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Wordtrade Reviews: Cosmic Leaps

# Contents

## Editorial Appraisals:

Some qualified reviewers offer their own brief evaluation of the book. Otherwise, most of our content represents the authors'-editors' own words as a preview to their approach to the subject, their style and point-of-view. <>

## A Cultural History of Hinduism general editor Karen Pechilis, Volumes 1-6, listed individually below [The Cultural Histories Series, Bloomsbury Academic, ISBN 9781350024434 (6-vol set)]

How has Hinduism been shaped over time? What are continuities and changes in its cultural history of textual, social, ritual, visual, political, philosophical, and theological perspectives and practices?

Spanning over 4,000 years, **A Cultural History of Hinduism** provides an authoritative survey of one of the world's oldest religious traditions in its social and cultural contexts, from ancient times to the present. With 55 experts from academic disciplines such as history, religion studies, art history, anthropology and philosophy, the work represents inclusive narratives and aims to generate new cultural history questions.

Chapter titles are identical across each of the volumes. This gives the choice of reading about a specific period in one of the volumes, or following a theme across history by reading the relevant chapter in each of the six.

The six volumes cover: 1 – Antiquity (2000 – 200 BCE); 2 – Classical Age (200 BCE – 800 CE); 3 – Post-Classical Age (800 – 1500); 4 – Age of Empires (1500 – 1857); 5 –Age of Late Colonialism (1857 – 1947); 6 – Age of Independence (1947 – 2017).

Themes (and chapter titles are): sources of authority; defining body and mind; social organization and everyday norms; identity, difference and dialogue; politics and power; visual Culture; lineages and emerging exemplars and movements; and hinduism in global context.

The page extent for the pack is approximately 1632pp. Each volume opens with an Introduction and concludes with Notes, Bibliography, Notes on Contributors, and an Index.

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One of the world's oldest religious traditions, Hinduism has continually produced, engaged, and shaped a diversity of cultures and histories. As a method of academic study, cultural history is superbly suited to an exploration of Hinduism's fascinating vastness and depth. Cultural history has an expansive field of vision. It examines the power of patterns and the patterns of power; how and why influential institutions came to be, and ways in which they seek to reproduce and enhance their status. At the same time, cultural history is attentive to meaning beyond structure, such as the potency and creativity of the viewpoints of individuals and groups outside the mainstream who also seek to contribute meaningfully to society. It sees the dynamism of contested representations and meanings across the exceptional and the everyday as constitutive of both cultural practices and historical transformations. Interdisciplinarity is to the fore in performing cultural history; the many scholars involved in this comprehensive project, A Cultural History of Hinduism, are professionally skilled in a variety of academic disciplines, including history, religion studies, art history, area studies, language and literature studies, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, and archaeology. The aim is to provide accurately holistic and inclusive narratives that are thought-provoking and generate new cultural history questions.

**A Cultural History of Hinduism** spans the temporal frame of 2000 BCE to 2017 CE through six illustrated volumes representing distinctive time periods that each contain an introduction plus eight chapters on eight general themes that are applicable across all of the time periods: Sources of Authority; Defining Body and Mind; Social Organization and Everyday Norms; Identity, Difference, and Dialogue; Politics and Power; Visual Culture; Lineages and Emerging Exemplars and Movements; and Global Context. As the capsules below indicate, these general themes were understood distinctively in different ages; some variation in subtitles for these themes across the volumes also signals that complexity. Each volume may be read on its own, or the reader may examine similarities and differences of each specific theme across the time periods represented by the volumes.

Volume 1 focuses on developments in antiquity (2000-200 BCE), including the development of Brahmanism in that era. In its exploration of the eight themes, the volume examines the creation of Vedic authority; ideologies that imbue the body with social, political, and cosmic meanings; priestly and domestic ritual developments; differing dialogues on the nature and goal of humanity; patronage relationships between priests and kings; the visuality of coronation rituals; competing accounts of cosmological and historical pasts across Brahmanic and non-Brahmanic traditions; and enduring issues of Brahmin identity.

Volume 2 focuses on developments in what is often considered the "classical" age (200 BCE-800 CE), including the construction of this classicality through the production of various cultural texts. In its exploration of the eight themes, the volume examines the social authority of Brahmins; the emergence of yoga as an embodied practice; representations of caste in the Sanskrit epic Mahabharata; the formation of doctrinal identities among the schools of Indian philosophy; competing secular and theologically driven discourses around governance (nits) and polity; the development of Hindu temple iconography; the proliferation of major theistic devotional sects and orders; and the diffusion of key Hindu cultural texts, ideas, iconographies, and practices into the Greco-Roman world and Southeast Asia.

Volume 3 focuses on developments in the post-classical age (800-1500), including the increased diversity of people participating in shaping the cultural history of Hinduism in that era. In its exploration of the eight themes, the volume examines the creation of distinctive authoritative texts in Sanskrit and vernacular languages; the renewed emphasis on the body in Tantra and bhakti; new urban forms of socialization; the flourishing of devotional (bhakti) Hinduism; discursive definitions of power and their intersecting modes of conceiving sovereignty on multiple social levels; the development of large-scale imperial and cosmological temples; the establishment of renowned and lasting philosophical lineages; and the intercultural vibrancy of the thriving transregional trade.

Volume 4 focuses on developments in Hinduism during India's age of empires (1500-1857), including ways in which processes of rule facilitated important forms of interaction and exchange among increasingly diverse and highly mobile constituencies. In its exploration of the eight themes, the volume examines how sources of authority were reinterpreted to suit the era's changing circumstances; the relationship between bhakti and notions of embodiment; changes to daily norms; the significance of Hindu sectarianism; the impact of shifting power structures on Hindu institutions; the creation of new styles of art and architecture that reflect the period's distinctive cultural interactions; the role of exemplars in structuring Hindu communities; and the impact of European colonialism on global conceptions of Hinduism.

Volume 5 focuses on developments in the age of late colonialism (18571947), including diverse ways of envisioning Hinduism's relationships to political, social, and technological changes characteristic of the period. In its exploration of the eight themes, the volume examines authority, tradition, and modernity; modern science, Hinduism, and the body; regional religious reform; ideologies of a distinctive Indian identity; emerging political discourses and religious revival; the impact of images via new print media on devotion and political symbolism; the reinvigoration of sampradaya, monastic institutions, and regional networks; and the global spread of Hindus and Hindu teachings.

Volume 6 focuses on developments in the age of Independence (19472017), including contemporary issues in defining, interpreting, studying, and mobilizing Hinduism. In its exploration of the eight themes, the volume examines the postcolonial renegotiation of authoritative sources; the intertwining of Ayurvedic and yogic holistic self-development with new media and nationalism; the interplay of traditional norms and democratization; caste and the politics of representation; the rise of Hindutva; visualities of political messaging; the active intervention of religious actors in the public sphere; and the global construction of Hinduism in India and the diaspora.

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## Volume 1: A Cultural History of Hinduism in the Pre-Classical Age edited by Jarrod Whitaker [The Cultural Histories Series, Bloomsbury Academic, ISBN 9781350024281]

A cultural studies approach pays close attention to the multifaceted ways that meaning is debated or contested and how people legitimize, enforce, or resist interpretations in any given historical context. If we want to say something meaningful about the ideas, beliefs, moral expectations, and daily activities of people who lived in India roughly 3,500 to 2,000 years ago, we need to take seriously the views of our textual authors. At the same time, we must critically assess the ways in which ancient Indian thinkers invest their religious truth claims and understandings of reality with ethical, economic, and political agendas. The contributors to this volume are thus sensitive to the intentions of the textual authors, primarily Brahmins, yet also embed those authors in complex discursive worlds that speak through them. Furthermore, a cultural studies approach frequently entails speculating on the lives of people who did not compose Sanskrit texts. The authors of the chapters pay close attention to the communities and groups that Brahmins speak for and about, such as women, members of lower classes, and cultural outsiders. We have limited access to the views of these people, but we can

reasonably speculate how dominant ideologies may have affected their lives and defined their relationships with others in a lived social world. Finally, while the Classical Age (200 BCE-800 CE) will be covered in the next volume in this series, for historical clarity, some contributors in this volume deemed it necessary to discuss texts and cultural developments that originated around 200 BCE or in the first few centuries of the Common Era.

Rather than offering a lengthy discussion of the eight chapters in this volume, let me summarize them and let each contributor speak for her or himself. The subject matter of each chapter covers pertinent issues about ancient Indian religion, culture, and society and lends itself to a cultural studies approach. Each contributor approaches their assigned topic by paying close attention to the language of the texts, an approach professionally referred to as philology. They also bring to bear various modern theories and methodological insights to inform their interpretations of how people understood and used the ideas, practices, and values in the texts to negotiate religious and sociopolitical relationships and realities.

In his discussion about "Sources of Authority: The Invention of Vedic Authority" (Chapter 1), Caley Smith examines the various strategies that Vedic priests use to make their liturgical knowledge and textual traditions authoritative. In particular, he is concerned with how the Vedas came to be seen by later traditions as true, relevant, and independent. Smith demonstrates that Rgvedic poets are concerned with legitimizing the temporary authority of local clan-lords, who could potentially rise to the position of tribal chieftains or kings. In order to justify their ability to empower such leaders, Rgvedic poet-priests employ key mythological and ideological tropes. For example, they underscore their truth claims and ritual efficacy by claiming to follow in the footsteps of primordial sages who discovered the correct procedures for ritual and in accordance with the cosmogonic deeds of Indra. In this sense, the truth of early Rgvedic rituals comes from the first ancestors and acts of creation. By the end of the Rgvedic period, the ideology of ritual efficacy shifts, and authority for ritual performances is derived from the sacrifice of a cosmic giant, as seen in the famous

Puruasukta hymn. The use of a new origin myth disrupts old ritual associations, while transforming their relevancy for new ritual applications. Finally, in the late Vedic period, the Vedas are seen as eternal and revelatory, so much so that the gods and rituals emanate from them. Consequently, the Vedas achieve ontological independence and become authoritative in their own right. Smith situates these ideological changes in shifting political contexts, in which priests cater to wealthy and powerful elites by adapting their liturgical poetry and ritual activity to serve ever-changing ceremonial needs.

In her discussion on "Defining Body and Mind" (Chapter 2), Amy Hyne-Sutherland examines the ways in which ancient Indian sources understand the relationship between the mind and the body. In the first half of her chapter, Hyne-Sutherland explores how ancient Indian thinkers understand the body as a physical object and a canvas on which social and political ideas are mapped. In particular, she systematically examines how bodies are conceived in relation to pastoral life, violence, and illness; how the concept of the mind (manas) is related to the concept of the heart (hrd, hrdaya) and emotions; and how ideas of the cosmos and natural processes are associated with individual and communal bodies. She further considers how gender and sexuality are aligned with bodily distinctions, both biological and culturally constructed, especially the way in which women's bodies are seen as commodities to be exchanged in a patriarchal, ritualized economy. Finally, she examines how ascetic groups formulate ideologies that reject or discipline bodily desires and processes to transcend the limits of human mortality and suffering. In the second half of her chapter, Hyne-Sutherland takes her lead from the work of contemporary disabilities studies to analyze how ancient Indian texts diagnose and deal with highly charged mental states and emotions, particularly "madness" (unmada). She carefully demonstrates how interpretations of the mind and body in ancient India reflect anxieties about normative relationships, social responsibilities, and embodied experiences.

In his discussion on "Social Organization and Everyday Norms" (Chapter 3), Marko Geslani surveys Vedic texts for evidence of everyday life: that quotidian realm of human activity set apart from politics, public struggles, and social expectations. He, however, questions the validity of this quest because our sources only reflect the concerns of educated, male, priestly elites and their explicit concerns for ritual efficacy, economic success, and political power. Geslani attempts to recover everyday concerns of priests in texts like the Atharvaveda and the Grhyasutras, though he recognizes that even these texts reflect a narrow set of concerns. For Geslani, the Grhyasutras document a historical process when Vedic ritual shifted from the performance of exclusive solemn sacrifices to more egalitarian, private domestic rites. He sees this process as a normalization of everyday life, wherein Vedic ritual norms and regimes of bodily purity underscore new expectations on Brahmins to maintain an exclusive status and distinct social identity. Consequently, the Grhyasutras contain a script for the idealized performance of Brahmanism in the face of challenges and social pressures.

In her discussion on "Identity, Difference, and Dialogue" (Chapter 4), Signe Cohen is concerned with exploring the various ways in which Vedic texts portray their composers' identities and communities, as well as those who are excluded from being members. As Cohen demonstrates, texts like the Rgveda and the Upanisads address the key question of what being a human means, yet in different ways. While the Rgveda depicts the importance of ancestors and a vague notion of the afterlife, the hymns primarily focus on what it means to live the good life here and now. In contrast, the Upanisads introduce the idea of a heavenly, blissful state that should be the ultimate goal for all humans to achieve. For these texts, liberation from the unending cycle of suffering and rebirth can only come about with secret knowledge about the relationship between an individual's immortal self, or atman, and its correlation with the impersonal, ultimate principle or brahman. Since individual selves are in fact the brahman, then all beings are interconnected, transcendent, and part of a universal whole. Another way Vedic texts explore issues of identity is through dialogue hymns

between two speakers, who frequently desire different, often conflicting, goals. Laden with moral undertones, Rgvedic dialogue hymns often debate human mortality, appropriate ways to produce progeny, the continuation of family lineages, and the central role that ritual should occupy in the lives of the speakers. In contrast to the private nature of the issues debated in these hymns, the dialogue hymns of the Upanisads are set within a highly charged public arena in which true esoteric knowledge is debated and death may result for the loser who succumbs to a barrage of withering intellectual questioning. Finally, Cohen examines how Brahmins depict outsiders to their tradition, including foreigners, members of lower classes, and those individuals who subscribed to the new religious traditions of Buddhism and Jainism.

In her discussion on "Politics and Power" (Chapter 5), Marianna Ferrara examines in detail the close relationship between Brahmins and kings, since both groups are deeply invested in the control of economic and political power. A central component of this relationship is the performance of Vedic rituals and the liturgical propagation of a semantics of power that consistently describes priests and kings in terms of strength, glory, and righteous authority. Furthermore, as a system of patronage, Vedic ritual functioned as the primary means for Brahmin priests to gain wealth and maintain their claims to a privileged status. As the exclusive possessors of sacred knowledge, Brahmins thus underscore their authoritative right to perform rituals for wealthy elites and the primary responsibility of such individuals to protect and patronize members of the priestly class. As Ferrara shows, Brahmins compete with each other for control of sources of patronage. Furthermore, while issues of class occupy a predominant place in Vedic texts, the role of women in Vedic ritual plays a minor yet important place in discussions of gender roles and male power. Finally, Ferrara examines the impact and threat of new ascetic religious traditions on the status and normative truth claims of Brahmins.

In her discussion of "Visual Culture" (Chapter 6), Joanna Jurewicz undertakes the difficult task of thinking about visual culture in a period that attests no material representations in stone, metal, or other visual mediums. At the end of the ancient

period, around 300-200 BCE, we do witness the building of permanent stone or brick structures in North India at sites like Sarnath and Sanchi to commemorate the Buddha, and the creation of stone pillars and rock-cut caves with imagery and written edicts, such as those left by Asoka. Unfortunately, while Brahmins talk about material objects like ritual implements and variously shaped fire pits, we have little archaeological evidence in the form of material representations from Vedic India. This does not mean we do not have visual culture in ancient India, however. Jurewicz argues that certain elements in Vedic ritual have a distinctly visual component and need to be appreciated as such. In the rajasuya ritual, in which a king is consecrated, Jurewicz examines the language of specific moments wherein priests pour water on the king, dress him in robes, furnish him with a bow and arrows, and make him stand upright on a tiger skin with raised arms. According to Jurewicz, these acts are designed to invoke a complex set of images in the minds of the participants that relate to fundamental cosmological and ethical frameworks. Through complex thought processes and embodied actions, Brahmins thus create powerful visual symbolism and imagery during their ritual performances.

In his discussion on "Lineages, Emerging Exemplars, and Movements" (Chapter 7), James Hegarty presents five narrative case studies from Brahmanical, Buddhist, and Jain sources that situate the truth claims and legitimacy of each tradition in ancient lineages. He argues that each tradition deals with questions of authority by creating mythological narratives that connect ancient exemplary figures—teachers, priests, kings, and even gods—with the founders of each tradition or figures considered profound embodiments of their respective tradition. Brahmins, Buddhists, and Jains thus present competing accounts of the cosmological and historical past to secure patronage and legitimacy in a sociopolitical environment in which each tradition competed over limited religious and economic resources from 600-200 BCE.

In his discussion on "Global Context: Teaching the Antiquity of Hinduism" (Chapter 8), Madhav Deshpande reflects on a lifetime of learning Sanskrit, teaching courses on "Hinduism" in an American university context, and tackling some of the more

contentious issues in scholarship on ancient India. Growing up as a Brahmin in India, Deshpande recounts how the term Hindu was never used in everyday discourse and only in terms of Hindu—Muslim identity. He further describes the complex and nuanced ways in which his own identity was defined as a Brahmin in India, and his experience of using the terms Hindu and Hinduism after moving to America in the 1970s and accepting an academic position. Deshpande then considers how ancient Indian scholars justified the authority and truth claims of the Vedas. As he demonstrates, ancient Indian scholars disagreed on key interpretative principles because diverse hermeneutical traditions have always existed throughout Indian history. While ancient sources claim that the Vedas are external revelations without human authorship, a critical understanding of the texts and their history demonstrates that the Vedas, like all texts, are products of human creativity and imagination, as well as being sites of contested meaning. From this critical perspective, modern scholars can detect the various layers of text production and transmission of any one text and the historical understandings of those texts over time. Deshpande highlights this by examining some of the narratives in the epic Mahabharata and its sub-text, the Bhagavadgita. Consequently, Deshpande reminds his readers that "a critical cultural studies approach to ancient and modern Indian history demonstrates that there has never been a singular, unbroken, or ahistorical tradition called Hinduism." Finally, he discusses how ancient Indians in the Vedic period understood their own identities and how this undercuts twentieth-century understandings of the term arya and the erroneous Aryan Invasion Theory. <>

# Volume 2: A Cultural History of Hinduism in the Classical Age edited by Adheesh A. Sathaye [The Cultural Histories Series, Bloomsbury Academic, ISBN 9781350024304]

## The Contexts of Classical Hindu Culture

For the benefit of the uninitiated reader, we begin with an outline of the political and socio-economic contexts of Hindu culture between 200 BCE and 800 CE. Given an absence of formal courtly records or chronicles, scholars have used other kinds of documentary evidence to reconstruct the political and socio-economic history of this time period, including inscriptions, coins, archaeological remains, Buddhist and Jain accounts, royal genealogies in the Sanskrit puranas, and Greek and Chinese testimonia (Singh 2016: 369-71). These materials yield a complicated picture, to be sure, but we may identify four broad phases:

1. Disintegration of the Mauryan Empire (c. 200-185 BCE)
2. Post-Mauryan formations (185 BCE-300 CE)
3. Gupta-Vakataka hegemony (300-500 CE)
4. Post-Gupta regional polities (500-800 CE)

In the fourth century BCE, the subcontinent's first imperial formation was initiated by the Magadha ruler Candragupta Maurya (r. 321-297 BCE) through a conquest and annexation of his neighbors. His successors continued this imperial project, and at its maximum extent (c. 250 BCE), the Mauryan Empire stretched from Afghanistan in the northwest to Bengal in the East and Andhra Pradesh in the South. It featured a large standing army, a complex centralized bureaucracy, and profitable international commerce. Particularly under Asoka (r. 269-232 BCE), the Mauryans maintained a pluralistic religious policy, giving support to Buddhist, Jain, and Ajivika monastics

(Sramanas) and Brahman groups as well—though restrictions were placed against Vedic animal sacrifices.

After Asoka, the Mauryan Empire entered into political decline, perhaps due to economic pressures of maintaining a large military and bureaucracy (Thapar 2002: 205-6), until in 185 BCE the last Mauryan ruler was assassinated by a Brahman general named Pusyamitra Sunga. The ensuing Sunga dynasty, it seems, revived the performance of Vedic public rituals, including even the asvamedha horse sacrifice; however, they could not hold on to the vast domains of the Mauryans (Thapar 2002: 210), and we find a number of independent regional polities competing for power. In the deep South, three houses rose to prominence: the Colas, Ceras, and Pantiyas. In central India, we find the Satavahanas of the Deccan as well as the Kadambas in Karnataka, the Iksvakus in Andhra, and the Pallavas further South. In the East, the Sungas and later the Kanva dynasty of Magadha competed with the Licchavis in Nepal and the Kalingas in Odisha.

In the north, several outsider groups established themselves in the Punjab, Indus Valley, and Gangetic plains. These included the Indo-Greeks, or Yavanas, whose control of these regions extended to include the city of Mathura, beginning around 200 BCE until the early first century CE. The Indo-Greeks left their cultural mark through their coinage, and also through depictions in relief sculptures at Buddhist stupas in Bharhut (c. 100 BCE) and Sanchi (c. 50 BCE), in Madhya Pradesh. At nearby Vidisha, a pillar in honor of the Hindu deity Krsna was constructed by an Indo-Greek ambassador named Heliodorus (115 BCE). The pillar features an inscription—one of the earliest written in Sanskrit—in which Heliodorus specifically calls himself a Visnu devotee (bhagavata).

On the heels of the Indo-Greeks came the Scythians (Sakas), a nomadic group from Central Asia. Displaced from their homelands, Saka rulers established a presence in the Punjab and Indus Valley in the first century BCE, vied for control of Mathura, and remained a power player in the region until the fourth century CE. The first century CE witnessed yet another group arriving into the area from the northwest—the Kusanas, who traced their ancestry to the Yuezhi communities of nomadic pastoralists in

Western China. For the first three centuries of the Common Era, the Kusanas held power in the areas of the Hindu Kush, the Punjab, and the Indus Valley, and controlled large portions of the Gangetic plains, including Mathura. Like the Yavanas, we know about the Sakas and Kusanas primarily from the coinage they left behind, their patronage of Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain religious communities (Singh 2016: 377), and the development of distinct new schools of art and sculpture.

While the years between 185 BCE and 300 CE may have been a period of political reconfigurations, conflict, and shifting circles of power, there was nonetheless a certain degree of socio-economic stability across the subcontinent (Thapar 2002: 234-44). There were overall improvements in manufacturing, logistics, guild-based labor organizations (Singh 2016: 403-6), agricultural output, and increased trade capacity in India and into central and western Asia as well (Neelis 2011). In South India, direct trade contact was established with the Romans in Egypt and with Southeast Asia (Singh 2016: 409-17). Rulers during this time—both foreign and domestic—appear to have fostered a pluralistic religious environment, donating to Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu institutions and sponsoring monumental architecture, sculpture, and public art.

This political scene would be reconfigured with the emergence of the imperial Guptas. By 320 CE, a ruler named Candragupta had established command over Magadha and its neighbors; this was gradually expanded over much of the subcontinent by his successor Samudragupta (c. 335-75) (Gokhale 1962). Unlike Mauryan methods of coercive takeover and centralized governance, the Gupta strategy appears to have involved "catch-and-release" conquest, in which defeated kings were reinstalled as tributaries, strategic marriage alliances, and the public use of Hindu ritual—both older Vedic sacrifices like the asvamedha and also temple rites (pujas)—to establish a cultural hegemony. Regional rulers retained control over their territories but were ultimately subordinate to the Gupta rulers, who presented themselves in their public epigraphical proclamations with grandiose titles like maharajadhiraja ("Great Overlord of Kings") (Thapar 2002: 290-1). This tradition of Sanskrit panegyric poetry (prasasti) was part of

an outpouring of elite Sanskrit literature, performing arts, leisure, entertainment, fine art, and architecture in Gupta-period courtly and urban contexts.

Another hallmark of the Guptas was a political economy in which peripheral territories were managed through land grants and endowments to individuals or collectives, such as temples or monastic groups, who managed their own agrarian production and revenue. Some scholars (e.g., Sharma 1965: 76) regard this as the first phase of Indian feudalism, as it also included a nascent system of serfdom, in which peasant laborers could be transferred along with the land upon which they worked (Thapar 2002: 295). Others (e.g., Chattopadhyaya 1994) have viewed this as part of a long process of regional state formations. For religious institutions, these tax-free, permanent endowments generated new modes of economic power; at Hindu temples, for example, deities were named as grantees and became juridical persons who could now legally act in the world. In return, rulers gained merit, prestige, and new forms of social power through public rituals, as well as politically allegorical imagery embedded into the sacred visual landscape of temple sites (Willis 2009: 5, 8; Inden 2006: 192-3).

By the year 500, the imperial holdings of the Guptas had weakened through a combination of attacks by the Huns, a decline in long-distance trade, and challenges in maintaining decentralized modes of governance and revenue (Thapar 2002: 286-7; Jha 2004: 165). Various regional states again began to compete for supremacy amidst a fragmented political landscape. In the north, Harsavardhana of Thanesar (r. 606-47) established a measure of sovereignty in the Gangetic plains, ruling from the city of Kannauj. Harp was an enthusiastic patron of religious activity, art, literature, and learning, as we learn from the Sanskrit poet Bana, the Chinese traveler Xuanzang, and from Harsa's own Sanskrit dramas. Though Harsa's empire would not survive long, the city of Kannauj would remain a centerpoint for political contestation, economic activity, literature, and learning for more than 600 years.

The post-Gupta regional states also used religious patronage, land endowments, and Sanskrit literary culture as instruments for prestige and social power. In the West were the Maitrakas of Gujarat, while in the South were the Calukyas and then the

Rastrakutas in Karnataka. The Pallavas and Pantiyas held sway in Tamil Nadu, where the earliest Tamil devotional poetry had developed by the eighth century. This would prove to be a watershed moment in religious history, generating a popular new idiom, emotive bhakti, that would spread virally across the subcontinent and usher in the post-Classical period. The implications of these developments have been more properly assessed in subsequent volumes of this series..

## Classical Hindu Cultural Texts

A wide variety of Hindu cultural texts were produced between 200 BCE and 800 CE. We find literary works in the Prakrits (prakrta, "originary") as well as Sanskrit (samskrta, "refined")." Sanskrit had long been the formal language of the Vedic liturgy, and as such, it remained a living, oral language; still, by 200 BCE, Sanskrit had ceased to be the first language that one learned—one's mother tongue—though as the "father tongue" (Ramanujan 1999b: 449) it was an important second. In the early centuries CE, Sanskrit was repurposed, so that it was not only a vehicle for the sacred articulations of the Vedas but now served also as a medium for the highest intellectual, authoritative, and prestigious forms of expression, even for non-sacred topics (Pollock 2006). Sanskrit fostered a linguistic register that was unmoored from regional cultural and temporal specificities, and that invoked not just sacred power but a new kind of elite worldly power as well. This nexus of power and literary expression generated a stable translocal cultural formation, a "Sanskrit Cosmopolis," extending across the subcontinent and far beyond—from Afghanistan to Bali (Pollock 1996).

