *Preface of the Translation of the Ishopanishad:*"Should it be asked, whether the assertions found in the Puranas and the Tantras &c., respecting the worship of several gods and goddesses, are false, or whether Puranas and Tantras are not included in the Sastra, the answer to this is : the Puranas and Tantra, &c. are of course to be considered as Sastra, for they repeatedly declare God to be one and above the apprehension of external and internal senses; they indeed expressly declare the divinity of many gods and goddesses, and the modes of their worship; but they reconcile those contradictory assertions by affirming frequently, that the directions to worship any figured beings are only applicable to those who are incapable of elevating their minds to the idea of an invisible Supreme Being, in order that such persons, by fixing their attentions on those invented figures, may be able to restrain themselves from vicious temptations, and that those that are competent for the worship of the invisible God, should disregard the worship of Idols" (1945 II: 41-42).

its nature is changes from that of the mere materials of which it is formed, and that it acquires not only life but supernatural powers (1945, II: 45). [11]

Rammohun says that after this "mysterious process" the images are endowed in the eyes of the devotees with a paradoxically human and divine essence. He describes how male gods are married to female goddesses in marriage ceremonies akin, although on a grander scale, to human marriage and how worshippers fulfill human needs by feeding and bathing the idols and putting them to bed during the night. Like the missionaries, Rammohun even alludes to sexual acts that are performed as part of the worship of these idols, saying that: "Other practices they have with regard to those idols which decency forbids me to explain" (1945, II: 46).[12]

Rammohun's arguments were met with animosity by both the Christian missionaries and the Hindu Brahmin Community in India. For the missionaries, if the denunciation of idolatry was welcome, Rammohun's claim that the Vedas contained a monotheistic religion was not, and many a heated debate ensued between Rammohun and the Christian missionaries who argued that the only true God was the one found in the Bible. The dialogue was often rehearsed through letters to newspapers, where fiery arguments would take place in which the tenets of both Hinduism and Christianity were questioned. Rammohun's disquisitions on Christianity transformed him into *persona non grata* among Christian missionaries.

3.2.1: Rammohun and the Christians

Initially, Rammohun's campaign against idolatry was well received by missionaries in both India and Britain. In 1816, *The Missionary Register* acclaimed Rammohun's reform movement: "The rise of this new Sect, the zeal and subtlety

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[11] See also 1947 II: 60.
[12] Ibid: 118.

displayed by its founder, with its obvious tendency to undermine the fabric of Hindoo

Superstition, are objects of serious attention to the Christian Mind" (quoted in Crawford

1984,37). *The Register* goes on to wonder whether "... this man may be one of the many

instruments, by which God, in his mysterious providence, may accomplish the overthrow

of idolatry" (quoted in Crawford 1984, 37). However, after Rammohun's publication of

The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness in 1820, the missionaries were

provoked. In Rammohun's introduction to the four Gospels in *The Precepts of Jesus*

(also translated into Sanskrit and Bengali), he raised doubts about the miracles performed

by Jesus and questioned the validity of the Trinity within the framework of monotheism.

Joshua Marshman, editor of the monthly magazine, *A Friend to India* and one of the

"Serampore Trio" (together with William Carey and William Ward) – at first greeted the

translation by the "heathen" Rammohun with enthusiasm.

> The Work, while it furnishes an overwhelming proof of the truth and excellence
> of the sacred Scriptures, since an intelligent heathen whose mind is as yet opposed
> to the grand design of the saviour's becoming incarnate, feels constrained to
> acknowledge that the precepts of Jesus the Saviour are so fully consonant with
> truth and righteousness, so exactly suited to circumstances of making, those of his
> countrymen, as well as those of the Western world...lend so evidently to maintain
> the peace and harmony of mankind... (Quoted in Ahluwalia & Ahluwalia 1991,
> 23-24).

But in the following issue of the magazine, which appeared in September of 1820

Marshman said that although the news of a translation of the gospels by an 'authentic'

Hindu had initially contented him, given it would "expose the folly of the system of

idolatry universally prevalent" and enable the gospel of Jesus to be propagated, he was

soon dismayed by the manner in which Rammohun questioned the "sacred oracles" rather

than treating them with appropriate reverence (Marshman, *Friend of India*, Sept. 1820).

Rammohun responded in *An Appeal to the Christian Public in Defence of "The Precepts of Jesus"* signing the tract, "A Friend to Truth".

> In perusing the twentieth number of "The Friend of India," I felt as much surprised as disappointed at some remarks made in that magazine by a gentleman under the signature of "A Christian Missionary"...Before however I attempt to inquire into the ground upon which their objections to the work in question are founded, I humbly beg to appeal to the public against the unchristian like, as well as uncivil manner in which the Editor has adduced his objections to the compilation, by introducing personality, and applying the term *heathen* to the Compiler (1948, V: 51).

Rammohun questioned whether it was just to call him a heathen since that he had made his renunciation of idolatry and allegiance to One God clear to the public, much to the disdain of his parents and many of his fellow countrymen. Further, Rammohun responded to various points in Marshman's editorial and used Biblical passages to illustrate the ideas he had previously presented in *The Precepts of Jesus*. Rammohun did not back down from his assertion that there should be a separation of "...the moral doctrines of the Books of the New Testament, ascribed to the four Evangelists, from the mysteries and historical matters therein contained..." (1945 II: 59). In the concluding sections of his treatise Rammohun responds to Marshman's allegation that Vedanta promotes atheism.

> Neither can I conscientiously coincide with the respected Reviewer in his imputing atheism to the Vedanta system, under supposition of its denying moral attributes to God; nor can I help lamenting that religious prejudice should influence the Reviewer so much, as to make him apply the term of atheist towards a sect or to individuals who look up to God of nature through his wonderful works alone; for the Vedanta, in common with the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, from the impossibility of forming more exalted conceptions, constantly ascribes to God the perfection of those moral attributes which are considered among the human species excellent and sublime (1946, II:70). [13]

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[13] He goes on to quote passage from the Mundaka Upanisad, Katha Upanisad, Kena upanisad and Isho upanisad (1945, II: 71).

Rammohan published in *The Brahmanical Magazine* a "Second Appeal to the

Christian Public" and after a series of responses by various missionaries including

Marshman, Rammohun concluded the discussion by writing "A Final Appeal" in which

he described the corruption of Christianity[14]:

> In my present vindication of the unity of the Deity as revealed through the
> writings of the Old and New Testaments, I appeal not only to those who sincerely
> believe in the books of Revelation, and make them the standard of their faith and
> practice and whom must, therefore, deeply feel the great importance of the divine
> oracles being truly interpreted; but I also appeal to those who, although indifferent
> about religion, yet devote their minds to the investigation and discovery of truth,
> and who will, therefore, not think it unworthy of their attention to ascertain what
> are the genuine doctrines of Christianity as taught by Christ and his apostles, and
> how much has been corrupted by the subsequent intermixture of the polytheistical
> ideas that were familiar to its Greek and Roman converts and which have
> continued to disfigure it in succeeding ages (quoted in Ahluwalia & Ahluwalia
> 1991, 28-29). [15]

The *Final Appeal*, however, was not the end of Rammohun's debates with the

Seramapore Baptists. In the July 14th, 1821 issue of *Samchar Darpan*, a Bengali weekly

published by the missionaries, a letter was published containing negative judgments

about the ethics and philosophy of the Hindu *Śāstras*. Rammohun replied to the letter,

but the editor refused to publish the response, which motivated Rammohun to launch his

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[14] The Baptist missionary press refused to publish the "Final Appeal", which led Rammohun to purchase his own printing press. (Crawford 1984, 51).

[15] Not all the Christian reactions to Rammohan's critique were negative. One response from someone who called himself " A firm believer in Christ" replied: " Here we observe an individual, born and bred in a country benighted under the most gross idolatry and superstition, who is by a just use of the understanding which our gracious Creator has given to mankind to guide them to all truths, having discovered the falsehood of this system of idolatry and the absurdity of those superstitions conscientiously abandoned both, and thereby subjected himself to inconvenience and danger of which persons living in more enlightened societies can hardly form an idea. Next he directed his attention to the Christian religion; and the same just and honest use of his understanding, which discovered a falsehood and absurdity of idolatry and superstition, satisfied him that Jesus and the Messiah, that he was employed by God to reveal his will to men, and to make known to them the only true religion. He observed the internal and historical evidence of Christianity, to be such as demonstrated its truth. Blessed with the light of Christianity, he dedicated his time and his money not only to release his countrymen from the state of degradation in which they exist, but also to diffuse among the European masters of his country, the sole true religion – as it was promulgated by Christ , his apostles and disciples" (Quoted in Ahluwalia & Ahluwalia 1991, 29-30). See also Cromwell 1984 pp. 56-62 for a discussion of Rammohun's collaboration with the Unitarians and Presbyterians.

own magazine, *The Brahmanical Review*, and a Bengali version, *Brahmana Sevadhi*.

The main purpose of the magazine was to give Hindus the opportunity "of answering the

objections against the Hindoo Religion contained in a Bengali Weekly Newspaper,

entitled 'Samchar Darpan,' conducted by some of the most eminent of the Christian

Missionaries..." (1946 II:139). Rammohun used this publication to critique the position

of power and the conversion agenda of the British missionaries. He wrote in the "Preface

to the First Edition" of the *Brahmanical Magazine* (1821):

> It is true that the apostles of Jesus Christ used to preach the superiority of the Christian religion to the natives of different countries. But we must recollect that they were not of the rulers of those countries where they preached. Were the missionaries likewise to preach the Gospel and distribute books in countries not conquered by the English, such as Turkey, Persia, &c., which are much nearer to England , they would be esteemed a body of men truly zealous in propagating religion and in following the example of the founders of Christianity. In Bengal, where the English are the sole rulers, and the mere name of Englishman is sufficient to frighten people, an encroachment upon the rights of her poor timid and humble inhabitants and upon their religion cannot be viewed in the eyes of God or the public as a justifiable act (1945 II:137).

Rammohun continued to highlight the association between Christianity and colonialism

in subsequent issues of *The Brahmanical Magazine*. In the second issue, Rammohun

challenged the missionary and Orientalist construction of Hinduism, asking why only

certain passages from particular works were translated and not others.

> A commonly received rule for ascertaining the authority of any book is this, whatever opposes the Veda, is destitute of authority. "All Smritis are contrary to the Veda, and all atheistical works are not conducive to future happiness: they dwell in darkness." Manu. But the missionary gentlemen seldom translate into English the Upanishads, the ancient Smritis, the Tantras quoted by respectable authors and which have been always regarded highly. But having translated those works which are opposed to the Vedas, which are not quoted by any respectable author, and which have never been regarded as authority, they always represent the Hindoo religion as very base (1945 II:154).

Here Rammohun not only exposes the bias operating in missionary choices of texts to translate, but also establishes the discursive authority for Hindus of Vedic literature. He goes on further to highlight what he deems the hypocrisy of the missionary critique of *Puranic* writings that represent God as bearing various names and forms, showing that Christians have precisely the same notion of the divine. "They say that the God must be worshipped in spirit and yet they worship Jesus Christ as very God, although he is possessed of a material body" (1945 II: 164).

In the third issue of *The Brahmanical Magazine*, Rammohun, reacting to the responses written in the *Friend to India*, continues to question the validity of the Trinity and the image of Jesus Christ within the context of Christianity. Rammohun is not satisfied with the explanation he is given of the Trinity, viewing it as no different from polytheism.

> In like manner three beings under one godhead, according the Editor [of *Friend to India*], though there are distinct in person are yet I infer, considered by him one in nature as gods, god the father, god the son, and god the Holy Ghost. Is this the unity of God which the Editor professes? Can this doctrine justify him in ridiculing Hindoo polytheism, because many of them say, that under one Godhead there are more than three beings distinct in person but one in nature (1947, II: 160-161)

In his critique, Rammohun also counters the accusation made by the missionaries against the authority of Brahmin priest as having "an unjust ascendancy over their pupils" , by charging that Christians were just as susceptible to the influence of their ministers in matters of doctrine and practice (1945, II: 162).

Rammohun's examination of Christian reverence for Jesus Christ raised the question of how it is possible to separate the spiritual and the material in worship. The editor of the *Friend of India* had countered Rammohun's initial query about the presence

of images of Jesus by stating that "Christians worship Jesus Christ and not his body separately from him" (1945, II: 164). For Rammohun, that statement was an indication that Christians practiced precisely the same idolatry that had been ascribed to the Hindus. He wrote:

> The Editor in fact confesses their adoration of Jesus Christ as the very God in the material form: nevertheless he attempts to maintain that they worship God in spirit. If we admit that the worship of spirit possessed of material body is worship in spirit, we must not any longer impute idolatry to any religious sect, for none of them adore mere matter unconnected with spirit. Did the Greeks and Romans worship the bodies of Jupiter and Juno and their other supposed gods separately from their respective spirits? Are not the miraculous works ascribed by them to these gods, proofs of their viewing them as spirits connected with the body? Do the idolaters among Hindoos worship the assumed forms of their incarnations divested of their spirit? Nothing of the kind! Even in worshipping idols Hindoos do not consider them objects of worship until they have performed Pranapratishtha or communication of divine life. According to the definition given by the Editor, none of them can be supposed idolaters, because they never worship the body separately from the spirit! But in fact any worship though either an artificial form or imaginary material representation is nothing but idolatry (1945, II:165-165).

As the backdrop to Rammohun's critique of Christianity and Christians was the assertion of a true religion of the Vedas. He attempted to distinguish it from the "popular system of worship", practiced by the Hindus that was the focus of missionary attention and condemnation. In the fourth issue of *The Brahmanical Magazine* (November 15, 1823), Rammohun asserted that the study of popular practices of religion was a study of "corruption" and to take these practices as representative of Hinduism would be equivalent to judging Christianity by its pre-reformation form "...with all its idols, crucifixes, Saints, Miracles, pecuniary absolutions from sins, trinity, transubstantiation, relics, holy water and other idolatrous machinery" (1945 II: 185). In the concluding paragraph of his article, Rammohun succinctly outlined his conception of Vedanta, stating that although modern religion practices are discordant with it, the ancient religion

worships "ONE BEING as the animating and regulating principle of the whole collective body of the universe, and as the origin of all individual souls... and we reject Idolatry in every form and under whatsoever veil of sophistry it may be practised, ..."(1945, II:189). This denunciation extended to the Christians who worshipped the image of Jesus. In a publication entitled *Humble Suggestions to Countrymen Who Believed in the One True God*, [16] Rammohun called for compassion and understanding towards the Christians:

> ...[T]hose amongst Europeans who believing in Jesus Christ to be the Supreme
> Being moreover construct various images of him, should not be hated. On the
> contrary, it becomes us to act towards those Europeans in the same manner as we
> act towards such as believe Rama &c., to be the incarnations of God, and form
> external images of them. For the religious principle of the two last-mentioned
> sects of foreigners are one and the same with those of the two similar sects among
> Hindoos, although they are clothed in a different garb.
>
> When any belonging to the second and third classes of Europeans
> endeavour to make converts of us, the believers in the only living and true God,
> even then should one feel no resentment towards them, but rather compassion, on
> account of their blindness to the errors into which they have fallen: since it is
> almost impossible, as everyday experience teaches us, for men, when possessed of
> wealth and power, to perceive their own defects (1945, II: 201).

3.2.2: Debate with the Hindu Community

Rammohun's views on Hinduism, and specifically on idolatry, were not accepted by many Hindus and he was chastised by several member of the community including members of his own family. In 1817, as a rebuttal to a letter written by Sankara Sastri in the *Madras Courier* (December 1816), which defended image worship, Rammohun published *A Defence of Hindu Theism*. Rammohun viewed Sankara Sastri's narrative as an apology "for the absurd idolatry of his fellow creatures" (1945 II: 83). Sankara Sastri begins his letter objecting to Rammohun's appellations as "discoverer" or "reformer", stating that Shankaracharya had already elucidated the principles put forth by

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[16] This publication was written under the name, Prusunnu Koomar Thakoor, one of Rammohun's pseudonyms.

Rammohun without assuming "the title of *reformer* or *discoverer*" (1947, II:84).

Rammohun retaliated that he had never claimed either of those titles, nor had he said that

he was the first to illustrate "the absurdity of idol worship" or to promote the spirit of

unadulterated divine worship as advocated by the Vedas, so that he was unfairly

castigated as an "*innovator*" (1945,II: 85). Rammohun agreed with Sankara Sastri's point

that a large number of Hindu scriptures - including the Āgamas, *Tantras*, *Purāṇas*,

Śāstras and Vedas enjoin the worship of "the invisible being". But he is concerned that

this truth is not available to the ordinary Hindu.

> This statement of the learned gentleman, as far as it is correct, corroborates indeed
> my assertion with respect to the doctrines of the worship of the invisible Supreme
> Spirit being unanimously inculcated by all the Hindu Sastras, and naturally leads
> to severe reflections on the selfishness which must actuate those Bramanical
> teachers who, notwithstanding the unanimous authority of the Sastras for the
> adoption of pure worship, yet, with the view of maintaining the title of God which
> they arrogate to themselves and of deriving pecuniary and other advantages from
> the numerous rites and festivals of idol-worship, constantly advance and
> encourage idolatry to the utmost of their power (1945, II: 85).

Indeed, he criticizes Sankara Shastri's interpretation of the Vedas as prescribing sacrifice

and ritual, arguing that these passages should be understood metaphorically. While

Rammohun, as we have seen earlier, had suggested that ignorant people might find it

easier to venerate an image instead of the "invisible Being", here he asserts that in fact

the worship of the Formless Being is more comprehensible than the worship of idols.

> The learned gentleman states that "the difficulty of attaining a knowledge of the
> Invisible and Almighty Spirit is evident from the preceding verses." I agree with
> the point, that the attainment of perfect knowledge of the nature of the God-head
> is certainly difficult, or rather impossible; but to read the existence of the
> Almighty being in his works of nature, is not, I will dare say, so difficult to the
> mind of a man possessed of common sense, and unfettered by prejudice, as to
> conceive artificial images to be possessed at once , of the opposite natures of
> human and divine beings, which the idolaters constantly ascribe to their idols,
> strangely believing that these things so *constructed* can be converted by
> ceremonies into *constructors* of the universe (1946, II: 87-88).

Rammohun maintains that non-idolatrous worship of the Supreme Being is possible for

Hindus, just as Muslims, Protestants and Sikhs worship without the existence of

sanctified objects (1946, II:89).

Rammohun concludes his *Defense of Hindu Theism* with a condemnation of the

degeneracy of the gods of Hindu mythology, as depicted in *Purāṇic* and *Tantric*

literature, and its negative impact on Hindu practices.

> But should the learned gentleman require some practical grounds for
> objecting to the idolatrous worship of the Hindoos, I can be at no loss to give him
> numberless instances, where the ceremonies that have been instituted in the
> pretext of honouring the all-perfect Author of nature, are of a tendency utterly
> subversive of every moral principal.
> I began here with Krishna as the most adored of the incarnations, the
> number of whose devotees is exceedingly great. His worship is made to consist in
> the institution of his image or picture, accompanied by one or more females, and
> in the contemplation of his history and behaviour, such as his perpetration of
> murder upon a female of the Putna; his compelling a great number of married and
> unmarried women to stand before him denuded; his debauching them and several
> others, to the mortal affliction of their husbands and relations; his annoying them,
> by violating the laws of cleanliness and other facts of the same nature... It is
> impossible to explain in language fit to meet the public eye, the mode in which
> Mahadeva, or the destroying principal is worshipped by the generality of
> Hindoos: suffice it to say, that it is altogether congenial with the indecent nature
> of the image, under whose form he is most commonly adored.
> The stories respecting him which are read by his devotees in the Tantras,
> are of a nature that, if told of any man, would be offensive to the ears of the most
> abandoned of either sex. In the worship of Kali, human sacrifices, the use of
> wine, criminal intercourse, and licentious songs are included: the first of these
> practices has been generally extinct; but it is believed that there are parts of the
> country where human victims are still offered (Rammohun 1946, II: 92).

