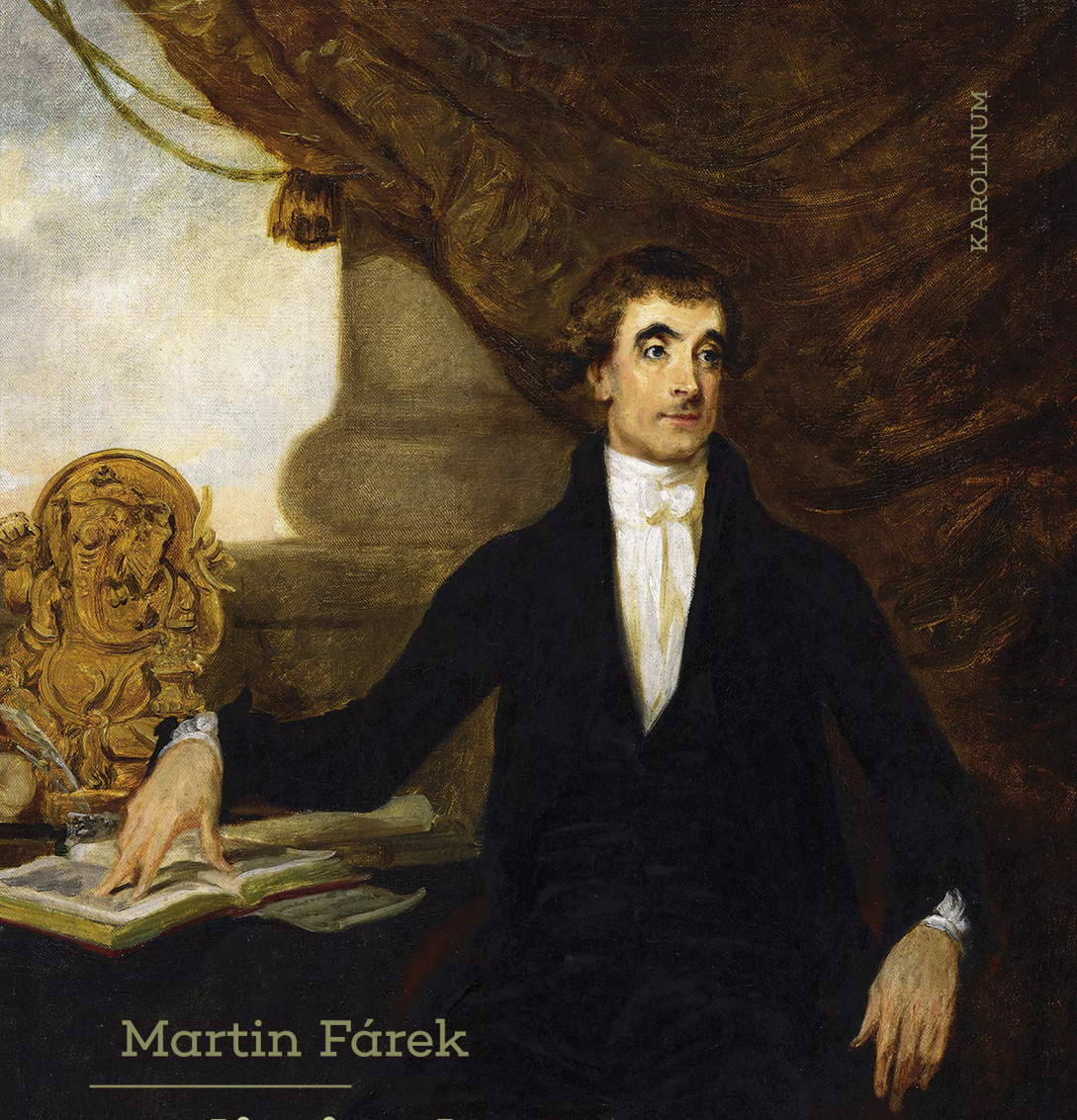

KAROLINUM

Martin Fárek

India in the Eyes of Europeans

Conceptualization of Religion in Theology and Oriental Studies

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I express my appreciation to my new friends and colleagues at the Technical University of Liberec for their support and understanding during the period of my final work on this book. You are a great team and I am happy to be able to work with you. And finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Eva, the woman of my life, to our children, parents, and the whole family. Without your support, this book would simply not have materialized.