Most extant textual sources for Hinduism in the Classical Age were composed in Sanskrit, covering a wide range of topics. Perhaps the most emblematic were the dharmasastras ("treatises on moral law"), also called smrtis, or "texts of recollection" (Olivelle 2017: 14). Landmark smrti works included Manusmrti, or Manava Dharmasastra (second century CE), Yajnavalkyasmrti (fourth—fifth centuries), Visnusmrti (seventh century), and Parasarasmrti (seventh—eighth centuries). These versified texts provided normative models for worldly action, consisting of totalizing

taxonomies and divine genealogies to support "the positive and negative regulation of particular cultural practices" (Pollock 1989: 18).

The dharmasastra tradition was built on earlier texts called the dharmasutras (third—second centuries BCE) that were part of the Vedanga intellectual tradition ("Vedic ancillaries") (Olivelle 1999: xxiv). Smrti texts also integrated materials froth a separate intellectual discipline of statecraft called the arthasastra ("theory of politics"). The best-known of these works is Kautilya's Arthasastra, a text with a complicated history (first to third centuries CE; see McClish 2019). The Arthasastra delineated extensive rules and guidelines for running a successful state—including political strategy, economic policy, and criminal justice, and a vast set of other worldly topics.

In contrast, the dharmasastras developed a theological approach to virtuous behavior, insisting that human actions should be subordinated to a higher, divine paradigm. As part of this imperative, the dharmasastras theorized a social hierarchy of four classes (varnas), synthesized with a scheme of four life stages, or asramas (student, householder, forest-dweller, renunciant) that had earlier been an independent scheme in which one could choose any of the four modes upon Vedic graduation (Olivelle 2018b: 82) but which was now regimented as a fixed linear sequence. This unified social theory was referred to as the varnarama-dharma; it was most clearly expounded in the classical smrti texts like the Manusmrti—the Laws of Manu—which colonial administrators later were to take as a sourcebook for the creation of British Hindu law.

It might be argued that sastra was the most fundamental feature of intellectual life in this period (Pollock 1985). Besides dharma and artha, numerous topics outside of strictly religious domains received the sastra treatment as well. These magisterial texts, composed in Sanskrit by learned Brahmans, produced classificatory schemes, taxonomies, norms, rules, and standards for a wide range of subjects—from medicine to theater to training horses and elephants." Within the wider ambit of sastra, we find various ritual manuals that delineated the rules and regulations for conducting the theistic worship of iva, Visnu, and other deities (e.g., the Visnudharma and

Sivadharma). These appeared by the sixth century CE but continued to develop in the post-Classical period, feeding into the emergence of various Tantric literary traditions.

Another significant domain of textual production during the Classical Age was philosophy. New Upanisads appeared as part of the ongoing Vedic project of speculative inquiry into truth and reality. Some, like the Svetasvatara and Maitri Upanisads (early centuries CE), brought theistic perspectives to bear upon the soteriological theories of the Self and the Absolute (atman and brahman). Several distinct schools of philosophy also developed during this time, each centered around a set of foundational aphoristic texts or sutras, such as the Mimamsasutras of Jaimini (for the Mimamsa schools) or the Brahmasutras of Badarayana (for the Vedanta schools). By 800 CE, a thriving commentarial tradition coalesced around these and other root texts, including the prolific writings of the Mimaimsaka Kumarila (seventh century) and the Vedantin Sankara (eighth century).

Last but certainly not least was the production of epic and puranic literature (itihasa-purana)—a field of Sanskrit literary activity that proved to be foundational for mainstream Hindu religious life." The epic tradition, or itihasa ("history"), is represented by two monumental Sanskrit works, the Ramayana of Valmiki and the Mahabharata of Vyasa (early centuries CE). These were lengthy bardic poems that told of heroic adventures set in the remote past, interlaced with many mythological subtales, anecdotes, discourses, and innumerable lessons on morality, religiosity, and proper conduct. Embedded within the Mahabharata was the Bhagavad Gita, "The Song of the Blessed Lord," a versified sermon delivered by Krsna, the human manifestation of the God Visnu, to the semi-divine hero Arjuna on the battlefield of the great Bharata war. This text pulled together several strands of classical Hindu thought: Vedic ritual, Upanisadic asceticism, Samkhya and Vedanta philosophy, yoga, and theistic devotion (bhakti). More so than any other Sanskrit work of the time, the Gita offered a comprehensive package of Hindu religious ideas that were curated for mainstream audiences. As such, the Gita has continued to be popular, accessible, and widely disseminated even today (Davis 2015).

Another text belonging to this genre is the Harivamsa (early centuries CE), which chronicled the life accounts of Krsna and his lineage. The Harivamsa was a transitional text, positing itself as an appendix (khila) of the Mahabharata (Brodbeck 2021) but structured rather like a purana. The puranas ("ancient tomes") were encyclopedic compendia of Hindu myths and legends, ritual practices, ideas, descriptions of holy sites, royal genealogies, and many other materials. Puranic texts were closely related to temple-based Hindu traditions and often had distinct sectarian affiliations. The Skandapurana (sixth—seventh centuries), for example, provides an important capture of early Saiva cultures, including a summary of the doctrines of the Pasupata school of philosophy (Bakker 2014). At the tail end of the Classical Age comes the Bhagavata Purana (ninth or early tenth century)—the first major puranic text to integrate ideas of emotional bhakti that can be traced to the Tamil poetry of the Alvars (Hardy 1983: 44).

Aside from Sanskrit literary works, the archaeological record of this time period reveals other kinds of cultural texts that were equally impactful for Hindu religious life: inscriptions, coins, temple structures, and visual art. All of these forms experienced intensive development in the multireligious environment of the Classical Age (Figure 1.2).

The earliest extant physical writings in South Asia are the Prakrit inscriptions of the Mauryan emperor Asoka (r. 268-232 BCE), inscribed into rocks and pillars across the subcontinent, from Afghanistan to Andhra Pradesh. These edicts outlined Asoka's governmental policies, a social theory of dhamma (Pkt., "virtue") that adapted Buddhist or Hindu religious doctrines for secular aims (Thapar 1973: 149). After the Asokan Edicts, epigraphical tradition blossomed over the next few centuries, through numerous donative inscriptions, grants, deeds, memorials, and even graffiti at monasteries, caves, temples, shrines, and other sacred sites. These were carved in stone, or etched in plates made of copper or other metals. Manuscripts were surely produced, but as these were made of perishable materials like palm leaves or birch bark, very few have survived from this period. Paper appears to have been known since the mid-first millennium, but its use was not widespread in South Asia until the eleventh century.

Another valuable source of documentary information about the Classical Age is numismatics. Much of what we know about pre-Gupta political history comes from large caches of coins—and especially ones minted by the Indo-Greeks (Yavanas), Scythians (Sakas), Parthians, and Kusanas, who vied for power during the centuries between the Mauryan Empire (c. 185 BCE) and the rise of the Guptas (300 CO. These coins provide a means to reconstruct the otherwise undocumented royal lineages of these groups, and depictions of Hindu deities on these coins, such as Krsna, Balarama, and various goddesses (Bopearachchi 2016), alongside imagery from Buddhist, Greek, and other traditions, reveal the value of religious idioms for rulers to establish power and trust with regard to their subjects.

A number of distinct traditions of iconographic art also emerged within this multireligious milieu. Perhaps the most influential school of art developed at Mathura, a cosmopolitan North Indian city that was a site of intense competition between foreign as well as domestic rulers. The early phase of the Mathura school developed between the mid-second century BCE and the first century CE, while the city was under Yavana (Indo-Greek) and Saka rule. Among a host of goddesses, nature spirits (yaksas and yaksis), and other figures, this time period also featured intricately carved large stone reliefs depicting Jain and Buddhist narratives.

In the first century, with the establishment of Kusana rule, and with influence also from the Graeco-Indian Gandhara school of Buddhist art in the northwest, the art transitioned into the Kushana period (first—fourth centuries CE). Images produced during this time integrated elements from a wide range of religious traditions that the Kusana rulers supported—Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Greek, and Iranian. In the Gupta period (c. 300-500 CE), the sculptural production at Mathura and in other connected schools (e.g., Gandhara or Varanasi/Sarnath) continued to grow in sophistication (Singh 2016: 526-7). We also see developments in painting, temple architecture, and coinage, including gold coins issued to commemorate Samudragupta's horse sacrifice. In post-Gupta times, temple architecture and sculpture began to develop into distinct regional styles across the subcontinent, including the rock-cut halls of the Calukyas of

Badami (fifth to eighth centuries) or the grand temple architecture of the Pallavas (seventh to thirteenth centuries).

## Eight Perspectives into The Classical Age

These written, visual, and archaeological materials, as well as the ideas, practices, and doctrines that they document, together constitute the primary archives that this volume takes up for historical analysis. That is to say, we examine the active roles these cultural texts may have played within their political, socio-economic, and religious contexts. While the contributors take distinct disciplinary perspectives, their analysis may be said to converge around two questions—first, how these texts aided religious communities in delineating their identity on their own terms, and second, how they acquired an authority and prestige that we may call "classical."

Timothy Lubin (Chapter 1, "Sources of Authority") investigates the genealogy of one crucial idea at the heart of both questions: Brahman authority. He reads how the Dharmasastras, the Bhagavad Gita, and other normative texts established new forms of social authority for Brahman communities through an expanded use of Sanskrit for scholastic discourse on moral or legal (dharma) matters and through connections to older Vedic orthodoxy and orthopraxy using domestic rituals, social practices, and new political institutions, such as ritualized gifts, land grants, and inscriptions.

Tracing diverse constructions of yoga in first-millennium texts, Karen O'Brien-Kop (Chapter 2, "Defining Body and Mind") notes the existence of two different modes of yoga. One was mind-centered, focused on the isolation of the abstract Self (atman) from the material self, and was expounded in the Upanisads, the Mahabharata, and the Gita (where it is also given a theological and devotional basis). The other was a body-centered renunciant discourse that was found in Brahmanical sources (Smrtis, Mahabharata, and Pasupata texts), as well as non Vedic (Sramana) traditions, whereby liberation of the Self was to take place through austerities (tapas). Patanjali's Yogasutras, O'Brien-Kop argues, subordinated the latter (ascetic practices) as being preparatory stages for the former (mind-oriented modes of meditative concentration

and absorption), giving this text an authority but also allowing for a productive dialogue with the Buddhist Yogacara tradition.

Aditya Adarkar (Chapter 3, "Social Organization and Everyday Norms") turns to a core identity marker of classical Hinduism—the social ideology of "caste" as varna hierarchy. Tracing the emergence of varnasrama-dharma through a neo-Brahmanical dialectic engagement with Buddhist and Jain discourses, Adarkar focuses on the unique cultural role of the Mahabharata in the naturalization of varna as a system. Analyzing four mythological figures who attempt to break out of their varna identity—Parasurama, Visvamitra, Karna, Ekalavya—Adarkar demonstrates that the epic uses their stories to create a literary space where audiences may experience profound sympathy toward those who are abjected by varna order, but without threatening the stability of the overarching Brahmanical structures themselves.

Focusing on how "Hindu" identities emerged within the six classical schools of Indian philosophy—as well as the colonial-era canonization of those six as being the six Hindu schools—Kengo Harimoto (Chapter 4, "Identity, Difference, and Dialogue") explores how, within a robust tradition of dialogue and debate, individual philosophers shaped their identities and those of their schools by focusing on key doctrinal differences concerning the authority of the Vedas, the existence of a creator God, and the nature of karma. Harimoto engages in close readings of two philosophers often deemed to be "champions" of Hinduism: Kurnarila, a proponent of the Mimamsa school of ritual theory, and Sankara, the well-known non-dualist Vedanta philosopher, to see how each constructs the identity of their own tradition and refutes the doctrines of other schools. Harimoto demonstrates that while both philosophers use the same identity marker, "Vedavadins" ("proponents of the Vedas"), they offer contradictory definitions of what this should mean.

Mark McClish (Chapter 5, "Politics and Power") tackles the question of what may have constituted secularity (and therefore also religiosity) in the Classical Age, through a careful analysis of the idea of niti ("governance"). He examines the emergence of two distinct approaches to the purposes of governance within sastraic texts—one secular,

and the other, theologically driven. First, as developed in an early version of the Arthasastra (first century CE), good governance involved cultivating an "eye of sastra"—that is, a form of disciplinary subjectivity that allowed the trained specialist to see the world for what it really was (according to the realist perspective of text). This subjectivity, McClish argues, results in a "functionally secular" worldview for ministers and other professional niti specialists within the courtly sphere. In contrast, discourses around governance in the wider Hindu tradition—that is, in dharmasastra texts, in the Mahabharata, and in later redacted stages of the Arthasastra itself—governance is now regarded as part of raja-dharma ("the duty of kings") and is thereby subordinated to the theologically driven moral and phenomenological framework of varnasrama-dharma.

While these five chapters focus almost exclusively on written textual materials, the remaining integrate the study of visual art and material culture from the Classical Age. In detailing the "visual language" of Hindu iconography in this time period, Natasja Bosma (Chapter 6, "Visual Culture") offers a detailed walkthrough of the avatara myths of Visnu, as well as key myths of Siva, examining how these narratives and the theological messages they contain were iconographically represented through sculptures and reliefs at Gupta-period temple sites. Bosma's analysis points to the importance not only of iconographic features but also the value of analyzing images in situ (on doorways, walls, courtyards, or other strategic locations) in generating visual meaning.

Nina Mirnig and Marion Rastelli (Chapter 7, "Lineages, Emerging Exemplars, and Movements") offer a comprehensive engagement with scholarly understandings of major popular domains of Hindu theistic worship and their genealogy in the first millennium, including the worship of Visnu, Siva, and the Goddess. Taking stock of a tremendous range of epic and puranic texts, theistic sastras, early Tantric literature, inscriptions, and iconographic and archaeological remains, Mirnig and Rastelli trace the emergence of distinct schools, monastic orders, and traditions of practice within Vaisnava, Saiva, and Sakta streams. We learn of the appearance of specific groups such as the Pancaratra school or the Pasupatas, but also the common theological ideas,

parallel idioms of devotion, and shared religious practices like puja (hospitality rites), vrata (observances), pilgrimage, and funerary practices. Mirnig and Rastelli further discuss how temple-based Hinduism was closely connected to political life in the Gupta period and beyond.

In the final chapter, Vasudha Narayanan (Chapter 8, "Global Contexts") takes us outside of the subcontinent to investigate how international trade networks facilitated an export of ideas, practices, and material culture out of South Asia. Narayanan follows two distinct routes of international cultural transit that developed in the first millennium. The first was a primarily intellectual pathway through which astronomical, mathematical, and philosophical ideas traveled across West Asia and the Greco-Roman world. The second trajectory was in the direction of Southeast Asia, which became an enthusiastic importer of Hindu iconography, temple architecture, ritual practices, and Sanskrit literary culture, as-part of a large-scale adaptation of classical models of Hindu kingship within the geopolitical contexts of Cambodia, Java, and other Southeast Asian locations.

To return to the allegory with which we began, these chapters, taken together, provide a holistic impression of what was happening in the History House of Hindu culture in the centuries between 200 BCE and 800 CE. What we cannot find, of course, are any doorways that might let us actually go inside the house and verify what we are reporting from our stations at the windows. That is, the inferential methods of cultural history can only get us so far, and ultimately, we must remain open to the possibility that other explanatory models might also fit the data we are gathering. As we peer into the History House, our best bet is to work collaboratively and in concert—to share what we see from our different windows and to process this data through different disciplinary lenses so that we might eventually discern shapes within the shadows, and words amidst the whispers, in order ultimately to make better sense of the past. <>

## Volume 3: A Cultural History of Hinduism in the Post-Classical Age edited by Karen Pechilis [The Cultural Histories Series, Bloomsbury Academic, ISBN 9781350024328]

Phrases commonly used to describe the era of the period at hand, 800-1500 CE, such as medieval and Middle Ages, tend to convey it as an in-betweenness bordered by significant events, be they the fall of the Roman Empire to the Renaissance in Europe, or the end of the Gupta Empire to the beginning of the Mughal Empire in India. It is thus a period traditionally defined in scholarship not by its own innovation or authority, but by its contrast to two proximate periods of flourishing; in this view, the main image for the in-between period has been one of fragmentation as a prominent symptom of decline. However, while largely accepting these chronological event parameters, recent scholarship tends to see more continuity than break, in which the in-between period is one of dynamic transition that reworks classical inheritance into distinctive constructions that anticipate early modern formulations. As a designation for this period, "post-classical" gestures in this direction. Taking the view of a dynamic evolution, one can see that a major trend in the post-classical period is the increased representation of a diversity of people as cultural participants, their voices heard and actions described via inscriptions on monumental temple constructions, vernacularized literature, devotional literature, stories, and sectarian debates, as authors performed interpretive imbrication with the past (Pechilis 2012) to introduce new ideas and practices...

Scholarship on Hinduism in the post-classical era shows historical agents' active reconfiguration of defining "Hindu," a debate that continues today (Llewellyn 2005). Imagining the post-classical period shapes a present-day cultural history to which scholarship is but one contributor: nationalism, modernity, post-modernity, identity politics, globalization, and so on are also in the mix of defining the period as a remembered cultural repository that illuminates both history and today. The

connection between past and present is active; for example, in 2010 the Government of India released a commemorative postage stamp of Rajaraja I's Brihadishwara (Brhadesvara) Temple in Tanjore (Thanjavur), celebrating 1,000 years of the temple's existence. Recent scholarly studies trace the complex development of ideas and images connecting the post-classical past to the present through analysis of devotional and dynastic leaders (Novetzke 2008; Pechilis 2012; Shukla-Bhatt 2014; Talbot 2016; Bhatia 2017).

Brief Introduction to the Volume's Chapters

The chapters in this volume are arranged by topics that are the same across the volumes that the Cultural History of Hinduism series comprises. The topics each represent a point of orientation for the purpose of focused analytical discussion; all of the topics and discussions are interrelated and contribute to a holistic understanding of a cultural history of the post-classical period.

In Chapter 1, "Sources of Authority," Deven M. Patel indicates that the post-classical period is distinctive in that it "demonstrates that Hindus were willing to also invent new sources, some as ambitious in their claims to authority as the ancient Veda," and identifies four major themes to organize his discussion of these authoritative claims: mobility, crystallization, argument, and realignment.

These themes help us to understand that authority is always "in motion," seeking to influence a wide range of practices, including ritual, building, artistic performance, and social organization. Predominant genres include instructional works (sastra) on language and logic, poetics, the performing arts, love, and correct or legal behavior; commentaries on legal, poetic, and philosophical works; texts that collect various perspectives, including legal digests, literary anthologies, and doxographies; and the rendering of Sanskrit classics in regional languages. Further developments that negotiate the classical and the regional occur in new worship spaces and practices, as well as the development of major philosophical schools and lineages. Rich in detail, this

chapter provides an important indication of the diversity of Hindu claims to authority in the post-classical period.

In Chapter 2, on "Body and Mind," Loriliai Biernacki argues that the post-classical period "engages with a renewed focus on the body" while maintaining an ambivalence towards it, especially via bhakti and Tantra formulations and interventions. These perspectives encouraged a different psychology towards the body, which responded to the authoritative ritual and social customs of Brahmanic orthodoxy, as well as the influential non-dualist philosophy of Sankara, to address "the problem of the body in the scheme of enlightenment in a world that begins to move away from an uncomplicated ascetic rejection of the body." Through examples from mythology, drama, folk stories, and hagiographies, she shows their representations of the "interactivity" of mind, body, and spirit, including the persistence of the body's desires in challenging the mind's detachment; the mind's ability to determine the body through mental intentions, as well as speech acts such as a curse; and the Tantric reformulation of asceticism as a disciplined giving up of the body that leads to a new and better body. New technologies of the body, such as the subtle body, were introduced, which challenged the bifurcation of mind and body by viewing them as both engaged in processes of subjectivity and objectivity. The knowledgeable person discerns the ways to successfully use each, according to their nature, to realize spiritual ways of being.

In Chapter 3, "Social Organization and Everyday Norms," Bharati Jagannathan, Sushmita Banerjee, and Kanad Sinha discuss changes and continuities in defining social life. A significant number of scholars in the post-classical period wrote commentaries on the classic text promoting a code of moral conduct, the Manusmriti (also Manava Dharmathstra or Laws of Manu, dated variously from the second century BCE to the third century CE). Puranas, which continued to be written in this period, also weighed in on proper social order and conduct. The fourfold varna (often glossed as "caste") schema was accepted as a frame, but became intertwined With commentators' reflections on a changing social context, in which the superiority of

Brahmans became questioned in light of their own behavior as well as the increased power and social status of ksatriyas and Maras. Some sub-groups (jati) became professionally powerful, and there is evidence that normative marriage prescriptions, which were to maintain the boundaries of endogamous groups, were not necessarily followed; some of these narratives advocated for women's increased rights in marriage. Creative literature from the period (poetry, drama, romance) describes a lively urban society of monetary commerce that creates cultures of both pleasure and corruption. The Delhi Sultanate both built upon and transformed this urban society, by constructing monuments that repurposed local knowledge, and bringing Hindus into their Persianate courtly culture. Persian, Hindawi, and Arabic literature suggest observers' fascination with the natural and social aspects of India. Into the fifteenth century, a range of multilingual literature demonstrates the narrative intertextuality of morality, conquest, and Sufism.

In Chapter 4, "Identity, Difference, and Dialogue," Leah Elizabeth Comeau focuses on historical evidence of exchange in order to provide examples of encounter and difference. Through comparative consideration of the large temple complexes at Thanjavur, Khajuraho, and Angkor Wat, she illustrates the shared emphasis on monumental construction, coherence of programs of sculptural design, and, especially in the latter two, "cross-cultural, regional, and religious exchange." Turning to literature, she provides a detailed analysis of the writings of al-Biruni (973-1048), who was commissioned by a Muslim patron to research Hindu culture, revealing his careful positionality between the expectations of his Muslim audience and his observational and perhaps dialogic proximity to Hindu sects. Devotional poetry in regional languages is a prominent sphere of exchange, and Comeau highlights specific poet-saints and their works that show the diversity within and across Saivism, Vaisnavism, and Sufism, while noting significant resonances in their claims. She concludes that "The study of South Asian religious history requires an eye for multidisciplinary and multi-vocal analysis."

In Chapter 5, "Power and Politics," Leslie C. Orr provides a nuanced view of polities in post-classical times, examining theories about and descriptions of the character of medieval polities, kingship in relation to ritual and ritualists, the politics of patronage, and expressions of power. A fascinating picture emerges of many overlapping claims to leadership authority, from the paramount overlordship of imperial actors to smaller regional, family-based kingdoms within or at the margins of the imperial realm, to intermediate local leaders, landowners, and members of local assemblies. Royal genealogies, eulogies, and rituals asserted the proximity of the king to the divine, with rituals performing alignment with cosmic order, vigor for victory in battle, and generosity towards multiple categories of subjects. Those subjects in turn—including chiefs and their wives and daughters, merchants, landowners, and others—engaged in donative activities to create their own public displays of political status on a regional level. Inscriptions in stone and copper, recording gifts to Brahmans, temples, and ascetics, were means through which rulers and others could express and perform power. This discursive defining of power and intersecting modes of conceiving of sovereignty continued to play out across Indic, Turkic, and Persianate claims to authority.

In Chapter 6, "Visual Culture: Mediations of the Drew* and Nagara Temple," Amy-Ruth Holt argues that the post-classical temple should be viewed as "a historic media that illustrates and promotes the practice of religion," providing social, commercial, and political linkages and serving as a performative venue for post-classical religious developments. Detailing the evolution of the southern (dravida) style through discussion of architectural elements and sculptural program, she shows the path to the monumental temple constructions by the Chola dynasty kings, who represented themselves in a distinctive alignment with the powerful god Siva. Temples in the Deccan offered distinctive flourishes, including elements that mediated the dravida and nagara (northern) styles, as well as elaborate sculptural reliefs on the temple's exterior walls. With the resurgence of monumental temple building in the sixteenth century, the Chola paradigm was evoked as a way to legitimize authority. Many

temples in the northern architecture and sculptural programs display an engagement with Tantric formulations, from a yogini temple in Orissa to the erotic-themed temples at Khajuraho. Distinctive thematic styles suggest new modes of worship, such as the Jagannatha temple at Puri, Orissa, and the Surya Temple at Konark, Orissa. Across India, the magnificent stone temples of the post-classical period put diverse cosmologies on display.

In Chapter 7, "Lineages, Emerging Exemplars, and Movements," Thomas A. Forsthoefel discusses the "Brahman synthesis" of renowned philosophical leaders, including Sankara, Ramanuja, and Madhya, that represent the vitality of traditions considered to be "orthodox" in the post-classical era. Brahman orthodoxy "conspicuously asserted itself" via these traditions, providing a context for both dialogue across orthodoxy and resistance to it. Philosophers debated the location of the spiritually real and its relationship to the phenomenal world and the consequences this had for envisioning the selective imbrication of humanity and the divine. Responses to their positions included formation of sampradayas (sects or subtraditions). A revealing example is the Sri Vaisnava sampradaya, which began to split during the post-classical era, developing a "northern school" based in Kanchipuram that emphasized Sanskrit discourse on the Vedas and a "southern school" based in Srirangam that focused on Tamil discourse on the "Tamil Veda." Devotional (bhakti) traditions also oriented themselves in response to philosophies circulating at the time; as deeply concerned with embodied existence, such traditions were especially attracted to translating the incipient ideas of spiritual equality in the philosophies.

