

ENABLING ENCOUNTERS

Transformative Experiences on the Edges

Between

Hinduism and Christianity

- Case Studies from Nineteenth-Century Mission

History -

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William Hodge Mill, Cambridge Divine

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Richard Fox Young

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Preface

To begin these lectures, which I call "Enabling Encounters," and to fit a framework around them, allow me to cite some lines from the preface of a recent book by the American writer Anne FADIMAN, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* (1997). The subtitle describes it as being about *A Hmong Child* (that is, of refugee parents from Laos), *Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures*. The child referred to, Lia, suffers from epilepsy. A tragic figure, Lia finds herself trapped on the edges between two contrastive etiologies of illness, one being that of her Hmong parents, who understand her condition in terms of spirit possession, and the other being that of her doctors in the California hospital who treat her. Though the doctors, as one would expect, diagnose the problem in neurological terms, it is a diagnosis that makes no cultural sense to Lia's parents. While the book itself is enormously illuminating, the author's reasons for writing it intrigue me just as much:

I have always felt that the action most worth watching is not at the center of things but where the edges meet. I like shorelines, weather fronts, and international borders. There are interesting frictions and incongruities in these places, and often, if you stand at the point of tangency, you can see both sides better than if you were in the middle of either one. (1997: viii)

How well she says what I would like to say! That *the action most worth watching is not at the center of things but where the edges meet*. But, while FADIMAN finds the most interesting appositions to be cultural and medical, the ones I look for are more symptomatically religious. In times like these, however, when the world is painfully aware of the frictions and incongruities between religions, it may seem unlikely that standing at the point of tangency can in any constructive way help us see both sides better than if you were in the middle of either one. I submit, however, that it does, and that the experience of being in-between isn't only disabling, even if in Lia's case it was, for it can just as well turn out to be transformatively enabling. And the evidence I adduce, which comes from the mission history of India in the 19th century, is naturally full of frictions and incongruities. And it suggests exactly

that-that standing at the point of tangency between religions in that era could be transformative and was.

In turning for evidence to the 19th century, I am not implying that other eras in the encounter between Hinduism and Christianity were less fraught with frictions and incongruities. Far from it; although the edges are constantly shifting, they manifest themselves at every turn, whether we look to the deeper past or the present. It was, however, the nineteenth century that saw India being most thoroughly "edged" into encounter, as it were, by the West. For it was then that Hindus and Christians first began to deliberately situate themselves on the edges, instead of being inadvertently caught in-between. Admittedly, the action we'll be looking at was hardly the most representative of that era. The Hindus I introduce exemplify the Sanskritic ethos of "Great Tradition" Hinduism (as the textualized religion of literate elites is sometimes called in the idiom of anthropologists); that I speak only of brahmins and not of dalits and others in the social hierarchy should not be misconstrued to imply that to me the only action worth watching involved the dominant caste. It would, moreover, be mistaken to think that because the Christians I single out for attention are High-Church Anglican missionaries I therefore harbor a hidden animus toward the Evangelicals. My reason is this, that after fumbling around, in a variety of publications, with the individuals I introduce in these lectures, it comes into clearer focus for me that there is an *edge-effect*, as I hazard to call it, which manifests itself when individuals stand at the point of tangency between religions. And the individuals whose niche in history I know best happen to have stood there, though I realized it only recently.

From the cases I adduce, it will become clear that the edge-effect kicked into action for a variety of complex reasons, and that being placed at the point of tangency between religions was hardly a sufficient-though surely a necessary-condition for transformation to occur. To account for why it was that some individuals, surely the minority, returned from the point of tangency transformed, I have opted for thick description of the case-study variety.

For the first of my case studies, we'll look at what some might regard as a most untransformable beast, a Cambridge divine. I'll be talking about William Hodge Mill, an obscure figure found only in the footnotes of contemporary

histories. Next, we'll consider the case of the Benaras brahmin Nilakanth-Nehemiah Goreh, a much misunderstood convert to Christianity. And then we'll turn to another obscure but fascinating individual, the Hindu savant Somanath Vyas, whose encounter at the point of tangency transformed his sense of Christianity's relevance to Hinduism but left his religious identity more or less intact. Note that the principle behind my selection of these particular individuals is the *ecumenicity* of the edge-effect: as long as certain enabling factors were present, anyone at the point of tangency, Hindu or Christian, could have felt the impact.