In 1817 Rammohun published *A Second Defence of The Monotheistical System of*

the Vedas in Reply to an Apology for the Present State of Hindu Worship, in response to a

tract entitled *Vedantacandrika* by Mrityunjay which was published in Bengali and

English.[17] Mrityunjay Vidyalankar, was the head pundit at the College of Fort William at Calcutta.[18] Rammohun critiques the *Vedantacandrika* and Mrityunjay in the opening sentences of his essay:

> It is much feared that, from the perusal of this treatise, called the lunar light of the Vedanta, but filled with satirical fables, abusive expressions, and contradictory assertions, sometime admitting monotheism, but at the same time blending with it and defending polytheism, those foreign gentleman, as well as those natives of this country who are not acquainted with the real tenets of the Vedanta, might on a superficial view form a very unfavourable opinion of that theology, which, however, treats with perfect consistency of the unity and universality of the Supreme Being, and forbids, positively, treating with contempt or behaving ill towards any creature whatsoever (Rammohun 1946, II: 99)

Rammohun is in agreement with the argument made in the *Vedantacandrika*, that "faith in the Supreme Being when united with moral works, leads men to eternal happiness" (Rammohun 1946, II: 100). His point of contention concerns what are considered "moral works". For Rammohun image worship does not fall under this category and is not conducive to "eternal happiness". He seeks to draw a sharp distinction between moral behavior and ritual activity, specifically image worship. [19]

Rammohun also condemns Mrityunjay for promoting "an idolatrous belief in the divinity of created and perishable beings", an idea that he claims is rejected by the *Śāstras* and leads to immorality (Rammohun 1946, II: 105). He states:

> For every Hindoo who devotes himself to this absurd worship, constructs for that purpose a couple of male and female deities; he is taught and enjoined from his infancy to contemplate and repeat the history of these, as well as of their fellow deities, though the action ascribed to them be only a continued series of

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[17] *Vedantacandrika* was initially published anonymously, but was later identified as the work Mrityunjay. The English translation of *Vedantacandrika* was done by W.H. Macnaghten, a British judge in Calcutta where Mrityunjay served as a pundit for the Supreme Court after his time at Fort William College. Rammohun found the English and Bengali versions inconsistent (Rammohun 1946 II:100).

[18] Rammohun stated in the Advertisement preceding the essay that he had published a response in both Bengali and English for his countrymen and for the British. He included in the English translation, for his "European readers...some additional remarks to those contained in the Bengali publication..." to make his "arguments more clear and intelligible to them than a bare translation would do" (Rammohun 1946, II: 97).

[19] He offers the Brahma Sūtra 3.4.37 and Manu 4:22-24 as proof texts.

debauchery, sensuality, falsehood, ingratitude, breach of trust, and treachery to friends (1946, II: 106-106).

Rammohun finds the very sight of the image hideous, especially repellent to "a mind whose purity is not corrupted by a degrading superstition" (1946, II: 105). Here he takes a similar view to that expressed by William Ward, remarking that the idolatry pervasive in India is of a much more heinous nature than that of ancient Greece and Rome due to its disastrous effects on the moral and material condition of society (1946, II:112). As evidence of this, he gives the example of dietary constraints.

> The present Hindoo idolatry being made to consist in following certain modes and restraints of diet (which according to the authorities of the Mahabharata and other histories were never observed by their forefathers), has subjected its unfortunate votaries to entire separation from the rest of the world, and also from each other, and to constant inconveniences and distress (1946, II:112-113).

Rammohun unequivocally identifies idolatry as the cause for the ills of Hindu society when he placed it first among the five points of which he states are of the "most important nature" for social reform (1946, II: 112). The first point upon which the other four are contingent maintains that: "The adoration of the invisible Supreme Being, although exclusively prescribed by the Upanishads, or the principal parts of the Vedas, and also by the Vedanta, has been totally neglected, and even discountenanced, by the learned Brahman and his followers, the idol-worship, which those authorities permit only to the ignorant, having been substituted for the pure worship" (1946, II:112). Rammohun's subsequent points are all related to this deviation from "pure worship"; they are concerned with the practices of *satī*, dowry and child marriage, polygamy and the elevation of certain castes to the detriment of others (1946, II:112). Rammohun concludes his article, as in his *First Defence,* by giving examples of what he deems the corrupt nature of the gods of popular devotion.

3.3:   Partial Presences: Concluding Remarks

The act of conversion was central to the imperial, colonial and missionary enterprise. Conversion, according to Gauri Viswanathan, "is typically regarded as an assimilative act- a form of incorporation into a dominant culture of belief" (2001, xxvi). The very nature of the act of conversion to Christianity highlights its implicit intent of mimicry, whereby the Hindu is encouraged to replicate and adopt the religion, culture, values and institutions of the Christians. However, as Homi K. Bhabha demonstrates, the result of this process is never a perfect replica, but rather only a "partial presence", that is "almost the same, but not quite" (1994, 86). For the colonizers, this partial presence is a necessity, since allowing the native to reach full status would rapture the hegemony of the colonial subject, rendering the colonizer's position obsolete. This dubious nature of mimicry illuminates the fissure and limitations of colonial and missionary authority and discourse. Rammohun's polemic provides a concrete example of the ambivalent nature of the relationship between the colonizer and colonized. The English writings of Rammohun Roy demonstrate the precarious nature of colonial, Orientalist and missionary writings concerning Hinduism, idolatry and colonial rule.

Rammohun shared the beliefs of the Orientalists and missionaries concerning the decayed state of Hinduism, believing that in its original form knew no idols and was committed to the veneration of the one true God. Rammohun had at one time been lauded as Christianity's most promising convert, but this assessment was altered when Rammohun explicitly clarified his Hindu identity and extolled the truth contained in the Vedas. The point of debate became the question of whether the Vedas held up the same supreme God known to the Christians through their scriptures. As is evident in the

writings of the Serampore Trio, the *Brahman* of the Vedas could in no way be

comparable to the Godhead of Christianity; Christianity, for the missionaries was the

only viable form of monotheism. Rammohun contested this point, arguing that the

Vedānta contained the knowledge of the one true God and he deployed the discourse

utilized by the missionaries to condemn Hinduism against Christian beliefs and

scriptures. What remained a constant between the missionaries and Rammohun was the

positing of the Hindu image as an idol.

CHAPTER 4
THE IDOL GOES WEST

The preceding chapters have discussed the production of the discourse

surrounding the Hindu image, in various contexts, up through the 19th century. While the

narratives may have traversed geographic boundaries, the actual material image remained

situated, for the most part, in India. In this chapter, I will examine the discursive

trajectories and object removal that enabled the relocation and commoditization of the

tangible Hindu image in both Britain and North America. Following Appadurai (as

discussed in the introduction), the Hindu image is not only inscribed in its actual form but

also in the channels through which it is distributed or exchanged; we have to look at the

"things in motion" (1986, 5). In addition, I would like to suggest that an examination of

how and where the image was displayed provided meaning to its form and function.

Although the physical removal of religious objects - as mementos, gifts or for

private collections – had begun during European trade contacts with India, it appears that

the construction of a biography of these divine images in the West began in the textual

archive fabricated by travelers, Orientalists, missionaries, Brahmins and Hindu reformers.

Part of the British colonial project in India in the nineteenth century included collecting

and classifying Indian objects with a view to producing a history of India. Through this

system of categorization, value was assigned to certain objects and this determined what

was to be taken from India and housed in English museums, to be considered art, artifact,

or souvenir (Cohn 1992, 302). Due to an ambivalent relationship with Hindu imagery,

where there was a simultaneous attraction and repulsion to the object, the actual material

icon was slow to penetrate British borders. [1] The British missionaries had classified

Hindu images as "idols," emblematic of the immoral and denigrated state of India. This

perspective along with the fact that icons were used solely for liturgical purposes and not

collected as works of art in the indigenous Hindu context, meant that they were not

regarded as objects of aesthetic admiration. The transformation of Hindu religious

imagery into art, to be admired in museums or private collections, was to become part of

the Western and Indian landscape only in the early twentieth century, due in large part to

the efforts of E.B. Havell, who will be discussed in the third section of this chapter.

In the first section I will examine "The Great Exhibition of the Industry of All

Nations" that took place in London in 1851, which provided a location for connecting the

East with the West through "the profusion of exotic images that surrounded consumer

goods in an aura of sensuous mystery and possibility" (Lear 1989, 77). The later

nineteenth century saw the East as constituting a proliferation of signifiers of the exotic

and fantastic, along with lingering connotations of primitivity and monstrosity. The

Indian object was both desirable and dangerous, but now also became something

pleasurable to be owned and consumed (Lalvani 1995, 275). While the actual item was

available for public observation, it was the narrative of display that created its meaning.

In the second part of the chapter, I will examine how discourse surrounding

idolatry and the Hindu image shifted with the relocation of an embodied Hindu subject.

Focusing specifically on Swami Vivekananda at Chicago's Columbian Exhibition in

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[1] The earliest evidence of a Hindu image in Britain is found in Abraham van der Doort's 1638 documentation of King Charles' I collection: "Item in this same window as east Indian Idoll of black brasse which was by my lord Denby taken out of there Churches from there alter" (Millar 1960:94). The "Idoll of black brasse" seemed to have disappeared after 1640 when King Charles I was beheaded and his belongings scattered through auction. The earliest image still inhabiting Britain is the Sagar or Hedges Viṣṇu currently on display at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. The Sagar Viṣṇu was brought to Britain in 1684 by William Hedges (1632-1701), a former governor of the East India Company in Bengal. It was presented erroneously as "Gonga" in 1685 to the Ashmolean Museum (Davis 1997, 144-145).

1893, I will examine how his presentation of Hinduism as an innately spiritual tradition, in contrast to Western materialism, not only challenged the narratives of missionaries, Orientalists and Hindu reformers, but also contributed to the "paths and circuits" that enabled the repositioning of "idols" as works of art.

4.1: From Curio Cabinets to the World Fairs

By the second half of the nineteenth century the British Empire had established itself at the political summit of the modern world and at the forefront of the global economy. World Fairs or expositions occurred throughout Europe and served not only to promote commercial ventures by establishing international trade that would benefit domestic production, but also to legitimate Europe's presence in the colonies and to underscore the necessity of imperial power.

> Britain was in an especially unique position in encountering forms of religion that were affiliated with "savagery." As the supreme colonial power, one of its tasks was to sell natives on a better, and more proper, way of life. This intention was primarily motivated by economic considerations, but the advancement of Christianity as the sanctifying power behind the British way of life was instrumental toward that end. Indeed, as far as "acts" of colonialism were concerned, English Protestantism and the imperialism of British cultures were virtually inseparable at the time of the Great Exhibition (Burris 2001, 57).

The World Fairs enabled the display of cultures through selected items in a commoditized format that rendered foreign cultures palatable, to be consumed and exhibited in an unprecedented manner, further highlighting the connection between religious, colonial and economic agendas. In some cases, actual human representatives were used as "living ethnological displays" in order to reinforce colonial and Orientalist notions of racial difference by embodying the trope of "the exotic savage", which reiterated the colonial agenda of economic, religious and political domination.[2]

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[2] For further discussion of living Indian subjects at World Fairs see Mathur 2000.

While Indian objects had been collected for private collections, and as trophies of conquest and conversion, as we have seen in the second chapter, this was the first time that such an extensive presentation of foreign culture in tangible form was displayed to the general public. In effect, the World Fairs provided a venue for the empire to recalibrate "political domination" into "entertainment" of a romantic, savage and exotic character (Breckenridge 1989, 199).

The World Fair's antecedent was the curio or wonder cabinet, which had showcased "bizarre" and "exotic" objects from distant lands, but access to wonder cabinets was restricted since they were assembled in private homes, for the most part.[3] The function of the wonder cabinet was not to inform or educate, it existed to provoke a sense of awe through the grouping of "bizarre" objects from strange cultures (Breckenridge 1989; Clifford 1988; Mullaney 1983). The value of an object in the wonder cabinet was derived not from any aesthetic value or economic worth, but from its association with other sensationalized and "strange" items.

In the mid-nineteenth century, with the emergence of World Fairs, the metonymic significance of single items was transferred into collections contextualized through their categorization and display with other objects from the same geographical region. This association marked the beginnings of objectifying culture into a consumable form and enabled the emptying of indigenous meanings, and re-signification in a new home. World fairs not only laid the ground work for exchange relations in terms of economic pursuits but also, as Anne McClintock writes, enabled the British public to participate in

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[3] Mullaney ascribes the *Wunderkammer* or wonder cabinet to the late Renaissance period, beginning in Vienna in 1550, and thriving for 100 years before eventually fading in the middle of the seventeenth century (1983, 40). Carol Breckenridge links wonder cabinet to the Oriental repository, kept by the East India Company that housed items such as the Tipu tiger, and other Indian artifacts in London (1989, 199)

the "experience of *imperial* progress consumed as *national* spectacle" (1995, 59). The

Crystal Palace exhibition of 1851, known officially as "the Great Exhibition of the

Industry of All Nations" epitomized spectacle in the genre of World Fairs (Brekenridge

1989, 201).

4.1.1: The Crystal Palace

> India, the glorious glowing land, the gorgeous and beautiful; India, the golden
> prize contended for by Alexander of old, and acknowledged in our day as the
> brightest jewel in Victoria's crown; India the romantic, the fervid, the dream
> country of the rising sun; India, the far-off, the strange, the wonderful, the
> original, the true, the brave, the conquered; India, how nobly does she show in the
> Palace devoted to the industrial products of the world![4]

While India had been represented at previous world exhibitions throughout

Europe, within the Crystal Palace, India was given a place of prominence solidifying its

position as the crown jewel of Britain's empire (Breckenridge 1989; Burris 2001).[5] As

we have seen in Orientalist and missionary discourse India was situated as an antiquated

civilization lagging behind Europe in progress and civilization within the global

framework. India provided a glimpse into Europe's past. The process of collection

became of vital importance for Europe's own self-image. As James Clifford explains,

"[t]he value of exotic objects was their ability to testify to the concrete reality of an

earlier stage of human culture, a common past confirming Europe's triumphant present"

(1988, 228).

The Indian Pavilion was arranged by the East India Company, and rather than

displaying the troublesome "idols" of Hinduism, more neutral elements of Indian culture

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[4] "India and Indian Contributions to the Industrial Bazaar", the Industrial Jubilee, comprising Sketches, the Pen and Pencil, of the Principal Objects in the Great Exhibition, of the Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations 18, 4 October 1851, p.317

[5] Not only was the India Pavilion allocated a large amount of space, it was also given a central location at the southwest corner of the Crystal Palace which faced the Crystal Fountain which was the ceremonial center of the exhibition.

were exhibited – textiles, ceramics, and carpets as well as objects of regal splendour such as palanquins, jewels and weapons. What was exhibited was that which could easily be appropriated into the British aesthetic without offending the Christian consumer. The connection of the Hindu image to idolatry and as such to degeneracy, barbarism and downright sacrilege rendered it incongruous to an aesthetic art tradition. "Overt religious iconography or exotic Indian fauna," writes Abigail McGowan, "were simply too alien to be assimilated into British design" (2005, 268). The exotic nature of India had to be re-presented without connotations of danger, but in terms of wealth and luxury. Exoticism still retained its ability, as defined by Fanon, to simplify an object and generate stereotypes. However, now it signified opulence in the emerging marketplace. While the displays functioned as synecdoches for entire cultures, a textual accompaniment was necessary since "[o]bjects on display, do not provide their own narrative" (Breckenridge 1989, 205). Narratives worked in tandem with the tangible object or visual display to narrate India as a possession of the British Empire. Lara Kriegel writes , " [t]he sets of texts produced around the Exhibition employed a number of common strategies – including story telling, classification, mapping and illustration – to make objects, and the nations they metonymically represented, audible" (2001, 145). In the *Illustrated Exhibitor* written in 1851, John Cassel outlines a history of British triumph over India evoked through the objects showcased in the Indian Court. He writes: "We gaze upon the myriad of objects rare and beautiful, which [India] contributes, and our thoughts wander back to the day when she was free and powerful". Through his presentation, Cassel enjoined his readers to contemplate the former glory of India now conquered and tamed for the enjoyment of the Empire.

Objects and artifacts were not the only commodities crossing the borders into the Western world. Hindu ideas and Hindu bodies accompanied the movement of objects. As we have seen, Rammohun Roy had argued for a return to what he saw as the pure monotheism of the Vedas and *Upaniṣads*. Unlike Dayananda Saraswati, the founder of the Ārya Samāj, who categorically rejected anything Western, Rammohun sought to integrate certain aspects of Western culture, such as education, into Indian society. Rammohun Roy and his successors in the Brahmo Samāj provided a foundation for the traversing of Hindu beliefs from the colony to the metropole, enabling the promulgation of Hinduism throughout the Western world by indigenous Hindus.

4.2: The World Parliament of Religions

Held in Chicago in 1893 as part of the Columbian Exposition to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Columbus' "discovery" of America, the Exposition was to be a stage to display the greatness of America as an industrial power and great civilization. As in the case of earlier World Fairs, the focus was on industry, underwritten by Protestant notions of rationality and enterprise (Kopperdrayer 2004, 10). In 1889, during the planning stages for the exposition, Charles Bonney, a lawyer from Chicago, suggested to the Exposition Corporation that they should "sponsor a series of international congresses to complement the material triumphs and technological marvels that formed the substance of the Exposition's displays" (Seager 1993, 4). He explained that "[s]omething higher and nobler" was required "by the enlightened and progressive spirit of the ages" (quoted in "The Genesis of the World Religious Congresses of 1893", *New Church* Review 1

(January 1894): 73-100). [6] John Henry Barrows, a minister of the First Presbyterian

Church, was selected by Bonney to head the World Congress Auxiliary's Department of

Religion. The World Parliament of Religion was the culminating event of a series of

conventions on religion held in the summer of 1893. Sponsored by the Congress of

Religion, the World Parliament of Religion ran from September 11th to September 27th.

In his "Words of Welcome" which opened the Parliament, Bonney stated:

> The religious faiths of the world have most seriously misunderstood and
> misjudged each other from the use of words in meanings radically different from
> those which they were intended to bear, and from disregard of the distinctions
> between appearances and facts, between signs and symbols and the things
> signified and represented. Such errors it is hoped that this Congress will do much
> to correct and to render hereafter impossible (Bonney 1993, 18).

The purpose of this gathering, he went on to say was "to unite all religions against

irreligions; to make the golden rule the basis of this union; and to present to the world the

substantial unity of many religions in the good deeds of religious life."(Bonney 1993,

21). The tradition of World Fairs, as we have seen glorified the hegemony of the Western

world within the framework of colonial and imperial enterprise that was marked by

unequal power relations. Non-Western religions had been previously judged to be

superstitious, primitive and irrational – that which was being deemed by the organizers as

"irreligion" (Koppedrayer 2004, 13). Mary Louise Burke, a devotee of Vivekananda

wrote in her book *Swami Vivekananda in America New Discoveries*, that:

> No doubt some members of the audience had come expecting to hear strange and
> weird beliefs regarding idolatry, blood sacrifice and polytheism; for the popular
> conception, fed by missionary propaganda, was that the Oriental lands were rife
> with dark and unholy practices (1958, 75).

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[6] Bonney became the president of the envisaged World Congress Auxiliary which consisted of twenty
departments dedicated to a variety of issues including the press, history, women's progress, social reform
and religion (Seager 1993, 4).

Science and its reconciliation with religion, and unity through tolerance were recurring themes throughout many of the speeches. Seager questions the notion of unity proposed by the congress asserting that this was "an encounter among representatives of civilizations and religions on a playing field skewed towards the values of the dominant groups in American society" (1993, xxi).

The seventeen days of the Parliament marked the first time that indigenous Asian teachers introduced their religion to a majority Western audience. While Hindus such as Rammohun Roy and his eventual successor in the Brahmo Samāj, Keshub Chandra Sen, had earlier brought their teachings and beliefs to the West, their audiences were always limited in size. The World Parliament of Religion, in contrast, attracted several hundreds of delegates and was attended by close to four thousand people over the course of its span (Barrows 1993, 62). Among the delegates from South Asia was the Theravada Buddhist Anagarika Dharmapala from Sri Lanka, Virachand Gandhi from the Jain association of India, Protap Chandra Majumbdar sent by the Brahmo Samāj, and most importantly for this study, Swami Vivekananda, representing the Ramakrishna Mission (Barrows 1993).