Martin Fárek, Liberec, June 2021

A Note on the Transliteration of Indian Words and on the Translation from Czech

To make the text more accessible to a wider audience, Indian words in this book have been anglicised, following a common usage in this kind of academic literature. The closest English equivalent is given upon a word's first occurrence. Full transliterations with diacritical marks are listed in the index. Anglicised words that have been in common use for a very long time are an exception, and although their transliteration does not come as close to the Indian original as possible, they became more usual than their linguistically desired closer transliterations; e.g., it would be more accurate to write "Brahmans," but the colonial "Brahmins" has been commonly used for a very long time. Indian names have also been anglicised according to the common use and I think there is no need to give transliterations for them. Because of the research focus, there are numerous translations from the Czech original texts in this book. It was ongoing effort of the author to assure that the translations give precise meaning of the original Czech paragraphs or sentences.

Introduction

How Do Europeans Approach the Otherness of Indian Traditions?

Is this hymn possibly a memory of the pre-Vedic religion, when God the strict, the powerful, the just, ruled people who had not dispersed all over Asia yet? . . . If it is so, then the peak of Indian religion is to be found in prehistory, and everything that followed, the Vedas, Brahmanism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, was only a journey down the hill.
(Emanuel Rádl, *The West and the East*)

The fascination with India has been a remarkable and long-lasting phenomenon all over Europe, including the Czech Republic, my homeland. European scholarship dealing with India represents an immense library that encompasses the results of research in many disciplines: linguistics, history, religion, ethnography and anthropology, art history, philosophy, politics, economics, and others. Even a nation as small in number as we are, we can pride ourselves on a relatively great number of scholars who devoted their work to the Indian subcontinent and who still continue to do so. There is a considerable amount of books, articles, and other resources on the topic. Czech Indologists, for example Dušan Zbavitel, Kamil Zvelebil, Vladimír Miltner, Hana Preinhaelterová, and others, have won acclaim among Western as well as Indian scholars. It would appear that we have excellent knowledge of India's history, culture, religions, and its many languages. However, is that really the case?

What kind of knowledge does Indology and other related disciplines actually offer as branches of Oriental studies? Over the last forty years, the very nature of Oriental studies has become the subject of critique, which shook the foundations of some seemingly self-evident findings and truths. Several influential scholars have paused to reflect and asked themselves: How have Europeans actually understood the thought and behaviour of Indian people? And how have they approached the otherness of Indian culture?[1] Searching for answers, these scholars have pointed out problems in intercultural understanding that is hampered by the creation of deformed images of another culture.[2]

A very important question arises: How to proceed in intercultural research? This is the question that I am going to ask myself, arguing that we are still trapped by our cultural limitations despite the impressive efforts of several generations of European scholars. Whilst travelling in India, studying and taking part in discussions abroad and at home, I have become increasingly surprised by how the specifically European treatment of the Indian culture's radical differences precludes their perception. I intend to argue that understanding and perception of this culture is overwritten with our own story. We take it for granted that people in India developed basically the same understanding of themselves and the world as we did. A significant factor in the failure to comprehend the otherness of India is the European treatment of religion. Conceptualisation of Indian traditions as "religion" caused numerous problems which will be the main subject of my analysis. By discussing the selected topics, I hope to point to a solution leading to intercultural understanding as an alternative to what is commonly followed not only in the Czech context, but also in other countries.[3]

What experience and reflections bring me to analyse the conceptualisation of religion in the Orientalist discourse? It was on the pages of

1 See for example S. N. Mukherjee, *Sir William Jones: A Study in the Eighteenth Century British Attitudes to India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968); P. J. Marshall, *The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

2 See especially S. N. Balagangadhara, *"The Heathen in His Blindness…": Asia, the West and the Dynamic of Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

3 Some of the problems with the religious perspective of European research and its influence on the ideas of non-believers has been hinted in analyses of travelogues written by people from different European nations. See, for example, Róbert Gáfrik, "Representations of India in Slovak Travel Writing during the Communist Regime (1948–1989)," in *Postcolonial Europe? Essays on Post-Communist Literatures and Cultures*, ed. Dobrota Pucherová and Róbert Gáfrik (Leiden and Boston: Brill Rodopi 2015), 283–298.