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Case One

William Hodge Mill, Cambridge Divine

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Mill, who lived from 1792 to 1853, received his education at Trinity, where in 1813 he was sixth wrangler-no mean achievement, I understand-and the next year was elected a Fellow. By 1820, the year he went out to India, he had an M.A. and priestly ordination. Under whom he might have studied, I have no idea. One thing is sure, however. There was nothing to interest him in the theology of William Paley, whose successors must still have wielded considerable influence when Mill was here. In any event, from very early on, Mill was considered a High-Churchman's High Churchman, a *Pre-Tractarian* High Churchman of the later Oxford variety, which, if I haven't misunderstood the authorities I've consulted, was always rather rare here at Cambridge. Since I am by no stretch of the imagination a church historian, I turn to Peter NOCKLES for a definition of what species of churchman a Pre-Tractarian High Churchman might have been:

According to NOCKLES, these were individuals who "tended to uphold in some form the doctrine of apostolical succession as a manifestation of [their] strong attachment to the Church's catholicity and apostolicity as a branch of the universal church catholic, [They] believed in the supremacy of Holy Scripture and set varying degrees of value on the testimony of authorised standards such as the Creeds, the Prayer Book and the Catechism. [They] valued the writings of the early Fathers, but more especially as witnesses and expositors of scriptural truth when a 'catholic consent' of them could be established. [They] upheld in a qualified way the primacy of dogma and laid emphasis on the doctrine of sacramental grace, both in the eucharist and in baptism, [They] tended to cultivate a practical spirituality based on good works nourished by sacramental grace and exemplified in acts of self-denial

and charity rather than on any subjective conversion experienced or unruly pretended manifestations of the Holy Spirit." (NOCKLES, 1994: 25-26).

So far as I can tell, NOCKLES' definition fits my man like a glove. Later on, however, the post-India Mill, the Mill who had stood at the point of tangency between Hinduism and Christianity for a number of years, became a card-carrying Tractarian who rubbed shoulders with the likes of Keble, Pusey, Newman and others. Had the events of his life worked out differently-events that cannot be chronicled tonight-he might even have joined them at Oxford instead of returning here to Cambridge, where from 1848 until his death he was Regius Professor of Hebrew and an intimate of the High Churchmen of the Camden Society, John Mason Neale and Benjamin Webb.

Although I don't know exactly how Mill evolved into a High Churchman, I do know that the so-called Hackney Phalanx of High Churchmen, especially Joshua Watson, saw in him a rising star. An Anglican layman who exercised considerable influence over affairs of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, Watson recommended Mill when Thomas Fanshawe Middleton, India's first bishop and himself a High Churchman, was casting around for a suitable rector of the theological college he was about to open in Calcutta. Besides his theological *bona fides*, Mill was a linguistic polymath and therefore a real catch for Bishop Middleton, who had the SPG send him out in 1820.

The college of which Mill became rector-Bishop's College-was pure Cambridge, from the collegiate Gothic in which it was built, on the west bank of the Hooghly River next door to the Calcutta Botanical Garden, to the cap-and-gown dress code that Bishop Middleton believed a must if students of Holy Scripture were to keep themselves holy. The edifice is still there, occupied by another institution and a bit worse for wear, but the travelers' diaries of the era record in tones of awe how passengers were transported back to Cambridge when they espied the College on the horizon as their ships rounded the bend at Garden Reach-provided, of course, that the traveler knew what Cambridge looked like. The Americans didn't, and a missionary who went out to India from Princeton in the 1830s, Robert Owen of the American Board, thought the buildings squat and ugly, the turrets too short.