In Chapter 8, "Global Context: Interactions, Exchanges, and Engagements," Ranabir Chakravarti provides much evidence for the "communications, interactions and exchanges within and beyond the South Asian subcontinent, [which] does not offer an image of the insularity of the subcontinent." There were centers of exchange that brought local, regional, and supra-regional polities into exchange relationships of wares, from food such as spices and vegetables to war animals such as horses and elephants. Dependent on the monsoon winds, maritime trade flourished across the

Arabian Sea. Textual evidence from Jewish and Arab traders shows the rise of select ports on India's western coast via the trade in Indian areca nuts, pepper, and iron; later, expensive horses were imported from Arabia and Fars. Epigraphic sources document the formation of diasporic communities in India, including Jewish traders, Muslim Arab merchants, and Syrian Christians, as well as their building of houses of worship. The trade in the Bay of Bengal was oriented towards Southeast Asia, including Srivijaya in southern Sumatra and Cambodia; much of this trading took place in the context of cultural transactions across the Buddhist world. Trade and exchanges, including the maritime trade across the Indian Ocean, paved the way not only for transactions of commodities but were also combined with cultural transactions, including interactions in the socio-religious spheres. These left rich and long-lasting impacts on the vibrant plural cultures of South Asia. <>

## Volume 4: A Cultural History of Hinduism in the Age of Empires edited by Valerie Stoker [The Cultural Histories Series, Bloomsbury Academic, ISBN 9781350024359]

The period from 1500 to 1857, which this volume has labeled "the Age of Empires," was an important one for the cultural history of Hinduism. Within this timeframe, new ways of thinking about religious identity and difference emerged in India prompted in part by the subcontinent's changing socio-political circumstances. As India took center stage in a developing global economy, it became home to several significant empires, each of which sought economic and political dominance over highly diverse territories. The sixteenth century witnessed the apex of the Vijayanagara Empire in South India, the establishment and flourishing of the Mughal Empire in the north, and the arrival of the first European powers who would then vie for economic and political dominance in South Asia over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While empires were neither a novel nor an exclusive type of political formation in this era of South Asian history, their processes of rule facilitated important forms of interaction and exchange between increasingly diverse and highly mobile constituencies living in the

subcontinent. These exchanges—linguistic, economic, political, aesthetic, and conceptual—contributed to significant developments within Hinduism at both elite and popular levels. They also fueled conceptualizations of Hinduism writ large.

Indeed, the time period covered by this volume is also one in which the terms "Hindu" and "Hinduism" were increasingly used as labels for a particular set of religious practitioners and orientations in the subcontinent. The fact that the term "Hinduism" came into common usage primarily among nineteenth-century Europeans as a category encompassing a broad array of religious orientations present within South Asia has led some scholars to argue that the notion of a unified "Hindu tradition" was invented by the British colonial regime and was without precedent in Indian thought (e.g., Frykenberg 1989; Stietencron 1989, 1995). Other scholars, however, have challenged this view on the grounds that it overstates the role of European colonialism in framing Indian religious history and ignores important precolonial as well as colonial-era Indian self-understandings (e.g., Lorenzen 1999; Nicholson 2010).2

The chapters in this volume are attentive to this discussion and collectively chart a variety of ideas about, as well as forms of, Hinduism that emerged in this period of cosmopolitan encounter and exchange. The regimes of the Vijayanagara (c. 1346-1565) and Mughal Empires (c. 1526-1857), as well as their peer, subordinate, and successor states, reflect the subcontinent's large-scale and complex encounter with Islam as practiced by Persianized Central Asian Turks who governed significant portions of India by the thirteenth century. Recent scholarship on South Asia between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries emphasizes the development of a blended Indo-Persian culture that produced new art and architectural forms, literary genres, community organizations, philosophical ideas, political structures, and forms of emotional expression (e.g., Asher and Talbot 2006; Eaton 2019; Nair 2020; Truschke 2016; Verghese 1995). Various aspects of Hindu religiosity, including devotional practices, the socio-political functioning of temples and monasteries, and the delineation of sectarian boundaries, were deeply embedded in this broader cultural matrix (Burchett 2019; Fisher 2017a; Stoker 2016). At the same time, there is evidence

that the era's cross-cultural encounters also contributed to the emergence of a nascent notion of Hinduism as we now conceive it, that is, as a bounded if internally diverse religious orientation distinct from others within the subcontinent. It was this nascent notion that, in the later part of this volume's timeframe, the European colonial powers encountered, elaborated upon, and often misconstrued by filtering it through their own preconceptions. Of course, Hindu practitioners living under these European colonial regimes continued to draw upon the era's earlier notions of religious identity, updating them to address unfolding circumstances in diverse ways. These practitioners participated actively in producing modern forms and conceptions of Hinduism.

The concept of modernity has been a useful if contested one in illuminating the historical links between sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Indian religious identities and those of the later European colonial era. The timeframe covered by this volume has been recently reframed in some scholarly literature, including many of the chapters in this collection, as the "early modern" period of South Asian history. This label reflects a broader historiographic effort to challenge long-standing and incorrect assumptions that European colonialism brought modernity to an ossified, medieval India. As John Richards has argued (1997), processes of modernization such as increased interaction of diverse populations living within large and relatively stable states that facilitated high levels of physical and social mobility were well underway in the subcontinent by the year 1500 when the European presence was minimal.

Whether such processes amounted to actual modernity has been questioned by Dipesh Chakrabarty, who draws a distinction between Richards's modernization and the intellectual movement of modernism, which often frames modernization's historic significance in terms of a radical break with the past (2011). While Chakrabarty is correct that it is difficult to identify a deliberate intellectual response to modernization in South Asia as early as 1500,3 there is evidence that some of the subcontinent's early modernizing trends contributed to new ways of thinking about identity. Generally speaking, the logistical requirements of empires for efficient travel and communication across large territories as well as attentiveness to specific local conditions, produced

shared frames of reference while also heightening awareness of various forms of difference (Burbank and Cooper 2010: 8-9). In terms of the South Asian empires under consideration here, imperial processes of rule helped to develop transregional religious and intellectual networks, centered on practices like bhakti (devotionalism) and Vedanta philosophy, which in turn helped to produce pan-Indian categories of religious identity such as "Hindu." This was the case even as such categories coexisted with an abundance of diverse and densely inscribed subcategories of identity based on language, region, caste, sectarian orientation, and other social factors. Thus, even if the term "Hinduism" itself was not in circulation in the earlier part of this volume's timeframe, particular forms of what we now call Hinduism, shaped by the features of India's early modern historical circumstances, did emerge. These forms of Hinduism were defined by diverse engagements with long-standing traditions in light of the era's evolving realities; they were constituted by a heightened awareness of various types of difference within India occasioned by India's increasingly complex interactions with a wider world.

Examining early modern Hinduism through the lens of imperial contexts marked by encounter and exchange is not without its risks, as a focus on empire can exacerbate the elitist bias inherent in the historical record. Yet, as many of the following chapters show, imperial activities inform us about a range of social agents precisely because the power of royal elites often depended upon productive engagement with various non-elite constituencies and their diverse sensibilities. In addition, the chapters collected here are careful not to overstate the role of empire in Hinduism's cultural history in this period. As several of the chapters demonstrate, there were various political formations operating in the subcontinent during this timeframe, and the activities of these states, which were often independent of or resistant to the empires with which they coexisted, also played a role in Hinduism's historical development.4 Finally, the chapters here avoid overstating the role of any politics, imperial or otherwise, in Hinduism's cultural history by exploring developments that unfolded outside of the political realm, often in regional and non-elite contexts. Some key forms of Hindu religiosity in this period, such

as bhakti, operated at both elite and popular levels and in macro and micro contexts. Studying the dynamic interaction between such social milieux highlights both the value and the limitations of centering empires in an analysis of Hinduism's cultural history in this period.

In examining various forms and features of Hinduism that emerged during these three-and-a-half centuries across an array of geographic regions, the chapters in this volume showcase complex and often innovative engagements with tradition. The themes addressed by the chapters include the relationship between bhakti and notions of embodiment; changes to the norms of daily life; the significance of Hindu sectarianism; the impact of shifting power structures on Hindu institutions; the creation of new styles of art and architecture that reflect the period's distinctive cultural interactions; the role of exemplars in structuring Hindu communities; and the impact of European colonialism on global conceptions of Hinduism. This introduction supplies a historical overview of the period, using the activities and dispositions of the major imperial states as an organizing framework while reminding the reader of such a framework's inherent limitations.

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The nineteenth century was eventually to mark a significant shift in the ideological underpinnings of British rule in India, with the disbanding of the East India Company in 1858 in the wake of the Indian Rebellion. But even prior to this event, British conceptions of how best to rule India were changing, with increased calls for imposing British ways of life and cultural norms on the Indian populace, rather than attempting to govern India in accordance with its own traditions as the British construed them. Whig politician Thomas Babbington Macaulay's 1835 "Minute on Indian Education," which argues for suppressing Indian educational traditions in favor of teaching Indians to be more like the British, would be a major example of this trend. But even without such deliberate arguments in favor of Anglicization, the British presence in India was influencing daily practices and norms. As Hatcher documents in his chapter, places with a significant British presence like Calcutta saw Indians experimenting with certain

European styles of dress and comportment while others eschewed such adaptations. New developments in print culture and journalism in these regions produced a public sphere characterized by increased debate on such issues.

As part of these cross-cultural exchanges, so-called "reform movements" emerged in some Hindu communities. These movements often responded to the British presence both by aligning certain Hindu beliefs and practices with European sensibilities and by defending Hindu traditions against unfair European criticism. As Hatcher and Shukla-Bhatt argue in their respective chapters, reforms to Hinduism during the period of British rule were not simply a matter of European concepts being imposed on a passive Indian populace; rather, there was a dialogue between traditions taking place, with Indian ways of thought and life being repurposed to serve new ends. These engagements with the colonial presence on the part of Hindu thinkers were as diverse in method, argument, and impact as the empire itself.

One key example of a Hindu reformer who engaged with British ideas was the Bengali Brahmin Rammohun Roy (1772-1833), whose life and work are discussed in several of the following chapters. Rammohun Roy published critiques of Hindu religious and cultural practices such as "idolatry," child marriage, and widow immolation in which he argued that, because such practices were not original to Hinduism but had accreted to the tradition over time, they ought to be purged. In 1830, Roy established a voluntary organization, the Brahmo Samaj, that encouraged social activism on behalf of such reforms and modeled them through communal enactments of, for example, Hindu worship that did not involve icons. Roy also worked with the colonial regime in Bengal on the legal abolition of "suttee" or widow immolation. As a result, Roy was held up by the British as evidence of, in Hatcher's words, "the beneficial influence of European civilization." Yet Hatcher's chapter also explains that the impact of such legislation was far from straightforward. In Shukla-Bhatt's discussion of Roy's work, she highlights his criticisms of Christian theology, especially the doctrine of the trinity, and his advocacy for the superiority of Vedanta thought. She thereby demonstrates that a reformer like

Roy was not simply capitulating to European norms but was reexamining his own tradition and intellectual commitments in light of the ideas present in his context.

In other parts of India, we see examples of quite different responses to British rule, several of which had a greater impact on actual Hindu practice. Raman's chapter sheds light on the life and activities of the Jaffna-born Tamil Saivasiddhanta thinker Arumuga Navalar (Arumuka Navalar 1822-79). Navalar's concern about the threat Christian missionization posed to Tamil Saivism prompted him to craft polemics against Christianity, which he disseminated widely using a printing press he purchased in Madras. Navalar's activities constitute a Hindu reform movement in the sense that he also worked to purge what he saw as problematic mutations of Tamil Saiva rituals that reflected regional adjustments to the sacred texts. This was part of his broader effort to strengthen the community against external critique precisely by standardizing its canon and practices.

Finally, several of our authors also discuss another important form of Hinduism that emerged in the west Indian state of Gujarat during the period of British rule. The Swaminarayan movement, founded by the Brahmin Sahajanand Swami (1781-1830), flourished on the edges of colonial rule in more rural settings. Rather than purging Hinduism of "backward" customs or searching for alignment between British cultural norms and traditional dharmasastra statements, this movement aimed to accommodate those aspects of traditional Hindu society that would exert a stabilizing influence in a region marked by socio-economic upheaval. The movement encouraged respect for one's elders, self-discipline, and service to society as the means for personal and social upliftment. All of this was placed within a Vaisnava devotional framework that retained many familiar features of popular bhakti. As Hatcher points out in his chapter, this movement has often been wrongly contrasted as a traditionalist foil to Rammohun Roy's "modern" or Anglicized Hinduism when, in fact, the Swaminarayan movement's interactions with the British regime were often mutually beneficial. This attests to the diversity inherent in both the various forms of Hinduism that emerged in

this period and the British regime's strategies for managing its presence in the subcontinent.

Thus, Hinduism throughout the age of empires was a complex and evolving set of phenomena, irreducible to a single feature, even as some important efforts were made to identify core attributes within and unifying parameters around it. This complexity makes it impossible for a volume of this type to be exhaustive. Nevertheless, by highlighting several significant through-lines in early modern Hindu religiosity, such as bhakti, dharma, sectarianism, and Vedanta philosophy, the chapters here chart the emergence of modern forms and conceptions of Hinduism. <>

## Volume 5: A Cultural History of Hinduism in the Age of Late Colonialism edited by Gwilym Beckerlegge [The Cultural Histories Series, Bloomsbury Academic, ISBN 9781350024403]

This volume in the Cultural History of Hinduism series covers the relatively brief period when India was directly ruled by the British Crown rather than as previously by the Crown's agent, the British East India Company. This period will be referred to as the "age of late colonialism," consistent with the style adopted in this series. The period covers the years from the uprising against the British East India Company in 1857, commonly known as the First War of Independence or the Great Revolt, to the achievement of Indian independence in 1947.

The political changes that took place in India between 1857 and 1947 inevitably affected many social and cultural aspects of life in India, for example, artistic, intellectual, religious, social, and technological. It is this web of changes, some directly instrumental in promoting the cause of political independence, and many marked more indirectly by this decades-long struggle, which will be explored by the contributors to this volume. These inter-connected and no less far-reaching changes had a considerable impact on

the future development of Indian culture and the place and manifestations of Hinduism within it.

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By the end of the late colonial period, the independent, political entity of India had been marked out by hastily imposed, new boundaries at some considerable cost in terms of human lives. Throughout this period, attempts also had been made to define more sharply the boundaries of "Hinduism" in relation to other traditions within India and what were increasingly spoken of as "world religions." This was an enterprise in which both Hindu intellectuals and India's scholarly observers participated. It added momentum to the growing tendency since the late eighteenth century to pull together the many strands of Indian tradition that did not appear to form part of other designated "religions," such as Buddhism, and to categorize the newly created portmanteau concept of "Hinduism" as a "religion."

A more distinctive feature of late colonial scholarship than the continuing refinement of the overarching concept of Hinduism was arguably an increasing preoccupation with the relationship between continuing Hindu tradition and what were held to be new, significantly different formations, shaped under greater exposure to colonial and global influences. If the late colonial period inherited the concept of Hinduism, it bequeathed to its heirs a suite of newly created subordinate categories, including modern Hinduism, reform Hinduism, the Hindu Renaissance, and neo-Hinduism. Although these terms have proved to be no less contentious and problematic than Hinduism, the concept they were created to refine, they have collectively constituted a vocabulary that continues to shape the study of Hinduism of the era of late colonialism and beyond.

During the years when the struggle for independence came to dominate India's national life, the spiritual and political became increasingly fused in the rhetoric of Hindu political leaders, most famously Gandhi. The utterances of acknowledged Hindu gurus, for example, Vivekananda, were also hailed as revitalizing Hindu tradition and

galvanizing Hindus, thus contributing to India's nation-building. In the decades following independence, this tendency would become even more marked in Indian public debate and in the campaigns of Hindu nationalist organizations such as the RSS and its "family" of linked organizations, including the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), which expanded in the decades after independence.

The era of late colonialism was a period during which not just new Hindu organizations, but new forms of Hindu organizations came into existence, aspiring to function at a national, or even international, level. Education, particularly English-medium education, and socio-economic class created a new generation of leaders and affected the demographic composition of many Hindu organizations. Access to education and material resources also widened opportunities, although still limited at this time, for women and stigmatized social groups.

Diasporic, global networks slowly began to take shape during the late' colonial period, following Hindu patterns of migration. The Ramakrishna Math and Mission attempted through its Vedanta Centers to offer Hindu teaching to individuals not born into Hindu families in the United States and Europe, and the wider dissemination of the teaching and practice of yoga began. From a twenty-first-century perspective familiar with the prominence of Hindu organizations, such as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, the visible presence of resident Hindu communities in many countries, and the global dissemination of various styles of yoga, it is perhaps easy to overlook the innovative and, in the longer term, transformative nature of what were at the time admittedly modest expansions of the influence of Hindu practice and belief in the late colonial era.

In India, some nineteenth-century Hindu organizations, such as the Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj, initially attracted considerable support, but, from the perspective of the twenty-first century, their residual influence is more evident in their impact on later, more vibrant organizations than in the scale of their own followings. Many of the factors that promoted the emergence of new styles of Hinduism, different kinds of teachers, and reliance on new media also stimulated the revitalization of sampradayas.

The coexistence of these different expressions of Hinduism with their different histories, a diversity in keeping with the pluralistic nature of Hinduism as a "big tent," gave institutional expression to an ongoing, dynamic debate about the future of Hinduism as colonial rule came to an end. <>

## Volume 6: A Cultural History of Hinduism in the Age of Independence edited by Amanda Lucia and Maya Warrier [The Cultural Histories Series, Bloomsbury Academic, ISBN 9781350024427]

> *The Blessed Lord spoke:*
> *I am Time, the mighty cause of world destruction,*
> *Who has come forth to annihilate the worlds.*
> *Even without any action of yours, all these warriors*
> *Who are arrayed in the opposing ranks, shall cease to exist.*

"I am become Time, the destroyer of worlds"—a passage long-familiar to Hindus, but one which was made globally infamous when J. Robert Oppenheimer, an American theoretical physicist, claimed that a paraphrase of the scripture, "Now, I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds," came into his mind as he watched the explosion of the first atomic bomb on July 16, 1945. When Oppenheimer's recitation of the paraphrased scripture was overlaid onto a sexual scene in Christopher Nolan's 2023 eponymous biopic film, Hindus around the globe were outraged and disappointed at the rehearsed orientalism. Disregarding the real Oppenheimer's knowledge of Sanskrit and respect for Hindu scriptures—the very reason the verse came to his mind in the horror of that magnanimous moment—the film sexualized Hinduism on the Hollywood screen yet again. Uday Mahurkar, the information, commissioner of the Indian Government, wrote in an open letter that the scene was effectively "waging a war on the Hindu community" and almost appeared to be part of a "larger conspiracy by anti-Hindu forces."' One of the aims of this volume is to unfurl the networks that link together the continuing effects of orientalism and colonialism, the imagined war on Hindus by

global anti-Hindu forces, and the accelerating impacts of both for scholars, the faithful, and the academic study of Hinduism.

Indeed, in 1945, Oppenheimer's thoughts of the Bhagavad Gita caused little stir; instead, the world was focused on his unprecedented technological achievement, the unimaginable violence, and new threshold of radical change. That pivotal moment in time was not so far from Indian Independence in 1947, an event that also ushered in a time of tumultuous change—both technological achievement and indescribable violence. As is well known, Independence was a time of massive social upheaval in India as colonial governmental apparatuses were dismantled. The Partition of India formed the independent nations of India and Pakistan in 1947. In 1948, Sri Lanka became an independent country in the Commonwealth of Nations, known as the Dominion of Ceylon, and only became fully independent as Sri Lanka in 1972. The last hold of the British Empire was dismantled with the transfer of Hong Kong to China in 1997; with both the loss of India and Hong Kong, historians mark the end of British colonialism, often without much attention to the fourteen British Overseas Territories. Also, with the accelerations of capitalism and globalization, the United States (already a settler-colonial nation) has exerted new forms of global imperialism and empire-building that may exist beyond the formal confines of colonialism, but resonate with its motives and effects.

The point of rehearsing this largely well-known history is to remind readers that formal colonialism dominated not so long ago, and settler-colonialism continues relatively unabated. Furthermore, while the British Empire formally "ended" in the last few years of the twentieth century, there is much that remains in its structures, both visible and invisible. As South Asian historian Priya Satia reminds us, historicism is a mode of ethical thought, and "the historical sensibility that enabled imperialism is still intact, despite the seeming end of empire" (Satia 2020: 10). In post-colonial societies the cultural impacts of colonialism also endure, whether in the architecture of Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus railway station in Mumbai (formerly Victoria Terminus) (Figure I.1), in the name of Victoria Memorial Hall in Kolkata, or in the auto-orientalist rhetoric of

contemporary Hindutva politicians and the Ministry of Tourism's campaign of "Incredible India." Colonial legacy exists also in the multiple renaming initiatives across South Asia, in which the desire to decolonize and to assert independent and indigenous self-determination are ensconced.

With this in mind, it is somewhat unreasonable to imagine that Edward Said's famed book, Orientalism (1979), took so many Western-trained scholars of Hinduism by surprise. In hindsight, it would have been even more ludicrous to imagine that Western-trained scholars would be able to transcend the academy's epistemic foundations of racism, colonialism, and imperialism without considerable effort. Franz Fanon had warned decades prior that there would be a need to decolonize minds and ideas, in addition to political structures (Fanon 1963). Of course, Said's work has come under critique (App 2015; Irwin 2006) and there are ways in which his fundamental intervention can be expanded upon in new and productive ways (Hallaq 2018; Inden 2006). But what Said got right was the largely Foucaultian point that knowledge is ensconced within power-knowledge systems, which it simultaneously produces and enables for its own reproduction. In particular, he showed how ways of thinking (orientalism) served as the foundation for colonialism, and that the orientalism-colonialism relation was not only an eclipsed history, but an active social reality. Said argued convincingly that scholarship conducted in Area Studies programs—like South Asian Studies—cannot be considered without attention to the vested interests through which it is produced (for example, US Department of Defense funding for Title VI programs). And that the knowledge produced in such a context produces power-knowledge systems in its application. In so doing, his work disrupted the self-proclaimed narrative of scholars, that they were crafting scholarship that was independent, objective, and unbeholden to special interests and historical epistemological inheritances.

In this vein, post-colonial critique emerged contemporaneously with the ascendance of social history, a call for a new form of historiography influenced by social theory and sociology, and one particularly attentive to those marginalized and erased from the

archives. In more recent decades, the turn has been toward cultural history, as in the title for this series, which also interrogates the privileging of elites, but considers the domain of representation, the struggle over meaning, and the objects and experiences of everyday life as entry points for understanding historical epochs; as a field, it is heavily influenced by theory and method in cultural anthropology. Both intellectual shifts reformed history as a discipline, and challenged the status of political history, that is to say, history written as the history of the leaders of nations and ruling classes, which was deemed both conservative and in service of the preservation of the status quo.

Historians of South Asia were instrumental to these developments. Scholars such as Ranajit Guha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak, among many others, transcended the boundaries of their discipline, crafted the tools of post-colonial theory, and developed the field of Subaltern Studies. The scholarly community that founded Subaltern Studies focused on indigenous resistance to colonial dominance (Guha 1998), colonial impacts on subject formation (Bhabha 1994), multiply-effaced subaltern subjects (Spivak 1988), and methods for provincializing the specter of European and British colonial powers (Chakrabarty 2007). Other scholars looked more distinctly at the nation-state (Chatterjee 1994; Guha 1998; Pandey 2001) and colonial discourses and practices that produced modern understandings of gender, sexuality, and family and social values (Sarkar 2002). Many sought to uncover voices that had been marginalized or eradicated from the historical record (for one example, see Butalia 2000). This bounty of post-colonial scholarship emerging from these scholars and many others—far too many to name here—and their efforts productively centered South Asian Studies as a theoretical engine of post-colonial thought (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2006).

But for a variety of reasons which I will outline here briefly, the study of religion largely bypassed many of these important post-colonial recalibrations of the discipline. First, although the study of religion occurs in a variety of academic disciplines, the widespread institutionalization of Religious Studies as a distinctive academic field

occurred only after the dissolution of the height of colonial empire; most departments of religion were founded in the 1960s in the optimism of comparative cultural understanding. As such, they imagined themselves as somehow exempt from the critique being levied at the other, older disciplines that had been part and parcel of the colonial power-knowledge project. Second, the field was founded with a palpable Protestant bias that privileged an understanding of religion-as-text and as a result, the discipline tended to focus on questions of literary theory, semiotics, and textuality, and much less so on the power relations and social contexts of religious people. Third, in South Asian Studies, the Marxist engine of Post-Colonial Studies and Subaltern Studies employed a theoretical apparatus which had little desire to attend to—and quite a bit of disdain for—the topic of religion. The practical effect of this was that while South Asian Studies, Anthropology, and History departments confronted their complicity in colonial power-knowledge production and produced highly influential scholarship on the topic, scholars in Religious Studies departments largely did not.

This disciplinary lack of self-reflexivity with regard to the post-colonial context is one of the reasons why the scholarly study of Hinduism is such a fraught and hotly contested field in the present. Unfortunately, in tandem with this insufficiency, there has also been a rise in a variety of forms of militant Hindu nationalism, through which Hindus have attempted to cultivate national pride by constructing India as a Hindu nation, and to control the narrative of Hindu history, religion, and society in efforts to craft purely celebratory histories of Hindu accomplishment. As several scholars in this volume note, this aggressive form of Hindu nationalism emerges from and responds to the colonial context. Reacting to historical disenfranchisement, its advocates demand not only fair and equal representation, but dominant and hegemonic representation. As Arjun Appadurai explains, the desire for complete hegemony renders not only diverse opinions but also minority populations as undesirable; the demand for ideological hegemony aims to justify their complete eradication. Ironically, this occurs not in spite of Hindu's majority status, but because of it. Appadurai argues that it is because of the numerical majority's "anxiety of incompleteness" that they become "predatory and

ethnocidal with regard to small numbers precisely when some minorities (and their small numbers) remind these majorities and the horizon of an unsullied national whole, a pure and untainted national ethnos" (Appadurai 2006: 8). Because of Hindu nationalists' fascism, violence, and over-reaching of identarian politics, it has become commonplace for Western-trained scholars to discredit and disregard Hindu critique of academic scholarship on Hinduism.

Most definitely, much of the field of critique is driven by nationalistic identity politics, which abjures anything that might be conceived of as negative (according to a neoliberal, modernist, Protestant view), such as discussion of caste, sexuality, or polytheism. Viewed in this way, it becomes clear just how deeply indebted to the British colonial ideological project contemporary Hindu nationalists actually are (see Hatcher, Chapter 1). But the field of critique is vast and multifarious, and some of it is driven by genuine concerns about representation—particularly among Hindu populations living in the diaspora who exist as minorities in American and European societies informed by white supremacy and Christian dominance (or "wall of separation"-style secularism, see Hatcher, Chapter 1 and Kanungo, Chapter 5). In the current context, many critics join forces with Hindutva activists because of their mobilizing power; critical dissenters to both Western hegemony and Hindutva ideology find little room to articulate their views. From my perspective, even if scholars disagree with their Hindu critics, it is important to understand why Hindu nationalists have embraced such a fevered paranoia, and to interrogate why Western scholarship on Hinduism incurs such wrath from segments of the indigenous population that they study. Only by deeply engaging in disciplinary self-reflexivity, can scholars begin to see the substantive critique of ordinary Hindus that is largely obfuscated by an aggressive and nationalistic veneer.