4.2.1: The "Curio From India": Swami Vivekananda[7]

Many scholars and members of the Ramakrishna Movement have written in-depth studies about the life and teachings of Vivekananda (Burke 1958; Jackson 1994; Koppedrayer 2004). After providing a brief biography of his life, I will restrict my examination of Vivekananda to his writings in English about Hindu "superstition" and "idolatry". Swami Vivekananda was born Narendranath Datta in Calcutta on January 12, 1863. Raised in a middle class family, he was educated at Scottish Church College, a Christian Missionary institution, and a Presidency College. Narendra studied law and

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[7] Burke 1958, 17

read a fair amount of Western philosophy before becoming a member of the Brahmo

Samāj and a follower of Keshub Chandra Sen although he eventually became devoted to

the mystic Ramakrishna. Initially Vivekananda was dismissive of Ramakrishna,

regarding him as "strange and overly emotional" (Jackson 1994, 23). Ramakrishna was

an ardent devotee of Kālī who entered into altered states of consciousness and often wept

during worship. Upon Ramakrishna's death in 1886, Vivekananda became a *sannayasin*

and assumed leadership of the Ramakrishna Order, adopting the name Swami

Vivekananda in 1892.

Initially, Swami Vivekananda set off for the World Parliament of Religion with

the intention of raising money to conduct humanitarian work in India. However from his

first appearance at the Parliament, Vivekananda became a celebrity, fascinating the

audience and other delegates with his "exotic" monastic dress and his eloquent command

of English. Vivekananda's opening remarks at the Congress centered on the issue of

tolerance, claiming Hinduism to be the most tolerant religion of them all:

> I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and
> universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept
> all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the
> persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth (1995, I:
> 3).

For Vivekananda, in contrast to Rammohun, all that was considered abhorrent in

Hinduism was not the result of idolatry or deviation from the one pure God, but rather a

condition brought on by "sectarianism", "bigotry" and "fanaticism" that were common to

all of humanity.

> Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long
> possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched
> it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilization, and sent whole
> nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society

would be far more advanced than it is now. But their time has come; and I
fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honor of this convention
may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or
with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way
to the same goal (1995, I: 4).

Vivekananda's speech to the Parliament served to locate Hinduism as one of the most

ancient of traditions, as he built up on what John Henry Barrows had said in his "Words

of Welcome", when he described India as the "mother of all religions" (Barrows 1993,

23). Vivekananda regarded contemporary Hinduism in a positive light: it was not a

degraded remnant of a Golden Age, rather the mere fact of its endurance was proof of its

superiority. India, for Vivekananda, represented the pinnacle of scientific, technological

and spiritual knowledge. In many ways, Vivekananda's presentation of Hinduism is

similar to Rammohun Roy's formulation. Like Rammohun he identifies the Vedas as the

basis for divine revelation, and uses Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta to explain the

relationship between the soul and God. And like Rammohun, Vivekananda explains

Hindu concepts, using Christian terminology, but further extends his message by using

the language of science. [8] By using western science and Christian narrative to explain the

tenets of Hinduism, Vivekananda was able to render what had been perceived as strange

and barbaric as familiar and safe. This enabled the positing of Hinduism as a suitable

choice for America's spiritual needs. In order to effectively make this argument,

Vivekananda had to contend with the history of stereotypes that had constructed

Hinduism in the previous centuries. How could Vivekananda depict Hinduism as a

rational and logical religion in light of its previous conception as the most idolatrous and

superstitious religion in the world?

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[8] See Koppedrayer 2004, 20-24

4.2.2: Vivekananda's Vedānta and the Nature of the Image

> The Hindus have received their religion through revelation, the Vedas. They hold that the Vedas are without beginning and without end. It may sound ludicrous to this audience, how a book can be without beginning or end. But by the Vedas not books are meant. They mean the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different persons in different times. Just as the law of gravitation existed before its discovery, and will exist if all humanity forgot it, so is it with laws that govern the spiritual world (Read at the Parliament of Religion on September 19th, 1893: 1995, I:6).

In this passage Vivekananda, like many of the reformers, Orientalists and missionaries before him, holds the Vedas as the locus of Hinduism. The difference, however, lies in his refusal to categorize the Vedas as scripture in a particular sense, but as revelation that will continually be "discovered by different persons at different times." By making such a statement, Vivekananda is able to account for the various schools and interpretations that exist within Hinduism without having to provide a negative judgment of any of the systems of Hindu practice or thought. This is not to say that there is no hierarchy in Vivekananda's understanding of Hinduism or religion, rather it is a way of stating that all practices will eventually lead to a common goal. His message is unity. Like Rammohun Roy, Vivekananda positioned image worship at the lower end of the hierarchy of religious practices. In a speech delivered in California on April 1st, 1900 he stated:

> If you are strong, take up the Vedanta philosophy and be independent. If you cannot do that, worship God; if not, worship some image. If you lack strength even to do that, do some good works without the idea of gain. Offer everything you have unto the service of the Lord (1995 I: 443).

For Vivekananda, any attempt to worship God is virtuous and should be undertaken without condemnation.

Vivekananda's presentation of Hinduism is steeped in the Advaita, or non dual school of thought, founded by Śaṅkara in the ninth century. Rammohun Roy's

conception of Hinduism was also based in these principles and both Rammohun Roy and

Vivekananda defined Hinduism as a monistic tradition. In terms of the image or idol,

Vivekananda (in a manner akin to Śaiva Siddhāntins) considered the image to be a vessel

for the divine presence

> Suppose we all go with vessels in our hands to fetch water from the lake. One has
> a cup, another a jar, another a bucket, and so forth, and we all fill our vessels.
> The water in each case naturally takes the form of the vessel carried by each of us.
> He who brought the cup has the water in the form of the cup; he who brought the
> jar – his water in the shape of a jar, and so forth; but in every case, water, and
> nothing but water, is in the vessel. So it is in the case of religion; our minds are
> like these vessels, and each one of us is trying to arrive at the realization of God.
> God is like that water filling these different vessels, and in each vessel the vision
> of God comes in the form of the vessel. Yet he is one. He is God in every case
> (1995, II: 283).

Vivekananda argues that Hindus are well aware of the fact that the symbol is not God,

but rather a tool to facilitate worship and devotion.

> That is why the Hindu uses an external symbol when he worships. He will tell
> you, it helps to keep his mind on the Being to whom he prays. He knows as well
> as you do that the image is not God, is not omnipresent. After all, how much does
> omnipresence mean to almost the whole world? Its stands merely as a word, a
> symbol. Had God superficial area? If not, when we repeat the word
> "omnipresent", we think of the extended sky or of space, that is all. (Paper on
> Hinduism Read at the Parliament on 19th September, 1893 1995 I:15) [9]

Although Vivekananda placed image worship at the lower end of the spiritual spectrum,

there was nothing deprecatory in this assessment. In a speech given in India,

Vivekananda actually glorifies image worship by exalting Ramakrishna.

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[9] Manilal N. Dvivedi, a scholar and philosopher of Hinduism, echoed Vivekananda's sentiments in a presentation he made at the Parliament, stating:
> It may be said, without the least fear of contradiction, that no Indian idolater, as such, believes the piece of stone, metal, or wood, before his eyes as his god, in any sense of the word. He takes the symbol of the all-pervading, and uses it as a convenient object for the purposes of concentration, which being accomplished, he does not grudge to throw away (Quoted in Barrows I:317-318).

It has become a trite saying that idolatry is wrong, and every man swallows it at
the present time without questioning. I once thought so, and to pay the penalty of
that I had to learn my lesson sitting at the feet of a man who realized everything
through idols; I allude to Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. If such Ramakrishna
Paramahamsas are produced by idol-worship, what will you have – the reformer's
creed or any number of idols? I want an answer. Take a thousand idols more if
you can produce Ramakrishna Paramahamsas through idol-worship, and may God
speed you! Produce noble natures by any means you can. Yet idolatry is
condemned. Why? Nobody knows. Because some hundreds of years ago some
man of Jewish blood happened to condemn it? That is, he happened to condemn
everybody else's idols except his own (1995, 218).

Vivekananda is not critical of the practice of idolatry, rather he is critical of people who

are critical of idolatry. His attacks were in most cases were directed against Christian

missionaries whom he chided for exclusively focusing on idols as the chief cause of all

the ills of Indian society.

4.2.3 Idolatry, the Christians and Vivekananda

"One thing I must tell you. Idolatry in India does not mean anything horrible. It is
not the mother of harlots" (Vivekananda 1995, 17)

For Rammohun, idolatry was the result of superstition, derived from "custom and

fashion", the "fruit of vulgar caprice" (1945, II: 48). Vivekananda, on the other hand,

refused to condemn Hindu idolatry as superstition or as the source for any of the ills of

Indian society. [10] In a speech given on the 19th of September at the World Parliament of

Religions, Vivekananda concedes that superstition is an adversary to religion, but refuses

to assign such a label to image worship.

Superstition is a great enemy of man, but bigotry is worse. Why does a Christian
go to church? Why is the cross holy? Why is the face turned toward the sky in

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[10] Virchand Gandhi, the Jain delegate, shared the same viewpoint refusing to blame Hinduism for the
afflictions of Indian society. Responding to some disparaging remarks concerning "oriental" religions and
Hindus in particular, made by the Reverend Pentecost the night before, Gandhi proclaimed " I am glad that
no one has dared to attack the religion I represent. It is well they should not. But every attack has been
directed to the abuses existing in our society. And I repeat now, what I repeat every day, that these abuses
are not from religion but in spite of religion, as in every other country (Barrows 1993, 333).

prayer? Why are there so many images in the Catholic Church? Why are there so many images in the minds of Protestants when they pray? My brethren, we can no more think about anything without a mental image than we can live without breathing. By the law of association the material image calls up the mental idea and vice versa. (1995, I:15-16).

Vivekananda sees the use of imagery in any religious tradition as a necessity in order to conceive of that which has no form. By contending that all peoples use symbols and images, Vivekananda is not attacking Christians but rather pointing out that images are simply a method of convening with the divine: "Idols or temples or churches or books are only the supports, the aids of the spiritual, but on and on he must progress" (1995, I;16).

Vivekananda however, does reproach Christian missionaries for what he deems something far worse than idolatry, "bigotry". In a speech given at the Parliament on the 20th of September, 1893 entitled "Religion Not the Crying Need of India", Vivekananda questions the missionary's infatuation with conversion premised on the need to eradicate supposed Hindu cruelties.

> You Christians, who are so fond of sending out missionaries to save the soul of the heathen – why do you not try to save their bodies from starvation? In India, during the terrible famines, thousands died from hunger, yet you Christians did nothing. You erect churches all through India, but the crying evil in the East is not religion – they have religion enough – but is bread that the suffering millions of burning India cry out for with parched throats (1995, I:20).

This line of criticism was also taken up by other delegates from India at the conference. N.B. Nagarkar, a member of the Brahmo Samāj, in a talk entitled, "The Work of Social Reform in India," adopted a more vituperative tone:

> Every year you are lavishing – I shall not say wasting – mints of money on your so-called foreign missions and missionaries sent out, as you think, to carry the Bible and its salvation to the 'heathen Hindu,' and thus to save him! Aye, to save him. Your poor peasants, your earnest women, and your generous millionaires raise millions of dollars every year to be spent on foreign missions. Little, how

little, do you ever dream that your money is expended in spreading abroad nothing but Christian dogmatism and Christian bigotry, Christian pride, and Christian exclusiveness (quoted in Barrows 1993 I:776-778). [11]

The attack against Christian missionaries was inevitably also directed to the scores of knowledge regarding India that had been produced by Orientalists. In presentations following the World Parliament of Religion, Vivekananda takes a more aggressive stance against Western conceptualizations of Hinduism by highlighting the skewed nature of its assumptions. In a lecture given at the Universalist Church, Pasadena, California on January 28, 1900, Vivekananda argues that iconoclasm is about asserting the superiority of one religion's idol over another's.

> I simply mean to illustrate, I do not mean criticism of any religion. The Christian believes that God took the shape of a dove and came down to earth; to him this history, and not mythology. The Hindu believes that God is manifested in the cow. Christians say that to believe so is mere mythology, and not history, that it is superstition. The Jews think that if an image be made in the form of a box, or a chest, with an angel on either side, then it may be placed in the Holy of Holies; it is sacred Jehovah; but if the image be made in the form of a beautiful man or woman, they say, "This is a horrible idol; break it down!" This is our unity in mythology. If a man stands up and says, "My prophet did such and such a wonderful thing", others will say, "That is only superstition", but at the same time they say that their prophet did still more wonderful things, which they hold to be historical. Nobody in the world, as far as I have seen, is able to make out the fine distinction between history and mythology, as it exists in the brains of these persons (1995, 2:378).

He goes on further to discuss how Hindu ritual and the *linga* were perceived through the prejudice of Western society and Christianity.

> One sect has one particular form of ritual and thinks that that is holy, while the rituals of another sect are simply arrant superstition. If one sect worships a peculiar sort of symbol, another sect says, "oh, it is horrible!" Take for instance, a general form of symbol. The phallus symbol is certainly a sexual symbol, but gradually that aspect of it has been forgotten, and it stands now as a symbol of the Creator (1995, 2:378-379).

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[11] Nagarkar went on in this theme in a later presentation, "The Spiritual Ideals of the Brahmo Samaj: "For these [Christians] our only feeling is a feeling of pity - unqualified, unmodified, earnest pity, and we are ready to ask God to forgive them, for they know not what they say"(quoted in Barrows 1893 II:1229).

Vivekananda contends that for Hindus, the *linga* is not a phallus, while Christian missionaries regard only their own reading of the image as significant, and do not consider how their own symbols and practices might may be perceived through another cultural lens.

> Those nations which have this as their symbol never think of it as the phallus; it is just a symbol, and there it ends. But a man from another race or creed sees in it nothing but the phallus and begins to condemn it; yet at the same time he may be doing something which to the so-called phallus worshippers appears most horrible (1995 2:379).

Vivekananda's critiques are not reserved solely for Christian missionaries, but directed to anybody who seeks to eradicate religious imagery. Discussing what he deems the futile efforts of reformers from all religious traditions who have attempted to rid their religions of idols, Vivekananda states:

> From time to time, there have been reformers in every religion who have stood against all symbols and rituals. But vain has been their opposition, for so long as man will be as he is, the vast majority will always want something concrete to hold on to, something around which, as it were, to place their ideas, something which will be the centre of all thought-forms in their minds (1995, II:38). [12]

Speaking specifically of reformers within the Hindu tradition, Vivekananda says:

> There are among us at the present day certain reformers who want to reform our religion or rather turn it topsy-turvy with a view to the regeneration of the Hindu nation. There are, no doubt some thoughtful people among them, but there are also many who follow other blindly and act most foolishly, not knowing what they are about. This class of reformers are very enthusiastic in introducing foreign ideas into our religion. They have taken hold of the word "idolatry", and aver that Hinduism is not true because it is idolatrous. They never seek to find out what this so-called idolatry is, whether it is good or bad; only taking their cue from others, they are bold enough to shout down at Hinduism as untrue (1995, III:450).

Vivekananda sees this type of reform as a waste of time. He can not comprehend why so much energy is spent on trying to rid peoples of practices that lead to the worship of God.

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[12] Vivekananda goes on to discuss the Muslims and Protestants, and questions their condemnation of all rituals other than their own as idolatry (1995 II:38-39).

In Vivekananda's assessment, we are all idolaters, and this is not a derisive accusation,

but a part of the "nature of man" (1995, II: 40).

> Who can get beyond it? Only the perfect man, the God-man. The rest are all
> idolaters. So long as we see this universe before us, with its forms and shapes, we
> are all idolaters. This is a gigantic symbol we are worshipping. He who says he is
> the body is a born idolater. We are spirit, spirit has not form or shape, spirit is
> infinite, and not matter. Therefore, anyone who cannot grasp the abstract, who
> cannot think of himself as he is, expect in and through matter, as the body, is an
> idolater. And yet how people fight among themselves, calling one another
> idolaters! In other words, each says his idol is right, and the other's are wrong
> (1995 II:40).

Instead of wasting time and energy condemning people for image worship, Vivekananda

enjoins the reformers not to criticize, but to encourage and assist others in their spiritual

quest.

> Everybody ought to do what he is able to do; and if he be dissuaded from that, he
> will do it in some other way in order to attain his end. So we should not speak ill
> of a man who worships idols. He is in a stage of growth, and, therefore, must have
> them; wise men should try to help forward such men and get them to do better.
> But there is no use in quarrelling about these various sorts of worship (1995 III:
> 363).

4.2.4: Commodifying Vivekananda's Hinduism- Making it Spiritual

Vivekananda's presentation of Hinduism shifted the picture from one of

superstitious beliefs steeped in idolatry and heathenism, to a tolerant, unifying theology

that epitomized the spiritual quest. By asserting that Vedanta was a humanitarian and

practical religion, he sought to establish the spiritual superiority of India in contrast to the

material West, thereby subverting the Christian ethic of care and White Man's Burden: it

was the West that needed the spiritual guidance of India. Vivekananda recognized the

need to commodify himself for the Western consumer, remarking in a letter that he was

able to charm his female hosts as a "curio from India" (Letters 1970, 39). The spiritual

East/ material West dichotomy was a useful concept for Vivekananda, re-affirming his

contention that Hinduism was not in a period of decay, but was rather the apotheosis of

spirituality. In this manner he capitalized on Orientalist perceptions of the Golden Age,

engaging in what Ashis Nandy calls, an "alternative language of discourse" (1988: xvii),

where spirituality was proclaimed as the indication of the cultural superiority of India.

Brekke echoes this when he writes of Vivekananda:

> His dialogue with the West was not that of the poor and subjugated with the rich
> and powerful. Vivekananda readily accepted the superiority of the west in terms
> of economy and technology. But India was rich and powerful in an equally
> important realm: that of religion and spirituality. The idea in itself was, to a large
> extent, one that had developed in the West...In his discourse with a Western
> audience Vivekananda managed to put India in a superior position... (2002, 49).

This postulation of the spiritual superiority of India would eventually come to permeate

how Hinduism and its artifacts would be interpreted, and would play a large part in the

transformation of "idol" into art.

4.3: Into the Museum: From Idol to Art

It is not my intention to provide a comprehensive history of the Hindu image in

museums; rather I will discuss how its appearance and location in Western museums was

enabled through the discursive "paths and circuits" systemized during the time of the

World Fairs. The notion of culture and its various significations figure prominently in

discussion concerning the relocation of an object into art. I have already addressed the

fact that selected items become synecdochal markers for entire cultures. In *The*

Predicament of Culture, James Clifford discusses an "art-culture system" developed

within the context of colonialism and imperialism in the 19th century which heavily

influenced the classification of objects as art (1999). The legacy of colonialism and

European imperial expansion were deeply implicated in concepts of art and culture since

objects from non-Western cultures were acquired from colonized lands (Coombes 1998,

Rosaldo 1993, Williams 1983). A brief history of the signification of the term "culture"

highlights its accretionary character and shows how it frames and defines not only actual

objects, but a general state of civilization. Raymond Williams outlines three sets of

referents through which the concept of culture developed:

> (i) the independent and abstract noun which describes a general process of
> intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic development... (ii) the independent noun,
> whether used generally or specifically, which indicates a particular way of life,
> whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general form...(iii) the
> independent and abstract noun which describes the works and practices of
> intellectual and especially artistic activity... (1983, 90-91).

James Clifford characterized culture in terms of art and literature in the nineteenth

century, and sees culture as being of two types. Culture with a capital C refers to the

presumed height of human development, epitomized by the "masterpieces" produced by

European geniuses. The second category, culture with a small c, denotes the unchanging,

inclusive essence of a people, which Clifford identifies as artifacts belonging to the non-

Western world. For an object to be accepted as an authentic artifact, it must locate itself

in an untouched, pristine state that bespeaks a timeless essence in a particular cultural

tradition. That which is recognized as authentic to a culture cannot bear any traces of that

culture's contact with other cultures; particularly it may not be marked by that society's

history of colonialism that enabled such works to make their way into Western markets

(Coombes 1998, 218).

Prior to the nineteenth century, India occupied a liminal position in the world of

art, producing objects that belonged neither to the category of primitive or masterpiece.