the books written by Vladimír Miltner, Dušan Zbavitel, Miroslav Krása, and Milada Bartoňová that I first encountered Indian traditions. Ever since 1994, I have had a number of experiences on my trips to India that made me doubt the explanations that I have read since I began my studies of Western Orientalist work. Most European authors would maintain that in order to become a Hindu, one has to be born a Hindu. Yet, I have witnessed inhabitants of several regions of India respecting foreigners who practised one of the various local traditions. Moreover, some Indians would accept *diksha* from these Europeans or Americans, a ritual initiation into traditional Indian practices such as mantra recitation, visualisation, etc. Hinduism is said to be a religion unifying most of India's inhabitants, but I have observed a great number of often very different traditions. Concepts such as *religion*, *faith*, or *confession* have proved to be particularly confusing in India. It is true that these and similar words are used in everyday parlance in Indian English. However, if you engage in extended conversation with Indians, you will find that the so-called Hindus have no common faith. Furthermore, they have difficulties understanding what this concept actually means in Europe. Indologists have claimed that Buddhist and Jain traditions were a revolt against the Brahmins and their ritualism. I have talked to Jain Brahmins in Shravanabelagola, who maintain a large number of rituals that bear a considerable resemblance to those of "Hinduism," including names and characters of "Hindu" deities.[4]

During my first substantial research, I found that since the arrival of Christian missionaries in India European literature exhibits a notable continuity of topics, questions, and explanations. It became clear that many Western interpretations of Indian traditions originate in the works of Protestant missionaries from the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. Whatever the differences were between the stances of the first British Orientalists such as William Jones or Henry T. Colebrooke, and those adopted by the so-called Anglicists, these two groups still shared some fundamental views of Indian society and religion. Surprisingly, despite increasing secularisation of humanities, they in one way or another

4 Similarly, there are also Buddhist Brahmins, see for example Christiaan Hooykaas, *Balinese Bauddha Brahmins* (Amsterdam: North Holland, 1973). If Western scholars explain the existence of Buddhist or Jain Brahmins by reference to syncretism, they ought to clarify what has changed so fundamentally in Buddhist and Jain lore that these supposed criticisms or even revolts against the Brahmins have given rise to traditions that have their own Brahmins. The question of whether the ascetic movements reacted against Brahmin orthodoxy will be dealt with in the first chapter.

retained many of the original Christian ideas which are in use even today. Those include differentiating the "moral" Krishna of the *Bhagavadgita* from the "immoral" Krishna of the *Puranas* and subsequent traditions, or the search for parallels between the New Testament theology and the Indian understanding of the *Bhagavadgita*.[5] However, I was mistaken in presuming that the secularisation of humanities had by itself emancipated scholars to achieve a deeper understanding of Indian traditions.[6] I attributed some problematic assertions solely to colonial ideology. It was only later that I would encounter theoretically more plausible and useful explanations. I have gradually come to realise that the results of Western scholarship tend to ignore the groundwork on which the whole structure rests. Our generation can hardly catch sight of the basis that supports the framework of dominant explanations of India.

Paradigms and Theories in the Study of Indian Culture

Before tackling the problem of European understanding of Indian traditions, I shall briefly describe my basic theoretical approach as well as explain a few terms, starting with *Indian traditions*. Subsequently, the current scholarly discussion will be presented as a meeting point of arguments developed in the Oriental and postcolonial studies and in the newly conceived comparative study of cultures. Finally, I will present an outline of particular problems in the order in which I will further elaborate on them in their respective chapters.

It is, above all, the post-war development of philosophy, or theory, of science that has provided significant insights into the process of generating, establishing, and refuting scientific theories.[7] The image of science

5 See, for example, David Haberman, "Divine Betrayal: Krishna-Gopal of Braj in the Eyes of Outsiders," *Journal of Vaisnava Studies* 3, no. 1 (1994): 83–111, and Vincent Pořízka, *Opera Minora: Studies in the Bhagavadgita and New Indo-Aryan languages*, ed. Jaroslav Strnad (Prague: Oriental Institute, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, 2000).

6 See Martin Fárek, *Haré Kršna v západním světě: Setkání dvou myšlenkových tradic* [Hare Krishna in the western world: Meetings of two traditions of thought] (Pardubice: Univerzita Pardubice, 2004). The choice of the title was unfortunate as it seems to suggest that the book focuses on the Hare Krishna movement, whereas it actually deals with the historical typology of Western, especially Anglo-Saxon, scholars' approach to the Chaitanya tradition. Nevertheless, the typology provides a general picture of the Western approach to the "Hindu" traditions.