With this short prelude, readers can now approach the title of this series: A Cultural History of Hinduism. Undoubtedly, if scholars mention to conservative Hindus that they study "Hinduism," they are swiftly informed that there is no such thing. And in fact, it is also important to foreground that such a conversation only occurs in English,

also a colonial legacy. For if they were speaking in Hindi (or another Indian language), the only relatively similar phrasing would be that they study Hindu dharm, an indigenous term meaning law, way of life, that which should be done, and only by approximation: religion. So even in the approach of this publication, there is an epistemological choice to use the term "Hinduism," which was first used by the Vedantic reformer Rammohun Roy in 1816 (Pennington 2005: 60), popularized by the British, and then used in the construction of "world religions" thereafter (Balagangadhara 1993). Many scholars have argued that the term signifies a distinctively modern (and Western) form of religiosity that was generated through colonial encounter, and one that imposed religion—and Hinduism—as a unifying epistemological category, and its contents crafted in accordance with a Protestant worldview. In contrast, other scholars have argued that there is considerable continuity between the plurality of pre-modern understandings of Hindu identity and the contemporary designation of Hinduism as religion (for a more thorough treatment of this debate, see Lorenzen 1999). Recently, the Feminist Critical Hindu Studies (FCHS) Collective has argued for the replacement term "Hindu formations," with the justification that "the term Hindu formations complicates the notion of 'Hinduism' as a coherent religion and 'Hindus' as a homogenous community of practitioners. We assert that these categories—Hinduism and Hindu—not only arise in conjunction with forms of white supremacy and caste supremacy, but are imbricated with them" (FCHS 2021: 3). Importantly, while many other Hindus would prefer the term sanatana dharma, they would also recognize that the term "Hinduism" has significant power, activating a recognizable and unifying religious identity for billions of Hindus worldwide. Thus, even at the outset, before any hypotheses are made or arguments written, even in articulating the object of study—Hinduism, Hindu dharm, Hindu formations, sanatana dharma—there are conflicting, politicized, and racialized epistemological views (see Hatcher, Chapter 1, and Swamy, Chapter 8).

Such epistemological difference has created a heated field of debate within the study of "Hinduism" over the past several decades. One reason for this is that the time period

covered by this volume has also produced a seismic change in relation to how one might approach the study of religion. In fact, as mentioned, it was only in the mid-1960s that the academic study of religion as a critical academic discipline rather than a theological, missionizing, and/ or devotional project proliferated in university departments. Then (as now) departments of religion were institutionalized predominantly in universities in the West; India still has few stand-alone departments dedicated to the academic study of religion (Cavallin, Sander, and Sitharaman 2021). Furthermore, according to Article 45 of the Indian Constitution (the so-called "blasphemy laws") and multiple sections of the Indian Penal Code, discourses that are critical of any given community's religious sensibilities are deemed not only harmful to peaceful communal relations, but illegal (Scott 2023). Such discursive confines are often antithetical to critical scholarly inquiry and easily come into conflict with notions of "freedom of speech" and "academic freedom," both of which are particularly prevalent ideals in Western liberal societies.

In consequence, it is somewhat unsurprising that the scholarly field of Hindu Studies has catalyzed significant conflict between politicized Hindus and Western-trained scholars of religion. On the one hand, many Hindus are eager to construct celebratory narratives of Hinduism and are defensive and protective against any questioning of their religious traditions; they feel justified in this view, in part, because they are supported by Indian laws banning speech related to religion that the faithful would deem "offensive." On the other hand, scholars—both in India and abroad—rely on critique as a mode of discourse in the study of religion and challenge the ideologically motivated construction of partisan historical accounts. The current state of epistemological conflict which has consumed the scholarly field of Hindu Studies in recent decades emerges within these interdependent, reactive, and combinative effects of the rise in Hindu nationalism of the past several decades (Nussbaum 2007; Kanungo, Chapter 5), the latent Protestant Christian bias in the academic study of religion (Mazusawa 2005), and the underlying context of white supremacy and colonial imperialism (Lucia 2020; Satia 2020).

One catalyst for conflict began in the early 2000s, with Rajiv Malhotra's virulent critique, which, under his leadership, developed into lasting conflicts between various subgroups for the study of South Asian religions in the American Academy of Religion, and a broader ideologically driven fractionalization globally. Initially, Malhotra and his supporters objected to psychoanalytical theoretical approaches and discussions of sexuality in Wendy Doniger's work and that of some of her students, most of whom had well-established academic careers at the time of the critique, such as Jeffrey Kripal, Paul Courtright, and Sarah Caldwell (Malhotra 2001; see also Taylor 2011 and Daniyal 2015). However, in the decades that followed, it became apparent that this critique was not always substantive, but instead objected to Western-trained scholars speaking on Hinduism in general, scholarship that could be interpreted as religiously offensive to Hindus, and scholarship that violated the parameters of Hindutva ideology. It also became apparent that this broader critique resonated with many Hindus, with tens of thousands of Hindus signing online petitions for a variety of related campaigns. In many cases, scholarly acquiescence to Hindutva demands would effectively eliminate critical scholarship. For example, recently Malhotra argued that any criticism against Hindu gurus is a derisive and Western-funded assault on the Indian nation conducted by "break India forces" (Malhotra 2017). In his view, gurus are Hindu emissaries for the nation and thus, any critique of their personal or organizational behavior constitutes a seditious attack.

In the long history of Indian discourse, it is a relatively recent development that a significant number of Hindus have become intolerant of critique of Hinduism and India, and many advocate for a singular view of Hinduism and Hindu history. In contrast, historically, India had robust traditions of skepticism, argument, and philosophical discourse (Sen 2005). Recent forms of intellectual intolerance, which advocate for legal indictments, charges of sedition, and silencing (often violent) of dissenting views, are the product of the acceleration of a Hindutva ideology that has been gaining popularity over the past thirty years. The Hindutva view tends to restrict authority to speak on Hindu heritage to Indian Hindus alone (and then, only to those

who comply with Hindutva ideology). For example, one campaign called for the removal of renowned Sanskritist Sheldon Pollock from his directorship of the Murty Sanskrit Library, based on the argument that only an Indian Hindu who would translate according to a "traditional view" should represent Sanskrit (read Hindu) heritage. More recently, South Asian historian Audrey Truschke's bookAurangzeb (Truschke 2017) became a flashpoint for her refusal to depict the fifteenth-century Mughal ruler Aurangzeb as the genocidal, despotic, and vilified ruler that many contemporary Hindus consider him out to be (see Kanungo, Chapter 5). As a result, Truschke and her family have been subject to an onslaught of criticism (including death threats), and a variety of Hindu groups, including the Hindu Students Council (HSC) and the Hindu YUVA (Hindu Youth for Unity, Virtues and Action), have called for her immediate removal for spreading what they view as "Hinduphobia."2 In opposition, organizations representing human rights, Dalits, Kashmir, and Muslims have vocally supported her scholarship and her appointment.' In the past decade, Hindus have also launched concentrated campaigns to purchase endowed chairs in Hinduism in American universities, based on the presumption that the appointed scholar will narrate Hindu history, culture, and religion in accordance with donors' wishes (Redden 2016). In 2020, when the Conference on the Study of Religions of India (CSRI) was slated to be held in Madras, Arvind Kumar derided the conference as "Hinduphobic" and argued that "it is time to roll back access" to India for American academics (Kumar 2020).

The Hindutva attempt to silence views that differ from their own applies not only to Western-trained scholars (of any ethnicity) who hold positions in the Western academy but also to Indian Hindus (both abroad and in India) who critique the singularity of the Hindutva view. One of the most significant early restrictions on intellectual freedom was Delhi University's decision to remove A. K. Ramanujan's famous essay, "Three Hundred Ramayanas," from syllabi in the History department in 2011. The essay highlighted the diversity of multiple versions of the Ramayana that are told in India and beyond, and thus challenged the nationalistic view that identified a

singular narrative to justify its Ramjanmabhoomi campaign (Vijetha 2011). In the years that followed, in addition to significant campaigns to rewrite history in public schools in India and abroad, there have been multiple instances that have sounded alarms for both scholars and the general public (Figure 1.2). In 2016, students at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in Delhi were arrested and charged with sedition in a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) attempt to silence political dissent (Singh and Dasgupta 2019). In 2018, the Indian Council on Philosophical Research (ICPR) decided to postpone (and effectively canceled) a conference on religious pluralism at JNU because of a xenophobic objection to "foreign scholars" involved and paper submissions on Adivasi religion (The Wire 2018). In 2019, Benaras Hindu University students protested and boycotted the faculty appointment of Firoz Khan, who was hired to teach Sanskrit (BBC 2019b). The argument against his appointment was that a Muslim teaching Sanskrit at BHU would do harm to Hinduism and that only an Indian Hindu is qualified to teach Sanskrit. On January 6, 2020, fifty masked assailants armed with rods, sticks, and acid rampaged the JNU campus in retaliation for student protest against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). The Hindu Raksha Dal (Hindu Defense League), a right-wing Hindutva group, claimed responsibility, and members of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the student wing of the BJP, were also visible in the video footage of the attack.

Ironically, such aggressive campaigns to silence dissenting views tend to have the opposite effect of their intended purposes; they result in less—not more—self-reflexivity and empathy with Hindu views among Western-trained scholars of Hinduism. They tend to thwart critical scholarly reflection on the fact that orientalism continues to contour the field, and scholarship on Hinduism continues to overemphasize exoticism, ritualism, social hierarchies, sexuality, and texts. In a provocative critique of the field, Richard Weiss argued effectively that "scholars continue to examine modern Hinduism through dichotomies of static Hindu traditions and dynamic Western modernity" (Weiss 2019: 4). The aforementioned FCHS Collective has recently issued an intersectional feminist critique of the discipline and aims to "propose a series of strategies and commitments for change and action in the fields of

South Asian Religions, Hindu Studies, and South Asian Studies" (FCHS Collective 2021: 1). However, because of the last several decades of militant Hindutva activism, any critique of current scholarship is easily labeled as Hindutva and discredited—especially if critics emerge from outside of the academy and/or are of South Asian descent. In this way, substantive critique is deflected and scholarship informed by unexamined and latent orientalist, Christocentric, and racist perspectives remain under-scrutinized.

In the midst of this active contestation, Jonathan Edelmann has argued recently that part of the reason for the conflict is that "unlike other major religions in the US, Hinduism does not have its own intellectual space," that is to say a space for "tradition-based reflection," as is found in many theological seminaries (Edelmann 2016: 731, emphasis in original). This is a point worthy of consideration. As mentioned previously, some of this conflict stems from the misunderstanding of the purposes of the critical study of religion in the humanities and social sciences versus a theological engagement that is ultimately concerned with the propagation of the faith and constructivist ethics. There has been considerable success in the establishment of a Hindu Studies program at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley (2015) and the masters in Yoga Studies at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles (2013); both programs are aimed at the advancement of scholar-practitioners. One might also imagine Hindu sectarian groups creating robust intellectual communities for theological reflection following the model of Bhaktivedanta College, founded by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness in Belgium or the International Hindu University in Florida.

As for conventional institutions of higher education, there are many Hindu activists who would like to see Hindu Studies more closely replicate the conventions of Ethnic Studies, a scholarly discipline wherein members of an ethnic group are viewed to have privileged access and knowledge because of their identity In the study of religion, a comparable model would be Jewish Studies, which—for more reasons than can be discussed herewith—is dominated by Jewish scholars who engage in a variety of approaches to the study of Judaism. In the current political climate, the academic study

of religion is in transition. From my perspective, as a white female scholar and close witness to Hindu assaults against non-Hindu scholars, I see the field trending toward representational identity politics, wherein members of the religious group in question are increasingly viewed as privileged voices in speaking for their traditions. But, in contrast, the FCHS Collective argues that

As women of color, we have been trained to move through the racist spaces of the academy always questioning ourselves, our mastery of our fields, and our right to critique institutions. White scholars have never had to interrogate these relationships to academia or to their research subjects in the same ways as we have, if at all. As women of color scholars, we have been asked if we are "too close" to our communities to be able to research them objectively. (FCHS 2021: 2)

In this contested field of representational authority, one thing is clear: critics abound and all subject-positions are being called into question. In this active debate, only Time will reveal whether advocates for "Hinduism," "Hindu formations," or "sanatana dharma," the "eternal religion," will determine the future of the discipline.

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The post-Independence period, and the past three decades (since circa 1991) in particular, can be characterized as a period of simultaneous expansion and contraction, an anxious push/pull in the multifarious forces that are actively curating global Hinduism. On the one hand, there are expansive impulses—globally proselytizing gurus, aggressive campaigns to build elaborate temple complexes, Hinduism recoded as tolerant, ecumenical, and universalistic, and India as the global exporter of Ayurveda, yoga, and spirituality. In this view, India earns its predominance because it serves as visva guru (guru to the world). On the other hand, there is a simultaneous and reactionary impulse to contract—to erect communal boundaries, to reinforce the Indian nation as exclusively Hindu, and to recode Hinduism with a singular narrative informed by a divisive and aggressive Hindu theology. This we can see in the rise in Hindu nationalism, Hindu violence against and persecution of Muslim and Christian

minorities, the Hindu rejections of Western influence, and in everyday articulations of Hindu supremacy. In this view, Hindus perceive their nation, religion, and communities as distinctively persecuted, defamed, and violated (by "Hinduphobia" and "anti-Hindu forces"). Their argument then, is that to combat this onslaught they must aggressively assert and protect Hinduism (sanatana dharma) against immanent attack.

Intriguingly, in both the expansion and the contraction modalities, religious figures are active in the public sphere, serving as temple-builders, proselytizers, politicians, corporate gurus, yoga aficionados, and media celebrities. In my chapter in this volume, I argue that one of the markers of the post-Independence period is this active intervention of religious actors in the public sphere—the dynamic resurgence of Hindu adepts as religio-political leaders and social influencers. I understand this to be a resurgence, because as Samta Pandya writes, "guru governmentality is a form of indigenous governance" (Pandya 2016: 88). I argue that India "has never relegated religion to the private sphere in the Habermasian sense—or, for that matter, in the Protestant Christian sense" (Asad 1993). Thus, to recognize the public influence of Hindu religious leaders in the post-Independence period is not to highlight something new to the Indian subcontinent. Arguably, what has developed is the resurgence of active collaboration between the political and religious spheres. During British colonial rule, this traditional form of Hindu governmental affiliation was largely suppressed and emerged only in modes of nationalist resistance. In the post-Independence period, there has been a renewal of this collaboration through state-sponsored temples, priests, and new celebrity gurus who wield extraordinary power to shape public opinion and mobilize Indian voters. "Such developments can be read as a renewal of indigenous Indic modes of collaboration between the state and religion, albeit adapted to a modern democratic polity" (Lucia, Chapter 7).

Before releasing readers to the erudite chapters in this volume on post-Independence Hinduism, there is yet one pressing topic, which none of the chapters address at length and is not included in the sections addressed in the volumes in this series. And thus, I feel as though I must address it here in the short space remaining, lest this volume be

remiss. In recent years, there has been exceptional research conducted on the relation of Hinduism to the environment and the impact of the current environmental catastrophe on Hindu religious practices. Hinduism, in many ways, is a religion in which materiality and the natural environment are absolutely vital. It is a religion of sacred rocks and trees, rivers and mountains; a religion of ritual offerings, pilgrimage, and objects infused with Sakti (energy) (Lucia 2021). And as such, it is a religion that is particularly impacted by the current state of global climate crisis, and one that may offer unique ways of approaching our current crisis of eco-catastrophe.

Anthropologist Tulasi Srinivas has sounded the alarm in her account of how the toxicity of the Vrishabhavathi River in Bengaluru (also known as Bangalore) torments this megacity of twelve million inhabitants often applauded as the "Silicon Valley of India." She writes that "the city is predicted to face a water crisis of epic and incendiary proportions—a day zero when the water taps in the city are predicted to run dry)—in two short years" (Srinivas 2020). For now, the priests of the Gali Anjaneya temple, situated on the riverbank and dedicated to Hanuman (also known as Anjaneya), bathe the deity with bottled water. The temple priests dread the "gift of floods" for which the temple was once revered, but now brings only an inundation of toxic river water in monsoon season, as it did in 2017. Her account alerts her readers to the undeniable fact that Hindu sacred sites (and deities and the people who worship them) are existentially threatened by a growing ecological disaster and to the inadequacy of the current response in "new India," wherein Hinduism is employed as a "divisive, nationalistic rhetoric . . . a cramped and angry political and ideological tool used to (once more) divide neighbors and friends" (Srinivas 2020). In her work advocating for an anthropology of wonder, Srinivas suggests that the present moment provides an opportunity for a "radical social hope," which "is key to anti-alienation, to a sense of feeling and being 'at home' in the modern world" (Srinivas 2018: 8). In the midst of eco-catastrophe, she points to space wherein Hinduism supplies "a new imaginative geopolitical theology" by revealing its theological essence of "earthly custodianship and ecological care" (Srinivas 2020).

Luke Whitmore's work on Kedarnath strikes a similar tone. In the aftermath of the horrific and tragic mudslides, floods, and terror in Uttarakhand in 2013, Whitmore argues for contextual, networked, eco-social systemic approaches to eco-catastrophe that could "offer a portable holistic model for thinking about how religious woridviews inform conceptions, experiences, and practices connecting to the natural world that can be deployed across multiple scales" (Whitmore 2018: 12). He advocates for thinking in spaces of interdependence, wherein Hinduism is a formidable force within a contextual web of significance that can help to confront climate crisis. Such a view is also supported by David Haberman's research (2011, 2013, 2020) wherein he shows repeatedly—in multiple different contexts of Vaishnava devotion in northern India—how Hindu faith and practice can reconfigure human relations with the natural environment. He writes, "major lessons in the worship of Mount Govardhan, then, include the assertion of divine presence throughout the material world, the realization of the sacrality of the natural world, and the benefits of a worshipful attitude toward the physical world. All this opens up the possibility of a different relationship with the world, particularly with the other-than-human" (Haberman 2020: 242). In this way, Hinduism may be one avenue through which to formulate practical solutions to the eco-catastrophes facing contemporary India. Haberman focuses on the worship of Mount Govardhan, but one might also look to Kedarnath or the Ganges River to see how anthropomorphism cultivates "an ethics of care" that might lead to closer connections with the natural world and greater involvement with protective care and conservation (244).

As the Yamuna River produces soapy suds from industry run-off (Figure 1.5) and the air quality in New Delhi becomes so toxic that even the deities wear masks, there may be no more pressing issue for which religion can be put to use to sway the actions of Indian Hindus. In April 2021, India's Covid-19 figures shocked the world, and became a horrific human tragedy, with more than three hundred thousand new infections reported daily (Pat 2021). Scholar and activist Arundhati Roy characterized the Covid crisis as a "crime against humanity" and placed blame on Prime Minister Narendra

Modi and his policies, in defiance of his popular acclaim among many Hindus (Roy 2021). Corona Devi (coronavirus) became a deity enshrined across India, to whom the faithful make offerings for their own protection and for the protection of others in this necro-political moment. Some critics may deride the worship of Corona Devi as a product of fear and superstition, but such actions can also be understood as a means of procuring and mobilizing personal agency while encompassed in a state of precarity that is largely beyond individual control. In India, the worship of the goddesses Hariti and Sitala (smallpox) and Ola Bibi (cholera) provides a historical precedent for coping with this newest ailment facing humanity. Of course, skeptics will argue that hand sanitizer, masks, and bleach—and more generally, infrastructure projects that create clean water systems, medical facilities, and waste treatment plants—will fight disease better than religious offerings to an anthropomorphized virus. But nevertheless, the anthropomorphized deity just might be the conduit through which to begin conversations about the importance of such measures. Hinduism is a pluralistic and multifarious tradition that can be deployed for expansion or contraction, cosmopolitanism or nationalism, ahimsa (non-violence) or violence, an ethics of environmental care or the denial of eco-catastrophe. Only one thing is certain: Hinduism (Hindu dharma, Hindu formations, and sanatana dharma) is the religio-cultural life breath of 15 percent of the world's population, and their views and practices will impact the shape of the future, in ways that only Time—or perhaps Death—the destroyer of worlds, will reveal. <>

## Psychedelic Experience: Revealing the Mind by Aidan Lyon [Oxford University Press, 9780198843757]

**Psychedelic Experience** presents a philosophical account of psychedelic experience.

A central premise of the book is that such experiences are mind-revealing experiences and that they can be induced by means other than psychedelics. In particular, the book argues that psychedelic experiences can also be had as the result of meditation. Aiden Lyon presents a unified conceptual framework for thinking about the different kinds of

psychedelic experiences one may have as a result of psychedelics, meditation, and their combination. This framework is then used to shed new light on various commonalities between psychedelics and meditation, such as the ability to promote long-lasting increases in mindfulness and their reputation for inducing mystical experiences. Finally, the book uses these new philosophical resources to flip things around and shine the light back on philosophy itself, arguing that psychedelic experiences can be used as tools for doing philosophy. The result is a new approach to philosophy (or the revival of an ancient one), which integrates traditional analytic methods with a range of psychedelic techniques.

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This book was born out of several psychedelic experiences I had in Amsterdam starting around 2014. There were four in particular that influenced its development.

The first experience kick-started the general philosophical project and, in a way, was the culmination of my initial series of experiences. Like so many people, I was deeply transformed by my psychedelic experiences. I found that they were helping me be more creative and insightful and generally live a better, healthier life. It was clear that these experiences were incredibly valuable. However, they were also curiously variegated in their qualities—each experience was so unlike all the others. At some point, I had the experience that launched this project: I realized that this variability posed a philosophical puzzle. While these experiences were extraordinarily different from one another, it was also clear they were unified in some important way. And so I started wondering what these experiences have in common and what sets them apart from other kinds of experience. In short, I realized there was an important philosophical question lying hidden in plain sight: what are psychedelic experiences? It seemed to me that it would be tremendously useful to have some kind of conceptual framework, even a rough one, for understanding these experiences from a subjective perspective. So, I started thinking about the question of what psychedelic experiences are, what they have in common, and how they relate to one another.

The second experience gave rise to an insight that set several major pieces of the puzzle in place and determined the general structure of the book. This insight was that

whatever psychedelic experiences are, they constitute a category of experience that is much broader than how they are typically conceived. It is commonly thought that a psychedelic experience is an experience one has after consuming a psychedelic substance. (For example, the current Wikipedia page on 'psychedelic experience' defines the concept along these lines.) However, such an understanding ties the experience too tightly to its cause. You don't need to take a psychedelic to have a psychedelic experience. There are other ways. Indeed, part of the insight was that meditation (which I had been practising for a while) is another way of having a psychedelic experience. Thus, it became clear to me that our understanding of psychedelic experiences should be conceptually independent from psychedelic substances. This second experience also involved the realization that my most profound experiences were often attained by combining meditation and psychedelics. So, not only are there different ways of having psychedelic experiences, they can also be combined, with powerfully synergistic effects.

The third experience was a natural outcome of the second and my explorations with meditation and psychedelics (although I wasn't aware of this at the time). This experience made it clear that there are psychedelic experiences that are radically unlike the others—so much so that they seem to be yet another category of experience. In the literature, these experiences have come to be known as mystical experiences. While it can be difficult to describe psychedelic experiences, mystical experiences are a whole other ballgame. They are deeply ineffable and, as William James famously observed, they also have a noetic quality to them. Despite their ineffability, mystical experiences have been described as revelations of ultimate reality, glimpses of enlightenment, unions with the divine, and so on. Whereas "regular" psychedelic experiences appeared to be understandable within a naturalistic worldview, those that are mystical reveal that there is an entirely different way of looking at the world that should not be ignored. This inspired me to approach the topic with greater humility and opened up a new world of philosophical wonder—one in which naturalism and mysticism can be integrated as equals.

The fourth experience inverted my philosophical project. Up until that point, I was focused on using philosophy to make sense of psychedelic experiences. In this fourth experience, I had the insight that psychedelic experiences are themselves philosophical. It's difficult to describe what this means, exactly. Part of this insight was personal in nature: whatever it was that had originally drawn me to philosophy, as an academic, was the same thing drawing me into these experiences. However, it also seemed that this aspect of the experiences wasn't merely reflective of my own predispositions. As is well known, there is a plausible case to be made that many of the world's philosophical traditions find their origins in psychedelic experiences, whether they were induced with the help of substances such as kykeon in the Eleusinian Mysteries of ancient Greece, or soma of the Rig Veda, or the yogic and meditative practices of Hinduism and Buddhism. In short, it appears that these experiences can help us cultivate wisdom. They can help us become wiser in the sense of being better decision-makers and they can also help us pursue a deeper form of wisdom. This, I think, is the wisdom that Socrates and Plato were in love with, the wisdom of the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path, the wisdom of the Dao, the wisdom of Suhrawardi's Illuminationism, and so on. Thus, I became fascinated with the idea that psychedelic experiences can help us do philosophy—in the sense of loving and pursuing wisdom.

Of course, there is nothing new under the sun: others before me have had similar experiences, insights, and thoughts, so I only mention them to help explain how this book came about. I was compelled to write it because I needed to reconcile all of these profound experiences, and their unusual forms of knowledge and wisdom, with the rest of my belief system. My background is primarily analytic and scientific: I grew up in an atheistic household and hold a Bachelors degree in mathematics and a PhD in analytic philosophy on the foundations of probability theory in statistical physics and mathematical biology. Because of my background and interests, I couldn't find anything written about psychedelic experiences that satisfied my philosophical curiosity. The scientific literature was helpful but often too focused on specific empirical details, and there was almost nothing in analytic philosophy (although that is

now changing rapidly). And while there was plenty of important work on, and within, the mystical traditions, it tended to downplay, or just not even mention, psychedelics. I also found that many of the books about psychedelics were either lacking in rigour or didn't dive into the philosophical questions that I found to be important and was passionate about. So, I set out to write a book that I wish had existed when I first began having these experiences—something straightforward while still reasonably precise, and something philosophical but with a healthy respect for both naturalism and mysticism. As such, I think the book will be of value to others who are encountering these experiences for the first time (or are curious about them) or who share a similar background and mindset.