The turrets, however, were a good perch where the bishops of Calcutta could get a bird's eye view of the education being imparted in the classrooms below. In one of these turrets, rooms were kept for the Episcopal Visitor, an *ex officio* function performed with enthusiasm when High Church bishops held office, but with inquisitorial vigor when they didn't. Daniel Wilson, the Evangelical from Islington and a CMS sympathizer who disliked High Church affectations, needled Mill incessantly-and was needled back. In 1837, just as Mill was about to leave for England, Wilson wrote of the College seminarians with begrudging admiration that they "translate Homer, Xenophon, Cicero and Ovid in a manner perfectly surprising." Their ignorance of William Paley, however, he deplored. (BATEMAN, 1860: 285; WEBSTER, 1954: 127). If this was the kind of place Bishop's College was, an alternate universe where the frictions and incongruities were the same old bugbears that bedeviled High Churchmen and Evangelicals here in England, where was the point of tangency? The edges where transformation might occur? The enabling factors?

If only he had had the ears to hear, even the querulous Bishop Wilson up in his turret could have heard the answer, because it was Greek, Latin, *and* Sanskrit that Bishop's College seminarians were being taught. It was in the languages of classical antiquity, at the point of tangency between all three, that Mill experienced transformation-not, course, without another enabling factor being present. Leave that aside for later, however, and consider for a moment the joys of mastering a new language-not that I ever found much joy in Sanskrit (only a lot of blood, sweat, and tears). But Mill was a person who needed a new language the way a mountaineer needs a mountain. And to Mill, Greek and Latin were mere hills compared to the Himalayas of Sanskrit. In the Bodleian, where Mill's travel diaries are preserved, one can discover how he embarked upon his linguistic mountaineering. Even before arriving in India, aboard a ship, Mill spent the voyage composing in Sanskrit a version of the Lord's prayer, which he, still thinking in Latin, called the *,Oratio Dominica Sanscretice,*. Scored with scratches and marred by errors corrected with yet more errors, the result seems amateurish compared with the polished versions of later years.

Mill, of course, was feeling his way forward, and the next evidence we have of his growing prowess in Sanskrit comes from 1823, his third year in India, when the Bishop's College press printed a translation of the Ten Commandments (the Latin title, *Decalogus*, appears at the top). Before anything else, it occurred to Mill-and I find this enormously interesting-that, to be taken seriously from a Hindu perspective, Christianity would need to be presented as a *dharmā*, a code of normative conduct. That, in fact, is exactly what the Sanskrit text claims the Commandments are, an exposition of the *mahadharmā* (the great Law). And for a Hindu perspective on Christianity of that variety, Mill needn't have looked farther afield than to Calcutta's very own Ram Mohun Roy and his *Precepts of Jesus*, which appeared in 1820, the year he arrived. Although Mill was personally acquainted with Ram Mohun, he was cool toward him and later denounced him for pitting the "morality" of the Gospels against its "mysteries." Could it be, though, that in drawing attention to the *dharmic* qualities of Christianity, Mill, like Ram Mohun, was already standing at the point of tangency between Hinduism and Christianity, able to see both religions better than if he had stood in the middle of either one? Not quite-since around this same time the Bishop's College press brought out another Sanskrit translation, a more representative one this time, considering that Mill belonged to that species of High Churchman who, according to NOCKLES, valued "the testimony of authorised standards." And thus the Hindu world came to know, from the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene, and the Athanasian, which came with the Latin title *Fidei Christianæ (Pratitivakya)* and the proud boast of being *primum expressa* (translated for the first time), that Christianity was a metaphysically sophisticated religion, more than merely the inspiring collection of *dharmic* principles Ram Mohun had made it out to be. Here, in the ancient formula of the *homoousion*, was the dogma that Ram Mohun could never countenance, that of Jesus Christ, Son of God, who is of one substance with the Father. Since on other occasions I have dealt at length with Mill's translation of the Creeds, I'll not drag you through the Sanskrit technicalities.

As fascinating as these are (*tatsvarupa*, for instance, for *homoousios*), what I'd like to draw attention to isn't in the Creeds but rather in some remarks that Mill

attached to the end, where we see the High Churchman coming out of the closet, as it were. " *They are born again* who desire to be in union with Christ's Church (*krishtashrama*), repent of their sins, submit themselves to Christ's authority and Christ's commands, who receive baptism as instituted by Christ in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Now, in this short statement there are more linguistic conundrums than one can shake a stick at, starting with "They are born again" (*te dvija bhavanti*), which, although technically correct, would be read to mean that becoming a Christian makes one a brahmin (a *dvija*)-a preposterous assertion since becoming a Christian entailed the immediate forfeiture of brahminhood.