The acceptance of the Hindu idol as art was a complicated process that required its re-

association, to some degree, with notions of sacrality and Western aesthetics. As shown

in chapter two, the image had been understood as a "dumb wooden object", a

monstrosity, or an unmentionable object. To be viewed in the context of Western art, it was necessary that these associations with heathenism and barbarism be re-signified, so that the idol could be viewed in a Western aesthetic and spiritual realm. In order to track the taxonomic shift of the idol into art in the Western world, I will trace the history of the India collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum and conclude with an examination of the writings of E.B. Havell, a British scholar of Indian art.

4.3.1: Eventually The Victoria and Albert Museum

The curio cabinet and the World Fairs were the immediate forebears of the museum. In previous chapters, I have discussed the existence of an imperial or colonial archive of textual narratives that provided the basis for knowledge produced about India. The accretional nature of the archive also allows the addition of other forms of narrative, in this case, actual material objects. Barringer refers to the museum in Britain as a "three dimensional imperial archive" that enabled the display of objects acquired from colonized areas of the world (1998, 11). The relocation of the object to the heart of the Empire not only signified a sense of ownership, but also altered how the object was perceived. The Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851 was the antecedent of the South Kensington Museum, the earlier incarnation of the Victoria and Albert Museum (Barringer 1998; Mitter & Clunas; Skelton 1978). The South Kensington Museum, formed in 1856, housed a variety of institutions including an art school and the Department of Science and Art, which was a government controlled organization responsible for the teaching and study of art and design. The imperial mission of the museum was enunciated in 1858 by the first curator, John Charles Robinson, who proclaimed that "the Art-Library, Schools, and general Departmental Machinery, at

Kensington, the action of which, be it remembered, is emphatically Imperial rather than

Metropolitan" (Robinson 1858, 404). Although a small number of teachers educated in

South Kensington worked in Australia and India, Robinson's ambition to establish South

Kensington as the Empire's central institution for art education was not realized, and its

influence barely extended beyond the borders of Ireland and Britain (Barringer 1998, 14).

The contents of the South Kensington Museum were similar to those displayed at the

Crystal Palace, with objects that demonstrated the commercial importance of the colonies

in terms of manufactures and raw materials; in fact, many of the items displayed at the

World Fair found a home in the South Kensington Museum. The ornamental value of

Indian designs for manufacturing processes and the production of commodities in Britain

was of key importance. In *The Grammar of Ornament*, written in 1856, Owen Jones, a

member of the museum purchasing committee wrote, "[t]he Indian collection at the South

Kensington Museum should be visited and studied by all in any way concerned with the

production of woven fabrics" (Jones 1865 II: 79). India, like other Eastern countries, had

been defined as a source for ornament and decoration that would be employed in the

design of commodities produced in Britain. The South Kensington Museum Guide

remarked that "a court is appropriated to specimens of ornamental art manufactures,

especially rich in Indian tissues, Chinese and Japanese porcelain and lacquered work,

decorative arms, bronzes..." (1857, 3). The classification of objects from all over Asia

into the single category of "ornamental and manufacturer" is reminiscent of previous

strategies of Orientalism that grouped non-Western cultures together as a monolithic

"Other". At the Muesuem, the organization of objects mirrored this process by collapsing

India, China, Japan and Persia into a single entity – the source of "Oriental Collections" which were housed in the area known as the "East Cloister" from 1864 to 1865.

Appreciation for India's manufactures, textiles and various applied arts may have domesticated India for the British public, but this appreciation was restricted to these products in particular. The decorative arts of India were admired for their beauty and method of fabrication, but this appreciation was not extended to Hindu imagery. Sir George Birdwood, the Art Referee of the India Section of the South Kensington Museum, and a great supporter of Indian decorative arts, wrote in the introduction of his book, *The Industrial Arts of India*, that "[t]he monstrous shapes of the Puranic deities are unsuitable for the higher forms of artistic representation; and this is possibly why sculpture and painting are unknown, as fine arts, in India" (1879, 125). Although "Hindu art" was not even acknowledged as a category during this time, sculptural and architectural remains were valued for their antiquarian interest. The year 1873 saw the opening of the Eastern Courts filled with more than a hundred plaster casts of Indian architecture and sculpture (Barringer 1998, 17). The casts were replicas of the original monuments and were admired both as examples of ornamental and engineering skill and in terms of their significance for historical archaeology. The inclusion of architectural specimens from India was due in large part to the efforts of Lieutenant Henry Hard Cole, Royal Engineer and Superintendent of the Archaeological Survey of Indian's North Western provinces, whose father happened to be South Kensington's Museum's Superintendent. The casts sent from India were accompanied by an article and photographs that appeared in 1871 in the *Art Journal* which described the gateways of Sanchi, along with sculptures from

Amaravati, as examples of Indian art (Birdwood 1879). The fact that the monuments of Sanchi and Amaravati were Buddhist and not Hindu origin is of great significance.

In his *Catalogue of the Objects of Indian Art exhibited at the South Kensington Museum*, published in 1874, Cole provided the first comprehensive history of Indian art written in English (Mitter 1992, 256). The *Catalogue* contained much on ornamentation and the applied arts; Cole admired the workmanship of Indian artisans in terms of sculpture and decorative art, but failed to see any value in Indian painting (1874, 15). Further, Cole saw Buddhist art, due to its perceived simplicity, as far superior to Hindu art. For him, Hindu art was of more recent date and displayed signs of degeneration. He wrote '[t]hat the power of delineating human and other forms was formerly greater than is evinced by modern Hindu sculptures, is proved by the excellence of the carvings that still exists in the capitals of the edict pillars and in the Sanchi bas-reliefs" (1874, pp.13 ff. and 15).

In 1880, the collections of the India Museum formed by the East India Company were officially transferred to the Cross Gallery in the South Kensington Museum. In 1899, amid a "similar pomp and circumstance" that had accompanied Queen Victoria's heralding as the Empress of India in 1876, the foundation stone was laid by the queen for the Victoria and Albert Museum as the new avatar of the South Kensington Museum.

4.4: E.B. Havell- Spiritualizing India Matter

The early twentieth century produced a small group of British art educators who would challenge the exclusivity of the category of fine art and produce re-significations of the images of Hinduism that differed from earlier missionary attitudes. Ernest Binfield Havell who was associated with the South Kensington Museum, traveled to India in 1884 to gather information for the colonial government regarding the state of "art and industries" and to become the Superintendent of the Madras School of Art (Banerji 2002, 41). In 1886, he became the Principal of the Calcutta Art School and was responsible for the Calcutta Art Gallery. It was in Calcutta, with the help of Abanindranath Tagore, that a distinctive school of Indian art known as the Bengal school emerged. The Indian art movement was to become an important force in promoting nationalist and anti-colonial sentiments. Due to illness, Havell had to return to England in 1906, and was eventually declared medically unfit for service in India. This did not deter Havell's support for the Indian art school and his quest to establish new British art education policies in India. The moment of "the taxonomic shift" discussed by James Clifford when "artifacts came to be redefined as art" (1998, 196) can be pinpointed in 1910 (Skelton 1978, 303). After his lecture "Arts Administration in India" delivered to the Royal Society of Arts in London on January 13th 1910, Havell echoed the sentiments he had expressed in his previously published writings regarding what he deemed the "prejudiced" attitudes towards Indian art. The Chairman of the Royal Society of the arts was George Birdwood, author of *Industrial Arts of India* and adjudicator of aesthetic taste with regard to India. Birdwood clearly embodied the "prejudices" against Hindu art that Havell referred to. In response to Havell's criticisms, Birdwood commented, pointing to a photograph of a Buddha from Java, that "[t]his senseless similitude, in its immemorial fixed pose, is

nothing more than an uninspired brazen image, vacuously squinting down its nose to its

thumbs, and knees, and toes. A boiled suet pudding would serve equally well as a symbol

of passionless purity and serenity of soul" (quoted in Davis 1997, 177-178). This

statement elicited great outrage, which led to the formation of the Indian Society, whose

mandate was to promote an alternative trajectory of education and appreciation of Indian

art in Britain.[13]

The relocation of the "idol" as art was not simply a matter of aesthetic conversion.

Hindu religious images had long been viewed as objects of immorality, irreligion and

barbarism. With this in mind, Havell's enterprise seems all the more complicated, and

this transition must be viewed in a larger societal, theological and cultural context. I

cannot provide a comprehensive survey of Havell's writings, but I will instead discuss his

overall approach, as is evident in two of his works, *Indian Sculpture and Painting* (1908)

and *The Ideals of Indian Art* (1911). In the preface to *Indian Sculpture*, Havell

distinguishes himself from other art historians and archaeologists by expressing his wish

to demonstrate that Indian art is not a degraded form of a Greco-Roman precursor, but

represents an aesthetic tradition of its own (1964, 2). Havell affirms that in order for a

European to understand and appreciate Indian art, he must first "divest himself of his

Western prepossessions,...and place himself at the Indian point of view" (1964, 2).

Havell criticizes the manner in which Europeans have interacted in the past with Indian

imagery, stating:

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[13] Birdwood's statement prompted a number of English artists and intellectuals, who had recognized that his comment was actually directed towards India rather than Java, to show their support Indian art in a letter to *The Times*, dated February 28th 1910. The letter began with the statement: "We the undersigned artists, critics, and students of art... find in the best art of India a lofty and adequate expression of the religious emotion of the people and of their deepest thoughts on the subject of the divine" (quoted in Mitter 1992, 270).

> We [Europeans] no longer desecrate and destroy the masterpieces of the Moguls and the great monuments of India; we patch them up and try to admire them. But there is still that insidious form of vandalism in our departmental system – much more cruel and deadly than active iconoclasm because it acts through the mind instead of matter – which continues to blindly crush out the means by which India might yet surpass the greatness of her ancient art (1964, 2)

Havell states that although he wishes to emphasize Britain's role in the destruction and degradation of Indian art, it is his objective "to help educated Indians to a better understanding of their own national art, and to give them faith and pride in it without which the wisest measures that any government would devised will always be thrown away" (1964, 2).

Havell's project of rendering Indian art acceptable to the Western world required a re-signification of the object in terms of the spiritual. The archaeologist's contention that Hindu remains contained no artistic value was, in Havell's view, inadequate since they were grounded in the classical European tradition. To appreciate Indian art was to see it as "essentially idealistic, mystic, symbolic, and transcendental" (1964, 7). The appropriate context for the interpretation of Hindu art, then, was the Hindu philosophical tradition, not a Western Christian framework. In the *Ideals of Indian Art*, Havell reinforces this point when he writes:

> It is difficult to argue with those who are so steeped in Western academic prejudices as to treat all Hindu art as puerile and detestable... Such critics seem not to appreciate the fact that Hindu art was not addressed, like Modern Western art, to a narrow coterie of *literati* for their pleasure and distraction. Its intention was to make central ideals of Hindu religion and philosophy intelligible to all Hinduism, to satisfy the unlettered but not unlearned Hindu peasant as well as the intellectual Brahmin (1964,123-124).

Havell perceived an intrinsic spiritual quality in Hindu imagery. Contrasting Hindu art to

Renaissance art, where the intention was to produce perfection in the material world,

Havell argued that Hindu art sought to depict the immaterial, the transcendental. In

Indian Sculpture, he wrote:

> Thus while modern European art hardly concerns itself with the Unseen, but
> limits its mental range to the realm of Nature and thus retains, even in its highest
> flights, the sense and form of its earthly environment. Indian art (...) is always
> striving to realize something of the universal, the eternal and infinite (1964, 6).

Havell underscores his point by discussing the iconoclasm of the Western world and

tracing a brief history of the emergence of images in Hindu liturgy.

> While Greeks made the perfect human body the highest ideal for an artists, there
> has been always in Indian thought a deep-rooted objection to anthropomorphic
> representations of the Divine. The Aryans in early Vedic times built no temples,
> and image-worship was not recognized in their higher ritual. The Hindu Sastras
> hold that it is unlucky to have any representation of a human figure within he
> inner precincts of a temples, the substitution of a plain stone emblem of phallic
> origin for an anthropomorphic image in Saiva worship may be due to this feeling.
> The change appears to have taken place about the time of the great Hindu
> reformer of the eighth century, Sankaracarya, who regarded the Lingam as a
> symbol of the Eternal Unity, or "formless god" (1964, 21). [14]

He goes on to write:

> Hindu Philosophy thus clearly recognizes the impossibility of human art realising
> the form of God. It therefore creates the Indian painting and sculpture a symbolic
> representation of those, milder, humanized, but still superhuman, divine
> appearances which mortal eyes can bear upon. A figure with three heads and
> four, six or eight arms seems to a European a barbaric conception, though it is not
> more physiologically impossible than the wings growing from the human scapula
> in the European representation of angels...(1968, 22).

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[14] In his *Ideals of Indian Art*, Havell discusses how "sex symbolism in Hindu art and ritual" is misperceived
by those who do not understand the Indian context (1968, 158)

Two points are significant in this statement. The first is that the Hindu image is, according to Havell, not the actual God but a symbol. Secondly, Havell points out the problem of scrutinizing Hindu art from a European perspective that does subject its own art to a similar critique. Further, in *The Ideals*, Havell writes of the absurdity of viewing Hindu art as a degradation or deviation from ancient forms and influences, requiring that it remain static in time. In a chapter entitled "The Feminine Ideal", Havell contends that:

> No art can be interpreted correctly unless it is understood that here is a process of evolution in the meanings of symbols, as in religious ideas. Much of the misunderstanding and depreciation of Indian culture in Europe has been due to the want of recognition of this principle.
>
> It may be partly true, as Sir George Birdwood is always insisting, that "India has remained, to the present day, a reservation of antiquity- Chaldaean, Assyrian, and Babylonian." If local traditions and superstitions are considered, the same might be said of many parts of Christians Europe; but one does not look to European folklore or the thoughts of an ignorant peasant to interpret the higher spiritual significance of Christianity. In the same way it is utterly misleading to interpret the great works of Indian sculpture and painting in an academic or pedantic sense totally at variance with the philosophy which inspired Indian culture in all its higher aspects, and to inscribe to symbolic forms used by Indian artists and philosophers in the fifth century A.D. meanings which may or may not have been applied to them, in other remote countries, 500 or 5,000 years before Christ (1968, 164).

In order to combat European, and in some cases Indian, interpretations of Hindu art, Havell had to render the object agreeable to Western notions of high art. Havell attempted to achieve this was by arguing for the need to create a "new" frame of reference that was derived from the Indian context not by referring to the canons of Western aesthetics. The notion of the spiritual became the route through which Hindu images gained admission into the realms of Western high art. This is ironic, since Havell believed that a true appreciation for Hindu art could not be realized in the settings of private collections or museums. In *Indian Sculpture*, he wrote that the intrinsic spiritual

value of Hindu art would be lost: "such qualities cannot be adequately realized in isolated sculptures collected in museum and art galleries; to be fully appreciated they must be seen in their proper environment and in the atmosphere of the thought which created them" (1964, 23).

4.5: Concluding Remarks: Consuming Hindus

The purpose of this chapter was to demonstrate how the actual movement of Hindus and Hindu objects across continents produced accompanying discourses. The packaging of Hindu images and Hindu theology into palatable forms for Western consumption produced new narratives of description and understanding. The Crystal Palace signified Indian culture as one of lavishness and luxury, desirable to the English consumer. Vivekananda's depiction of Hinduism presented it as the quintessence of spirituality, he represented idolatry as basic but necessary step toward transcendence, and he depicted Hindu spirituality as the answer to all the ills of American society. These re-significations presented Hinduism and Hindu images in a new and favorable light, and enabled the acceptance in the early twentieth century of the "idol" as art. But Indian culture and Hindu theology were not emptied of their previous associations, as we shall see when we examine the uses and understandings of the Hindu image as commodity in the contemporary Western society. But first we turn to the meaning of the Hindu image within the context of the nationalist movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

CHAPTER 5
SACRIFICE, SEDITION AND SERIALS: THE GODDESS AS A POLITICAL SYMBOL

Today the Bengalis alone of all the Indians have understood that the Westerners are a set of fierce and blood-thirsty beasts of prey. They are a nation completely devoid of mercy, righteousness, conscience and manly virtues. They do not want the world to be made happy. They do not want righteousness in the world. They want to live for themselves only. They want everything for themselves to eat. They want to fill their coffers with all the treasures of all the nations of the world, They want all the inhabitants of the world to lay everything that they possess at their feet and become their slaves, The Bengalis have understood this, and are consequently trying to dispel the illusion. The Bengali is today making all India appreciate his own sterling divine qualities. This is why that avaricious, blood thirsty nation is going about with open mouth and baring its fearful teeth to devour the Bengalis (*Jugnatar*, 30th of November, 1907)

The twentieth century signalled the reclaiming and usage of images for the Hindu nationalist and anti-colonial movements. Hindu goddess imagery, in particular, was utilized as one of the key purveyors of Indian political power. Focusing on the Bengal nationalist movement which arose in the mid nineteenth century, this chapter will discuss how both British colonials and militant Hindu political leaders employed Tantrism and its symbols in the formulation of their respective agendas. Pertinent to both these discourses was the association of Tantra with the Goddess, in most cases Kālī and her various forms.[1]

When Kālī and Tantra were first "discovered" by the Orientalists in the eighteenth century they were viewed ambivalently.[2] This attitude shifted in the nineteenth century

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[1] Among Kālī's forms are Durgā, Chinnamastā, and Bhavani.

[2] Orientalist scholars became interested in Kālī beginning the late 18th century. The goddess Kālī was discussed by William Jones, who wrote that the practice of human sacrifice to Kālī, sanctioned by the Vedas, had been replaced by less sanguine rites due to the existence of more benevolent goddesses such as Lakṣmī. In order to explain the existence of these rites during his time, Jones compares the temples of Durgā, whom he associates with Kālī /Bhavani with Roman Catholic churches and assigns any 'erroneous' practices not to the deity, but to humans. In a letter dated February 7th,1790 to Jonathan Duncan, he writes: "With all my admiration of the truly learned Brahmens, I abhor the sordid priest craft of Durga's Ministers, but such fraud no more affect the sound religion of the Hindus, than the lady of Loretto and the Romish

to one of abhorrence and disgust, with the bulk of information being produced by Christian missionaries. The category of Tantra and its association with Kālī was not solely a Western production. The nationalist movement in Bengal in the late nineteenth century, which was of critical importance in the quest for self-rule and the end of British political dominance, seized upon Tantra and the symbol of Kālī. As we recall from chapter three, the *bhadralok* were particularly vocal in the struggle to return government and political affairs back to the control of Indians.[3] Many *bhadralok* were willing to concede that Hindu imagery was evidence of the degraded state of Hinduism; as we have seen Rammohun Roy had argued that "idolatry" was the cause of the ills of Indian society, and not a feature of Hinduism in its earliest form. But while Bengali reformers and the more conservative members of the nationalist movement claimed that images in Hinduism were part of a lower form of worship, we see the usage of Hindu imagery for anti-colonial resistance in the more radical factions of the nationalist movement (Urban 2003. 74). Through the writings of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Aurobindo Ghose and Bipinchandra Pal, the nation was divinized and imaged as a Hindu goddess, who also in some cases became a symbol for secret societies formed in order to mobilize nationalist movements and end British rule in India.

5.1: Oh No – Its Tantra! Sacrifice, Body Liquids and Women

Both the colonizers and Western educated Bengalis viewed "Tantra" with some mistrust due to the ritual use of sex, "impure' substances, and the mingling of castes that were understood as being part of its practice. As Sir Monier Williams stated "Tantrism is

impositions affect our own national faith" (Garland 1970, 2:856). Colebrooke, on the other hand, saw the Goddess Kālī, as a recent creation of the inauthentic Tantra (Humes 2003, 149).

[3] During the mid-nineteenth century the *bhadralok* were being phased out of the privileged economic and political positions they had formerly held. Racial tensions were also escalating between the British and its Muslim and Hindu subjects. See Lipner 2005, 4-6.

Hinduism arrived at its last and worst stage of development"; in the *Tantras*, the noble

classical tradition of the Vedas had become, "exaggerated and perverted," mixed together

with such "terrible and horrible things as sanguinary sacrifices and orgies with wine and

women." (*Hinduism* 122-123,116). Monier Williams was echoing the sentiments of

Rammohun Roy who had written:

> The stories ... in the Tantras, are of a nature that, if told of any man, would be
> offensive to the ears of the most abandoned of either sex. In the worship of Kali,
> human sacrifices, the use of wine, criminal intercourse, and licentious songs are
> included: the first of these practices has been generally extinct; but it is believed
> that there are parts of the country where human victims are still offered (1945, 1:
> 92).