Given the importance and timeliness of the topic, I've also tried to make the book accessible to a wide audience. You don't need to be a philosopher or a scientist or a mystic to read it, but you may need to look a few things up here and there. Readers who are immersed in the field of psychedelic research may find that the book sometimes approaches things in a counterintuitive way—particularly my understanding of psychedelic experience as a kind of experience that can be had without consuming a psychedelic. However, based on feedback I've received, such readers tend to find that this counter-intuitiveness eventually fades and, as one lets go of the tight association between psychedelic experiences and psychedelic substances, a more experiential and a priori perspective emerges that many find helpful. Other readers who are more immersed in the mystical traditions (or wisdom traditions, if you prefer) tend to have a different reaction. They find this perspective familiar and appealing but also that the book can sometimes emphasize the mind at the expense of the body, heart, and soul. This choice of emphasis mostly reflects one of the underlying goals of the book: to help show how an analytic and scientific mindset can accommodate a mystical one without compromising the scruples of either way of looking at the world. With that said, the emphasis is also somewhat illusory. 'Mind' can be understood here as broadly synonymous with psyche—historically interpreted as 'mind, 'soul, 'self, 'spirit, `breath, etc.—and to include such things as somatic awareness, heartfulness, subtle energy, and

so on. Thus, various somatic and energetic experiences—for example, those associated with qigong, asana, pranayama, and kundalini practices—can be understood as psychedelic (e.g. as spirit-revealing or as revealing of subtle energy).

There is one final aspect of the book that deserves prefatory comment, which is its overall positive and optimistic tone. This tone doesn't reflect a belief that psychedelics and meditation are panaceas or that the spiritual/self-development path is a smooth one (far from it!). In general, all interventions on the body and mind come with risks, and the consumption of psychedelics and the practice of meditation are no exception. Indeed, since risk and reward tend to go hand-in-hand, one may argue that these particular interventions can be especially risky. While there is something to that perspective, it also seems reasonably clear from the research literature that we can mitigate and manage those risks. That doesn't mean that psychedelics and meditation are for everyone, but it does mean that their risk-reward profiles can be suitable for certain kinds of people in the right sorts of circumstances. Thus, the positive and optimistic tone of the book reflects this assessment, along with a belief that a better philosophical understanding of psychedelic experiences can help us further refine the risk-reward profiles of these interventions. Indeed, this is one of my central motivations for writing the book: that we can benefit from a more philosophically precise understanding of these experiences.

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## Book Outline

In Chapters 2-4, I lay out a philosophical framework that can help us think clearly about psychedelic experiences. This framework is needed because thinking clearly about psychedelic experiences is not an easy thing to do. There are at least three main reasons why. The first is that the general topic is emotionally charged and potentially has huge social and political implications. Such topics often invite passionate and nonrigorous thinking (on both sides of whatever debate). The second reason is that the method of inducing a psychedelic experience that most people are familiar with—namely, by consuming a psychedelic drug—has such a profound and disruptive effect

on the mind that thinking clearly about anything can be challenging, let alone the disruption itself. The third reason is that the concept of psychedelic experience is both old and new—familiar and unfamiliar—and that can cause a lot of confusion. We don't yet really understand these experiences, and the little bit of knowledge that we do have can fool us into thinking we know more than we actually do. For these reasons, we need to start slowly and carefully, and build up a philosophical framework—a conceptual architecture, if you like—that will help us avoid many obstacles down the road.

In Chapters 5-8, I will point this new philosophical machinery at the scientific literature, so that we can start to make sense of actual psychedelic experiences. I will focus primarily on three kinds of psychedelic experience: (i) those that occur spontaneously, (ii) those that are induced by the consumption of psychedelics, and (iii) those that are induced by meditation. By studying these three kinds of psychedelic experience, I believe we can get a good handle on the general phenomenon of psychedelic experience (abstracting away from how it is induced). One way to think about these four chapters is that they constitute an informal assessment of the likelihoods of various hypotheses that we may want to consider. For example, take the hypothesis that psychedelics tend to produce psychedelic experiences. How likely is that hypothesis given that we know that psychedelics produce hallucinations (which may seem like the opposite of the mind being revealed)? As another example, consider the hypothesis that meditation also induces psychedelic experiences. How likely is that hypothesis given that the experiences that typically result from psychedelics and meditation look so different? And so on. There are many other hypotheses and many other pieces of evidence that we can consider. As we'll see, some of these hypotheses can only be articulated once we have the philosophical framework in place.

In Chapters 9-11, I will come back to issues that are more philosophical in nature. In particular, I will discuss how psychedelic experience relates to two philosophically substantial issues: (i) that of mystical experience and (ii) that of wisdom and enlightenment. Necessarily, these issues will be less grounded in the scientific

literature. However, they will be analysed within the confines of the philosophical framework that will—if the previous four chapters are successful—have received indirect support from the empirical research. So, although the issues of these three chapters may seem unusual or perhaps unscientific, the plan is to discuss them in a manner that meets the usual standards of analytic philosophy and scientific inquiry. Indeed, one of the exciting aspects of the latest research into psychedelics and meditation is that we can begin to scientifically investigate these issues, which have long been thought to lie outside the domain of science.

With that overview of the book's structure in place, let's now look at the goals of the particular chapters.

In Chapter 2, I introduce the central question of the book: what is psychedelic experience? A core objective of this chapter is to argue that this question is best understood as a conceptual question rather than an empirical question about the effects of psychedelic drugs (as might be expected by some readers). Approaching our topic in this way allows us to cleanly separate the concept of psychedelic experience from the baggage that often comes with the topic of psychedelic drugs.

This, in turn, makes it easier for us to think about things like psychedelic drugs in a baggage-free way. For example, we can ask whether so-called psychedelic drugs are actually psychedelic. That is, do psychedelics actually produce mind-revealing experiences?" Perhaps they don't—perhaps they only produce mind-scrambling experiences. Or perhaps they do, but perhaps they only reveal the mind in particular ways. If so, then are there methods for revealing the mind in other ways? And so on. By establishing this clear separation of conceptual and empirical matters, it will be easier to address each appropriately and find answers to our questions.

In Chapter 3, having established the central question as a conceptual one, I will then develop an answer to it. We already have the hint of an answer: a psychedelic experience is a mind-revealing experience. That must mean that it is an experience in which the mind is revealed in some way. But in what way? As we will see, we need to be

careful here. If we are not, then all sorts of experiences will count as being psychedelic—for example, when you discover facts about your mind by reading a psychology textbook. As we dig into this issue, we'll see that it is essential to stipulate that psychedelic experiences come in degrees. That is, experiences can be more or less psychedelic than other experiences. This raises the question of what it means for one experience to be more (or less) psychedelic than another experience. My answer is that an experience is more psychedelic than another if it is more revealing of the mind. And, as we'll see, there are four main ways an experience can be more revealing of the mind: (i) scope: it can uncover larger parts of the mind; (ii) clarity: it can uncover parts of the mind more clearly; (iii) novelty: it can uncover more novel (or more deeply hidden) parts of the mind; and (iv) duration: it can uncover parts of the mind for longer periods of time. These four ways of being more mind-revealing constitute the four dimensions of what I call psychedelic space. All possible psychedelic experiences have a location within this conceptual space, and the overall phenomenological character of a psychedelic experience is determined by its position with respect to these four dimensions. In general, the further out along these dimensions an experience is, the more psychedelic it is.

In Chapter 4, I use the conceptual framework of psychedelic space to begin developing some empirical hypotheses about psychedelic experience that we may want to consider. This is necessary because it will help us avoid many pitfalls later on. For example, a common objection to the hypothesis that psychedelics produce psychedelic experiences is that many of the hallucinatory experiences that psychedelics are known to cause seem to be anything but mind-revealing. The point that psychedelic experiences can vary in terms of their clarity is important to consider when we think about this objection. It may be that psychedelics do produce mind-revealing experiences, but they tend to produce them with low clarity. That's a hypothesis that is more specific than the one that just says that psychedelics produce mind-revealing experiences. According to this more specific hypothesis, hallucinations may be like the imperfections in the lens of an old telescope: despite these imperfections, the telescope

can still reveal things to us—the craters of the moon, for example. Similarly, another pitfall we can avoid concerns the question of whether meditation produces psychedelic experiences. This question is often asked in a lopsided way, where 'psychedelic experience' is used to refer to the kind of experience typically produced by psychedelic drugs. This causes unnecessary confusion, and we can do better by reframing the question as asking whether meditation produces psychedelic experiences understood as mind-revealing experiences. Understanding the question in this way makes it clear that meditation may tend to produce psychedelic experiences that are different from those that tend to be produced by psychedelic substances. For example, one salient hypothesis in this regard is that meditation-induced psychedelic experiences tend to be higher in clarity than those induced by psychedelics. As we'll see, we need to be careful in how we articulate these hypotheses, and there are many complicating factors that need to be considered.

With these conceptual issues sorted out, we are then ready to begin examining the empirical evidence concerning psychedelic experiences. The first step in this direction is Chapter 5, in which I put forward a unifying theory of the psychedelic experiences induced by psychedelics and meditation in terms of their effects on attention. Psychedelics and meditation are often said to expand awareness, and awareness and attention have an intimate relationship with each other. Some philosophers even think they are identical, but the consensus appears to be that attention and awareness are separable but intimately related (Lopez 2022). Either way, given this close connection between awareness and attention, it stands to reason that psychedelics and meditation must have an important effect on attention. In fact, we'll see that some meditative practices are, by definition, the repeated and deliberate manipulation of attentional resources. We can see, then, one way in which meditation expands awareness and thus reveals the mind: it helps one allocate attentional resources to things in the mind that don't normally receive those resources, making it more likely that they appear in awareness. Whereas meditation improves the control over the allocation of one's attentional resources, I'll suggest that the effect of psychedelics is to free up one's

attentional resources. These additional resources then have to go somewhere—that is, they end up being reallocated throughout the mind. When this happens, the effect is similar to that of meditation: the parts or aspects of the mind that receive extra attentional resources are more likely to appear in awareness—or to appear in awareness more vividly. I'll argue that this hypothesis helps us understand the various psychological and phenomenological effects of psychedelics.

It will also help us explain the overlapping and synergistic effects of psychedelics and meditation. The result of this chapter will be a unified theory of how psychedelics and meditation can reveal the mind: they do so by changing how attentional resources are allocated.

In Chapter 6, we will then consider what is, arguably, the simplest kind of psychedelic experience: when a long-lost memory suddenly floods one's consciousness. We are all familiar with such experiences since they can be triggered by the most mundane events, such as when we happen to come across a scent that we haven't smelled since childhood. Although we don't normally think of them in this way, these sorts of memory flashbacks are spontaneous psychedelic experiences—they can happen without unusual interventions such as the consumption of psychedelics or the practice of meditation. Because these experiences are so familiar to us, they provide us with a convenient starting point for studying psychedelic experience as an empirical phenomenon.

Another reason why it is useful to focus on memory in this context is that there is an important relationship between memory and meditative practices that cultivate mindfulness. In various Western/modern contexts, the concept of mindfulness is often defined as paying attention to the present moment in a particular way. However, this sort of definition is mistaken—or at least, it is incomplete.' We will see that mindfulness has a subtle but crucial connection to memory that needs to be accounted for in order for us to have a complete understanding of mindfulness. This better understanding of mindfulness will result in two major consequences. The first is that we will establish an elegant connection between psychedelic experience and

mindfulness. Roughly speaking, a psychedelic experience is like suddenly finding your keys after having lost them, and mindfulness is like not having lost them in the first place. This connection between psychedelic experience and mindfulness will be especially useful later on, when we begin to consider the relationship between psychedelic experience and wisdom (Chapter 11). It will also help make sense of a somewhat surprising body of evidence: that psychedelics can induce long-lasting improvements in mindfulness. The second major consequence of this better understanding of mindfulness is that it implies that the practice of meditation should have an observable and beneficial impact on one's recollective abilities. Indeed, there is a growing body of scientific research that supports this prediction, and so we will take a look at that literature.

Finally, in this same chapter, we will consider the evidence that psychedelics bring about experiences that involve the recollection of long-lost memories. Based on the fact that such experiences are psychedelic when they happen spontaneously, it seems reasonable to expect that if so-called psychedelics are genuinely deserving of their name, then they should result in these kinds of experiences. With that in mind, we will consider what the evidence says about this prediction. We will see that while the evidence is positive overall, it is only suggestive. One of the major weaknesses of the current body of evidence in this regard is that we lack controlled and well-designed studies that demonstrate that the supposed memories recovered during psychedelic trips are genuine and not merely fantasies that are constructed on the fly.

In Chapter 7, I turn to the common objection that I mentioned earlier: how can the visual hallucinations that psychedelics are renowned for producing possibly count as mind-revealing? As I mentioned, some of the hallucinations may simply be imperfections, and so although they themselves may not be mind-revealing, there may nonetheless be some aspect of the larger experience that is. However, I will argue that at least some hallucinations are, in fact, instances of mind-revelation. My argument for this will involve making a distinction between two kinds of visual hallucinations: (i) simple hallucinations and (ii) complex hallucinations. Simple hallucinations tend to be

the colourful geometric patterns that psychedelics are famous for causing. Complex hallucinations tend to involve more meaningful experiences, such as the apparent perception of a person who isn't real, or walking through an alien city, or talking to a dragon about your life. I'll argue that both kinds of hallucinations may be mind-revealing, but the simpler ones appear to be the clearest case of hallucinations that are revealing of the mind.

In Chapter 8, I examine how mind-revelation may be responsible for the supposed increases in creativity that psychedelics have a reputation for causing. Indeed, if psychedelics increase creativity, then this may form the basis for an objection to a view such as mine: far from being mind-revealing, it would seem that psychedelics are mind-creating (Shanon 2002). My reply is that a lot of our creativity exists hidden from our awareness and that psychedelics can increase our effective creativity by bringing more of it into our conscious experience. I also argue that meditation has a similar effect and consider the evidence that meditation increases our creativity by revealing the mind. Although it may seem unintuitive at first—that is, that we have hidden creativity that can be revealed—I argue that this view about creativity is well supported by contemporary cognitive science.

In Chapter 9, the next issue we will tackle concerns the extent to which the psychotherapeutic benefits of psychedelics and meditation can be explained in terms of their tendency to produce mind-revealing experiences. This is an important issue to consider because it is the therapeutic value of these interventions that is the primary driver for most of the current research, especially in the case of psychedelics. We don't yet know how to explain these effects, but some plausible hypotheses have been put forward. One natural hypothesis to consider is that by inducing psychedelic experiences, psychedelics facilitate psychological insights, which either have immediate therapeutic value in themselves or enable substantial and long-term improvements in behaviour and thinking.

A similar explanation could be put forward for meditation: various meditative practices are known to reliably afford psychological insights, I think there is some truth to these

explanations, but they are also somewhat incomplete. I will argue that there is a more comprehensive explanation available: with the appropriate qualifications in place, both psychedelics and meditation tend to result in increases in mindfulness, which is what is ultimately responsible for the therapeutic benefits we observe (or at least, a substantial portion of them). My argument will rely on the connection between psychedelic experience and mindfulness that is established in Chapter 6. Considering this explanation in terms of mindfulness can help us appreciate how psychedelics and meditation may benefit our well-being in general, which will help pave the way for some of the arguments in Chapter 11 concerning how psychedelics and meditation may enhance our wisdom.

In Chapter 10, I turn to the topic of mystical experience. This is necessary because both psychedelics and meditation are widely reported to lead to mystical experiences, which are often thought of as peak or maximally psychedelic experiences. Since the conceptual framework of psychedelic space is designed to account for experiences being more or less psychedelic, mystical experience presents us with an important test case. A natural question to consider is whether mystical experience can be located within psychedelic space as a maximally psychedelic experience—that is, an experience that maximizes the four dimensions of scope, clarity, novelty, and duration. I'll argue that there is a sense in which we can't answer this question. This is because mystical experiences are deeply ineffable and, as a result, they form a kind of singularity for analytic philosophy (and any downstream field of investigation). The best we can do is to reason around the experience, which the framework of psychedelic space allows us to do. So, although we can't speak directly to the question of whether mystical experiences are maximally psychedelic—or even if they are psychedelic to any degree—we will be able to develop an understanding of them that is still valuable.

In Chapter 11, I argue that psychedelic experience, when appropriately engaged with, is conducive to wisdom. It is important to be clear upfront that this is not the same as the statement that consuming psychedelics is conducive to wisdom. Indeed, if psychedelics tend to produce psychedelic experiences that are very low in clarity, then they may do

more harm than good when it comes to wisdom. Moreover, whereas many of the effects of psychedelics are clearly temporary, the effects of meditation appear to be more enduring. In so far as we think that being wise is a stable, long-term attribute of a person, then it could be that meditation may be more conducive to wisdom than psychedelics are. At any rate, we needn't take a stand on such issues here—psychedelics and meditation may provide different and complementary methods for cultivating wisdom. In this chapter, I will unpack in more detail how psychedelic experience, regardless of how it is brought about, can help us become wiser. This gives rise to a different way of doing philosophy, which I will refer to as psychedelic philosophy.

Chapter 12 offers conclusions. <>

## Philosophy and Psychedelics: Frameworks for Exceptional Experience by Christine Hauskeller [Bloomsbury Academic, ISBN 9781350231610]

What do psychedelics reveal about consciousness? What impact have psychedelics had on philosophy? In this rapidly growing area of study, this is the first volume to explore the philosophy of psychedelic experience, from a range of interdisciplinary and cross-cultural perspectives. In doing so, **Philosophy and Psychedelics: Frameworks for Exceptional Experience** reveals just why the place of psychedelics in our societies should not be left to medical sciences alone, as psychedelic experience opens up new perspectives on fundamental philosophical questions relating to human experience, ethics, and the metaphysics of mind. Mapping a range of philosophical responses to the surge in studies into psychedelic drugs in the cognitive sciences, this go-to volume examines topics including psychedelics and the role of governance; psychedelics and mysticism; what psychedelics can tell us about dyadic thankfulness; and psychedelics as ways to gain new knowledge. Written by leading international scholars, the essays cover Western and non-Western traditions, from analytic philosophy to Zen Buddhism, and discuss a variety of hallucinogens, such as LSD, MDMA, and Ayahuasca, in order to

build a much-needed bridge between the rapidly growing scientific research and the philosophy behind psychedelic experience.

CONTENTS

The title of this volume, Philosophy and Psychedelics, conjugates two words that each refer to a multiplicity of different discourses and practices. Just as philosophy denominates a vast range of perspectives and methods, so is there no single type of psychedelic experience, substance, or practice. There are varieties of each, and it is the myriad loci where philosophy and psychedelics overlap and potentially interact that is the ambit of this book.

Our approach seeks to avoid the hierarchical perspective inherent in the many philosophies that are of a subject — there are many bi-directional relations where one side can inform the other. The overarching questions that inspire this volume and its area of discourse concern how philosophers can begin to comprehend the exceptional

experiences that psychedelics afford various people in various cultures through the different forms of thought and analysis philosophy has to offer; and, moreover, how psychedelics in turn might inform, influence, and alter philosophy itself, in addition to other modes of thinking and forms of behaviour. The chapters herein adopt differing approaches to the theme of philosophy and psychedelics, drawing out different connections.

Why has modern philosophy seldom addressed these fascinating questions? One part of an answer may lie in historical and contemporary suppression through ideology and prejudice. The intellectual archaeology of the remnants of the history of philosophers contemplating psychedelic-like states has hardly been unearthed. Western philosophy starts in Ancient Greece, a culture evidently enthralled to practices of altering states of consciousness. The Pre-Socratic philosopher Democritus provided a taxonomy of plants, Pliny tells us, that induce various visions and exalted states of consciousness. Democritus himself became known for his 'madness' and was said to have 'travelled in the boundless, as Hippocrates apparently reported.' Socrates, reports Plato, claimed that 'madness, provided it comes as the gift of heaven, is the channel by which we receive the greatest blessings'. Intoxication and ecstatic states were celebrated in Greece, through the Dionysian festivals that entranced Nietzsche,' as well as through practices and millennia-old institutions such as the Eleusinian Mysteries. These practices were closed down and prohibited by incoming power structures,' structures to which Western philosophy became deferential until the Modern Age.

Let us return philosophy's gaze to that glimpsed by William James, Henri Bergson, Walter Benjamin, John R. Smythies, Henry H. Price, Aldous Huxley,' and other philosophers who reflected on mind-altering substances. These substances were variously known as phantastica, hallucinogens, entheogens, psychotomimetics, or psychedelics. Though each name refers to the same set of substances, they are not synonyms because of their differing connotations. The interpretational frameworks connoted include illusion and divinity, psychology and metaphysics, as well as several modern medical sciences such as pharmacology, neuroscience, and psychiatry. The

range of names and associations reflects the fact that the West has struggled to establish a common lens through which to make sense of and study the extraordinary phenomena these substances occasion. The following examples of extracts provide but a small flavour of the types of experience that psychedelics can induce, each of which carry the potential to evoke a flurry of philosophic reflections:

> *Ideas are distorted; perceptions are confused. Sounds are clothed in colours and colours in music.. . . Musical notes become numbers. . . . [Y]ou feel yourself vanishing into thin air, and you attribute to your pipe . .. the strange ability to smoke you.'*
> *`[A] monistic insight, in which the other in its various forms appears absorbed into the One.'*
> *`[A] pronounced antipathy to conversing about matters of practical life, the future, dates, politics. You are fixated on the intellectual sphere . .'*
> *It is impossible to convey the horror of thus being threatened with sheer nothingness. . . . "[T]he fear of infinity". . . I wished I had the courage to try to find out where one is if one is nowhere.'*
> *I knew that [the umbrella] wasn't a vulture, but I couldn't prevent myself from seeing it as one. . . . I had strange visions . . . I immediately foresaw that all this was necessarily leading me to chronic hallucinatory psychosis."*
> *`[A] marvellously enhanced appreciation of patterning in nature, a fascination deeper than ever with the structure of ferns, . . . the markings upon seashells . . . [and] the fairy architecture of seeds and pods . . .*
> *A shattering annihilation, a feeling of being inside an explosion, and being fragmented into countless tiny shards. . . . There were no feelings of fear, indeed no feelings at all, other than a kind of impersonal ecstasy."'*
> *As I accepted my death and dissolution into God's love, the insectoids began to feed on my heart, devouring the feelings of love and surrender . . They feasted as they made love to me. . . . it was extremely alien, though not necessarily unpleasant."'*
> *`They looked like jokers. They were almost performing for me . . . bells on their hats, big noses. However, I had the feeling they could turn on me, a little less than completely friendly.'*
> *`Then my whole life flashed in my mind from birth to the present, with every detail that ever happened, every feeling and thought, visual and emotional was there in an instant."*
> *`Seeing the xapiri [ancestral spirits] come down to me for the first time, I truly knew what fear was! . . . The forest initially became an immense void, which was spinning around me without letting up. Then suddenly everything was immersed in a blinding brightness. The light exploded with a great crash."'*
> *I am being inundated with "concepts". . . . This is a truly conceptually exploding experience. How can one ever hope to record this kind of intellectual supernova?'*

The wide typology of phenomena" that such reports suggests ranges from the intensely emotional to the emotionless, from the extravagantly visual to the non-perceptual, from the super-conceptual to the non-cognitive, from disembodied mind to interconnected physicality, from the loss or expansion of one's being to the intrusion of myriad apparent weird and wondrous beings, from the therapeutic to the threatening, from sublime love and light to the darkest of fears.

What can induce such an eclectic yet profoundly exceptional set of experiences? If we begin by abstracting away culture, character, cosmos, life history, expectations, set, setting, and so on we reach the maximal abstraction, the isolated molecular type in which chemists define their objects. As such,'psychedelics' often refer to the serotonergic molecule classes, notably phenethylamines and tryptamines that include molecules such as mescaline, psilocybin, DMT, and LSD. Yet more classes than these are referred to by the word 'psychedelic, a word coined by Humphry Osmond and made public by him in a paper of 1957. Osmond's definition of 'psychedelic' was wide. It included non-serotonergic drugs such as hashish, muscimol, and nitrous oxide," as well as the unknown chemicals of the soma potion of Asia. Though a psychiatrist by profession, Osmond from the very start emphasised the philosophic ramifications of his newly classed 'psychedelics. In listing reasons for ascribing importance to psychedelics, Osmond writes that, beyond psychiatry, 'perhaps most important: there are social, philosophical, and religious implications in the discoveries made by means of these agents:

As well as emphasizing this modern philosophical importance of psychedelics," Osmond also bequeaths importance and credit to the people of cultures far and wide who pioneered and developed 'psychedelics':

> think upon those nameless discoverers and rediscoverers, Aztec and Assassin, Carib and berserker, Siberian and Red Indian, Brahmin and African, and many others of whose endeavors even scholars do not know. We inherit their secrets and profit by their curiosity, their courage, and even from their errors and excesses. Let us honor them. They do not appear in any list of references.

Thus, in defining 'psychedelics' one must include the plants, foods, potions, and medicines relating to the multifarious exceptional experiences of cultures of far-reaching places and times - even though the term is a product of the West's twentieth century. Further still, 'psychedelic' as an adjective rather than as a noun can refer to states achieved without the intake of such chemicals - for instance through breathing techniques, meditation, recitation, repetitive motion, poetry, and diet. 'Psychedelic', literally meaning the mind or soul (psykhe) being revealed (dëloun), stands for more than a set of defined molecules.

In the past decade there has been a rush of interest and research into psychedelic cultures, and so we now find ourselves in the midst of the so-called 'psychedelic renaissance', wherein new spaces have opened up in need of philosophic analysis. The march of the clinical medicalization of psychedelics essential to this renaissance calls for methods of hermeneutics and political economic critique, addressing ethical issues such as patents, appropriations, and commodification, the power of psychiatry and ethics in the clinic-patient relationship, and the relation of science to notions of spirituality. The fast-developing chemistry, pharmacology, psychiatry, and thus neuroscience of psychedelics relates to the philosophies of mind, of religion, and of science - for instance through the hard problem of identifying the relation between neural and mental correlates. This, in turn, can relate to metaphysics, expanded notions of the 'self', and the relation to Nature where aspects of normativity and attitude toward self, others, and the environment reappear. The mental and bodily phenomena themselves can be of beautiful and sublime significance, and thus one enters aesthetics and, more broadly, phenomenology. As well as the aesthetic value, the truth value concerning psychedelic experience brings the explorer into epistemology and the foundations of logic. All the facets of the wide discipline of philosophy can, in fact, be employed meaningfully in the endeavour to fathom psychedelia. As was stated at the start, this volume looks at the web of nodes that overlap and interact vis-à-vis philosophy and psychedelics and, just as a spider's web has no clusters (unless the

spider is on LSD), so has this volume no clusters of themes. Each node, each chapter, has relations to multifarious other chapters - and so we proceed alphabetically.