7 Thomas Samuel Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970); Imre Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes,"

as a process of accumulating factual knowledge which is only elaborated or improved on by new theories, has been called into question. It was in particular T. S. Kuhn and I. Lakatos who have developed an important criticism in this respect. The first of the famous philosophers of science points out that scientific knowledge is developed as a process of establishing paradigms and elaborating on them before finally abandoning them for new ones. He describes this process as a repetitive cycle of three stages: normal science–crisis–scientific revolution. Kuhn's claim that there is usually one paradigm within a given scientific discipline has been criticised by many. Lakotos was apparently the first to develop the idea that individual scientific disciplines actually comprise of several paradigms that co-exist and compete with each other. Instead of paradigms, Lakatos speaks of research programmes. Despite Lakatos' pronounced criticism of Kuhn's analyses, both thinkers arrive at an important conclusion that rejects the previous model of science as cumulative knowledge. Rather than just individual theories, science involves the competition of whole paradigms, or research programmes, that determine the starting points of their many theories.

Another topic is the relationship among theory, observation, and facts. European sciences have long relied on the assumption that there are empirically proven, and therefore neutral facts that, in theory, can be generalised by means of induction. At the root of this was another assumption, namely, that individual facts have a certain basic atomic nature that makes them unrelated to each other. They only become related to each other via theory.[8] This conviction has been called into serious doubt, starting from the Duhem-Quine thesis on the indeterminacy of theories by empirical data, to Popper's discard of the empirical basis of science, referring to the theoretical nature of data (the so-called bold hypothesis), to Kuhn's argument concerning the central role of paradigm in acquiring data and construing reality, to Feyerabend's radical thesis regarding the parasitic nature of observation. This critique gave rise to the currently largely accepted view that facts, or data, arrived at by observation are fundamentally determined by theories:

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in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, ed. Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 91–196; Peter Godfrey-Smith, *Theory and Reality: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003); Břetislav Fajkus, *Filosofie a metodologie vědy: Vývoj, současnost a perspektivy* [The philosophy and methodology of science: Development, current situation and the perspectives] (Prague: Academia, 2005).

8 Břetislav Fajkus, *Současná filosofie a metodologie vědy* [Contemporary philosophy and methodology of science] (Prague: Filosofia, 1997), 22.

> The main role of theory is in determining (1) what can be measured or otherwise observed, especially in terms of data, (2) what data are relevant, (3) how are crude data processed, (4) how are they interpreted, and (5) how the interpreted data are used legitimately in constructing and confirming theories, etc.[9]

Another insight developed out of a debate concerning the ways of confirming or refuting theories: Popper argues against the assumption that theories can be validated by the frequency of observations. He points out that some hypotheses have been accepted as a consequence of a single observation. By logical inference, he concludes that the verification of theories by observation poses considerable problems and postulates his famous criterion of falsifiability. To put it simply, theories ought to be able to predict a particular phenomenon and if the phenomenon is not observed under stated circumstances, the theory is therefore falsified. However, Popper also argues that observing the predicted phenomenon does not amount to verification of the theory. Supposedly, it only means that the theory has not been falsified. Although the last pronouncement is open to many objections, Popper's contribution is considered important inasmuch as any truly scientific theory must be falsifiable, and consequently at risk of being refuted. This criterion was later emphasised by Laudan.[10] If a thesis does not fulfil this condition, then it is highly probable that it is pseudoscientific.[11]

I find all of these three findings—the existence of competing paradigms (and not just theories), the dependence of data and their evaluation on theories, and the falsifiability criterion—crucial to my further argument. Shortly, I will summarise three different theoretical approaches to the study of Indian traditions. I consider them to be competing paradigms, or research programmes. Every programme is characterised by a specific constellation of theories, rooted in its basic axioms. Each has its strong points as well as less sufficiently developed arguments and unresolved problems. This constellation will be called *a metastructure of ideas*, made up of several rival or just co-existing theories.

In order to avoid any misunderstanding, I will clarify a few terms that will be used in this book. The term *Western* is used as equivalent to

9 Fajkus, *Současná filosofie a metodologie vědy*, 132–133.

10 Larry Laudan, *Science and Relativism: Some Key Controversies in the Philosophy of Science* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1990).