A substantial amount of information regarding the Tantras, focusing on Kālī and Durgā,

is found in missionary writings in the early nineteenth century. In *A View of the History,*

Literature, and Mythology of the Hindoos, William Ward writes:

> The image of Kalee exhibits a female with inflamed eyes, standing on the body of
> her husband, her hair dishevelled, slavering the blood of her enemies down her
> bosom, her tongue hanging from her mouth, wearing a necklace of skulls, and
> holding a skull in the left hand, and a sword in the right. .. The image of Doorga is
> that of a female warrior: and one form of this goddess is that of a female so athirst
> for blood, that she is represented as cutting her own throat; and half-severed head,
> with the mouth distended, is seen devouring the blood streaming from the trunk.
> This goddess stands upon two other deities, in an attitude so abominably indecent
> that it cannot be described; the common form of Kalee, standing on her husband
> Shivu, has a secret meaning, well known to a Hindoo, but which is so indelicate
> that even they, licentious as they are, dare not make it according to the genuine
> meaning of the fable to which it belongs (Ward 1822, 1970, xcvii)

Speaking of the goddess Chinnamastā, whom he identifies as Kālī, Alexander Duff from

the Church of Scotland Mission wrote, in 1839:

> Of all the Hindu divinities, this goddess is the most cruel and revengeful. Such,
> according to some of the sacred legends, is her thirst for blood, that being unable,
> in one of her forms, on a particular occasion, to procure any of the giants for her
> prey, in order to quench her savage appetite, she "actually cut her own throat, that
> the blood issuing thence, might spout into her own mouth." Of the goddess
> represented in the monstrous attitude of supporting her own half-severed head in

the left hand, with streams of blood gushing from the throat to the mouth,- images to this day be seen in some districts of Bengal. The supreme delight of this divinity, therefore, consists in cruelty and torture; her ambrosia is the flesh of living votaries and sacrificed victims; and her sweetest nectar, the copious effusion of their blood (1839, 241) [4].

The goddess Kālī had been a source of negative propaganda since the late eighteenth century for the Protestant missionaries, the East India Company and Hindu reformers who wanted to distance themselves from what they regarded as disreputable religious practices. Initially Tantra was associated with the "exotic Orient", a world of forbidden sexuality. However, in the case of the nineteenth century, Tantra and Kālī became associated not only with the negative perspective if the missionaries but also with the political activities of Bengalis urging sedition against the British government and with fictional depiction that captured the European popular imagination. Officials of the East India Company highlighted Kālī's capacity to incite violence through their obsession with the Thuggee cult in which Kālī was supposed to demand human sacrifices. The nineteenth century saw information concerning Kālī expand exponentially. Both the British and the Indians contributed to the production of the archive. As Hugh Urban states: "As a powerful dialectical category, Tantra could not only be employed by colonial authors as proof of Indian backwardness, barbarism and savagery; it could also be turned around and redeployed as the symbol of India in violent revolt against her colonial masters" (2003, 74).

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[4] Chinnamastā is one of the ten Mahāvidyās, a group of ten Goddesses that includes Kālī, Tāra, Tripura-Sundarī, Bhuvaneśvarī, Chinnamastā, Bhairavī, Dhūmāvatī, Bagalāmukhī, Mātaṅgī and Kamalā. See Kinsley 1997.

5.1.1: Constructing the Danger – Kālī and the Thug

On October 3rd, 1830 an article was published anonymously in the *Calcutta Literary Gazette* describing a murderous cult of robbers dedicated to Kālī. Not only did the article warn the reader of the existence of this cult throughout India, it urged the Government to take action against this danger: "It is the imperious duty of the Supreme Government of this country to put an end in some way or other to this dreadful system of murder, by which thousands of human beings are now annually sacrificed upon the great road throughout India" (1830). The publication was remarkably successful in achieving its goals, since the very next day an official campaign against the "Thugs" was launched under the leadership of the magistrate Curven Smith. The article in the *Calcutta Literary Gazette* was not the first writing that had appeared on this subject. An article entitled "Of Murderers called Phanisagars," written in 1812 by Dr. Sherwood described a band of robbers who used the same method to kill their victims (strangulation) as that described by the article in the *Calcutta Literary Gazette*. Sherwood's article had appeared eighteen years earlier and had caused hardly any public response. It seems that this difference in reaction is due in large part to the way in which the depiction of the *Phanisigars*, who were located in the South, differed from that of the Thugs. It was revealed eventually that the anonymous author of the article in the *Calcutta Literary Gazette* was William Sleeman (later known as Thuggee Sleeman). The major difference between the two articles had to do with the role of religion in the explanation for the activities of these bands of robbers. Sherwood passed over this aspect entirely, but for Sleeman the very foundation and motivation for these crimes was religious superstition associated with the cult of the goddess Kālī. Through his writings, the writings of his collaborators, judicial

reports and eventually works of fiction, the Thuggess were discovered and/or created. [5]

It is important to mention that the campaign against the Thuggees came at a time when the moral depravity of Hinduism, exemplified by Sati, represented as a religiously sanctioned form of human sacrifice, was being asserted by the British in order to justify colonial rule. The construction of the danger posed by the Thuggees as both physical and moral allowed the British to mount a campaign that secured valuable trade routes, and supported their quest for continued rule over India (Chatterjee 1998, 128). The crusade against Thuggee focused on the theft and ritual murder of unsuspecting travelers in the name of Kālī.

> I may fairly call unreserved communication with European gentlemen for more then twelve years; and yet there is not among them who doubts *the divine origin of the system of Thuggee* not one who doubts, that he and all who have followed the trade of murder with the prescribed rites and observances, were acting under the immediate auspices of the Goddess Devee, Durga, Kalee or Bhawanee, as she is indifferently called, and consequently there is not one who feels the slightest remorse for the murders which he may, in the course of his vocation, have perpetuated or assisted in perpetrating. A Thug considers the persons murdered precisely in the light of victims offered up to the Goddess (Sleeman 1836,7)

According to William Sleeman, the reason that this group had evaded the attention of the British for the past two centuries was the result "of Europeans being so far morally advanced that they had been (Christianly) unable to even conceive of the existence of a sect 'too monstrous for belief'" (Chatterjee 1998. 127). Sleeman, on the other hand determined that the Thuggees were a hereditary group which had existed for centuries and whose activities spanned the whole of the vast subcontinent.

Sleeman was able to capitalize on the depictions of Kālī put forth by East India company officials and Protestant missionaries in the early nineteenth century. The

[5] Certain scholars question the very existence of such a group. In "Scarf and Sword: Thugs, Marauders, and State-formation in 18th century Malwa", Stewart Gordon contends that Sleeman may have used the existence of certain groups of robbers in central India to create the myth of the Thuggee (1969:403-429).

intersection of Kālī and the Thuggees provided a model which perfectly served the economic, religious and political interests of the British. The Christian missionary, William Campbell, wrote of the relationship between Kālī and the Thuggee cult:

> Nay more, so long as they attended to her will and were guided by her counsels, all whom they would sacrifice were to be regarded as victims, to propitiate her favour, while all the booty which might be realized, would become their inheritance.
> ...a system more cruel, more shocking and more barbarous, because carried on under the mask of religion and often sanctioned by law (1836,68).

Sleeman had done his homework. He took care to align the story of the origination of Thuggee with Hindu mythology. Drawing on a passage from the *Devī Māhātmya* describing Kālī's slaying of the demon Raktabīja, Sleeman shows its connection with Thuggee.

> The thugs have a tradition that a demon by the name *rakut beej Dana* infested the world and devoured mankind as often as they were born or created; and to enable the world to be peopled *kale Davey* determined to put him to death. This demon was so tall that the deepest ocean never reached above his waist; and he could consequently walk over the world with ease. *Kale Davey* attacked him, and cut him down; but from every drop of his blood another demon sprung up, and the numbers increased at this geometrical rate, while she became fatigued with labour. In this she formed two men from the sweat that brushed off from both of her arms; and giving them each a handkerchief, told them to put all these demons to death, without allowing one drop of their blood to fall upon the ground. After their labour was over, they offered to return to the Goddess the handkerchiefs with which they had done their work, but she desired them to keep them as the instruments of a trade by which their posterity were to earn their subsistence and to strangle men with these *roomals*, as they had strangled the demons, and live by the plunder they acquired; and having been the means of enabling the world to get provided with men by the destruction of demons, their posterity would be entitled to take a few for their own use. The *roomal* they called the "Goputban", and the Goddess told them that should leave the bodies of their victims on the ground and she would take care that they should be removed, provided they never look behind them to see in what manner, and that if they observed this and all other rules she prescribed for them, no power on earth should punish them for what they did (1836, 127-128). [6]

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[6] The difference between this account and the one actually found in the *Devī Māhātmya* is that in order to defeat the demon Raktabīja, Kālī springs forth from Durgā's head and licks up all the drops of blood, effectively killing the demon. See Coburn 1997

According to an interview Sleeman conducted with Nasir, an approver (a captured Thug who gave evidence against other Thugs) the reason for the current discovery and punishment of the Thugs was they had disregarded the omens and disobeyed the rules laid down by the goddess (1836, 142). By compiling a lexicon of the language of the Thugs, entitled *Ramaseeana*, and composing and editing masses of material about Thuggee, Sleeman almost single handily shaped the definition and significance of Thuggee.

In 1839, a new form of discourse was added to the mix. A novel by Meadows Taylor, an occasional collaborator with Sleeman, entitled *Confessions of a Thug* introduced the British public to the myth of Thuggee. The book provided an important link between fiction and history, by claiming to "use the tools of fiction to popularise a whole story of fact" (Rawson 1967, viii). In the first line of Taylor's introduction we read: "The tale of crime which forms the subject of the following pages is alas! almost all true; what there is of fiction has been supplied only to connect the events, and make the adventures of Ameer Ali as interesting as the nature of his horrible profession would permit" (Taylor 1986, 1).[7] Martine Van Woerkens points out that: "while Sleeman draws history towards fiction, Taylor does the opposite and works at housing his fiction in history" (2002, 237). Portions of records from Thuggee interrogations conducted by Sleeman and passages from Sleeman's book *Ramaseeana* in fact make up the bulk of Taylor's work. Taylor himself acknowledges that he began writing this novel after reading a copy of *Ramaseeana*, and recognizes his debt to Sleeman (Taylor 1986,5n.1). But this debt is quite large. In certain instances it is possible to see a direct parallel

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[7] Ameer Ali is the main character of Taylor's Novel

between Sleeman's writings and the words that Taylor puts in the mouth of his main

character.

> Sleeman: "I am satisfied that there is no term, no rite, no ceremony, no opinion,
> no omen or usage that the thugs have intentionally concealed from me (Sleeman
> 1836,1).
> Ameer Ali: "I have told all, nor concealed from you one thought, one feeling,
> much less any act which at this distance of time I can remember" (Taylor 1986,
> 545).

Confessions of a Thug was received by the English audience as a truthful

representation, a chronicle of the activities of the Thugs and an accurate interpretation of

the myth and symbolism of the Goddess Kālī, highlighting the connection between

idolatry, human sacrifice and general moral depravity. However, by the late nineteenth

century the myth of Thuggee took on a far more threatening significance for British rule.

> If the early narratives used the Thuggees as an example of India's lawlessness and
> the need for strong British rule, the later narratives reveal a fear that the Thuggees
> had grown into something far more dangerous than a mere underground criminal
> group. Particularly in the decades after the mutiny, the Thuggees myth grew into a
> full blown paranoid fantasy, now imagined as a nationwide political organization,
> fuelled by religious fanaticism, and dedicated to the overthrow of British rule
> itself (Urban 2003, 85).

5.2: The Goddess as Warrior.

In the nineteenth century, the British presence in India was seen by some Indians

in a positive light. The author of an article entitled, "India's Duty to England", published

on April 8th, 1878 in *The Hindu Patriot* wrote:

> Our rulers may rest assured that the symptoms of dissatisfaction which they notice
> among the princes and people of India are not symptoms of a wish for political
> revolution. Far from it. Both the princes and people of India fully appreciate the
> order which the English have introduced, the protection and security which they
> have given, and the principles of progress, which they have instilled into life"
> (quoted in Majumdar 1937, 23-25)

However, in the early twentieth century, with the emergence of the anti-partition and

swadeshi movements, this attitude was radically altered to one of distrust.[8] Previous

moderate nationalist movements who were willing to work within the confines of the

colonial government were being displaced by more assertive people who utilized much

more aggressive tactics to achieve independence from the British. According to Peter

Heebs the difference between the extremists and moderates was that the moderates were

seeking self-government within the structure of the Empire, whereas the extremists

sought complete political autonomy through "the promotion of swadeshi and the boycott

of British goods, and the formation of 'national' institutions in the educational, judicial

and other fields" (1998, 2-3). [9]

Hindu images, and Tantric practice and symbols became an inspiration for the

Bengali revolutionaries. The use of literary fiction to construct new meanings for Hindu

divine images was not the sole domain of the British, but was taken up by the Bengalis as

well. As is the case with most colonized societies, the Indian nationalist movement used

what Walter Benjamin terms "cultural memory" to legitimate and support its own

political, anti-colonial ideology. Benjamin's "cultural memory", writes Susan Buck-

Morse, is a "reservoir of myths and utopian symbols from a more distant Ur-past" (1989,

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[8] In 1905, Lord Curzon, the Governor-General of India unexpectedly partitioned Bengal into East and West Bengal, sparking mass protests and the emergence of the swadeshi movement that promoted the boycotting of all English goods. Rabindranath Tagore outlined the following objectives of swadeshi : "1. To undertake fulfilment of the country's needs by the efforts of the people themselves; 2. To take over the responsibility of the people on their own shoulders; 3. To execute all national activities with the agency of Indians alone and to refuse the help of aliens in these matters; 4. To abstain from the use of foreign cloth and other goods; 5. To refrain from writing letters to relations and friends in the English, using English goods, English furniture, English music, English drinks, and having social intercourse with the English people; 6. To establish Indian schools; 7. To decide disputes without resort to the courts established by the British Government" (quoted in Biswas 1995, 39).

[9] Many indigenous anti-colonial movements were driven underground due to the British government's policy of suppression of 'sedition'. By 1909, a law was passed that enabled the government to prosecute suspected practitioners or organizations of sedition without a jury trail (Sanjivani; Jan 14, 1909, RNPB (1909) p.102; *Hindoo Patriot*, Dec 14 1908 RNEP p.402)

116). Tied to the production of memory is the process of mimicry which allows the

colonized to seize upon colonial stereotypes as tools of resistance. This is especially

evident in the use of the Hindu goddess as a symbol for Indian nationalism. The

burgeoning Indian nationalist movement utilized literature which glorified the violent

nature of the goddess in accordance with pre-existing Hindu imagery, in order to create

counterhegemonic symbols of resistance.[10] At first, the Nationalist movement began to

utilize the Hindu goddess as an allegory for the Indian nation. Then Goddess as mother

came to be more than an allegorical image, she was the divine embodiment of the Indian

nation and an object of veneration. This vision of the Goddess first appears in the

poem/song *Bande Mataram* by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-1894). [11]

Bande Mataram

I bow to thee, Mother
Richly- watered, richly-fruited
Cool with the winds of the south.
Dark with the crops of the harvests
The Mother!

Her nights rejoicing in the glory of the moonlight,
Her lands clothed beautifully with her trees in flowering bloom,
Sweet of laughter, sweet of speech,
The Mother, giver of boons, giver of bliss!

Terrible with the clamorous shouts of seventy million throats,
And the sharpness of swords, raised in twice seventy million hands,
Who sayeth to thee, Mother, that thou art weak?
Holder of multitudinous strength,

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[10] In some cases they created a deity to fulfill their mission, as we see in the case of Bhārat Mātā, Mother India

[11] Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, a former official under the British, was said to have written Bande Mataram in 1876 in reaction to the mandated singing of "God Save the Queen". His novel *Ānandamaṭh* was published in instalments beginning in 1881 in the serial *Baṅgadarśan*, a journal started by Bankim and later appeared as a book

I bow to her who saves,
To her who drives from her the armies of her foemen.
The Mother!

Thou art knowledge, thou art conduct,
Thou art heart, thou art soul,
For thou art the life in our body.
In the arm thou art might, O Mother,
In the heart, O Mother, thou art love and faith,
It is thy image we raise in every temple.

For thou art Durga holding her ten weapons of war,
Kamala at play in the lotuses
And speech, the goddess, giver of all lore,
To thee I bow!
I bow to thee, goddess of wealth
Pure and peerless,
Richly-watered, richly-fruited
The Mother!

I bow to thee, Mother,
Dark-hued, candid.
Sweetly smiling, jeweled and adorned,
The holder of wealth, the lady of plenty,
The Mother!

Bande Mataram was to become the mantra for Indian nationalism. The poem depicted the

Goddess as the Indian landscape itself – Mother Earth –in the first stanzas, and then as

Durgā in warrior form, the saviour of 70 million Indians.

The novel, *Ānandamaṭh* (The Temple of Joy) by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in

which *Bande Mataram* first appeared (1881), solidified the connection of the spiritual

with the political in other ways. Bankim associated the concept of renunciation not with

personal salvation but with service to the nation, His novel perfectly illustrates the

connection suggested by Benedict Anderson between fiction and the imagined nation

(Anderson 1983). "A novel", writes Tanika Sarkar, "had to carry the entire burden of a

politics that was yet to be born. *Ānandamaṭh*, therefore, was not really a representation;

it was more a performance, an iteration, making something happen with words" (2006, 3961).

Ānandamaṭh , set in the Bengal of the 1770s, recounts the story of a group of Hindu Vaishnava Sanyasins or renunciant warriors, the Santans who launch a war to eliminate the Muslims, who are depicted as foreign oppressors.[12] In Bankim's times (a hundred years after the time of his story was set), tensions between Hindus and Muslims were developing, and Muslims were eventually alienated from the Indian nation. Bankim, in *Ānandamaṭh*, utilised what Bipan Chandra has termed "vicarious nationalism," with Muslims serving as stand-ins for the British in his story. Since he worked as a government official, he could not write openly against British rule.[13]

Ānandamaṭh was to become one of the most significant pieces of literature for Hindu revivalism and the 'terrorist' factions of the nationalist movement, solidifying the relationship between the Goddess and Hindu nationalism. The story presents the Goddess in three forms: as-she-was, as-she is and as-she-will- be.[14] First the Goddess (as-she-was) is presented as the motherland, the earth as the source of vitality who was fertile and provided sustenance for her children. This incarnation corresponds to a time prior to foreign invasion.

> Then the monk took Mahendra into another chamber. There he saw a
> a beautiful image of the Goddess as Bearer of the earth, perfectly formed and
> decorated with every ornament.
> "Who is she" asked Mahendra.
> "The Mother as she was", replied the monk.
> "Who is that?" said Mahendra.

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[12] Although the Santans are depicted as worshippers of Viṣṇu (Kriṣṇa as the demon slayer) they revere India as a mother goddess.

[13] The government was becoming aware of seditious writing. In 1878, the Vernacular Press Act was passed, which sought to police "feelings of disaffection against the Government" (cf. RC Majumdar, 1965, 247).

[14] This tripartite division is also explicit in the hymn, *Bande Mataram*

"She who subdued the wild beasts such as the elephant and the lion underfoot and set up her lotus throne in their dwelling place. She was happy and beautiful, adorned with every ornament, radiant as the risen sun and full of majesty, Prostrate yourself before her". (Lipner 2005, 149-150)

In the second manifestation, the Goddess (as-she-is) is depicted as Kālī enshrined

in a dark chamber – oppressed by her enemies, deprived of her splendour and reduced to

starvation, but armed and ready for battle. This incarnation also shifts the concept from

Goddess as nation to the Goddess in anthropomorphic form familiar to her Bengali

devotees (see figure 5.1).