The first chapter discusses the phenomenology of gratitude in relation to certain psychedelic states. More specifically, Taline Artinian analyses and applies dyadic gratitude - 'thankfulness for a benefit without a source' - to psychedelic experiences of 'oceanic boundlessness' that relate to feelings of connectedness and unity concomitant to the phenomenology of losing one's 'self: Gratitude is commonly conceptualized as triadic - where there is a giver, a gift, and a beneficiary. This has ethical implications with regard to giver-beneficiary expectations. In dyadic gratitude - transpersonal gratitude - there is no giver, no person to whom a beneficiary can respond to ethically. In certain psychedelic states such dyadic gratitude can be experienced, and yet, as Artinian shows, an ethical dimension emerges in one's relation to Nature itself. Psychedelia enriches and informs the phenomenology of emotions and the values associated therewith.

In the following chapter, John Buchanan reflects upon how psychedelics may enable an extension of the borders of epistemology by amplifying human perception, both inner and outer. Explicating an ontology based on the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead - a long-neglected philosopher whose process philosophy has much to offer philosophical analyses of psychedelia - we understand how our concepts of percepts have been curtailed by restrictive ontologies. From this approach to the question of what is real, the common dichotomy of 'inner and outer' perception is shown as misleading. Buchanan explains that, for Whitehead, perception involves more than the traditional 'sensationalist doctrine: Perception, at its primal core, involves the integration of feeling throughout the pulses or processes of experience that constitute reality: the outer becomes inner. When the strictures of traditional philosophy and science are lifted, certain psychedelic experiences can be understood as veridical, as 'real. The philosophy provides a frame for the experience; the experience, in turn, fortifies the frame.

In Chapter 3, Kyle Buller, Joe Moore, and Lenny Gibson present a historical account of the West's generally troublesome encounter with such exceptional experiences. Though acknowledging ancient Greek philosophy and The Mysteries as an ideal praxis transcending theoria, the chapter lays its focus upon the Modern Age and upon the history of US society - which was pivotal for the global power structures and legal frameworks that developed and entwined through ecclesiastical legacies. This focus brings to the fore a number of figures often overlooked, forging connections amongst seemingly divergent currents. Further emphasis is laid upon LSD in this history, acting as an alien, volatile substance that wrought ostensible societal disruption. But tracing an underground stream, the authors consider causes for the current decriminalization in certain US states, which may also spread and evoke new valuations of psychedelic substances.

In philosophy, the study of value has traditionally been parted into questions of ethics and of aesthetics. The latter is often taken to be the study of what is considered beautiful and of the delightful terror of the sublime - as well as the study of art in all its manifestations. Psychedelic experiences are often noted for their extraordinary aesthetic aspects that may inform the study of aesthetics generally. In Chapter 4, Robert Dickins focuses on two figures who represent the sublime and the psychedelic related thereto - respectively the Irish political philosopher and aesthete Edmund Burke and the great British writer, Aldous Huxley. Dickins shows that Huxley's Burkean framework informs value theory by effacing the distinction between aesthetics and ethics, exposing how psychedelic experiences can be actuated and thus understood as sublime by contextualizing the experience through powers political, personal, and religious.

Since the 1970s, psychedelic use in the West has been largely prohibited and stigmatized, and any philosophy of psychedelics has been ignored. The War on Drugs is a recent instance of colonizing power politics that extract and extinguish ways of life, thought and action. A consequence of this is the narrow lens through which we now relate to psychedelics in Western culture: as clinical therapy or as spiritual flights of

fancy. In Chapter 5, Osiris Gonzalez Romero takes us beyond Hospital and Church, as it were, to open our eyes to the episteme and techne of Amerindian cultures - instructing our epistemology, phenomenology, metaphysics, and ethics. Gonzalez Romero takes a decolonizing perspective, in both what and how he writes and what he writes about, developing the field of 'psychedelic humanities' as an integrative, respectful, and fair endeavour. This decolonizing approach offers an ethical imperative dimension and broadens our understanding of psychedelic spaces of practices and knowledges.

In Chapter 6, Michael Halewood also seeks to redress the neglected value of psychedelics for philosophy and for life generally through an analysis of Alfred North Whitehead's specific notions of potentiality, novelty, and the reoriented notion of a 'proposition'. Halewood tells us that, for Whitehead, the 'soul' is not a static substance but a 'mode of functioning' that occasionally evokes consciousness. Yet the relation between that which we are conscious of in the world, and consciousness itself is not one of reality to appearance, but rather of a potential that pro-poses itself to our actual occasions of experience. Such propositions can result in novelty, new ways of perceiving and feeling the world - and this is their prime value. The truth value of a proposition expresses a set past and is, because of this, of less value than newly created configurations. Psychedelics allow for the extension of such propositions and, as such, do not present supernatural phenomena but rather emphasize novel ways in which to configure our place in the world.

Our place in the world is explored from a different angle by Christine Hauskeller in Chapter 7. Drawing upon concepts of alienation, individualization and colonization developed in Frankfurt School Critical Theory and on the philosophy of medicine, Hauskeller examines the science and political economy shaping the 'psychedelic renaissance. She asks whether it can be sound medical science to induce madness for the purpose of curing madness. According to her analysis, clinical trials in psychedelic psychotherapy can be paradoxical and ethically problematic. Paradoxes lie within the basic concept of inducing madness to cure madness, and in attempts to quantify the ineffable; the contradictory undercurrents in the clinical experiments tempt some to

pre-empt and steer participants' experiences and study mystical experiences and non-materialist metaphysical beliefs as possible therapeutics. Three ethically problematic colonizations are immanent in the clinical appropriation of psychedelics, namely the instrumentalization of both extraordinary personal experiences and indigenous knowledge practices, and their commercial appropriation. Rather than liberating us from the alienation and disconnected individualization that a capitalist order breeds, the assimilation of psychedelics into the 'medical industrial complex' restricts individual freedom and proceeds through cultural appropriation. Misconstruing the cultural malaise as an individual illness, medicalization ringfences legitimate psychedelic use to the clinical space.

The re-emerging interest in psychedelics in the twenty-first century has indeed, it seems, begun to reframe these substances as commodities to be integrated into a capitalist order. This attempted integration, however, brings about a friction because, as Fernando Huesca Ramon argues in Chapter 8, psychedelic experience itself can act as a catalyst for revolution against such an order. Drawing firstly upon the thoughts of Hegel and Marx, Huesca Ramon shows how capitalism brings about a distortion of the perception of values, antagonistic to genuine emancipation. He then focuses especially on works by Walter Benjamin with regard to his drug experiences and how they relate to his concept of 'aura: the re-perception and revaluation of things contingent on, to borrow an outside phrase, set and setting. And further he shows how Herbert Marcuse draws upon Freud to offer a critique of the capitalist order and the way in which it fosters 'false needs; aberrant valuations and perceptions. Psychedelics, as Marcuse suggests, can offer different ways of perceiving, and of reflecting on inculcated values and forms of experience. They can contribute to the necessary revaluation and emancipation from the socio-economic status quo.

Analytic philosophy, too, has started to consider aspects of psychedelics especially in epistemology, the study of knowledge. What we may know is very much related to what may exist — thus epistemology relates to ontology, the study of being. In Chapter 9, Jussi Jylkka explores a well-known philosophical thought experiment from Frank

Jackson — 'Mary's Room — in relation to unitary psychedelic experiences. Jylkka argues that the unitive psychedelic state can amplify our understanding of the distinction between knowledge that is relational and knowledge that is unitary and argues that this psychedelically-highlighted epistemology does not, contra Jackson, show that 'physicalism' is a false ontology. It does, however, pinpoint the limitations that empirical science can assert on the notion of the 'physical. The phenomenology of unitary psychedelic experience cannot be sufficiently understood by empirical science because it betrays in itself the very limitations of such science, as also shown from a different angle by Hauskeller. Contemplating psychedelic experience and philosophical thought experiments can sharpen our understanding of the nature of our experiential world.

Psychedelic drugs are commonly believed to induce hallucinations and cognitive distortions in one's perception of the world — consider the very word, 'hallucinogen. In Chapter 10, Ole Martin Moen continues this epistemic thread and argues that, in many instances, it is not justifiable to consider psychedelic experience to be hallucinatory, even though in some instances it may be. Moen demonstrates that judging psychedelics as distorting cognition is a view ultimately based upon 'naive realism' — the ideology that the everyday, prosaic perception of the world is a true representation of the world as it objectively is. By discussing aspects of psychedelic experience as case studies — namely colour phenomenology, synaesthesia, beauty, and love and trust — Moen argues that it is generally a mistake to call psychedelic perceptions of reality distorted.

To seek to understand psychedelic consciousness requires, in part, to understand what consciousness is, in itself and in its relation to the world — if such a division may even be staked. Different cultures have different understandings and frameworks into which such a question can be placed. In Chapter 11, Steve Odin looks at the rich cartography of the mind offered by the Zen Buddhist framework as presented by D. T. Suzuki, who drew upon William James as well as the psychoanalytic Western tradition in order to convey this Eastern understanding. Odin takes issue, however, with Suzuki's criticism

of Aldous Huxley's claim that psychedelics can conduce to the Zen state of satori (no-mind, the Void), showing that Suzuki misread Huxley's psychedelic phenomenology. The state of satori, or the 'cosmic Unconscious, Odin argues, can be achieved - perhaps even more assuredly - through psychedelic intake, along with other methods. To fortify this point, Odin showcases Czech psychiatrist Stanislav Grof as describing what are essentially satori experiences through his extensive work involving thousands of LSD participant sessions. On this basis, it may be the case that psychedelics advance our understanding of the capabilities of the mind, capabilities that have hitherto lain dormant in the West.

Rene Descartes is often considered a founder of the modern philosophy and mathematics of the West. Descartes sought certainty through a thought experiment: he may be living in a hallucinatory world created by an evil demon, yet his own reality as a thinking thing could never be put in doubt as a delusion. In Chapter 12, Matthew Segall draws on psychedelic experiences and re-interprets Descartes' demonic thought experiment as a bad psychedelic trip, one that is an inversion of Plato's cave: that certainty is found in the darkest cavern rather than outside in the sunlight. The ramifications of such solipsistic meditations, Segall shows, were detrimental to culture because of the separation of body and mind that it invoked. Segall argues for the more enlightened understanding of organic realism as developed in process philosophy, because this approach makes more sense of reality and psychedelic experience than do the shadows of dualism and representationalism cast by Cartesian thought.

Experiences of enlightened unity with Nature or with Deity are reported not only in the mystical literature of the past but also in contemporary accounts of the psychedelic adventurer. In Chapter 13, Peter Sjostedt-Hughes seeks to fathom such reported states within the framework of the metaphysics of Benedict de Spinoza - a metaphysics encompassing monism, pantheism, panpsychism, and the eternal substance: the timelessness of pure Nature, God itself. God is Nature for Spinoza. To achieve this framework, the tenets of Spinozism are explicated with a culmination in the Intellectual Love of God, amor Dei intellectualis, where the finite mind and infinite

intellect of Nature unite. Sjostedt- Hughes then provides a phenomenological account of the unitive states occasioned by certain psychedelic substances, notably the ever-so potent 5-MeO-DMT, comparing these phenomenological elements to the ontological aspects of Spinozism. This comparative analysis will proffer a Spinozan-Psychedelic symbiosis: that certain psychedelic states can be understood through the Spinozan system, and that the Spinozan system can be intuited through certain psychedelic states - a blinding flash of Spinozism that can change one's relation to oneself and to Nature itself, thereby promoting deep ecological benefits.

Such radical psychedelic experiences are to be approached with caution. To the surprise of some, Carl Jung urged caution, even avoidance of psychedelic drugs. In Chapter 14, Johanna Hilla Sopanen shows us why and how this warning can now be more comprehensively understood, in view of the recent publication of Jung's Liber Novus: The Red Book. This tome reports in text and illustration an intense, tormenting phase of exceptional dreams and visions that Jung sought and underwent. He understood such visions as emanating from what he called the Collective Unconscious, to which he later developed a method to induce access. This Collective Unconscious contained symbols that could, through careful analysis help the individual to develop greater self-realization. Sopanen argues that, in this way, it was Jung's exceptional experiences that fostered his school of Analytic Psychology yet also, paradoxically, made him weary of psychedelics as risking access to profound realms of the unconscious without the labour of integration the exposure requires. With special regard to integration, however, Jung has much to offer those who seek and undergo psychedelic experiences.

In addition to a potential realization of the self, psychedelics may also offer a potential realization of the contingency of the key axioms of logic. In Chapter 15, Michel Weber argues that Western philosophy (and, implicitly, science) has been crippled by two key components: traditional logic and a limited concept of empirical information. He argues that psychedelic experience allows one to overcome these crippling effects - notably by allowing for emancipation from the legislature of axioms, by which he

means the laws of identity, contradiction, and excluded-middle. Such emancipation can free up logic and with it the structures of thought so that far greater adventures of ideas can be undertaken.

In this volume philosophers from different traditions and backgrounds discuss the possible revolutionary potential of psychedelics regarding aspects such as liberating one from strictures of logic, ideology, epistemology, dogmatism, and habits of thought and behaviour. As we have seen, the variety of such experiential facets can be analysed, understood, and evaluated from different philosophical perspectives and sub-fields. Philosophical reflections and traditions can inform the emerging cultural debates about psychedelics and their legitimacy. At the same time, philosophy can enrich its ideas about human nature, truth, reality, and society when it permits the engagement with psychedelic experiences. Together, the chapters of this volume show strands of intersection and mutual influence between the kindred spheres of philosophy and psychedelics. <>

## Infinite Perception: The Role of Psychedelics in Global Transformation edited by Ocean Malandra and Natalie L. Dyer Phd [O-Books, ISBN 9781803414607]

**Infinite Perception: The Role of Psychedelics in Global Transformation** is an anthology of voices from the front line of the Psychedelic Renaissance, co-edited by journalist Ocean Malandra and neuroscientist and Harvard researcher Natalie Dyer, PhD. After being culturally dormant for decades, a new mainstream global psychedelic revolution is upon us. This pioneering anthology takes the reader on a renewed journey through the cultural, social, and personally transformative power of psychedelics. Discover unique perspectives from indigenous healers to scientists, anthropologists, artists, and activists. From this multidimensional exploration, the reader will gain a comprehensive new understanding of psychedelics and their impact that's not found in other books. This volume includes contributions and interviews from prominent voices such as Dennis Mckenna of the Mckenna Academy, Rick Doblin of MAPS, Zoe Helene

of Cosmic Sister, and Rick Strassman of the Spirit Molecule, as well as indigenous shamans from the Amazon rainforest to the Arctic Circle.

## Review

Infinite Perception is a brilliant new anthology of timeless wisdom for these changing times. As the weaponization of culture filters our consciousness, just as psychedelics penetrate the capitalist mainstream, we need voices – and experience– like the authors here share, that understand the vision emerging from our altered states is a vital part of the global transformation. Beyond the medical model of psychedelics, the mystical experience is what connects us to meaning and understanding our place. Indigenous voices parallel western doctors and explorers in this vital collection that maps the cultural and societal transformation afoot with psychedelics, and the personal transformations that heal and illuminate our journeys into the mystery. -- Rak Razam, author of Aya Awakenings: A Shamanic Odyssey

Humankind is now facing major existential threats. The emergence of global consciousness is absolutely required to solve these threats. If you want to learn more about how psychedelics can foster such emergence and positively contribute to individual, societal, and cultural transformations, please read this important and timely book. -- Mario Beauregard, neuroscientist, author of Brain Wars and Expanding Reality, co-author of the Manifesto for a Post-Materialist Science

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## Into the Mystic by Ocean Malandra

We are now fully in the middle of a "psychedelic renaissance." After decades of being pushed into the underground, visionary plants and other mind-opening substances are not only being studied at major universities all around the world, but at the grassroots level, communities, cities, and even entire states are decriminalizing their use. Behind this global movement lies a belief that psychedelics have a unique role to play in transforming the world by facilitating change right at the most primary level—human consciousness.

How that will happen and what will result from it is the theme of this book.

We believe that psychedelics are indeed a powerful tool for helping to facilitate transformation at every level of our now global civilization. The root meaning of "Psyche," which is "mind" or "soul" plus the root meaning of "Delic," to "manifest," literally points to their potential in helping us dream up new possibilities and make them realities. That is what this book is about.

The mainstreaming of psychedelics has also attracted certain interests, motivated by the investment potential, who are attempting to dominate the conversation with promises of "psychedelic therapies" to treat modern crisis level issues like depression and addiction. This book will also widen the conversation around that deceptively simple narrative.

While psychedelic compounds can be shown to have biochemical effects on the brain, what dozens of studies actually show' (and tons of personal stories also attest to) is that it is the extent that each person feels like they have had a "mystical experience" while under the influence of psychedelics that determines whether they get a therapeutic effect.

In other words, the magic happens at the consciousness level, not just the chemical. True to their literal definition, psychedelics are conscious change agents, not simply pharmaceuticals with only mechanical modes of action. In other words, they are active medicines, not passive. They need your participation to be effective. This is the core reason why all the hyped-up pharmaceutical claims fall flat. A theme that will be explored extensively in this book.

After all, studies are now showing that most of our mental health epidemic is being driven by social forces and not chemical ones. Depression and addiction shoot up when student and credit loan debts climb,2 when soulless jobs and lack of community leave people feeling isolated, and when the stress of capitalistic competition in every arena of life leaves one feeling drained and numb.

In fact, a recent study proved that when depression is not treated as an abnormal response to a normal situation, and instead seen as the opposite— a normal response

to an abnormal situation— patients immediately felt better and their outcomes actually improved. This turns the Western model of mental health on its head, literally. And it's about time.

With scientists telling us that the ecosystems of our planet simply cannot sustain any more business as usual, with global superpowers poised on the edge of World War III, and unprecedented inequality stretching social tensions to their breaking point all around the world, I think we are finally ready to collectively face reality. To me, this is the real reason why the "psychedelic renaissance" is happening right now.

Psychedelics are not about simply numbing the symptoms so we can get back to work on a system that we should be moving beyond. They are for opening the mind to other possibilities.

They are for entering that mystical realm, where true wisdom is gained that can truly transform our world.

This is what has inspired the title of this book. It comes from a well-known 19th century poem by William Blake, which states that:

> If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear as it really is, infinite.

While this phrase has become a kind of recurring reference point in modern psychedelic culture— everything from Aldous Huxley's The Doors of Perception, which details his explorations with mescaline, to the epitome of countercultural 60s musical band The Doors—Blake himself was actually inspired to write it by Plato's "Parable of The Cave," as Professor Carl Ruck explains in chapter 7 of this book.

Written at the dawn of Western civilization, the parable of the cave is a starkly powerful description of the limited perception we experience in everyday life. A reality in which the intricate connections between things, the infinite connections even, are not always apparent. Trapped in the darkness of a cave, stumbling in the near blindness of our own limited awareness, we don't have the ability to see exactly how we have gotten ourselves into our dilemmas, both personal and global, and we have a hard time seeing what "other possibilities" exist.

In Plato's allegory, one of the cave dwellers makes their way out into the sunshine. A reality of only vagueness and shadows is instantly transformed, illuminated, into a world of full spectrum colors, arching skies and endless horizons, populated with all the various forms of life that the world contains. It is no wonder that this allegory, and Blake's poeticized version of it, have become metaphors for the psychedelic experience.

Under the influence of psychedelic plant medicines, the unseen becomes vividly real, often even more real than reality itself as it pulses in technicolor visions before us. It is as if in the middle of the night, lost in the dark forest, we are suddenly given the night-vision of an owl and the whole world in all its intricately detailed nuances, only hinted at in the shadows before, is now cast in the floodlights for us to inspect, up close, and verify with our own senses.

This is the mystical experience that brings real healing. Here in the illuminated reality of infinite perception, where everything is interconnected, interdependent, and intertwined, every one of our actions is shown to have a ripple effect, not just among those that they immediately touch, but across the entire cosmos. It's like turning a tapestry over and seeing that, from the back, it's apparent that all those different figures and shapes are really all created from the same thread. A thread that weaves its way in and out of visible reality in a constant continuum.

A thread that has no beginning and no end. This is the mystical experience of infinite perception.

This is a book about what role psychedelics and their ability to open us up to this infinite perception, to allow us to escape the cave, that grant us owl vision in the darkest night, will have in helping us reimagine, reinvent, human civilization at the precisely the moment when it has become completely globalized, yet is poised at the brink of ecological collapse, world war, widespread poverty and inequality, and massive mental and spiritual pain.

This last bit is possibly what is driving the search for "other possibilities" harder than any of the others. Our own pain.

While each chapter in this book can be simply read on its own and will offer the reader a glimpse into one of these "other possibilities," the book is also organized to have a continuous thematic arc from beginning to end. It is a journey in and of itself that opens with a cosmic vision and closes with a personal one, yet at the same time, shows that those are the same thing. That is the power of infinite perception.

Each chapter is a glimpse into the potential of psychedelic plant medicines to play an active role in global transformation. Together, the chapters of this book help bring some clarity to just what exactly we are doing, what exactly we are aiming at, when we talk of a psychedelic renaissance and the role it may have in transforming our world into something more just, sustainable, and sacred. The mystical experience lies at the heart of this, and it is the continuous theme that weaves its way through this book.

The first section, "Cultural Transformation," begins with indigenous perspectives that ground us in the true use of visionary medicine. We are to harmonize with the world, reconnect to nature and understand that we are right now at a point of spiritual evolution. We then move into chapters that address some of our core cultural dilemmas that stand in the way of that evolution, from Zoe Helene showing how psychedelics can help us deconstruct the entrenched patriarchy that has defined male as dominator over not just female but the entire natural world, to Chaikuni Witan on how they can help us heal from the plague of racism, which has institutionalized the opposite of brotherly love.

The next section, "Societal Transformation," dives right into perspective changes at the societal level, from how psychedelics could help us transform the medical, legal and penal systems to how the psychedelic movement risks being co-opted by those very same entrenched institutions. This section includes entries from some of the top organizations involved in psychedelic research and their integration into modern society including MAPS, ICEERS, and Decriminalize Nature. A chapter on ayahuasca as a tool of resistance for indigenous Amazonian cultures, which has many deep implications for spiritually grounded revolutionary movements in the West, is also included here.

The last section zooms in to "Personal Transformation" itself. Your own experience is the last word after all, and it is here that you can read personal stories of those that have worked with psychedelic plant medicines in ways that have brought about healing and transformation. This section also includes several voices who have devoted their lives to working with specific plant medicines including author Elizabeth Bast, who shares the wisdom she has gained through apprenticing with the Bwiti tradition and the sacred Iboga plant, and ethnobotanist Scott Lite, who has been rediscovering the lost traditions of the Huachuma cactus.

We are publishing this book because in the process of global transformation, psychedelics will undoubtedly play a key role. While they are not the only doorway to the mystic experience, they are indeed a fast pass. A blinding flash that illuminates deeper levels of reality. In the right context and conditions, the right set and setting, with the right intentions and guidance, just like many indigenous and traditional societies have been using them for thousands of years, they are powerful tools for reharmonizing human consciousness with the true fundamental laws of the cosmos and the awe-inspiring complexity and abundance of Mother Nature.

It makes sense that the mental health crisis, the massive amount of spiritual pain in the world right now, is driving the new "psychedelic renaissance." But let's get to the root of it, not just treat the symptoms. After all, personal healing and global transformation go hand in hand, are infinitely connected. A world without war and environmental degradation, without racism and sexism, and without monotonous mechanized lifestyles, would also be a world without depression, addiction, and other mental illnesses.

Only wisdom drawn from the mystical realm, long suppressed in Western civilization, but still intimately part of everyday life for indigenous societies, will bring us out of the cave. Psychedelics, with their ability to catalyze a mystic experience in each and every one of us, are a tool, a torch, to help us find the way.

May this book inspire you to join in on this incredible journey as globalized humanity awakes to its true potential and dreams the world anew. Ocean Malandra <>

## Tibetan Manuscripts and Early Printed Books 2 Volumes: V. 1. Elements — v. 2. Elaborations edited by Matthew T. Kapstein [Cornell University Press, ISBN 978-1501716218 (v.1: paperback) ISBN 9781501771255 (v. 2: paperback)

In Tibetan Manuscripts and Early Printed Books, Volume I, Matthew T. Kapstein and an international team of specialists provide a comprehensive introduction to the material and aesthetic features of the wide range of Tibetan books, described in detail and illustrated with copious full-color photographs.

With a documented history of over thirteen centuries, Tibetan books have long served as a medium of culture and learning throughout Central and East Asia. Major collections of Tibetan manuscripts and printed books—for Tibetan works were put into print even before the age of Gutenberg—are found in libraries and museums far from the traditional centers of Tibetan learning. Yet the history, production, and design of these works remain poorly understood.

Topics covered in volume I include the manufacture of paper and ink, format and layout, scripts and scribal conventions, illumination and decoration, woodblock printing, book storage, preservation, and the use of contemporary digital technologies for the documentation of traditional works. Volume I of Tibetan Manuscripts and Early Printed Books is an essential resource for all students of Tibetan civilization, as well as for scholars, collectors, and others interested in the diverse book cultures of Asia. Volume II was published simultaneously with Volume I and is also now available.

Tibetan Manuscripts and Early Printed Books, Volume II explores the major categories of traditional Tibetan books, introducing their specific features and the main approaches to their study. In five major sections, it surveys manuscript collections

including Buddhist scriptural canons, official and administrative documents, works on technical subjects—medicine, veterinary practice, liturgical chant, and the arts of divination—and Tibetan books from China and Mongolia. Two case studies exemplify the roles of paleographic and iconographic analysis in the examination of antique manuscripts.

Like Volume I, the second volume of Tibetan Manuscripts and Early Printed Books has been written by the foremost experts in the field, whose wide-ranging essays are illustrated with numerous full-color images of original works. Addressing students and scholars of Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan history and culture in their varied dimensions, this volume will also interest scholars and other readers oriented more broadly to the global history of the book. Volume I was published simultaneously with volume II and is also now available.