11 Godfrey-Smith, *Theory and Reality*, 57–74.

Euro-American, because the development of disciplines relating to India in the US and in Canada has been derived from the European research, and it is still linked to the corresponding scholarship in Europe. The term *Indian traditions* refers to the traditions that had developed in South Asia before the invasion of various conquerors under the flag of Islam since the 10th century. It also includes these traditions that have been preserved in India during the Muslim ascendancy, developing in the various Sultanates, later under British colonial rule, and now in the independent Republic of India, alongside the increasing number of Muslims. This is not to say that these autochthonous traditions have not been influenced by Islam at all, for there is enough evidence that the opposite was true in many cases.[12] The mutual influence of the "Hindus" and Muslims on the Subcontinent in itself represents a vast field of research and it will not be discussed here.[13] On the other hand, many Indologists and anthropologists will attest that the so-called Hindu, Buddhist, and other communities have lived and continue to do so in accordance with their own rituals and festivals. They cultivate their own intellectual traditions and pass on their own stories of the past that are fundamentally different from those of Muslim communities. Research into the long-term continuity of autochthonous Indian traditions is therefore justified. I use the singular form of *Christian thought* and *Christian theology* intentionally, with an awareness of the varying dogmas, changes in interpretation, and other differences among the theologies of particular denominations. All these streams of thought share a number of basic themes that become more visible when compared to as different a culture as the one represented by Indian traditions, which sufficiently justifies the use of this umbrella term. If need be, a more precise differentiation between particular Christian ideas will be applied in specific points of argument.

The first paradigm are the Oriental studies, in which theories of various disciplines of humanities meet and interact. With regard to India, linguistics has for a long time been given unequivocal primacy due to the ground-break-

12 For example, in the poems of North Indian Sants or in the teaching of Nanak, the founder of Sikhism.

13 Those who are interested in this matter can consult, for example: Richard Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1993); Dušan Deák, *Indický svätci medzi minulosťou a prítomnosťou: Hladanie hinduistov a muslimov v Južnej Ázii* [Indian sages between the past and present: On searching for Hindus and Muslims in South Asia] (Trnava: Univerzita Sv. Cyrila a Metoda, 2010).

ing discovery of the Indo-European language family. In Popper's terms, this success was the exemplum of the whole paradigm, initiating, as it is well known, the fundamental development of Western comparative linguistics. However, 19th century Orientalists such as Horace H. Wilson, Eugène Burnouf, Friedrich Max Müller, and many others, were also involved in the study of religion, instigating the birth of religious studies. Among intellectuals dealing with India, we can find historians such as Mountstuart Elphinstone and Vincent Arthur Smith, anthropologists such as H. H. Risley who examined Indian traditions in the perspective of nascent physical anthropology, and many others. Since these disciplines were not as specialised and separate as they are today, it is reasonable to examine Indian traditions in a wider range of fields. Other influential thinkers who drew on Orientalists' work must also be taken into account. India featured in the works of philosophers such as Voltaire, Friedrich von Schlegel, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and others. Topics related to India were touched upon by Marx and Engels. Indian religions were discussed by Max Weber. Indeed, it would be possible to extend this list of both significant and less prominent personalities almost ad infinitum. The purpose of this introduction is not to give an account of Western intellectuals who have dealt with India, nor to outline the topics that they worked on. Instead, the characteristics and certain problems of specific paradigms will be addressed.

An important feature of European Oriental studies is the still predominantly accepted cumulative model of science and the use of induction and deduction. A linguistic competence, ideally, knowledge of Sanskrit and at least of one modern Indian language, is considered to be the main qualification for research, and a warrant of great authority for the Orientalists. Literature and poetry have been frequent fields of research. Translations of both the older and modern Indian texts and articles regarding linguistic topics have formed a huge part, if not the majority, of their publications. If someone from a different field deals with matters pertaining to India, they tend to rely on Orientalist scholarship. As for the Czech Indologist production, it includes translations from both the older and modern Indian literature, historiographical works, and more recently, a number of engaging anthropological and religious studies. After the Velvet Revolution of 1989, our leading Indologists claimed that their goal was:

> to continue to eradicate the remains of some habitual opinions, such as applying European criteria to the reality of India, or using European con-

ceptual categories in relation to the 'Orient' which has always formed the basis of simplifying and often confusing Eurocentric clichés.[14]

It is therefore surprising how few of our scholars reflect upon some important debates that have occurred globally. It will be argued that the majority of our scholarly output actually remains entrenched in the European categories of thinking, both in general framework and in respect to specific questions. It will be showed that the basic structure of seemingly modern interpretations is, in fact, very old; although many theses were formulated in the 19th century and even later, their origins are significantly older. It will also be argued that if we really are to see beyond the horizon delimited by European categories and to achieve better understanding of another culture, we must obtain a better understanding of our limitations first. In other words, in order to cross the horizon of our cultural confines, it is necessary to first realise that there is one.