They reached a dark chamber, in the depths of the earth, lit somehow by a faint light. There in the dim light he could see and image of Kālī.
 The monk said, "look, this is the Mother-as-she is".
 "Kālī" said Mahendra fearfully.
 "Yes, Kālī", said the monk. "blackened and shrouded in darkness. She has been robbed of everything; that is why she is naked. And because the whole land is burning ground, she is garlanded with skulls. And she's crushing her gracious Lord underfoot. Alas, dear Mother!
 The tears streamed down the monk's face. Mahendra asked, "Why has she a club and begging bowl in her hands?"
"We're her Children, and that's all we could put in her hands as weapons", said the monk. "now say, *Bande Mataram*".
 " *Bande Mataram*", said Mahendra and prostrated himself before Kālī.
(Lipner 2005, 149-150)

The final incarnation of the Goddess (as-she-will-be) is Durgā, who has shed her

frightful form but retained and increased her stock of weapons, demonstrating her

triumph over her enemies in regal splendour.

Then saying, "come this way", the monk began to ascend a second tunnel. Suddenly the rays of the morning dazzled their eyes and they heard the soft bird-song all around them. Mahendra saw a golden ten-armed image of the Goddess in a large marble shrine glistening and smiling in the early morning rays.
Prostrating himself, the monk said, "and this is the Mother-as-she-will-be. Her ten arms reach out in ten directions, adorned with various powers in the form of the different weapons she holds, the enemy crushed at her feet, while the almighty

lion who has taken refuge there is engaged in destroying the foe. Behold her whose arms are the directions" (Lipner 2005, 149-150)[15]

This connection of the goddess and Indian nationalism in literature was paralleled by the emergence of visual representational forms of the goddess as nation in chromolithographic imagery and theatre (Pinney 2003, 124). The nation as goddess was first performed in the play "Bhāratmātā" (Mother India) by Kiran Chandra Bannerjee on February 19th,1873. The image of Bhāratmātā becomes of great significance in the later phases of the Hindu Nationalist movement. Chromolithographic imagery also proved to be a useful medium for the burgeoning nationalist movement in the 20th century.

5.3: Open Access: Picturing God/dess

The emergence of lithographs changed the very nature of devotion by rendering the gods accessible in the home and not only in temples, and also made god's presence available to previously excluded groups of people. [16] In the climate of conversion and

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[15] Mahendra is a Brahmin landlord who leaves his once prosperous land with his wife Kalyani, and baby daughter, Sukumari. They are separated through an incident dealing with a band of robbers and Kalyani and Sukumari are rescued by the santans. Mahendra himself is thought to be a santan and is arrested by the Nawab's troops. He is rescued from captivity by the santans, whom he views as criminals. It is at this point that he is taken to see the Goddess in all three forms and introduced to the Santan's plight.

[16] An important transformation occurred with the emergence of lithographs in the mid-nineteenth century that altered the course of Hindu devotion. Previously, for liturgical or devotional reasons, in order to "see" god and receive darśan, a devotee would have to travel to various temples or pilgrimage sites. This not only involved physical movement, but was also restrictive in terms of who was permitted access to the temple space. While caste played an important role in this limitation of access (dalits were not permitted to enter the temple precincts), economic status was also at issue since one had to be able to afford the journey to the temple. One of the earliest depictions of the use of visuals in a domestic context appears in a lithograph in S. C. Belnos' Hindoo and European Manners in Bengal written in 1832. The image depicts a woman cooking with her children near her while a devotional image is hanging on the wall behind them. Mildred Archer and Ronald Light Brown describe the image as the "only known picture showing Kalighat painting in the wall of a hut" (1982, 142). The life of the lithographic image illustrates the complex nature of Hindu images in terms of perceptions and usages from both a colonial and indigenous perspective. Kajri Jain has shown that "nineteenth century lithographs occupied a liminal zone between 'industrial' and 'fine' art, between artisans and the gentry, between woodcuts and oil paintings, and, significantly, between devotional, political, and 'cultural' or aesthetic 'images' (2007, 97).

This genre of mass-produced images tends to be referred to as "calendar art'" due to the fact that the images often appear on calendars distributed by businesses. They are also called "Bazaar art", referring not only to images appearing on calendars, but more broadly to prints called "framing pictures" and those appearing for commercial functions such as advertising, movie posters, and packaging. Many art historians have situated the emergence of this genre as an outgrowth of the chromolithographic mass reproduction of

Protestant missionization these images were seen by missionaries in the same way they viewed temple icons. An anonymous missionary commenting on lithographs collected by the Church Missionary Society for exhibition in United Kingdom wrote:

> They have great value. As authentic representations of their gods by Hindus they mark a fast fading phase in the religious history of the country – the period when by adopting Christian tactics – the people are trying to bolster up their own tottering faiths. The Hindus are even now beginning to see that these pictures so far from hindering Christianity – help it on – for the more the people can be got to realize what their gods really are – the more their hearts turn from them...[quoted from several pages of preliminary written material tipped into a bound folio of early Calcutta Art Studio Prints in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford] (Ashmolean 1966, 53)

This, however, was simply a case of wishful thinking, since the currency of the lithograph was to buttress Hinduism in both a devotional and political context.

The popularity and ubiquity of the chromolithographic image derived from its ability to respond to the spirit of *bhakti* or devotion. The image provided the common Hindu with access to the divine, regardless of literacy, caste, gender and economic status. Another important facet of the printed image was its linkage to the anti-colonial movement, the secular nationalist movement and eventually the Hindu nationalist movement. In fact, among the British, concerns over chromolithographic images moved, in some cases, from anxiety over idolatry to worries of sedition against the British government. Herbert Hope Risely, the Director of Ethnography for India, stated in 1907: "we are overwhelmed with a mass of heterogeneous materials some misguided, some of it frankly seditious" (cited in Pinney 2004, 120). In order to examine the chromolithographs for anti-British content, Risely sent his assistant B.A. Gupte to

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works by British influenced Indian painters such as Raja Ravi Varma, which began being circulated as examples of fine art to be appreciated in the mid to late nineteenth century. Kajri Jain argues in one of the most extensive studies of this genre, *Gods of the Bazaar: The Economies of Indian Calendar Art*, that prints in the form of sacred icons and pilgrimage souvenirs had been available in the market place since the late eighteenth century (2007, 93).

Calcutta. In a letter dated December 11, 1908, Gupte wrote to Riley stating: 'of those I

could collect last evening, I feel that the one printed for a cigarette manufacturer is the

most effective and significant" (cited in Pinney 2004, 121). [17] (see figure 5-2) The image

that Gupte was referring to was a lithograph of Kālī produced by the Calcutta Art Studio

that had been in distribution since 1879 (Mitter, 1994, 178). On the surface, it appeared

to be a traditional image of the four-armed Kālī, garlanded with human heads standing

upon Śiva. But the lack of caste markings on the some of the heads strung in the garland,

and their white complexions, and moustaches, led Gupte to conclude that the heads were

European. [18] He went on to note "the symbolical British lion couchant in the... N.W.

corner, his fall in the N.E. corner and a decapitated red coated solider in the S.E. corner.

The falling head near the toes of the prostrate husband leaves no doubt as to the intention

of the designer" (quoted in Pinney 2004, 120). Lithographs such as this one prompted

Herbert Risely to draft the 1910 Press Act. The printing press had become an extremely

important tool in disseminating ideas, whether through imagery or narrative, especially

for the more radical factions of the nationalist movement. Key figures including

Aurobindo Ghose and Bipin Chandra Pal were emerging, and utilizing these media to

spread the anti-colonial message.

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[17] The writing around the image instructed Indians to buy Kālī cigarettes in order "to look after the interests of this country's poor and humble workers" (see Pinney 2004, 123).
[18] Mitter remarks, with reference to the same image, that there is a "hidden message in its colour symbolism of the black goddess dominating a supine white skinned Siva" (1994, xii).

5.4: Read All about it: Secret Societies and Serial Journalism

Underground movements or secret societies had been the primary base for the

early Bengal revolutionary groups. Of these groups, two of the most prominent ones – the

Anushilan Samhiti founded in 1902 and the later Jugantar (also the name of the journal

put out by the group) – were connected to Aurobindo Ghose. [19] Born in Calcutta,

Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950) and his brother Barindra were sent in 1879 to school in

England by their Anglicized father who was a physician. Having been educated in

English, Aurobindo did not learn Bengali until the age of eighteen. After graduating

from King's College, Cambridge where he excelled in Greek and Latin, Aurobindo

returned to India in 1893 where he found a job in the administration of the Maharaja of

Baroda. It was upon his return to India that Aurobindo became politicized, criticizing the

Indian National Congress' approach to dealing with the current British administration. In

the August 1893 edition of the English-Marati newspaper, *Indu Prakash* he wrote:

> I say, of the Congress, then, this- that its aims are mistaken, that the spirit in
> which it proceeds toward their accomplishment is not a spirit of sincerity and
> whole-heartedness, and that the methods it has chosen are not the right methods,
> and the leaders in whom it trusts, not the right sort of men to be trusted (Quoted in
> Heebs1998, xiii)

Disappointed by the Congress' attempts to ensure Indian participation in the British

government of India, Aurobindo organized a secret revolutionary group. Clearly

influenced by Bankim's *Ānandamaṭh*, Aurobindo published the pamphlet *Bhawani*

Mandir. [20] *Bhawani Mandir* called for the establishment of a temple to be constructed

and dedicated to the goddess Bhawani. Attached to this temple would be an order of

Brahmacarins (religious students) whose sole duty would be to serve the Mother. Like

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[19] "The Jugantar Party" was not used commonly or formerly structured until after 1915 (Heehs 1993, 243).
[20] The pamphlet was unsigned, but both government officials of the time and later scholars consider it
certain that *Bhawani Mandir* was written by Aurobindo. See Heebs, 1993, 65.

Bankim's santans, the *Brahmacarins* were to dedicate themselves to the Mother in the form of the nation. [21] It should be mentioned that in Aurobindo's pamphlet, Bhavani was not merely a goddess of popular Hinduism but was "Infinite Energy".

> In the unending revolutions of the world, as the wheel of the Eternal turns mightily in its courses, the Infinite Energy, which streams forth from the Eternal and sets the wheel to work, looms up in the vision of man in various aspects and infinite forms. Each aspect creates and marks an age. Sometimes She is Love, sometimes She is Knowledge, sometimes She is Renunciation, sometimes She is Pity. This infinite energy is Bhawani, She also is Durga, She is Kali, ... She is our Mother and the Creatress of us all (quoted in Ker 1917, 34)

Bhawani Mandir also articulated Aurobindo's conception of the Indian nation as Śakti, the Mother.

> For what is a nation? What is our mother-country? It is not a piece of earth, not a figure of speech, nor a fiction of the mind. It is a mighty Shakti, composed of the Shaktis of all the millions of units that make up the nation, just as Bhawani Mahisa Mardini sprang into being from the Shaktis of all the millions of gods assembled in one mass of force and welded into unity. The Shakti we call India, Bhawani Bharati, is the living unity of the Shaktis of three hundred million people; but she is inactive, imprisoned in the magical circle of *tamas*, the self indulgent inertia and ignorance of her sons. To get rid of *tamas* we have to wake the Brahma within. (quoted in Ker 1917,37).

While the practices concerning the temple and legion of brahmacaris outlined in *Bhawani Mandir* never materialized, this pamphlet marks the advent of the connection in Aurobindo's thought between religion and nationalism.

In 1906, in the wake of the partition of Bengal, Aurobindo left his job in Baroda and took a post as the principal of the Bengal National College and became a writer for the English language newspaper, *Bande Mataram*, which was founded by Bipinchandra Pal. Both Bipinchandra and Aurobindo were committed to the ideal of complete independence from British rule in India. In an article published in *Bande Mataram* on

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[21] The difference between these two narratives is that in *Ānandamath* the chief deity is Visnu, whereas *Bhawani Mandir* it is clearly the goddess. Further the santans' activities were militaristic whereas the Brahmacarins were to be engaged in activities such as education, development and charity.

April 23, 1907, Aurobindo referred to his ideology of nationalism as "political

Vedantism". A year later, Aurobindo clarified his view of nationalism:

> What is Nationalism? Nationalism is not a mere political programme; Nationalism is a religion that has come from God... This thing is happening daily in Bengal, because in Bengal, Nationalism has come to the people as a religion, and it has been accepted as a religion....It is a religion by which we are trying to realize God in the nation, in our fellow countrymen (quoted in Appadorai, 1973, 483). [22]

While on the one hand Aurobindo was discussing an all pervading religious energy or

Śakti in abstract terms, on the pragmatic level he made use of the Goddess Kālī as a

symbol for political mobilization – an image of Kālī engaged in a fierce battle against her

foreign oppressors.

Aurobindo was to become one of the most vocal critics and agitator against

British rule, with the founding of the new paper *Jugantar* (The New Age). In a letter

dated July 3, 1911, Aurobindo, wrote that the goal of *Jugantar* was to initiate "secret

revolutionary propaganda and organization" (Sri Aurobindo: Archives and Research I,

no.2 (1977): 84.)

Jugantar, published in Bengali, was much more radical than *Bande Mataram*,

overtly criticizing and calling for action against the British government.

> The laws of the English are based on their brute force. If we want to liberate ourselves from those laws, it is brute force that it is necessary for us to accumulate. It is there, then, that the right course of action now lies for us... Are not ten thousand sons of Bengal prepared to embrace death to avenge humiliation of their fatherland?...With a firm resolve you can bring English rule to an end in a single day. The time has come to make the Englishmen understand that enjoyment of the sweets of dominion in the country of another, after wrongfully taking possession of it, will not be permitted to be continued for ever. Let him fully realise that the life of a thief who steals the property of others is no longer an easy one in this country (*Juganatar*, 3rd March, 1907).

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[22] Bipinchandra viewed nationalism similarly. In the preface to a selection of his writings in 1907, he wrote: "This new National Movement in India is essentially a spiritual movement. To regard it as either a mere economic or political movement is to misunderstand it all together (quoted in Appodorai, 1973, 477).

Jugantar enjoined its people to: "Begin yielding up a life for a life. Dedicate your life as an offering at the temple of liberty. Without bloodshed the worship of the goddess will not be accomplished" (*Juganatar*, 3rd March, 1907). The call wasn't simply for self-sacrifice, but also violence against the British. Under Aurobindo's brother Barindra's leadership, violent terrorist activities involving bombs and guns were carried out against the British. *Jugantar* was shut down in 1908, after being prosecuted for sedition six times. [23]

> Some of the Mother's votaries have been hitherto worshipping her in secret and now they are revealing themselves slowly. This has caused a flutter among the race of monsters who are trying hard to thwart the noble enterprise of these true sons of India. But let us warn those cat-eyed fellows not to disturb the Mother's worship. The Mother is thirsty and is pointing out to her sons the only thing that can quench her thirst. Nothing less than human blood and decapitated heads will satisfy her. Let her sons, therefore worship her with these offerings and let them not shrink even for sacrificing their lives to procure them. On the date on which the Mother is worshipped in this way in every village, on that day will the people of India be inspired with a divine spirit and the crown of independence will fall into their hands. (*Jugantar* May 2nd, 1908)

Rituals in honour of Kālī were being used to promote political agitation or 'revolutionary terrorism'. Her myths and symbols were adapted to reflect the current political situation, and her ceremonies were used to pledge allegiance to the nationalist movement and *swaraj* (self-rule).

On the 28th of April, 1905 at a Mahāpūjā held at Kalīghat, the Brahmin priest enjoined devotees to worship the mother as nation and to take the following oath:

> In the holy presence of Kali Mata and at this holy Pitasthan that I will not use foreign made goods as far as practicable, that I will not buy at foreign merchants'

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[23] Aurobindo was first arrested in May 1906 because he was suspected of involvement in terrorist activities carried out by a group led by his brother Barindra. During his time in jail, Aurobindo spent most of his time in deep meditation. He was acquitted in 1908. In 1910 Aurobindo relocated to Pondicherry to begin a more spiritual phase in life, but on the same day he arrived, a warrant was issued by the Calcutta courts charging him with sedition for an article that had appeared in the journal *Karmayogin* which he had founded. The article in question was cleared of suspician of sedition in November 1910, at which point Aurobindo withedrew from active politics (Heebs, 1998, 282).

shops articles that are available at shops of the people of this country, and I will not get anything done by a foreigner which can be done by a countryman of mine (quoted in Johnson 1973, 552).

In an article appearing in *New India* on the 6th of June, 1907 Bipinchandra wrote:

> I would therefore, recommend the organization of *Kali Puja* in every important village, every new moon day. It cannot be the ordinary *Kali Puja*. For these *pujas* have no sanction except on special ceremonial days or for specific purposes. But we have a tradition of Kali worship whenever there are epidemics and troubles in the country... but then it is not the ordinary Kali, but what is called *Rakshakali* that is worshipped in times of troubles. *Rakshakali* is the Kali which protects from evil. *Rakshakali* is not black but white- the symbol is not of darkness but of light. And the sacrifices acceptable to *Rakshakali* are white goats and not black ones... Will the bureaucracy demoralise us, or shall we demoralise them; that is the question now They are trying to demoralise us. We too may perplex and demoralise them by the organisation of these *pujas*. They have already become nervous, and are conjuring up visions of all kinds of troubles. They are still thinking of the mysterious *chapattis*. It is not difficult to demoralise such people. These *Rakshakali pujas* will have a healthy effect on them. The very mystery will demoralise them. And thus these ceremonials would strengthen the determination of our people on the one hand, and simultaneously demoralise those that are trying to repress them on the other (Cited in Ker 1917, 48).

Without using overt language, Bipinchandra was arguing for self-rule and even promoting the killing of British officials by suggesting that the sacrifices acceptable to Rakshakali were white goats. White goats had been used as a euphemism for the British in the Bengali journal *Juguntar* when Aurobindo wrote in 1905.

> Rise up, O sons of India, arms yourselves with bombs, dispatch the white Asuras to Yama's abode. Invoke the Mother Kali.... The Mother asks for sacrificial offerings. What does the Mother want?.... A fowl or sheep or buffalo? No. She wants many white Asuras. The mother is thirsting after the blood of the Feringhees.... [C]hant this verse while slaying the Feringhee white goat: with the close of a long era, the Feringhee empire draws to and end, for behold! Kali rises in the east (cited in Urban 2003, 73).

The call for such offerings to the goddess seems to support the very fears and concerns put forth by the British in their understandings of Kālī and Tantra.

Bipinchandra, like Aurobindo, saw the nationalist project as intimately linked to a spiritual endeavour. He wrote in *The Spirit of Indian Nationalism* that "nationalism was not a mere political sentiment, but sacred both in its origin and implications. In India nothing really is purely secular. The sacred and the secular are strangely blended together in every department of the comparatively primitive life and activities of the people" (1910,11). Bipinchandra also had been heavily influenced by Bankim's *Ānandamath* and claimed that it had been the inspiration for the use of Hindu imagery in the nationalist movement.

> The so called idolatry of Hinduism is also passing through a mighty transfiguration. The process started really with Bankim Chander Chatterjee, who interpreted the most popular of the Hindu Goddesses as symbolic of the different stages of national evolution ...The interpretation of the old images of Gods and Goddesses has given new meaning to the present ceremonialism of the country and the people, while worshipping either Jagatdhatri or Kali or Durga accost them with devotion and enthusiasm with the inspiring cry of 'Bande Mataram'. All these are the popular objects of worship of the Indian Hindus, especially in Bengal. And the transfiguration of these symbols is at once the cause and the evidence of the depth of strength of the present movement. (1910. 36-37).

Bankimchandra reinterpreted the significance of images – initially regarded as emblematic of Hindu backwardness and barbarity – in light of the call for the nationalist movement to rise into action. Of the image of Chinnamastā, Bipinchandra suggested that having been beheaded by the British, the goddess must drink her own blood in order to survive (Urban 2003, 97). The sanguine images of the goddesses were not used solely to demonstrate the victimization of India and Indians by the British but also as a battle cry, urging that the blood of the British oppressors be shed. This call to arms through the use of religious imagery did not go unnoticed by the British government.

5.5: Sedition, Sanctions and Symbols

> And thus we have the strange spectacle, in certain parts of India, of a party capable of resorting to methods that are both reactionary and revolutionary, of men who offer prayers and sacrifices to ferocious divinities and denounce the government by seditious journalism, preaching primitive superstition in the very modern form of leading articles (Sir Alfred C. Lyall in Chirol 1910, xv).