I would love to keep going, but enough already! Mill wasn't yet at the point of tangency; at Bishop's College he was still here at Cambridge, consulting his Sanskrit lexicon, searching for the right words, sure that he'd found them, captive to the western magisterium, and unable to conceive of an Indian Christianity with a theological idiom of its own that didn't merely echo the philosophical categories and controversies of the Greco-Roman world of Christian antiquity. If I'm not mistaken, what Mill did with the Creeds would be called in linguistics a calque-a text written by a person thinking in another language, so transparent that you can see right through it to the original. And so again it has to be said: Mill wasn't at the point of tangency quite yet. Nor would he get there for another five years, even though the intervening period saw him catapulted to the front ranks of those much-maligned monsters, the Orientalists, because of his contributions to the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* on Sanskrit epigraphy and belletristic literature. By 1828, however, his attention was again fully focused on his missionary duties. And, as a High Churchman of the species defined by NOCKLES who valued "the Church's catholicity and apostolicity," he put himself to the task of finding the right words in Sanskrit to convey the notion of episcopacy. It was exactly the kind of philological exercise that got his juices flowing, and the end product, [A] *Proposed Version of Theological Terms* was a showpiece of High Church erudition. The text not only tells you how to say 'Father' (*pitr*), 'Son' (*putra*), and 'Holy Spirit' (*sadatman*) in Sanskrit, it also tells you how to say

'deacon' (*paricarin*), 'priest' (*jjayas*), and 'bishop' (*pradhanadhyaksha*), and-of course!-how to say 'Holy Catholic Church' (*punyasarvasabha*).

But were these really the words one needed to know? A few of them were, but only a few, as Mill found out, when, around this same time, an enabling factor, in the human form of his Sanskrit pandit (tutor), who, of course, was a Hindu and a brahmin, walked into his study at the College and, as Mill believed, brought him providentially to the point of tangency between Hinduism and Christianity where he saw, as if for the first time, where the edges really met. Ramachandra Vidyabhushana was the pandit's name, and about him I know nothing except that he came from Burdwan in Bengal, that he was a Vaishnavite and a scholar who had been honored with the title, "Ornament of Knowledge." As any self-respecting Orientalist would, Mill consulted Ramachandra on the fine points of grammar and philology for his Sanskrit translations of the Creeds and the Ten Commandments. On this particular occasion, however, the customary roles had been reversed, for it was Ramachandra who had come to consult Mill, about a lovely piece of belletristic writing in Sanskrit, which he called the *Shabdavataradhyaya*, "A Chapter on the Incarnation of the Word," indicating that his intention was to keep writing and that this chapter, based on the prologue to the Gospel of John, *adau babhuva shabdah* ("In the beginning was the Word"), was only the first.

Now, in calling what happened to Mill during this encounter a transformation, I don't mean an ineffable, mystical experience of the "aha!" variety, but it seems somehow understated to simply say that he was suddenly overwhelmed with creative possibilities he had never before considered. Although the words Ramachandra used, *shabda* for the Word, the Logos, and *avatara* for incarnation were words that Mill's *Proposed Version of Theological Terms*, recommended and he himself had used, Ramachandra used them the way they would be used by the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, that is to say, in the form of an epic narrative, unlike his own dense, terse, and formulaic translations.

More, however, was involved than mere style in and of itself, for this curious piece of writing was not the work of a Christian but a Hindu. Did it mean that

Ramachandra would become one of the "twice born," a *dvija* in the High Church sense that Mill had urged upon the readers of his Creeds? Hardly. It was, of course, disturbing to Mill that Ramachandra remained aloof from the Church, but it would be a mistake to think that he saw him as lost and beyond the pale of grace. For the spirituality at the point of tangency between Hinduism and Christianity that Ramachandra exemplified was to Mill by no means an *alien* spirituality. On the contrary, it was a spirituality that had a parallel at the point of tangency between Christianity and the religions of Greco-Roman antiquity. And, for Mill, Ramachandra had a counterpart in the 4th-century Nonnus of Panopolis in Upper Egypt who took time out from his usual themes, the sexual and martial exploits of Dionysius, to write a paraphrase on the Gospel of John in Greek hexameters.