Those "habitual opinions" will be the core subject of my discussion, the aim of which is not to eradicate them, but rather to investigate the role they have been playing in the meeting of cultures. These opinions and problematic categories of thinking will be analysed with the arguments of a new theory in comparative study of cultures. My goal does not consist of deconstructing either Hinduism or Buddhism.[15] If individuals of various European nations and groups appear to give practically the same account of Indian traditions, irrespective of their particular beliefs or philosophical stances, one can conceive of a new type of research. While the research approach envisioned here can open up new insights into our own intellectual tradition, it can also inform the people of India as to why and how their own traditions have been explained by foreigners. Postcolonial critique has shown that Indian people have adopted and still are frequently adopting the Western view of their culture.

In *Indie a Indové*, our Indologists aver that they are going to present the outcomes of the most recent research, "emphasising what has been newly discovered and methodologically re-evaluated."[16] However, this has happened to a small extent only. Moreover, this promise has arguably not been fulfilled in the more recent works either. Currently, there are, at least in the Czech context, another two paradigms that

14 Miroslav Krása, Dagmar Marková, and Dušan Zbavitel, *Indie a Indové: Od dávnověku k dnešku* [India and the Indians: From the ancient times till today] (Prague: Vyšehrad, 1997).

15 This is how several colleagues understood my objections in personal discussions.

16 Krása, Marková and Zbavitel, *Indie a Indové*, 16.

are scarcely known or reflected upon in relation to the study of Indian traditions. Be that as it may, the last three decades have seen new trends forming into fairly well-defined research programmes dealing with not only Indian traditions, getting involved plenty of scholars in Europe, America, India, and elsewhere. What is also important is that by making a conscientious effort towards a broad theoretical evaluation of the accomplishments and shortcomings of both research programmes, these scholars build a meta-theoretical framework of research. Historically speaking, this is related primarily to the rich output of the postcolonial critique initiated, above all, by the works of Edward Said. Postcolonial critique explains the genesis of concepts such as Hinduism, and to some extent Buddhism, as constructs of colonial science, which are portrayed as results negotiated between the rulers and the ruled. The theological basis of European interpretations of Indian traditions is analysed in the research programme of comparative science of cultures pioneered by the Indo-Belgian scholar S. N. Balagangadhara. Let me present a concise overview of the arguments used in these approaches, focusing primarily on what is relevant to the European treatment of Indian traditions as religion.

Instigated by Said's *Orientalism*, postcolonial critique now enjoys considerable popularity. This paradigm has launched an open critique of Orientalist disciplines, questioning the objectivity of their theories and practise. Theoretically speaking, the postcolonial paradigm is heavily influenced by the philosophical stance generally called Postmodernism, which results in the rather unsatisfactory nature of Said's argumentation. Said's work is undoubtedly stimulating and I will defend the fruitfulness of some of his insights later. However, it is difficult to put up with the quite a chaotic way of his writing which makes it difficult to understand his ideas and to follow their continuity. His work, primarily, consists of intuitive statements connected with empirical examples serving as an evidence material. Said's analysis is largely determined by his academic subject—literary studies. The main concern of this paradigm consists in examining the political bias of Orientalism.

Although Said's critique is predominantly linked to the Western interpretations of Islam and the countries where this religion prevails, he also studied the formation of Western representations of Indian and other traditions. Inspired by the Foucaultian and Marxist thought, his critique of Orientalism pinpointed several fundamental problems in the Western study of Asian and partly of African cultures as well. They all construe the Orient as "different to Europe." It is difficult to justify the

presumed unity of both larger and smaller cultures that can be found in the geographical area subsumed in the term Orient. The European construct of Oriental "otherness" was built on the erroneous supposition of a generally widespread character of the "Orientals," although there are fundamental differences between the cultures of a Palestinian Arab, a Carnatic Indian and a Japanese inhabitant of Kyushu, to name only three random examples. No less doubtful is the belief in some unchangeable essence of these cultures. Said draws attention to academic Orientalism, "a manner of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between *the Orient* and (most of the time) *the Occident*."[17] Furthermore, he pointed out a liaison between the academics and the particular interests of the colonial powers and the latter 20th century great powers, describing Orientalism in short as "a Western way of dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."[18] He thus considered the relationship between the Oriental countries and the West an uneven one, a relationship between the ruled and the rulers. It is primarily in this light that the cumulative tradition of Orientalist science needs to be scrutinised.