In 1910, Valentine Chirol, the director of the Imperial and Foreign Department of *The Times* wrote a series of articles which were to be collected and published in the book, *Indian Unrest*. Chirol stated in the opening chapter that the existence of agitators against British rule was confined to a small number of Hindus (1910, 5). The use of the printing press by radical factions of the nationalist movement to promote *swaraj* and incite disobedience was closely monitored by the Indo-British government. To explain the importance of the press for the Indian nationalist movement, Chirol quoted Lord Morley: "You may put picric acid in the ink and the pen just as much as in any steel bomb," and again, "It is said that their incendiary articles are 'mere froth.' Yes they are froth, but are stained with bloodshed." (1910,15). Chirol concluded that the incitement to violence was carried out by 'insidious appeals to the Hindu Scriptures and the Hindu deities, and its deliberate vilification of everything English" (1910, 12). The glorification of Hinduism required the denigration of all things English.

Chirol recognized the use of the Hindu religion as a tool to mobilize the public against British rule on India. In one section of his book, Chirol laments that the earlier type of Hindu reformer is no more:

> The enthusiasm kindled in the first half of the last century by great missionaries, like Carey and Duff, who had made distinguished converts among the highest classes of Hindu society, had begun to wane; but if educated Hindus had grown more reluctant to accept the dogmas of Christianity, they were still ready to acknowledge the superiority of western ethics, and the Brahmo Samaj in Bengal, the Prathana Samaj in Bombay, the Social Reform movement which found

eloquent advocates all over India, and not least in Madras, and other agencies of a similar character for purging Hindu life of its more barbarous and superstitious associations, bore witness exercised over the Hindu mind (1910, 24-25).

He goes on to write how in the current climate those very "barbarous and superstitious"

elements are being used by secret societies whose main goal it is to rid India of British

rule.

> Practices which an educated Hindu would have been at pains to explain away, if he had not frankly repudiated them thirty years ago, now find zealous apologists. Polytheism is not merely extolled as poetic expression of eternal verities, but gods and goddesses of the Hindu Pantheon are being invested with fresh sanctity (1910, 27).

Chirol asserts that the symbol of the goddess in "terrible form" as Durgā or Kālī is

invoked most frequently by Bengalis engaged in seditious writings. He highlights the

image of the goddess Chinnamastā and refers to Bipinchandra's interpretation of this

divine form

> [T]he constant invocation of the "terrible goddess", whether as Kali or Durga, against the alien oppressors, shows that Brahmanism in Bengal is equally ready to appeal to the grossest and most cruel superstitions of the masses. In another one of her forms she is represented holding in her hand her head, which has been severed from her body, whilst the blood gushing form her trunk flows into her open mouth. A very poplar picture of the goddess in this form has been published with a text to the effect that the great goddess as seen therein symbolizes "the Motherland" decapitated by the English, but nevertheless preserving her vitality unimpaired by drinking her own blood. It is not surprising that amongst extremists one of the favourite euphemisms applied to the killing of an Englishman is "sacrificing a white goat to Kali" (1910, 102).

The careful monitoring and documenting of secret societies and revolutionary groups

would continue through various government efforts. [24]

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[24] In 1917 a confidential Government of India Publication, *Political Trouble in India 1907-1917*, written by James Campbell Ker, a personal assistant to the director of criminal intelligence, documented the activities and writings of religious nationalist groups. The very perception of the Hindu religion by the British had moved from the irreligious to a more politically threatening position.

5.6: Concluding Remarks: Idols of Nationalism, Symbols of Freedom

But though the real and highest worship of *sakti* must be through the cosmic and social revelations of it, the highest form of Sakti worship is possible to the highly educated and cultured alone. The masses can hardly be expected to approach this high standard; and yet they too must be initiated in the mysteries of *sakti* worship; and for them adequate symbols and rituals must be provided. And I feel no hesitation to say, that I cannot conceive of a better symbol of *Sakti*, in our present condition than the symbol of Kali, not conceived as a supernatural deity, but simply as the symbol of cosmic evolution on the one side, and of race-consciousness on the other.... And as such these symbols may well be utilized, if properly interpreted, for organization or our new civic religion and sacraments. In this view and in this form I do not feel any hesitation to recommend the Kali symbol to those of my countrymen to whom it may really appeal as an inspiration for the cultivation of sakti. (Bipinchandra Pal, *New India* 6th June, 1907, quoted in Ker, 1917, 46).

Here, Bipinchandra sums up the fashion in which Hindu images could be re-interpreted, re-signified and re-deployed. Like Rammohun Roy and Vivekananda, Bipinchandra placed images on the lower end of the spiritual spectrum. But in terms of politics, the image has enormous power. The image of the goddess whether constructed discursively through fiction or depicted visually through chromolithography or invoked in revolutionary exhortations becomes a key symbol for the Indian nation and India as a nation – a source of strength not of shame.

The narratives that surrounded the image not only served the goals of Indian nationalism in the quest for self-rule, but were also utilized by the British in order to justify their occupation of India. The British association of Kālī with murder and sedition was not, as we see through the narratives of secret societies, simply a paranoid delusion. Tantra proved to be a powerful dialectical category and Kālī a powerful dialectical image enabling Hindus to deploy previously constructed meanings to their own advantage.

CHAPTER 6 :TOILET SEATS AND SHOES: CONCLUDING REMARKS

6.1: Hindu Nationalism and Orientalism: Some Generalities

Throughout my dissertation, I have tried to suggest a fluid definition for the term Hinduism. The construction of Hinduism and the assigning of meaning to the category of Hindu religion is arguably born out of the colonial encounter. "[I]t is therefore fair to say", as Peter van der Veer writes, "that Hinduism is a product of the encounter of Orientalism, and the colonial imaginary, and Indian beliefs and practices" (1999, 420). Van der Veer makes an important point here, one that is conspicuously missing from Said's discussion of Orientalism, by signalling the involvement of the colonized in the production of Orientalism. The creation of "Hinduism" was not a one sided process; it involved the interaction between the colonized and the colonials. With that in mind, it must be recognized that there is of course a definite class, or more specifically in the case of India, a caste bias, that affected the development and glorification of certain aspects of religious belief and practice as authentically "Hindu."

One of the main functions of Orientalism during the nascent phases of colonization was to systemize the variegated practices that occurred on the Indian subcontinent within one cohesive definition that embodied the whole of Hindu religion. During this process of systematization, as demonstrated in the previous chapters, certain practices and beliefs were elevated, denigrated or excluded. This process was linked to European and Brahmin Orientalist claims emerging in the 18th century about the existence of a former Golden Age of Hinduism that was now in a state of decline. It is important to notice here that although there was agreement between Europeans and Indians with respect to the glorification and spiritualization of primordial Hinduism, their

respective projects for the recovery of this holy essence were radically different. For the British, the solution involved the acculturation of the Indian subject through indoctrination into Western – that is Christian – civilization.

For the Hindus, exemplified by such reformers such as Rammohun Roy, the agenda focused on a return to the Vedas and Brahminical practices. Orientalism must be viewed not as a static force that assigns power exclusively to the Western world but as a process that enables knowledge production, allowing power structures to shift. This is particularly relevant during the struggle for freedom from colonial rule. The assertion of nationalism requires not a simple inversion of power structures where the positions of colonized and colonials are turned upside down, but a much more complex process whereby already constructed knowledge is used to further the nationalist agenda. Looking specifically at India, we can see how the conclusions drawn by missionaries, and by Orientalist scholars such as William Jones, were not dismissed but were instead used to buttress claims of Hindu superiority. The nationalisation of India, as in the case of most nations, was a nationalisation of religion – more accurately, a nationalisation of the Hindu nation (Chatterjee 1993, Van der veer 1999). The identification of India with Hinduism began through colonial and missionary encounters, when culture and religion were collapsed into a singular marker - Indians were Hindu. This identification posited Hindus as the original inhabitants of India and designated other religions, such as Islam and Christianity, as foreign. Further Orientalist scholarship canonized Sanskrit literature as the basis of the Hindu religion, which reinforced the link between Indian civilization and religion. Orientalist notions that had first emerged during the eighteenth century were

used by twentieth century nationalists to prove the priority and authority of Hindus over all others, including the European colonizers.

These notions were significant for both the secular nationalist movement and the Hindu nationalist movement. The most important element was the notion of Hindu spirituality. The effort to define and defend an authentic Hindu tradition continues in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, but as we will see in the following section this has been complicated for contemporary Hindus by their perception that Hindu images are being pillaged and desecrated in the Western society of today.

6.2: Om my God!

Although initially confined to New Age stores and Indian restaurants, the colourful and vibrant images of Hindu deities have appeared in new contexts and on a variety of products available in North American and European markets. Featured on The Simpsons, Xena Warrior Princess and even in a Playboy video, Hindu gods and goddesses have featured in Western television and movies since the 1930s. Over the past decade, with the explosion of all things yoga-themed, Hindu imagery has become part of an 'Indo-chic' marketing trend, which has seen the mass production of henna, bindis and 'sari-esque' merchandise for Western consumption. Lunch boxes, nightlights and T-shirts with the likeness of Ganeśa or Kālī are top sellers. While the appearance of these products is somewhat problematic due to their de-contextualized nature, these appropriations are not inherently disrespectful. It is the emergence of Hindu imagery on other types of products that is significantly more disconcerting. The last eight years has seen the marketing of products such as toilet seats, socks and shoes displaying Hindu divine imagery. The existence of these products not only demonstrates the ignorance and

carelessness that marks the representation of Hinduism in Western popular culture, but

provides an opportunity to understand how Hindus in both the diaspora and the

subcontinent value and define images in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

In 1999, Sittin' Pretty DeSigns, a Seattle web based manufacturer of toilet seats

began selling toilet seats with images of Kālī and Ganeśa emblazoned on the lids (See

Figure 6.1). The products were part of the sacred seat collection, which also featured the

Virgin Mary; curiously, however, the Website only included images of the Kālī and

Ganeśa models. The sales pitch was as follows:

> All toilet Seats are completely functional, Three coats of waterproof clear coat
> protect the art as well as make the seats washable with a non-abrasive cleaner.
> Great as unforgettable gifts, or as conversation pieces for your own home, these
> toilet seats are guaranteed to add a smile to your bathroom décor. Available in
> three distinctly different colors: bright red, royal blue and black. Cost $130. [1]

Elsewhere on the Website, it was obvious that the company had done some research on

Kālī and Ganeśa and was able to locate these figures within the Hindu context. The

description of the Kālī toilet seat identifies Kālī as "the Fierce Hindu Goddess who slays

demons and liberates you from the constriction of your negative thoughts. She destroys

all obstacles and frees you from the darkness of your fears." The narrative accompanying

the Ganeśa seat informs the prospective purchaser that "Ganesha the Hindu elephant God

removes all obstacles and destroys evil and provides you with protection on your

journey." [2] Due to massive protests launched by various Hindu rights groups such as

AHAD (American Hindus Against Defamation), "a Hindu Watchdog group dedicated to

preserve the sanctity of Hindu symbols, icons, culture and customs" [3], the company shut

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[1] http:Hinduism.about.com/library/weekly/aa111900a.htm
[2] http:Hinduism.about.com/library/weekly/aa111900a.htm.
[3] http://www.hindunet.org/anti_defamation/ - part of the Viswa Hindu Parishad of America. Rashtriya
Swamysevak Sangh

down and one of the partners, Lamar Van Dyke issued an apology that also provided an explanation for the use of the Hindu images. Van Dyke's main points were: (1) that the images would empower women, by putting "strong female images out there in the universe to attempt to counteract the negativity," since "Kali is one of the strongest female images to have survived the deliberate distortion the patriarchy has placed upon all of our history"; and (2) that the images would spread the glory of Hinduism -- "We do have the utmost respect and love for these deities. That is why we are sending them off to live with various people around the world" [4]

It is evident from the product positioning and the apology that these seats were not intended for Hindu consumers and Van Dyke indicates that a large part of the company's sales was to Yoga studios around the United States and to individuals who sought to "spiritualize" their bathrooms. "Here in Seattle, we found many of our friends actually make their bathrooms quite beautiful, and an elaborate, decorative toilet seat is part of it. For them, it serves somewhat as the shrine room of a traditional Hindu home." She does acknowledge that perhaps "it is the bodily function part of the bathroom that has set you off" but asserts that it is through these functions that we should unite since "these things are the one thing that all of humanity has in common." [5] While Van Dyke was familiar with certain aspects of Hinduism, she was obviously ignorant of the system of purity and pollution that pervades the Hindu tradition. [6] But what is further evident in this discourse is the concept that Hinduism is highly spiritual.

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[4] http://hinduism.about.com/library/weekly/extra/bl-toilet.htm

[5] For a complete version of the apology see http://hinduism.about.com/library/weekly/extra/bl-toilet.htm

[6] In 2002, in Stockholm, Swedish furniture manufacturer, Ikea, advertised a toilet seat "inspired by the Gold and Glitter of the Orient" in the interior design section of their catalogue. The consumer was enticed to "make the nicest toilet seat yourself", including a image of the Buddha seated cross legged on a toilet seat spray painted in gold. To make matters worse, the adjacent text incorrectly identifies the image as Siva. The product was withdrawn from sale and the company spokesperson, Tina Paulsson issued an

It is also interesting to trace the course of the protest against the toilet seats among Hindus. While the demand for an apology was initiated by the American group AHAD, news of the toilet seats also sparked ire from members and groups of the Hindu political community in India. The demand for the withdrawal of the product was based on the notion that any image of a Hindu God or Goddess was automatically and by definition sacred. According to AHAD Convenor Ajay Shah: "Associating toilet seats with the icons and deities that are considered sacred and placed in temples and worshipped by a billion people is extremely insulting to say the very least. It is, in our opinion, an outrageously insensitive use of Hindu symbols. Sacred seats with Christian, Jewish or Islamic symbols would have evoked a much more vigorous outcry."[7] Identified as a religious "symbol" similar to if not the same as a temple icon, any depiction of the gods must be regarded as sacred.

For many Hindu organizations, both political and social, such misuse of images was seen as an outright attack against Hinduism. Pyarelal Khandelwal, the vice president of the BJP commented in 2000 (while the BJP was the ruling party of India): "It's disquieting news... a contemptible thing to be strongly condemned by all, deliberately denigrating Hindu gods, knowing that they are held sacred by Hindus all over the world, is totally against the resolution passed by the United Nations General Assembly acknowledging the equality of all religions."[8] Also in India, members of the RSS and Shiv Sena saw the marketing of the toilet seats as hurtful and blatant evidence of prejudice against Hinduism. RSS spokesman M G Vaidya said: "It has hurt Hindu

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apology, after a protest launched by the Hindu community, stating "We have unfortunately not been sufficiently attentive to this picture and its symbolism and meaning for a lot of people".

[7] http://hinduism.about.com/library/weekly/aal11900c.htm

[8] http://hinduism.about.com/library/weekly/aal11900c.htm

feelings," and Shiv Sena leader Bhagwan Goyal called the products an "attempt to denigrate and humiliate Hindus". [9]

This movement for the protection of Hindu symbols is an example of the manner in which contemporary Hindu nationalist forces, especially in the last two decades, have engaged in political mobilization by means of religious texts, symbols, divine figures, and devotional feelings" (Hess, 1994, 175). This strategy is particularly evident in the case of the Hindu God Rāma. On December 6th, 1992 Hindu militants destroyed the Babri Masjid, a sixteenth century mosque. According to Paola Bacchetta, the militants had been incited by speeches given by two prominent female members of the BJP. The speeches "claimed that the mosque was a sign of Hindu humiliation by Muslim invaders and Hindu male failure to protect the Hindu nationalist motherland. They argued that the Muslim invader Emperor Babur had built the mosque on the ruins of a temple marking the birthplace of the god Rama, hero of the Hindu epic Ramayana" (2000, 256). [10] Here we see the trope of Hindu humiliation being invoked – humiliation at the hands of foreign invaders, this time the Muslims.

On June 12th, 2005 a thousand Hindus gathered in front of the French Embassy in London, chanting "Jai Shri Ram" (victory to Lord Rama), to protest the imaging of Lord Rama on shoes manufactured by Minelli (See Image 6.2). Sheila Maharaja, the spokesperson for the Hindu Human Rights group stated: "Bathed in the afternoon sun, Hindus from all walks of life joined us in a growing Hindu awakening to make it known that we will no longer stand for defamation of our sacred Lord Rama and the persecution

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[9] http://hinduism.about.com/library/weekly/aa111900c.htm
[10] Historians such as Romila Thapar have pointed out that there is no evidence to support this claim.

of Hindus anywhere in the world." [11] Echoing the rhetoric of the swadeshi movement,

Ramesh Kallidai, Secretary General for the Hindu Forum of Britain commented: "The

rally was a huge success and demonstrated the genuine concern Hindus in Britain and

elsewhere have had about the misuse and abuse of Hindu icons as well as the growing

intolerance in France. This is the main reason the Hindu Forum of Britain has urged all

Hindus to boycott French goods and stop flying Air France."[12] After three and a half

weeks and the series of protests, Minelli withdrew the Lord Rāma shoes from stores,

issuing a statement (not an apology) acknowledging that "great numbers of protestations"

had been carried out "by the Hindu community"[13] In response to the statement Ramesh

Kallidai established the guidelines for appropriate placement of Hindu images saying:

"It's okay to use Hindu images on bags, home decoration pieces and so on, but not on

tissue paper, toilet seats, shoes and underwear." [14] This protest and the ensuing results

established new procedures for the use of Hindu imagery in contemporary society. Like

the *paddhatis*, Āgamas, and *śāstras* of earlier times, the discourse of protest is

establishing new definitions and injunctions relating to the Hindu image – and even

creating new rituals.

What was to be done with the shoes adorned with images of Lord Rāma? In a

statement issued on June 11, 2005, the Hindu Human Rights (HHR) organization

demanded to know what the shoe manufacturer Minelli planned on doing with the shoes

they had withdrawn from sale. HHR writes: "As you probably do not know, Hindus

consider it a great taboo to destroy images of divinity. Hence the way to dispose of these

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[11] http://www.hinduforum.org
[12] http://www.hinduforum.org
[13] http://timesofIndia.indiatimes.com/articlesshow/msid-1138991
[14] http://timesofIndia.indiatimes.com/articlesshow/msid-1138991

shoes adorned with our sacred images is of special interest to us and should be done with full Hindu rites." [15] Questions arise as to what the appropriate "Hindu rites" would entail, and where the textual or liturgical sanction for such rites might be located. In a press release issued on January 5th 2006 by HHR it was announced that a solution to the problem of the proper disposal of the Rāma images had been found: "Most of the remains of the images have now been immersed into the River Ganga at Rishikesh with the appropriate Hindu rituals and ceremonies performed. Some of the remains are still in India and will also be immersed both into the Ganga in Haridwar and finally into the River Saryu in Ayodhya, the sacred birthplace and kingdom of Lord Rama."[16] (See figure 6.3), It is still unclear what the "appropriate Hindu rituals and ceremonies" actually are. According to another press release, the images were peeled off the shoes while reciting "Jai Shri Rama" and were immersed in the Ganges while *ślokas* dedicated to Lord Rāma were chanted. [17] The social life of these Hindu images -- emblazoned on Western commodities -- does not end with the removal of these products from the market. Rather, this movement onto and off of the market generates other trajectories, interpretations and rituals initiated by groups like AHAD, and Hindu Human Rights. In an attempt to re-situate Hindu images within what they consider to be legitimate and authentic Hindu circuits, striving to fabricate an unbroken chain to a perceived unadulterated originary divine reality, they in fact are creating another phase in the social, religious and political life of Hindu imagery.