In contrast with volume I, in which topics of broad import for the study of Tibetan books and documents were introduced, the contributions gathered here address specific classes of works. We cannot claim to treat them without numerous types that might be engaged in this context comprehensively, the thirteen chapters that follow survey prominent aspects of Tibetan book culture and engage with varied disciplines, including history of law, medicine, and music, as well as Tibetan and Buddhist studies.

A remarkable feature of Tibetan bibliography is the prominence of collections and compilations of several kinds. These include the vast scriptural canons of the Bön and Buddhist religions, the collected works of specific authors (gsung 'bum, bka' 'bum), and varied thematic compilations, often focusing on a given tradition of religious instruction and gathering authoritative writings pertaining to it. A predilection for multivolume sets is seen in both manuscript and print media from all parts of the Tibetan cultural area. Besides the interest to be found in the contents of such collections, they are significant, too, for what they may reveal of the material conditions of their production. For they required the marshaling of substantial resources together with the expertise of skilled artisans, including paper- and ink-makers, scribes, and painters, and sometimes of goldsmiths and embroiderers as well.

As chapter 5 of volume I, on colophons, shows, testimonial evidence is available in some cases to supplement what may be gathered from the investigation of the objects themselves. In the two chapters of the first part below, we examine complete and partial manuscript sets of the from vast Buddhist Kanju canon of scriptures at-tributed to the teaching of the Buddha (or, in the case of the tantras, a Buddha of the tantras' imaginal world), and of the "Collected Tantras of the 'Ancient School'" (Rnying ma rgyud 'bum). The latter, studied in chapter 11, is illustrated by an eighteenth- century manuscript collection of unusual beauty that well exemplifies the expense and care that were characteristic of luxurious book manufacture in Tibet.

In all literate societies, administrative and official regulations required the production of large numbers of documents, and Tibet was no exception in this regard. As in other bureaucratic regimes, Tibetan civil, ecclesiastical, and legal institutions employed specialized conventions governing official documents in respect to their formal features, terminology, and rhetorical structures. For this reason, Tibetan diplomatics, the study of official edicts and enactments, has come to form a key area for historical, anthropological, and sociological research. As a well- defined field of scholar-ship, Tibetan diplomatics has notably developed since the 1970s under the aegis of an ambitious project of research and publication founded at the University of Bonn, the Monumenta Tibetica Historica (MTH). The contributors to part 2, "Official Documents," have all contributed to the MTH and employ its methods of analysis. Their three chapters present, respectively, a broad overview of Tibetan diplomatics, a close reading of an edict promulgated by the Central Tibetan government, and examples of contracts prepared not in the center, but at the Nepal- Tibet frontier. In this last case, we see the adoption of conventions influenced by official standards current in Nepal and, beyond that, British India.

As these chapters remind us, manuscripts were not only repositories of learning, but also practical instruments, serving to maintain the proper order of Tibetan society. As such, manuscripts were plentifully created in relation to many spheres of practice besides law and governance. Scholarship on the book, in these areas, must often be

complemented by focused research on the practical disciplines concerned. Writings on technical subjects, introduced in part 3, provide a particularly rich body of materials in this respect. In some fields, they are accompanied by varied programs of illustration, often— as is the case with scientific and technical illustration elsewhere— employing intricate codes and symbolic devices whose proper interpretation may require specialized background. Among them, Tibetan medical literature and visual representation, the subject of chapter 15, have lately aroused particular over the longue durée, beginning with evidence from Dunhuang and concluding with developments during the Qing dynasty in Inner Mongolia and Kham. Tibetan veterinary literature, as represented specifically in works on hippiatry, enjoys a similarly long history, though the role of the book in this domain proves to be far less clear than it is in the case of human medicine. Chapter 16 introduces us to the treatment of Tibetan horses and the manuscripts devoted to it, interrogating the functions these works may have had.

The development of musical notation in Tibet has long aroused the interest of ethnomusicologists, which has led to diverse approaches over the years to interpret it satisfactorily. It has become clear that, in contrast to systems of notation based on precisely determined, relative or absolute values of pitch and time, Tibetan notation serves primarily as an aide-mémoire, offering graphic reminders to those already familiar with the performance of the musical scores represented. Chapter 17 explores the practical implications of this with reference to a selection of Bönpo liturgical scores for both instruments and voice. The chapter also serves as a reminder of the copious manuscript traditions of the Bönpo, which, while represented elsewhere in this book by a small number of illustrations (figs. 2.12, 4.19, 6.20, 6.39, 19.14), merit fuller examination.

In the final chapter of part 3, we turn to the prolific realm of Tibetan methods of astrology and divination. The very considerable variety encountered here, including systems of Chinese, Indian, and Tibetan indigenous origin— employing techniques ranging from observations of nature, the interpretation of dreams, and cleromancy, to the precise calculation of astral positions— has given rise to a remarkably varied visual

culture, much of which remains to be adequately documented and studied. To provide a general introduction to Tibet's mantic traditions as they appear in the manuscript record, selections from divinatory texts from Dunhuang are presented, followed by an overview of materials relating to geomancy, astrology, and hemerology as these came to be codified in the great seventeenth- century compendium of the astral sciences, the White Beryl (Bai ḍūrya dkar po) of the Fifth Dalai Lama's regent, desi Sanggyé Gyamtso (1653–1705).

Besides the topics surveyed in these chapters, other types of technical writings, employing distinctive graphic conventions, include works in the "language ed or distributed in any form sciences" (sgra rig)—grammar (sum rtags), poetics (snyan ngag), metrics (sdeb sbyor), synonymics (mngon brjod)— that may use tables, interlinear glosses, and, in manuscripts, rubrication to clarify or accentuate key points. Maps and topographical illustrations of various kinds, including mandalas and illustrations of "pure lands" (zhing bkod), are found in both single- sheet manuscripts and books; the image facing the first page of this introduction, for instance, provides an idealized mandalaic map of Tibet folded in a poti containing the esoteric precepts of the Fifth Dalai Lama. As we will see in the final chapter, too, ritual works sometimes include richly elaborated programs of illustration depicting deities, ceremonial objects of various kinds, altar arrangements, and so on.

Taking together the evidence of Sang gyé Gyam-tso's manual of iconometry (see §3.3.2), his contributions to medical and astrological illustration (chaps. 15 and 18), and the precisely drawn ritual diagrams emanating from the Fifth Dalai Lama's court (chap. 22), it seems possible to suggest that the standardization and refinement of technical drawing figured prominently among the projects for the advancement of learning under the nascent seventeenth- century Ganden Pod rang regime. Indeed, the finely drafted miniatures adorning the magnificent manuscript of the "Collected Nyingma Tantras" studied in chapter 11 may be seen in this light as well. The exacting visual programs of Tibetan books— manuscripts as well as some printed works— produced

during this period eloquently testify to the new regime's comprehensive vision of Tibetan society and culture in all its diverse aspects.

Part 4, "The Tibetan Book beyond Tibet," turns from works classed by their contents to those grouped by geographical origins. China and Mongolia played especially prominent roles in the development of Tibetan book culture and the diffusion of Tibetan literature; a large part of the Tibetan books preserved in many collections in Europe, Japan, and North America were acquired from them rather than directly from Tibet. China fundamentally contributed to the adoption of xylographic printing techniques for the multiplication of Tibetan books and the eventual spread of print in Tibet itself. In Mongolia, although Tibetan works were sometimes printed, manuscript production remained prominent, notably in the fabrication of opulent volumes making abundant use of precious metals and gemstones.

In the final part of this volume, 5, we introduce two case studies of manuscripts that raise different sorts of questions for research. The first, presenting a detailed commentary on a well- known body of instruction, brings us close to the period of the composition of the text it contains and underscores issues of redaction and scribal practice. The second, a brilliantly illustrated fragment from what had once been an important collection of esoteric rituals, poses puzzles for scholars seeking to establish its religious and historical context. Accordingly, the studies presented in chapters 21 and 22 illustrate differing methodologies in the examination of Tibetan manuscripts, the first focusing on paleography and Tibetan Buddhist doctrinal history and the second on artwork in relation to tantric ritual systems. In both cases, the aim is to situate the work, a manuscript of initially unknown date and provenance, in the milieu in which it was created and thereby to determine what it might contribute to general understanding of the cultural history of Tibet. Our relative successes or imprecisions in this regard may be taken as indicative of the current state of the field in Tibetan manuscript studies. <>

# Tibetan Sky-Gazing Meditation and The Pre-History Of Great Perfection Buddhism: The Skullward Leap Technique and the Quest for Vitality by Flavio A. Geisshuesler [Bloomsbury Academic, ISBN: 9781350428812]

Through a rigorous analysis of original scriptures and later commentaries, this open access book unearths a cornucopia of idiosyncratic motifs pervading the famous Tibetan sky-gazing meditation known as "Skullward Leap" (thod rgal). Flavio Geisshuesler argues that these motifs suggest that the practice did not originate in the context of Buddhism, but rather within indigenous Tibetan culture and in close contact with the early Bön tradition. The book argues that Dzogchen once belonged to a cult centered on the quest for vitality, which involved the worship of the sky as primordial source of life and endorsed the hunting of animals, as they were believed to be endowed with the ability to move in between the divine realm of the heavens and the world of humans. The book also traces the historical development of the Great Perfection, delineating a complex process of buddhicization that started with the introduction of Buddhism in the 7th century, intensified with the rise of new schools in the 11th century, and reached its climax in the systematization of the teachings by the great scholar-yogi Longchenpa in the 14th century. The study advances an innovative model of meditation as an open-ended practice that animates practitioners to face the most challenging moments of their lives with courage and curiosity, imagination and creativity, and playfulness and excitement; qualities that are oftentimes overlooked in contemporary descriptions of contemplation.

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## Skull Ward Leap Meditation and The Quest For Vitality

On the side of a mountain in the great Himalayas, there sits a yogi in a meditation pose. Surrounded by a stunning panorama of snow-capped peaks, he meditates by gazing into the deep blue of the cloudless Tibetan skies. Present yet relaxed, he holds his posture and gaze without moving, until he suddenly starts to perceive specks of light against the dark blue background of the open sky. At first, the lights just flicker and oscillate hectically. Then, they naturally start to form strings resembling sheep strung together by a rope. The meditator then gathers these luminous sheep together as if corralling them in a fence. Subsequently, the animals gradually shape-shift into more elaborate patterns, grow spectacularly in size, and configure other motifs, such as rainbows, lotus flowers, and even large stūpas, hemispherical structures containing relics of great Buddhist masters. Finally, without the slightest effort of active visualization, he finds himself in the midst of a magnificent maṇḍala, a world of gods. Instantly recognizing his own true nature as an enlightened being, he understands that the luminosity is nothing else than his own primordial wisdom, the nucleus of Buddha-nature located within his body. Implanted in his heart, this awareness is spontaneously mobilized to course through a series of light-channels consisting of white silk threads, crystal tubes, or far-reaching lassos that pervade his body. Like a lasso, the luminous energy is flung out of his eyes onto the canvass-like blue sky, and instantly recognized through his sight in the form of a magical display of lights. Ultimately, the visions swirl back into the expanse of the pure sky, evaporating just as miraculously as they appeared, and the physical body of the meditator dissolves into rainbow-colored lights.

The yogi performs "Skullward Leap" (thod rgal, Tögal),1 the famous Tibetan sky-gazing meditation. It is the most secretive meditation practice of one of the most esoteric traditions of Buddhism, namely the Heart-Essence (snying thig, Nyingthig) "Great Perfection" (rdzogs pa chen po or rdzogs chen, Dzogchen). Because of its great importance, Dzogchen is recognized as the highest teaching of both the "Ancient" or Nyingma (rnying ma) School of Tibetan Buddhism as well as the tradition known as Tibetan Bön, both of which claim to be among the most ancient religious schools on the Tibetan plateau. It is no coincidence that the meditation is centered on the open cloudless sky of Tibet as this openness perfectly represents the tradition's emphasis on freedom as a fundamental teaching. Indeed, the Great Perfection is notorious for relying on the idea of spaciousness—such as the "sky" (Tib. nam mkha', Skt. ākāśa/ gagaṇa), the "expanse" (Tib. dbyings, Skt. dhātu), or "space" (Tib. klong, Skt. dhātu)—to represent the fundamental freedom underlying all of human existence (Rossi 1999, 35; Hillis 2002). While "freedom" (Skt. mokṣa, mukti, from muc, signifying "release," Tib. thar pa) is a core persuasion of Indo-Tibetan religions, it is particularly developed within the Great Perfection. The tradition articulated a robust vocabulary and grammar of "freedom," and even went as far as popularizing an ontology of natural freedom. David Higgins identifies this fundamental attitude by noting that Dzogchen Buddhism is profoundly pervaded by the idea of "primordial freedom" (ye grol), and argues that it performed a radical transformation of the ancient Indian understanding of freedom, as it is "construed as a primary mode of being rather than as a teleocratic goal" (Higgins 2013, 219). "Humans," so Higgins summarizes the fundamental mindset of Dzogchen, "are fundamentally always and already free" (213–14).

Of course, this philosophical resonance of human nature is echoed in the tradition's meditative rhythm. Because freedom describes "how we are," rather than "capacities and properties of agents" (Higgins 2013, 219), it is not accidental that Dzogchen meditations are dominated by such themes as spontaneity, naturalness, and effortlessness. This becomes even more apparent if we look at the other primary meditation technique performed by Great Perfection yogis, namely Breakthrough

(trekchö, khregs chod). If Skullward Leap—undoubtedly the highest Dzogchen technique—is a practice that involves the application of simple yet disciplined postures, gazes, and breathing patterns leading to the gradual evolution of visions, Breakthrough is a sort of non-practice, frequently simply described as resting within the mind's natural state (gnas lugs). Longchenpa (1308–1364), the tradition's most eminent scholar-practitioner who is also known under his full name Longchen Rabjam Drime Özer (klong chen rab 'byams pa dri med 'od zer), correlates "freedom" to "simply letting be" (bzhag pa tsam) and "simply being aware" (shes pa tsam) (The Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle, vol. II: 1613.2).

Because "freedom" (grol) is not the same as "liberation" (bkrol), there is no need to make efforts in view and meditation. Since freedom abides as one's natural mode of being, this means that [freedom] is "unmodified" and "unfabricated." As a consequence, letting body, speech, and mind simply relax in their natural condition and abiding in the natural state of mind itself is called "freedom." (The Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle, vol. II: 1615.2-4)

The increasing popularity of Dzogchen Buddhism among contemporary practitioners is also related to a larger phenomenon known as the rise of Buddhist Modernism. As David McMahan argued, Buddhist modernism led not only to the unprecedented identification of "meditation as the essential Buddhist practice," but it also exhibits our culture's fascination with freedom. The term mokṣa invokes "tremendous cultural resonances" in the modern West as "it inevitably rings the notes of individual freedom, creative freedom, freedom of choice, freedom from oppression, freedom of thought, freedom of speech, freedom from neuroses, free to be me—let freedom ring, indeed" (McMahan 2008, 18).

More specifically, we could summarize the main characteristics of this modernist construction of meditation under the aegis of freedom by means of three processes, namely, demythologization, psychologization, and detraditionalization (McMahan 2008, 42).11 First, demythologization results in cultural freedom as it constructs meditation as largely decontextualized practice detachable from the wider mythical,

cosmological, and social context of Buddhism. Instead of being rooted in a particular place, time, and community, meditation is seen as a universal practice that is ubiquitous, present-centered, and focused on our individual selves. Second, psychologization brings with it a psychological freedom as meditation is seen as a process concerned with our "internal" realities and the experiential transformation of our consciousness, rather than the external reality of our bodies and the material universe surrounding us. Instead of being seen as a practice that involves all our somatic energies to explore the relationship between our internal awareness and the material world around us, meditation is a technique of relaxation that serves the recognition of our true inner self. Third, detraditionalization leads to institutional freedom as meditation is oftentimes practices outside of the institutional structures of traditional religion. Instead of being understood as a practice that is grounded in larger ritual, ethical, and philosophical structures established by tradition, meditation is regarded as a spontaneous and creative inner experience largely independent of institutional and social realities.

If Buddhist modernism embraces the ethos of freedom and encapsulates it in a description of meditation as something that is demythologized, psychologized, and detraditionalized, this book offers a systematic analysis of Skullward Leap meditation as a corrective. Specifically, it understands meditation as part of a larger "contemplative system," which consists of multiple components that surround the actual practice like frames that border a painting. In so doing, the book not only eschews the three reductive moves of Buddhist modernism, but it repairs them by restoring the frames of myth, embodiment, and institution. If the modern conception of meditation is largely free-floating,12 the core structure of this study—consisting of three major parts—provides a tight framework to approach meditation in a methodologically sound way. Indeed, neutralizing the modernist construction of meditation under the aegis of freedom, each part of the tripartite structure restores one of the frames that have too frequently been overlooked, namely mythical-historical narratives, technical-embodied instructions, and institutional-material tradition.

Such a comprehensive investigation into the contemplative system of Dzogchen requires a fundamentally interdisciplinary and comparative methodological attitude. Inspired by a long-standing tradition of historians of religions, particularly prominent in the Italian School of the History of Religions, the study traces large and seemingly universal ideas such as the centrality of the sky and explores them in a variety of contexts. This exhilarating journey leads us to sample distant worlds that span across time and space, from the very creation of the cosmos out of eggs to archeological traces in burial mounds of Tibetan kings, from early indigenous myths of flying deer to the elaborate anatomy of yogic bodies gradually accrued over centuries of embodied practice, from Stone Age rock paintings of antlered figures to MRI scans of human brains produced in cutting-edge laboratories, from the hunting behaviors of traditional peoples living in the Siberian steppes to the lives of renowned philosophers in bustling monasteries in Central Tibet, from the seekers of enlightenment in the years after the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet in the seventh century to the contemporary clinical studies of perceptual hallucinations among migraine sufferers, from the practices of witchcraft among contemporary religious communities of the Himalayas to the serene scenes of hermetic meditators sitting in isolated places. Such a journey could potentially lead to a flattening of the topographies of these varied contexts. To avoid this, the approach in this study is best described as a “contrasting comparison,” which pays equal attention to resemblances and divergencies. In fact, despite the discovery of fascinating similarities in these colorful environments, our investigative itinerary is also marked by forensic attention to details that serve to highlight the idiographic dimension of each unique cultural manifestation. To continue with my illustration, while the conception of the sky maintains certain stable characteristics, each context substantiates unique peculiarities that depend on factors like available evidence (e.g., archeological ruins vs. MRI scans), disciplinary perspective (e.g., ethnography vs. philology), historical change (e.g., ancient myths written in the ninth century vs. philosophical treatises written in the fourteenth century), and so forth.

Moving beyond the archetypical symbol of the sky and the modernist ethos of freedom to study Tögal as part of a complex contemplative system has far-reaching consequences for our understanding of the Dzogchen tradition. It is no exaggeration to say that Skullward Leap represents a watershed moment in the reception history of the Great Perfection with potentially powerful repercussions for our understanding of both Tibetan religion and meditation practice more generally. Just like a depiction of animals in an ancient rock painting reveals an entirely different meaning if it is no longer approached like an artistic creation in the contemporary sense, but rather a symbol transmitting a semantic logic that is itself profoundly shaped by its cultural-religious context, Skullward Leap starts to change in appearance once it is placed within its unique universe. Today, the Heart-Essence tradition holds a prominent position in the world of Tibetan Buddhism, and scholarship generally argues that its scriptures grew out of the tantric traditions of India imported to Tibet during the time of the empire between the seventh and the ninth centuries.14 While the post hoc self-narration of the tradition emphasizes its thoroughly Indic and Buddhist nature, a deeper look into the mythical, technical, and institutional dimensions of Dzogchen leaves us perplexed as we encounter an overabundance of idiosyncratic motifs that seem completely foreign to Buddhism and unique to the practice of Tögal.

The characteristics are too many to list them comprehensively here. Nonetheless, some of the most perplexing peculiarities can briefly mentioned: the overwhelming prioritization of the sky as a source of enlightened energy that manifests simultaneously in the sky, in our bodies, as well as the space in between; the description of this circulating energy as sheep that are chained together; the yogi's contemplative interaction with such animalistic beings, which involves the imitation of their behavior and the visionary attempt to capture them in fence-like structures; the luminous pathways inside the meditator's body—described as deer-hearts, silk-channels, buffalo-horns, or far-reaching lassos—which reproduce the terminology of the hunting of animalistic vitality as if internalizing the quest for precious substances; accompanying techniques such as the preliminary practices and introductions to the

nature of the mind, which involve the use of contemplative paraphernalia associated with such animals and their most characteristic traits like silk; and the culmination of the practice, during which the body of the practitioner is said to turn into a rainbow body, dissolving into the sky by transforming into light. Although these idiosyncratic motifs have puzzled experts in the field in the past, scholarship has generally avoided the thorny question of their origin. By contrast, and this is the first argument of Skullward Leap, I believe that these traits point to the Great Perfection's true identity as a tradition that is not suffused by a Buddhist or Indian ethos of freedom, but rather by indigenous Tibetan priorities centered on the "quest for vitality."

One could, of course, object and suggest that the presence of pre-Buddhist motifs in Dzogchen does not necessarily mean that it emerged outside of the province of Buddhism. After all, "an entangled encounter between different religious traditions and cultural spheres," to put it in the eloquent words of Georgios Halkias, "generates a vibrant manifold of similarities and differences where both indigenous and imported elements and processes reveal their identities relationally, in their creative responses to the challenges of identity and continuity they faced" (Halkias 2016, 131). It is theoretically possible that a set of Indian practices entered Tibet and there found articulation in terms of locally inherited concepts and metaphors. This book, by contrast, vigorously ratifies the revolutionary theory of an indigenous origin. I agree with Dan Martin, who once wrote that an effective way to establish whether "particular items, practices and ideas are most likely to be indigenous to Tibet," is to simply "sift out those things that clearly came from India and see what remains" (Martin 2014, 79). In our case, the matter is astonishingly simple: Not only do we not find a sun-gazing technique in Indian Buddhist sources, but most of the items in the list of eccentricities that mark the Dzogchen contemplative system are equally absent.

Of course, other readers could object and suggest that just because a tradition appears in Tibet in the tenth century does not necessarily mean that it must be "indigenous." After all, Tibet—due to the introduction of Indian religious teachings in the seventh century—was already a "Buddhist" domain at that time. However, while it is, indeed,

true that the main scriptures of the Heart-Essence Great Perfection appear suddenly in the form of so-called treasures (gter ma, Terma) in the tenth century, they seem too far removed from all of their potential Buddhist "ancestors." It is clear that they are neither directly flowing out of earlier forms of Dzogchen, such as the "mind series" (sems sde) or the "space series" (klong sde), nor do they seem to belong to Chinese teachings like Chan Buddhism or specific tantric systems imported from India. At the same time, it is extremely unlikely that these texts were just the result of an impromptu invention by some renegade scholars, who came up with a series of random texts that they would call the Heart-Essence Great Perfection. The teachings offer us a picture of an established and complex contemplative system that is premised on extensive yogic experience acquired through many years of practice. A more careful look at the evidence available to us does not only reveal that Dzogchen is an extremely ornate contemplative system—equipped with elaborate myths of cosmogony, detailed spiritual anatomies, phenomenological accounts of visionary journeys, and much more—but that it does not just suddenly appear in tenth-century Tibet. On the contrary, we are dealing here with a long-standing indigenous religious tradition that reaches back into a period that precedes the introduction of Buddhism in the seventh century before being transformed repeatedly through its contact with other teachings that flourished on the plateau.

The timing of this watershed moment in the study of the Great Perfection is felicitous as we have witnessed a sprouting surge in research into the indigenous traits of Tibetan culture, with more and more manuscripts of various provenance becoming available in recent years. In this regard, I would like to highlight the importance of two scholars' interventions. First, the work undertaken by John Bellezza, who has relentlessly brought to light localized popular practices by drawing on textual sources about the pre-Buddhist society (written during the empire and the ensuing centuries), archeological evidence, and anthropological data from contemporary Tibetan communities. In so doing, he effectively succeeds in reconstructing an indigenous worldview and the mythical-ritual religion of pre-Buddhist Tibet (Bellezza 1999; 2000;

2002; 2005). The second endeavor worthy of note is Toni Huber's Source of Life (2020), in which he has recently exposed what is likely the driving theme of indigenous Tibetan culture, namely the quest for vitality. By combining ethnographic fieldwork among highland populations in Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh with more extensive textual research that extends into the eastern Himalayas to include the Naxi and Qiang peoples, Huber offers unprecedented insights into how indigenous myths and rituals regulate fertility, virility, procreation by periodically revitalizing the human realm on earth with the life-sustaining energies emanating from the sky.

The works of Bellezza and Huber also share another trait with my appreciation of early Tibetan culture, namely its close association with Bön. Although the religious tradition only self-consciously formulated its identity in the tenth century (Blezer 2011b, 212), it too existed much earlier and centered its focus on the quest for vitality. As we will soon see, in the historical reconstruction of the earliest period of the Great Perfection, the distinction between Bön and Buddhism—particularly in the case of the Ancient School—is largely artificial (and anachronistic). It is hardly a coincidence that both Nyingma and Bön share the practice of Skullward Leap, the teachings of Dzogchen, and the literary medium of treasure revelation; all of which are directly or indirectly related to their pre-Buddhist origins. In fact, the two contemplative systems are profoundly intertwined, not only in these structural similarities, but also in their historical origins. Particularly the Bönpos are adamant that Dzogchen originated somewhere in Central Asia and certainly outside of India. To wit, the original scriptures were composed in the kingdom of Zhangzhung in a region in the Northwest of Tibet, frequently identified as Tazig, a term that points into the Iranian world.

Hence, when I use the expression "indigenously Tibetan," I do not mean to say that these practices are exclusive to Tibet, but rather that they are indigenous in the sense that they were originally non-Buddhist. To account for the fact that Tibet belonged to a wider cultural realm that included much of Central and Northern Asia, I frequently speak of the "wider Tibetosphere." The prehistoric inhabitants of the Tibetan plateau belonged to various different ethnic groups (Hazod 2012). These consisted not only of

Turkic and Tibeto-Burmese peoples, but also had close contacts with Indo-Scythian communities (Hazod 2009, 175). Throughout the study, I will also make frequent references to parallel ideas and practices in Scytho-Siberian, Iranian, Turkic, and Mongolian cultures. It might be relevant to note that experts have collected more and more evidence—including prehistoric art, ancient texts, and contemporary ethnographical data—that point to the pervasive and long-standing presence of a cult of the sky associated with deer across much of the Eurasian steppes. While it is beyond my capacity to reconstruct this Eurasian substratum, and virtually impossible to demonstrate its possible historical influences on the development of early Tibetan culture, future research could explore such links in order to complement the focus on Buddhism in our understanding of Tibet. It could even be argued that studies of the abundant depictions of animals like deer and sheep in Tibetan rock art,27 the discovery of a Himalayan cult of animal guides, the study of ancient manuscripts regarding burial customs and postmortem journeys involving deer or sheep in early Tibet,29 study of artifacts in silver, gold, and wood found during archaeological excavations of Tibetan tombs and from Zhangzhung and the Tibetan empire,30 and the identification of the deer as a major structuring device for mythical-ritual practices among indigenous Tibetans have allowed the field of Tibetan studies to adumbrate the first contours of a more local cult of the sky-deer.