The main problem of Orientalism is the creation of Western representations of the Orient, largely disjointed from the indigenous way of life and understanding, but firmly established in the academic discourse. In this respect, Orientalism has its own given structures, classical authors, and recognised methods. It has become "a system for citing works and authors."[19] The issue is that the rulers' interpretations were in the colonial period accepted by the emerging intellectual elites of the subjugated countries as a valid insight into their own culture. The political emancipation of the former colonies did not necessarily entail a change in the inherited explanations. As a result, decolonisation of humanities and social sciences is still a pressing issue in these countries.

As a professor of English literature, Said focused on analysing fiction and travelogues, which was presented especially in his *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). He threw doubt on the autonomy of fiction:

> . . . as I shall be trying to show throughout this book, the literature itself makes constant references to itself as somehow participating in Europe's

17 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (New York: Vintage Books 1979), 2.

18 Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

19 Said, *Orientalism*, 23.

overseas expansion, and therefore creates what Williams calls "structures of feeling" that support, elaborate, and consolidate the practice of empire.[20]

Let us return to the analysis of European scholarship. Rather unfairly, the popularity of Said's work overshadowed earlier works that outlined the same problems, albeit within a particular topic or discipline.[21] I would like to bring attention to the insights made by S. N. Mukherjee ten years before the publication of *Orientalism*:

> A comprehensive study of the British ideas and administrative policies must take into account the history of the development of Indian studies. It is often forgotten that all Oriental studies in the 18th century had a political slant, and all political pamphleteers writing on East Indian affairs based their theories of Indian politics on Oriental researches, or so they thought. In textbooks the history of Indian studies has been presented as a story of a series of discoveries by the British officers, who spent part of their leisure in revealing the history and culture of the country. The scholarly activities of the British administrators and the European missionaries and travellers (as most of the early Orientalists were) are presented in isolation, almost without reference to the society in which the Orientalists were born and to the British administration which they served (or to which, as in the case of some French scholars, they were actively hostile). *For a better understanding to the British response to Indian civilization we should study it within the context of the British and European economic system, social structure, and intellectual movements, and with reference to the problems of the British administration in India. Early Orientalists were not an isolated group. They were involved in the political conflicts of the time and their "theories" about Indian history and culture were influenced by their respective political positions and intellectual convictions* [emphasis added].[22]

The connection between Orientalist scholarship and Western politics and culture became the focus of a number of works that drew on Said's *Orientalism*, as well as texts written by Said himself.[23] The frequently

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20 Edward W. Said, *Culure and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 14.

21 The first analysis of Orientalism as the ideological basis of colonialism was probably carried out by Abdel Anwar Malek, "Orientalism in Crisis," *Diogenes* 44 (1963): 103–140.

22 Mukherjee, *Sir William Jones*, 2.

23 See the new foreword in the 25th anniversary edition of *Orientalism* in Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), xv–xxx.

cited and criticised authors include Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Talal Asad or Gauri Viswanathan. The Subaltern Studies Group founded by Ranajit Guha won acclaim in the study of Indian past, while postcolonial critique of Western ideas regarding the role of India's religion and Indian studies was taken up by authors such as Ronald Inden,[24] Richard King,[25] and Sharada Sugirtharajah.[26] Postcolonial studies have also had a significant influence on American anthropologists. McKim Marriot, for example, is well known for his critique of Western interpretations and for his efforts to explain the Indian reality in local terms:

> It is an anomalous fact that the social sciences used in India today have developed from thought about Western rather than Indian cultural realities. . . . Attending to what is perceived by Indians in Indian categories should at least promote a more perceptive Indian ethnography.[27]

Originally, Marriott was the inspiration for a project of ethnohistory highly influenced by Foucault's and Said's thoughts, which allowed anthropologists of the Chicago school to oppose Dumont's interpretation of the caste system.[28] Drawing on those insights, Nicholas Dirks advocated the thesis that *jatis*, sub-castes in their present form, developed from a specifically colonial organisation of the Indian society, rather than being directly inherited from ancient India.[29]

Said and other postcolonial scholars have been criticised for inadequate simplification, deficiency in historical knowledge, and also because they factually adopt the theories and methods of European humanities which are the subject of their critique. The major criticism came from scholars such as Ernest Gellner and Bernard Lewis. Amongst Indologists, the first to react was probably David Kopf. He refuted Said's critique as

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24 Inden, *Imagining India*.

25 Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and "the Mystic East"* (London: Routledge, 1999).