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[15] http://press.arrivenet.com/ent/article.php/652191.html
[16] http://rajeev2004.blogspot.com/2006/01/from-mailbox-hhr-press-release-5-jan.html
[17] http://www.hinduismtoday.com/archives/2006/1-3/06-08_diaspora.shtml

6.3: The Form of Function or the Function of Form

As demonstrated in the previous chapters, in various temporal periods and geographical locations, images serve a multitude of purposes – functioning politically, socially and religiously. But as is evidenced throughout my dissertation the actual tangible image is constructed through discourse; it is the commentary that imbues the Hindu image with meaning and function, whether through theological writings, poems, fiction or polemical and political narratives. Implicit within these discursive practices is the mandate for 'interpreters' to continually negotiate, establish and create regimes of truth. Therefore to represent Hindu imagery solely within a carefully circumscribed and purely religious context would be to disregard the complex history and relationship between humans and the divine image. As seen throughout the various chapters, the God/Goddess image has transformed from *mūrti*, to idol (in a pejorative sense), to a work of art and political symbol. These various conceptualizations do not necessarily negate one another. For instance, it is possible for the God image to serve both political and religious ends, and it is this combination of interpretations, the merging of formations, that becomes particularly important in contemporary times.

"Visual signs and images, even when they bear a close resemblance to the things to which they refer," writes Stuart Hall, "are still signs: they carry meaning and thus have to be interpreted" (2003,19). Interpretation becomes a function of learning meaning – interpreting, in this case, the discourse that has constructed the image. In Chapter one it was shown how physical depictions of Hindu gods and goddesses operate as primary sites of interaction between the divine and human realms, functioning as either a referent for concentration or meditation (as a vessel for divine energy) or as the literal

embodiment of the divine. It is the Āgamic literature – and more specifically the

paddhatis – together with the hymns of the Bhakti poets, and the writings of the Śaiva

masters and Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas that established the form and function of the Hindu

icon. Orientalist and missionary writings, as discussed in chapter two, interpreted the

existence of Hindu images as proof that Hinduism was in a state of decay. It is

particularly through missionary narrative that the Hindu image was constructed as an

"idol," and identified as the cause of all the ills of Indian society. While Rammohun

Roy, as we saw in chapter 3, conceded that the worship of the Hindu image is a lower

form of worship, and that popular devotional practice was a corrupt form of Hinduism, he

was insistent that the answer was not to be found in conversion to Christianity, but rather

a return to the Vedas. In his arguments he was building upon the narratives of both

Hindu philosophers such as Śaṅkara (who discussed a two tiered system of worship) and

the Orientalists(who posited a lost Golden Age). In chapter 4, we traced the movement

of Hindu images to Britain and America. While in some cases, the actual image may

have travelled, it is more critically the discourse, that eventually transformed the Hindu

image from "idol" to art – for example through the narrative of display at world fairs and

museums. Concurrently, the spiritual significance of Hinduism was extolled by

Vivekananda, who refuse to denigrate the idol and instead asserted that all religions

require idols as a means of reaching the formless God. Chapter 5 brings us into the

political phase of Hindu imagery. It is here that we can perhaps most easily see how

discourse gives the image its form and function: Kālī was both religious and political.

And again we see how discourse is citationary in nature: not only do we see the Bengali

nationalists drawing from Hindu mythology and contemporary works of fiction, but also

re-signifying the negative valuations placed upon Kālī by Protestant missionaries and the British government of India. The goddess' capacity to incite violence and demand sacrifice becomes a positive tool for mobilization against British rule. The use of Hindu scriptures and symbols for political purposes do not empty them of their religious significance. In fact it is precisely the association with the sacred that gives the symbol its political power.

The actual material object may exist as an iconic sign, but it is the discourse both historical and contemporary that functions as a system of representation and conveys meaning. This becomes clear when examining the contemporary examples, where the Hindu image becomes representative of not just the Hindu religion, but the Hindu 'peoples'. The protests launched by Hindus against the use of god/goddess imagery on certain products are predicated upon how the Hindu image has been interpreted over the last two hundred years. Arguably, it is less about the actual image and more about its discursive placement. At various moments in history and in different geographical locations, the Hindu image has been signified and re-signified – by Hindus and others. It is through those continual significations that meaning is established: the form the image takes is dependent upon these competing interpretations.

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Figure 1.1: Sadasiva – Mahadeva

1. Elephanta, Maharashtra. Cave no. 1 (great cave), Sadāśiva-Mahādeva image, ca. sixth century A.D. *(Photo: P. C. Patel)*

Source : Meister. Michael W. (ed) 1984. *Discourses on Siva: Proceedings of Symposium on the Nature of Religious Imagery*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
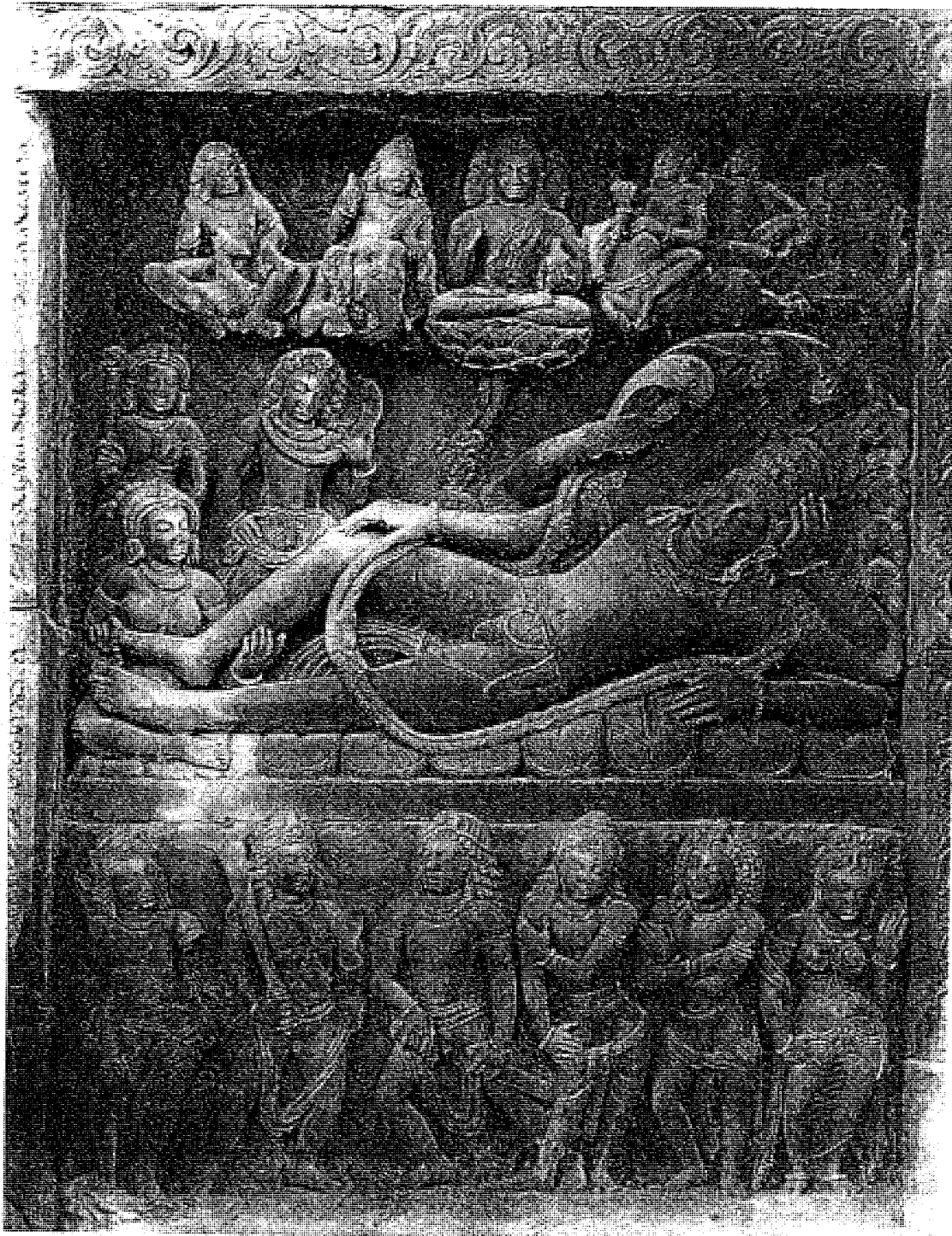
Figure 1.2: Linga
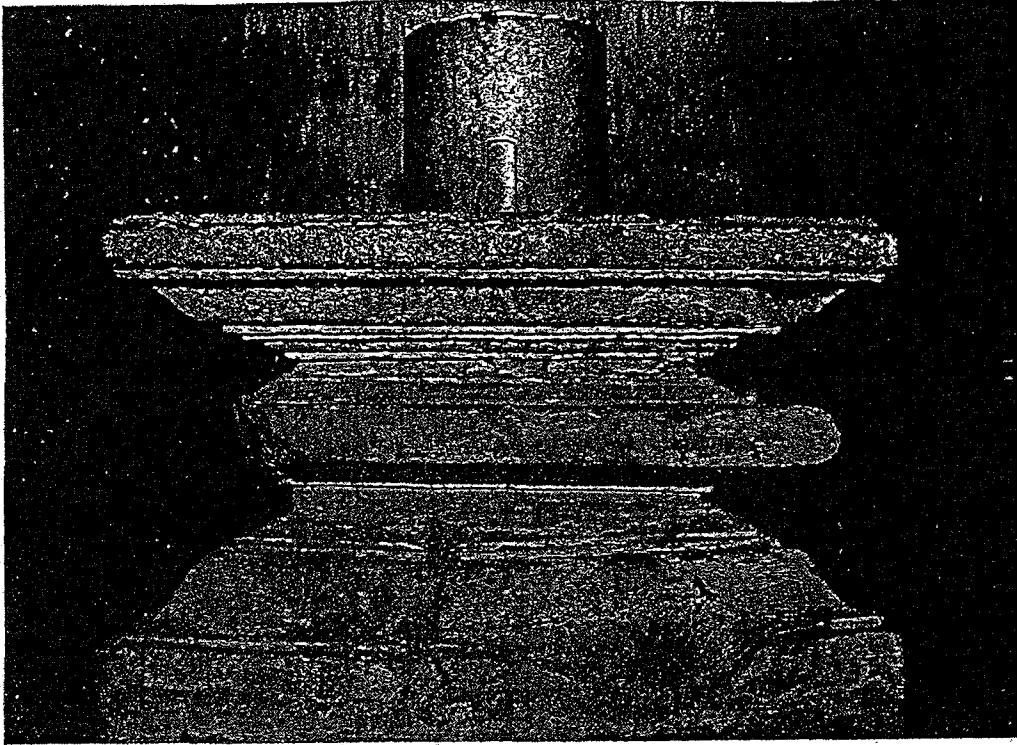
11. Khajuraho, Kandariyā Mahādeva Temple, *liṅga* in the sanctum, ca. A.D. 1125–50. *(Courtesy: Archaeological Survey of India)*

Source: Meister. Michael W. (ed) 1984. *Discourses on Siva: Proceedings of Symposium on the Nature of Religious Imagery.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Figure 1.3: Anantasesa

Vishnu Ananatasayin @ Deogarh in Madya Pradesh- 6th C. South Wall (sandstone)-
Dashavatara temple

Figure 1.4: Salagrama
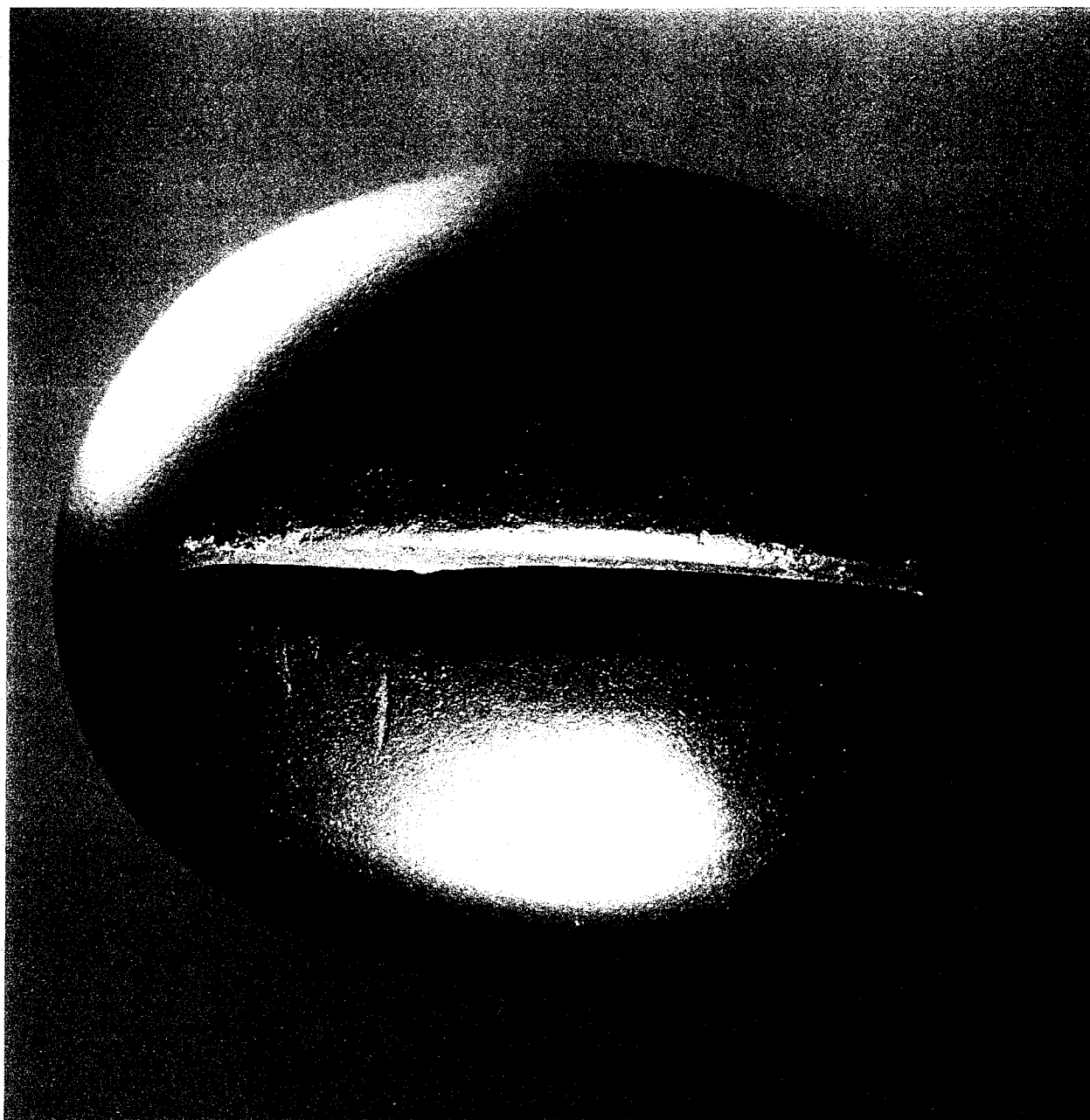
Salagrama, symbol of Visnu Banaras. (Mookerjee 26)

Figure 1.5: Lingodbhava

Lingobhavamurti-Tamil Nadu- Cola Period; c.900
Source: Blurton, Richard T. 1993. *Hindu Art*, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press

Figure 5.1: Chinnamasta

Fig. 22. Chinnamastā, contemporary lithograph.

Source : Kingsley, David R. 1997. *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahavidyas.* Berkley and LA: University of California Press.

Figure 5.2: Kali – Cigarette Ad

এ. এচ. জহরের অভিবাদন সহ প্রীতি উপহার।

KALI CIGARETTES. "মহাদেবপদ্ম বায়ম মুক্তকেশি চতুর্ভুজা।" KALI কালী সিগারেট।

Made by the East India Cigarette Manufacturing Co. CALCUTTA.

90 Calcutta Art Studio chromolithograph of Kali, collected by B. A. Gupte in Dalhousie Square, Calcutta, in December 1908
The advertising messages around the image urge Indians to buy Kali cigarettes 'to look after the interests of this country's poor and humble workers'.

Source : Pinney, Christopher. 2004. *Photos of the Gods: the Printed Image and Political Struggle in India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
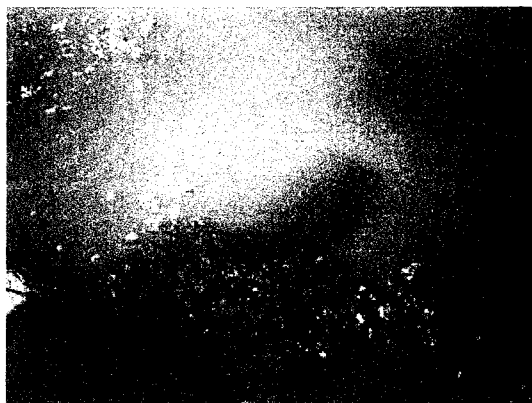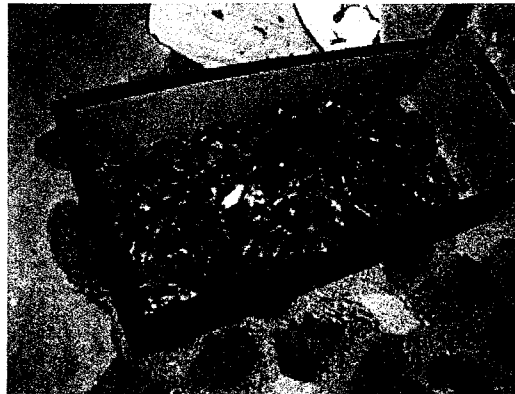
Figure 6.1: Kali and Ganesh Toilet Seats

Source: http://hinduism.about.com/library/weekly/extra/bl-toilet.htm
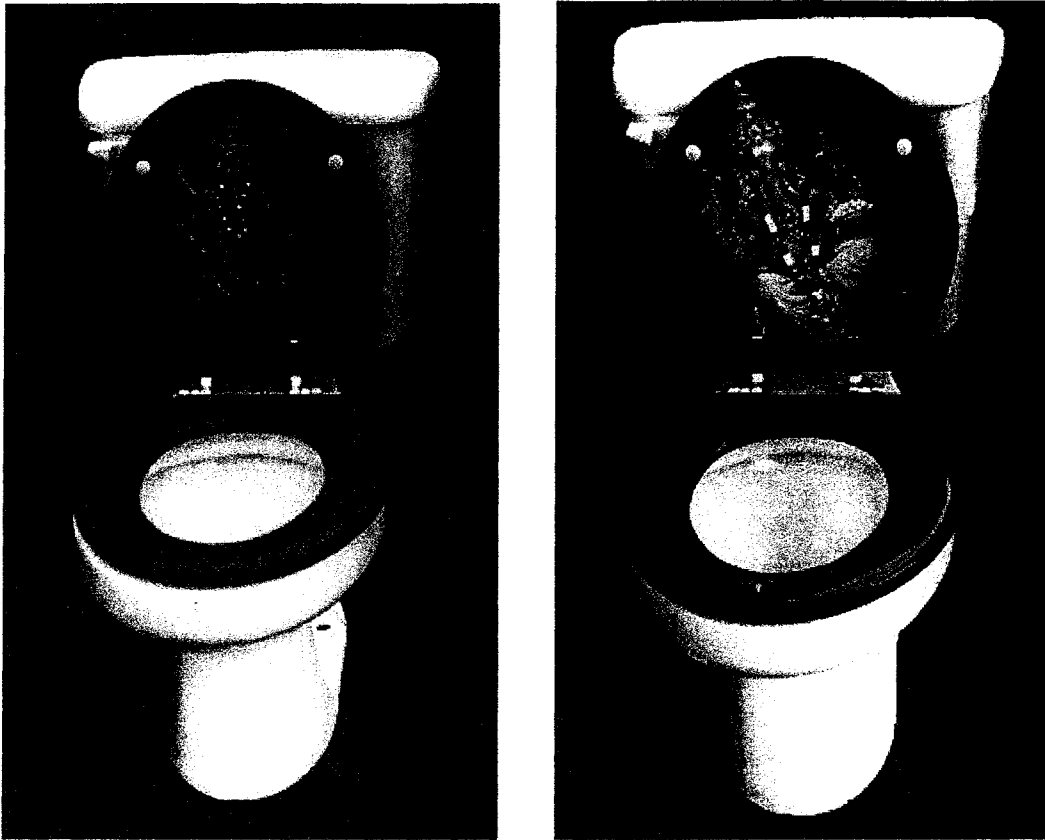
Figure 6.2: Minelli Rama Shoes

Source: http://www.hinduhumanrights.org/Gallery/Gallery2b.html

Figure 6.3: Ritual Shoe Disposal

Source: http://www.hinduhumanrights.org/Gallery/Gallery2b.html