This wider substratum brings us to another element that makes our venture into the origins of Dzogchen a bit tricky, namely the close association with “shamanism.” While there are many definitions of this term and it has oftentimes been applied too widely in discussions of Tibetan religions (Achard 2022, 1–2), it is nonetheless a relevant and effective concept if defined appropriately. In the present, shamanism finds its most vivid expression in the mythical-ritual world of Himalayan, Siberian, and North Asian religions. It involves the belief in the sky as the primary source of vitality, the conviction that vitality moves between the heavenly and the earthly realms by means of messenger beings like deer and sheep,33 and the practical performance of ritual acts by figures known as shamans, who successfully appropriate the help of the animalistic

emissaries of vitality to reinvigorate the community of humans in an effort to heal, protect, or solve other forms of crisis. Upon first blush, these pragmatic objectives of shamanism might seem far removed from the salvific ambitions of Dzogchen Buddhism. However, I will show that Skullward Leap is a meditation practice that operates along the same cultural continuum as shamanic traditions. While they are both deeply embedded within the quest for vitality and the sky-deer, they find divergent means to express their invigorating journeys to the heavenly realm.

Having shared my manuscript with experts in the fields of Tibetan and Buddhist studies, as well as beyond, I am under no illusion that my arguments will strike some readers as fanciful. I nonetheless invite you to suspend your judgment until the end of this book. It is no exaggeration to state that the sky-deer's role as the primordial source, transmitting messenger, and lasting object of vitality nourishes the Heart-Essence Great Perfection so deeply that this book's seemingly fantastical thesis cannot be dismissed easily. The animalistic emissaries of heavenly vitality do not just surface in some tangential reference in an enigmatic text, but rather permeate the entire contemplative system, from the mythical background, through the conception of the body, to the material universe.

Equally crucial, the resemblances are not only linguistic and thematic in nature but pervade the very structure and function of the practice of Skullward Leap itself. It is for this reason that I have decided to deviate from the existing translations of thod rgal as "Direct Transcendence" or "Leap Over" by proposing a more literal designation of the practice as "Skullward Leap." It is likely that these translations are anachronistic reinterpretations based on the gradual transmission of the practice from its original indigenous context to Buddhism. In light of the significant influence of the indigenous Tibetan substratum on the early development of the Great Perfection, it is much more likely that the expression thod rgal means something radically different. Literally, Tögal is an expression that consists of the Tibetan words thod ("above," "over," but also "head wrapper," "turban," "skull") and rgal ("to leap over"). In the larger Tibetan cultural area, in fact, it is the most elevated part of the human body—the skull or, its extension in the

form of a turban-like headdress—that allows the religious practitioner to gain access to the source of vitality located in the heavens. Both the head and the headdress, as we will see, have deep resonances with animals—particularly deer and sheep—which are central for the sky-gazing practice because of their ability to ascend and descend vertically to move in between various realms of existence.

To be clear, contemporary experts on Dzogchen Buddhism did not simply mistranslate the expression thod rgal. On the contrary, they clearly rigorously followed the tradition's own self-representation as a unique religious movement that allows practitioners to simply "leap over." In contrast to the tedious processes of mental and physical transformation, advocated by other Buddhist traditions on the Tibetan plateau and beyond, Dzogchen meditation enables practitioners to directly "transcend" embodied human existence by becoming their truest selves as beings of light. This Buddhist reading of the term Tögal—which has also led to a search for Sanskrit equivalents like avaskandha, viṣkanda, vyutkrānta, or vyatikrāntaka—as an expression of simultaneist enlightenment is not to be neglected as it has come to dominate the Dzogchen system as we know it today. This understanding, I must hasten to add, is the result of a long and opaque process involving the transformation of both the Dzogchen tradition and the meaning of vitality in Tibet. This brings us to another key objective of this study, namely the historical development of the cult of vitality and the sky-deer over time. As the discussion of the book gradually unfolds, it becomes ever clearer that the Dzogchen contemplative system, by and large, mirrors the cultural history of Tibet as a whole. The tripartite structure of this study transmits this historical development by reverberating the vicissitudes in the Tibetan conception of vitality.37 Here, the sky-deer also reveals a heuristic function that is closely related to its identity more generally. The deer does not only possess a complex semantic status throughout this region. It is associated with the idea of "transition" between various worlds, a sort of mediator between the world of animals and humans, between heaven and earth, between life and death, and so forth. In this study, this dual nature of the deer reflects the status of Skullward Leap, which changes rather dramatically with time while

simultaneously maintaining its core meaning across the centuries. At the same time, we have a movement in the opposite direction as the Buddhist orthodoxy struggles to integrate the pre-Buddhist tendencies present on the Tibetan plateau. Particularly, the moment of the introduction of Buddhism during the empire in the seventh century, the renaissance of Tibetan culture in the ninth century, and the rise of the scholastic tradition in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries left decisive marks on the Dzogchen Great Perfection.

Part I opens with a major bang as it looks at the mythical-ritual foundations of the Great Perfection to suggest that it is a tradition that was originally neither Buddhist nor Indian, but rather formed in a cultural "substratum" of pre-Buddhist culture. In a journey filled with rich stories, we travel into territories that most readers have never even imagined. Specifically, it leads us into the world of early Tibet, which we access through a body of textualized ritual narratives, so-called antecedent tales (rabs). These texts were written over the course of many centuries, with the oldest ones dating to the ninth century and the newer ones, frequently by anonymous authors, still used in ritual traditions throughout the Himalayas today. Despite this temporal and spatial distribution, however, the narratives have been studied by many scholars as a genre of texts because of their protagonists, themes, and structure. For heuristic reasons, these texts can be divided into two categories: first ancient texts found in the library cave at Dunhuang (敦煌) that was likely sealed in the early eleventh century, on the one hand, and a broad collection of antecedent tales belonging to the wider Tibetosphere that vary greatly in their dates of redaction, ownership, and date of discovery, on the other.40 Although the specific texts that I will discuss are not directly associated with the Great Perfection but circulated within the Ancient School of Buddhism and Tibetan Bön,41 I allow myself to group them together for the simple reason that they represent a unified worldview centered on the quest for vitality and the cult of the sky-deer.

Part II moves beyond the mythical background stories of the heavenly origins of vitality to analyze the embodied technical aspects of Skullward Leap by offering a close reading of a group of texts known as The Seventeen Tantras of the Esoteric Instruction Series

(henceforth: The Seventeen Tantras). These texts, which the Buddhist tradition claims were brought to Tibet by an Indian monk known as Vimalamitra and later discovered as treasures in the late tenth century, are the authoritative scriptures of the Heart-Essence Great Perfection.

Although scholarship has a tendency to refer to them as a collection, a practice that I maintain in this study, it is likely that the scriptures were written by multiple hands and over the course of decades or even centuries (Cuevas 2003, 62). I will not be able to reconstruct their precise redaction. However, I suggest that they were heavily influenced by earlier indigenous Tibetan beliefs and practices. More specifically, I demonstrate how the Great Perfection used Skullward Leap practice to mobilize the flow of life. The contemplative system, indeed, internalized the mythical universe, turning the body into the stage where the meditators would play out the quest for vitality and the cult of the sky-deer.

Finally, in Part III, we turn our attention to a third type of literature, namely the commentaries composed by the great fourteenth-century scholar-yogi Longchenpa. Most contemporary practitioners of Dzogchen are familiar with this buddhicized version of the Great Perfection as his extensive writings organized, unified, and systematized the tradition. Specifically, Longchenpa gave Dzogchen both internal definition—representing the core of its teachings in harmony with the Ancient School's exoteric (i.e., sūtric) and esoteric (i.e., tantric) teachings—and legitimacy toward other Buddhist schools of his time—situating it in relationship to the other major schools of Buddhism. While Longchenpa was an exceptionally prolific writer,46 this part draws primarily on his most influential writings for the systematization of the Great Perfection, namely The Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle and The Treasury of Words and Meaning. Analyzing these texts, we discover that Longchenpa was not only a great source of vitalization for the Dzogchen tradition, but also threatened to destroy some of its most characteristic traits. For one, Longchenpa simply brushes over some of the most idiosyncratic motifs related to vitality that abound in the earliest tantric scriptures, giving them little to no attention at all. Even more importantly, he

sometimes radically alters the logic of the existing tradition by inserting the circularity of the quest for vitality into a linear Buddhist path that culminates in a state of final liberation.

We are now almost ready to embark on our quest for the astounding features in the Dzogchen system through the reconstruction of the pre-Buddhist Tibetan world and commencing our journey through the gradually intensifying buddhicization of the tradition that reached its climax in the systematization by the great Longchenpa in the fourteenth century. Before doing so, however, I encourage you to keep our opening reflections on the nature of meditation in the back of your mind while reading this book. If meditation is no longer simply about the fundamental freedom of the open sky above Tibet, but rather about facing the ever-recurring adventures of life—emblazoned in the indigenous Tibetan quests for various life-sustaining energies—then this book also offers us an opportunity to adjust our definition of this phenomenally popular contemporary practice. In other words, by rehabilitating the quest for vitality as primary impetus for Skullward Leap, the book also adumbrates an innovative model of meditation as an open-ended practice that animates practitioners to face the most challenging moments of their lives with courage and curiosity, imagination and creativity, and playfulness and excitement; qualities that are oftentimes overlooked in contemporary descriptions of contemplation.

## Part I The Mythical-Historical Conception of Vitality

As a minor tradition that developed on the margins of Buddhist culture, either simply overlooked or actively suppressed by the powerful orthodoxy, Dzogchen features significant—and generally underestimated—affinities with indigenous Tibetan folk religion. While this first part makes hardly any reference to Skullward Leap practice, the remainder of the book will offer many justifications as to why this thorough reconstruction of the indigenous Tibetan worldview is warranted. Myths are commonly held to be something akin to fiction. However, we must never forget that we enter a world in which such stories are real because they provide the framework for ritual and contemplative practices. Since our understanding of pre-Buddhist culture is still very

limited, this part of the study turns to early Tibetan myths about the origin of life on earth in an attempt to reconstruct this early universe of beliefs and practices. Particularly in Bön sources, this conception of vitality boasts the preeminence of the heavens as a source of vitality, as well as the role of animals like sheep and deer as mobilizing agents that transport vitality between the realms of the sky and the earth. The quest for life was so central to early Tibet that it even gave rise to a unique vocabulary composed of words like lha, bla, mu/dmu/smu/rmu, phya/phywa, or g.yang, terms that can all be situated within the semantic field of "vitality." Myths, moreover, are real not only because they offer the blueprints for various religious practices like Skullward Leap meditation, but also because they are intimately linked to the historical circumstances in which they were composed. In our case, the stories point not only to an early Tibetan fascination with heavenly vitality, but also testify to the fact that this model of vertical vitality was challenged by worldviews that were likely imported from India. Indeed, the political context of early Tibet was rather tumultuous, including a series of cataclysmic events like the conversion to Buddhism during the height of the great empire in the seventh century, the collapse of the kingdom in the second half of the ninth century, and the Renaissance of Tibetan culture during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

## Part II The Embodied-Technical Circulation of Vitality

It is now time to build upon the mythical-historical background underlying the Great Perfection system by turning our attention to the keytheme of this study, namely the meditation practice known as Skullward Leap. As I mentioned, we are dealing here with a technique during which the meditators gaze into the open skies until they start to perceive flickers of light that are described in rich phenomenological details as a gradual increase in patterns and images. The technical details of the practice are furthermore anchored in an elaborate spiritual anatomy as the radiant energy is said to move out of our hearts, circulate through light-channels, and shoot out through the gateways of the eyes before being perceived in the form of visions. Although the tradition frequently portrays Skullward Leap as a culturally neutral practice under the

monocentric Buddhist aegis of freedom, it will soon become apparent that the exercise is profoundly rooted in the mythical universe of indigenous Tibetan culture. Based on its visionary, technical, and anatomical details, Skullward Leap can be regarded as an indigenous Tibetan practice that offered a sort of contemplative enactment of the mythical narratives surrounding the quest for vitality. In other words, just as the mythical search narratives served as antecedent tales for ritual practices performed throughout the Tibetan world, the stories function as charter myths that provide a blueprint for the contemplative performance of Tögal. Exploiting the powers of the sky as source of life, participating in the movement in between earthly and heavenly realms through luminous cord-like structures, and relying on the nomadic qualities of animals like sheep and deer, the yogi mimetically takes on the role of the hunter of precious life-sustaining energies. At the same time, however, this central part of the book continues to investigate how the quest for vitality and the sky-deer transformed throughout the history of the Great Perfection. Indeed, the practice dramatically alters the cosmological quest for life by transposing the drama of (re-)vitalization from the macrocosmic realm of the universe into the microcosm of the "subtle body." This tendency becomes particularly evident in some of the most extraordinary anatomical structures found in the Dzogchen body, such as the "deer-lamp tsitta," the "far-reaching lasso," "white silk thread," "crystal tube," or "buffalo horns." These traits, entirely foreign to tantric systems of Indian provenance, only make sense if they are interpreted against the elaborate backdrop of the quest for life and the mythical narratives involving the hunt for precious substances.

## Part III The Institutional-Material Crystallization of Vitality

In the final part of the study, we explore the contemplative system of Dzogchen in its institutional-material aspects and turn our attention to the crystallization of the tradition as an independent and powerful religious school during the fourteenth century. While the Heart-Essence Great Perfection was a relatively minor tradition in the centuries before, it burst onto the scene of Tibetan Buddhism during this period as the third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje (rang 'byung rdo rje, 1284–1339) and others started

to draw attention to its teachings. The rise of Dzogchen, however, is most intimately associated with the life and work of a singular scholar-yogi, namely Longchen Rabjam. Indeed, it is the merit of Longchenpa that the previously loosely associated teachings were organized into a coherent system on par with that of other schools on the Tibetan plateau. In light of the dominance of the vitalistic thrust and the overwhelming presence of indigenous Tibetan motifs in the Dzogchen tantras, Longchenpa's project was spectacularly successful. Indeed, contemporary practitioners of Dzogchen as well as the dominant scholarship on the tradition—who access the beliefs and practices of the tradition frequently through the interpretation of Longchenpa or one of his successors— are not only convinced that the tradition is deeply anchored in Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna teachings, but also celebrate freedom as its primary ethos. This being said, a more careful look at Longchenpa's writings reveals that they are fraught by an internal tension between two opposing trends: On the one hand, the crystallization of Dzogchen teachings appears to harden the tradition, setting its teachings in stone, and cutting it off from the dialectical circularity of the quest for vitality. Quite appropriately, Longchenpa frequently uses the image of a crystal that is "primordially pure" (ka dag) to defend his tradition's doctrine of freedom. On the other hand, even in its crystalized form, the Dzogchen teachings continue to be driven by the hunt for precious life-sustaining energy below the surface. The crystal, although adamantine, upholds its vitality as a powerful substance that reveals a richly dynamic display as soon as light shines through its prism. This tendency is particularly evident in the so-called "introductions" (ngo sprod pa), during which a teacher uses various means—frequently both metaphorical and material crystals—to show their students the nature of their mind. Exploring such performative techniques in their linguistic, material, and psychological dimensions, this final part provides substantial evidence for Dzogchen's surprising parallels with other religious traditions, not only the indigenous substratum that has concerned us so far, but also its closest living relative in the wider Tibetosphere, namely shamanism. <>

## The Cosmos, the Person, and the Sādhana: A Treatise on Tibetan Tantric Meditation With a translation of Master Tsongkhapa's Fulfilling the Bee's Hope

(Tibetan title: Dpal gsang ba 'dus pa'i bskyed rim blo gsal bung ba'i re skong gnad dong sal ba)by Tsong-kha-pa Blo-bzang-grags-pa, translated by Yael Bentor [Series: Traditions and transformation in Tibetan Buddhism, University of Virginia Press, ISBN 9780813951041]

A new translation and interpretation of a seminal fourteenth-century treatise on Tibetan Buddhist meditation

Sādhana, which translates as "realization," is the primary form of meditation in the Tantric Buddhism of Tibet. In this spiritual exercise, practitioners dissolve their ordinary reality—their identity and environment—and in its place visualize an awakened being. Eventually they actually transform into this divine being. In this vital new volume, Yael Bentor offers an invaluable translation of Tsongkhapa Lobzang Drakpa's famous treatise on this form of meditation.

Tsongkhapa was an influential monk, philosopher, and tantric yogi whose activities led to the formation of one of the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism. His treatise draws fascinating links between tantric practice, cosmogony, and the life cycle of a yogi engaged in the practice. Bentor's vivid translation, accompanied by her expert introduction and commentary, provides the grounding necessary to properly understand the text, tracing the reception and trajectory of Tsongkhapa's work through history and evaluating its great relevance up to the present day.

CONTENTS

Two key terms are at the core of this book: connections and continuity, bandhu and prabandha in Sanskrit. The tension between them is a central theme in our discussion. The notion of connections between the cosmos, the person, and the ritual is often seen in early Indian literature. To quote Gavin Flood: "One of the fundamental vedic identifications or homologies, which becomes central in later esoteric traditions, is between the body, the universe and the sacrifice." In our context, sacrifice is replaced by the practice of the sādhana—the tantric path of spiritual realization. In Sanskrit, the word "tantra" signifies a loom or a weave. It carries connotations of intertwining and braiding—and of continuity. We will see how the tantric path of the sādhana is interwoven with the fate of the cosmos and the person to create an intricate tapestry that explains how the sādhana practice works.

"Continuity" is one of the synonyms of the term "tantra." The Subsequent Tantra, an important tantra of the Guhyasamāja cycle, explains that the word "tantra" means continuity between three aspects: the cause, the fruit, and the method. Tantra then is a continuous link between the point of departure and the goal of the practice preserved through the method. The method, explains Nāropā in his commentary on this tantra, is the sādhana practice; hence, the continuity has a soteriological value. In Tibetan, "tantra" is translated as gyü, meaning a string, a continuum, or a stream, especially a stream of being. This continuum connects the beginners in the practice to the awakened beings they can become at its end.

Yet both terms—connections and continuity in this context—are not easily explained in Buddhist lexicon. How is the microcosm (that is to say, a yogi meditating in isolation, whose life is subject to his or her individual karma) connected to the macrocosm formed by the shared karma of all people in the world? Or beyond connection, how can the microcosm even affect the macrocosm? What connects the dissolution of the meditator's ordinary environment to the destruction of the world? One of the foundations of Buddhist thought is a sequence of causation known as interdependent arising: everything arises in dependence on interconnected causes and conditions. But what is the causal sequence that connects a person meditating on a sādhana and cosmological events? This question will be discussed at length below.

The notion of a continuity between a yogi who has just embarked on the sādhana practice and the awakened being this yogi will ultimately become is challenged by the Buddhist concepts of selflessness and impermanence, additional hallmarks of Buddhist thought. This contention, however, has been dealt with since early Buddhism; the concepts of selflessness and impermanence have always been accompanied by a notion of personal continuity—for example, one's karma that has begun in the past and continues forward into the future. Based on the various philosophical approaches, the continuity of a person can be explained as continuously changing from moment to moment or as a basis of designation9 for sentient beings—to give only two examples.

The threads that connect the sādhana to the cosmos and the person in the context of Guhyasamāja Sādhana, our concern here, were explained by the famous Indian yogi and scholar of the Guhyasamāja Tantra, Nāgabuddhi, in his work entitled Formulating the Guhyasamāja Sādhana10 in the late eighth to early ninth century CE.

The commentary on this work, written by the Tibet's eminent scholar Tsongkhapa Lozang Drakpa (1357–1419), is the foundation of our discussion in this book.12 As Thupten Jinpa writes, Tsongkhapa—"the founder" of the Geluk school of Tibetan Buddhism—"earnestly sought to develop a truly integrated worldview" on the basis of the numerous and diverse Indian scriptures and treatises. As we shall see, Tsongkhapa formulated a coherent system by integrating the tensions described above (or by

finding the middle way between them) by using rational inquiry as his guideline. No doubt Tsongkhapa was inspired by the weblike, unified system suggested by Nāgabuddhi. He wrote his commentary, Explanation of Formulating the Guhyasamāja Sādhana, in 1404, even before composing his famous work on tantric practice entitled The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Mantric Path. His reflections on Formulating likely impacted the Great Treatise, in which he refers to his earlier composition.

In his Explanation, Tsongkhapa stresses that not every similarity between the sādhana and the cosmos or the person has a soteriological value. Only certain homologies can serve to advance a yogi meditating on the sādhana toward their awakening. In following the Subsequent Tantra and Nāropā, mentioned above, Tsongkhapa emphasizes that only when there is a thread that continues without interruption from the ground to the goal can a yogi attain soteriological goals.

The goal of the Guhyasamāja Sādhana, according to Tsongkhapa, is the three bodies of a buddha:16 the dharma, resources, and emanation bodies (dharmakāya, saṃbhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya). To attain these three bodies of a buddha, certain homogenous causes for them must exist from the point of onset and continue throughout the tantric practice. This means that at each of the three major stages of the practice (called the cause, the method, and the fruit in the Subsequent Tantra), there is a comparable feature. These three major stages are often referred to in Tibetan literature as the “ground,” the “path,” and the “fruit.” The ground is the ordinary state in which a yogi embarks on the sādhana practice; the fruit or the goal of the practice is the awakened state of a buddha endowed with the three bodies; and the path that leads a yogi from the ground to the fruit is the tantric practice of the sādhana. Tsongkhapa maintains that the three bodies of a buddha cannot be attained without homogenous causes for each that have their roots in the ground and continue without interruption during every step of the tantric practice. (See the section “Purification” in chapter 3.) Moreover, an actual transformation is required in order to attain awakening, whether in a single life or in many lives.

As we shall see, the "very subtle body" made of winds and minds alone plays an important role in preserving the continuity from the ground state to enlightenment. This tantric approach stands in contrast to the "nirvāṇa without remainder" attained by the historic Buddha at his death. Nirvāṇa without remainder put an end not only to the Buddha's mental faculties, and in particular afflictive emotions, but also to all material aspects of his body. The difference here is twofold. First, certain subtle elements of the person continue in the enlightened being, though in a modified form; and second, a certain corporeality must be present even after liberation from saṃsāra is attained. While in nirvāṇa without remainder all physical aspects of the Buddha's body discontinue, the Mahāyāna (the Great Vehicle) theory of the three bodies of a buddha assumes a certain corporeality in the state of enlightenment, and the tantric texts will develop this further.

The nature of the corporeal aspect present in enlightenment has been contested, especially in relation to the theory of Mind Only, which is found in several important Indian Buddhis tantric treatises on the Guhyasamāja Sādhana. Mind Only, however, is not widely accepted among Tibetan scholars as the highest philosophical theory. As we will see, Tsongkhapa cites Indian scholars such as Āryadeva, who already in the early nineth century did not approve of the notion that the body attained at the culmination of the tantric practice is formed by the mind alone.

Most Tibetan scholars regard the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka as the highest Buddhist philosophy, although their individual interpretation of this philosophy differs. Tsongkhapa, as a Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka, saw the thread that carries a yogi from ordinary birth to enlightenment as continuous only to the extent that Prāsaṅgika philosophy allows it to be, or insofar as this thread acts as a basis of designation for sentient beings. (See the section "The Illusory Body" in chapter 3.) On the other hand, for Tibetan holders of the Buddha Nature in its strict sense, all sentient beings possess an innate buddhahood since beginningless time. But since Tsongkhapa does not accept such a view of Buddha Nature, his task of explaining "continuity" is more challenging.

The picture becomes even more complex when we explore the notion of connections. The idea of connections—homologies between the cosmos, the person, and practices—is the foundation of mysticism. They "might be said to be a principle of Indian religion." This notion is pervasive in Indian treatises, including Nāgabuddhi's Formulating the Guhyasamāja Sādhana, on which Tsongkhapa comments. Moreover, numerous Tibetan scholars writing on the Guhyasamāja Sādhana, whether his predecessors or successors, took these homologies for granted. Tsongkhapa cannot simply reject the notion of homologies altogether. In addition, he favors coherent and comprehensive systems that weave together different worlds.

Here Tsongkhapa offers his integrative approach that finds the middle way between accepting and rejecting the notion of connections. We will see how Tsongkhapa accepts homologies between the cosmos, the person, and the sādhana, to a certain extent, and how he finds ways to explain his acceptance. However, Tsongkhapa finds a soteriological value only when there is unceasing continuance from ground to fruit. In taking this stance, he distanced himself from the method of other Tibetan scholars. Not only that, but his explanations are also more intricate in nature, as we shall see.

This book aims to clarify the working of the sādhana in relation to the cosmos and the person. Toward this end, the first chapter considers Buddhist notions of cosmogony and cosmology, while the second discusses the natural processes that human beings undergo—death, the intermediate state, and rebirth. The third chapter is dedicated to a general explanation of the sādhana in correspondence with macro- and microcosmic processes, and the fourth chapter provides a fuller explanation of the practice based on Tsongkhapa's Fulfilling the Bee's Hope. The final part consists of a complete English translation of that same work.

In this book I follow the Tibetan method of addressing three types of people: beginning, middling, and advanced practitioners. In writing the first two chapters, I had in mind mostly beginning students and nonexpert general readers who are interested in the topics of Buddhist cosmology and the three events during the lifecycle of a person—death, the intermediate state, and rebirth. Readers who continue to the third

chapter will learn about the working of the sādhana in relation to the cosmos and the person in a general way. For middling and advanced readers, the first two chapters will serve to renew their acquaintance with Buddhist notions of the cosmos and the person. Those who are not intimidated by the complexity and details of the sādhana will benefit from reading the fourth chapter as well.

In the first chapter the reader will encounter two types of cosmological maps: vertical and spatial. These maps correspond to two different types of meditation. The vertical map corresponds to the notion of ascent through spiritual levels, while the spatial map is akin to circular representations and has bearing on the concepts of the center and its surroundings as well as on the configuration of the mandala. <>

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