26 Sharada Sugirtharajah, *Imagining Hinduism: A Postcolonial Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2003).

27 McKim Marriot, "Constructing an Indian Ethnosociology," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 23, no. 1 (1989): 1.

28 For an overview of this debate see Saloni Mathur, "History and Anhropology in South Asia: Rethinking the Archive," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 29 (2000): 89–106.

29 Nicholas B. Dirks, "Castes of Mind," *Representations. Special Issue: Imperial Fantasies and Postcolonial Histories* 37 (1992): 56–78.

anti-historical and "irreconcilable with responsible historical research." According to Kopf, British Orientalists worked on modernising Indian traditions "from within" so that Indian people could establish their identity in a changing world. He saw a fundamental difference between the first British Orientalists and the so-called Anglicists who did not find any worth in Indian traditions and endeavoured to implement the English model of education in the areas controlled by the British.[30] A little later, Eugene Irschick argued against the postcolonial authors' criticism, saying that research into Indian traditions is not merely a Western imposition because, in one way or another, it has involved Indian scholars and the local population in general. According to Irschick, Orientalist discourse, along with its findings, is a continuous process of dialogue between the Europeans and the Indians.[31]

Apart from Irschick's dialogue argument, other objections have been raised against the postcolonial critique of the Western study of Indian traditions. They can be summarized in the following statements: Postcolonial critique does not consider the European study of the Orient prior to the times of Europeans' colonial hold over some more significant part of the Indian Subcontinent—that is when Bengal gradually came to be ruled by the East India Company after 1757. Postcolonial critique does not explain how Oriental studies happened to develop and enjoy considerable attention in countries such as Germany that had no colonies in the regions in question.[32] Postcolonial scholars are wrong in imputing Orientalism to British and other European thinkers who, in fact, disagreed with Orientalists and strongly criticised their opinions. Like D. Kopf before, T. Trautmann maintained as well that:

> In India the British Orientalists were by no means a unitary group, but Orientalists constituted the core of a distinct policy group who, as I have said, had been dominant since the times of Hastings and who had devised the Orientalizing policy. This group constituted a faction promoting education in the vernacular languages; these "Orientalists" were in opposition to the "Anglicists," Evangelicals, and others who promoted English

30 David Kopf, "Hermeneutics versus History," *Journal of Asian Studies* 39, no. 3 (1980): 501–503.

31 Eugene Irschick, *Dialogue and History: Constructing South Asia 1795–1895* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1994).

32 Among the first scholars who raised these objections were Lata Mani and Ruth Frankenberg, "The Challenge of Orientalism," *Economy and Society* 14, no. 2 (1985): 175.

as a medium of instruction. The Anglicists were also involved in the production of knowledge of a kind Said calls Orientalism.[33]

Trautmann argued against the supposed unity of thought of Orientalism. From the same position, he criticised Inden's claim that James Mill's and Georg F. Hegel's works constituted hegemonic Indological texts. According to Trautmann, it is impossible to call neither Mill nor Hegel Orientalists because they did not know any Oriental language, nor did they travel to the Orient. Most importantly, the two used their knowledge of Orientalist scholarship to argue against the opinions of early British Orientalists and against the enthusiasm for India that was spreading amongst European intellectuals of their times. According to Trautmann, Said was aware of these discrepancies, but wanted to draw attention to the basis that was common to the contending parties. Trautmann proposed to rather pay attention to the relation between Orientalist and "anti-Orientalist" scholarship and to "examine and problematize" it. Moreover, he found fault with Said's approach in that it passes judgment on Orientalist knowledge while refusing to judge its content.[34]

To what extent are all the above mentioned objections justified? It is true that Said sometimes made historically erroneous generalisations or was deficient in factual knowledge. For example, he claims that Duperron's translations of the *Avesta* and of several *Upanishads*—based on Persian translations—were the first case of "the Orient being revealed to Europe in the materiality of its texts, languages, and civilizations."[35] As a matter of fact, prior to that Europeans had already been acquainted with Chinese texts translated by Jesuits. These texts were assiduously studied by European intellectuals at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries, some even tried to learn Chinese, for example Leibniz.

On the other hand, I do not consider the rest of the objections to Said's work interesting, nor appropriate as the critics impute to him what he did not say and overlook what he, in fact, did say. To accuse the postcolonial critique of turning the local people into passive participants in the growth of Orientalist scholarship is to trivialize Said's argumentation. He aimed at researching how European, and later also American

33 Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1997), 23.

34 Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*, 25.

35 Said, *Orientalism*, 77.