And so, I wonder, was there a conversion here? And if so, who converted whom? Or would it be better not to speak of persons at all, but of *Sanskrit*-of *Sanskrit* being converted to Christ and of *Christ* to Sanskrit? I submit that it is, and that some of the most interesting evidence of the transformative power that comes from being at the point of tangency is literary, because from this encounter on the edges an epic emerged, the *Shrikrishtasangita*, "A Hymn to Christ, the Blessed One," by William Hodge Mill. The *Shrikrishtasangita* commences with the "Chapter on the Incarnate Word" as a *sui voce* tribute to his enabler, Ramachandra, and concludes, some 5,000 stanzas later, with the *Te Deum*. The text as a whole took fourteen years to write, from 1828 to 1842, five of them right here in Cambridge at no. 12 Adelphi Street.

If that address still exists, I wish I could say the National Trust ought to make it a shrine, but I can't-the literary merits of the *Shrikrishtasangita* simply don't measure up to its size. Sure, the meters are flawless and display uncommon technical proficiency, but it's hard to avoid the overall impression that Mill was showing off his Sanskrit in the same way that certain early theologians used Greek and Latin to bedazzle-an ornamental gewgaw from the Second Sophistic in classical Christian antiquity seems a natural corollary. Some passages, however, are truly brilliant. Take, for instance, the "Unction of the Son" (*Ishvaraputrastotra*), on the birth of Jesus, which is redolent of theistic Hindu devotionism (*bhakti*). It starts like this: "He who is the Son, one with

the Father, always Lord from the beginning, glory to Him! Glory to Him! who existed before everything else." And it keeps on going for sixty more stanzas, each one punctuated with the same rapturous and rousing refrain: "Glory to Him! Glory to Him!" Still, as good as some parts are, most are precious and prettified set-pieces. And, when you're a 1000 stanzas down and there are still 4000 to go, you begin to wonder if it's Christ the Blessed One who was being converted to Sanskrit, or William Hodge Mill!

Despite its literary shortcomings, the *Shrikrishtasangita* merits attention for what it represents, if not for what it says, as the prototype of a new genre of Indian literature that I have grown accustomed to calling *Church Sanskrit*. And what the *Shrikrishtasangita* represents very beautifully, I believe, is the symptomatic mentality of the Christian classicist, steeped in the literature of the early Greek and Latin theologians, who sees in India's literary heritage the same possibilities they saw in theirs. In this perspective, Ramachandra the Hindu seems a less significant enabler in Mill's transformation at the point of tangency than the Basils, Chrysostoms, and Augustines of Christian antiquity who had likewise experienced the power of the edge-effect in their own era. This isn't my conceit. In the preface to the *Shrikrishtasangita*, Basil, Chrysostom, and Augustine are adduced as Mill's authorities for doing with Sanskrit what they did with Greek and Latin. The dynamic behind the *Shrikrishtasangita* is that of a reorienting, Christianizing assimilation, the dominant biblical metaphor being that of "Egyptian gold," repossessed from the classical heritage of Indian antiquity, melted down and hammered into ornaments of an unimaginable beauty because now they adorn the Christ, the Blessed One, not the deities of Great Tradition Hinduism. Literary allure and stylistic beguilement were therefore absolutely imperative if, as Mill fervently and naively-hoped, the *Shrikrishtasangita* was to subvert the affection of Hindus for the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Ever the erudite, classically-proficient scholar, Mill prefaced the *Shrikrishtasangita* with the text of a 4th-century "epistolary poem" from Gregory Nazianzus to a certain Nemesius, adding his own free-style Sanskrit translation. The original, which is redolent of Homeric Greek, would in Gregory's day have seemed stylish, ticks off a list of pagan deities, Bacchus, Isis, and Mythras, among others. Gregory then

sweeps them aside and declares with a flourish, "*As for me*, I will sing of the things Christ the Light taught me well, the divine song of Christ-bearing words!"

Merely by virtue of being in Sanskrit, did the *Shrikhrishtasangita* become a "divine song of *Christ*-bearing words"? Hardly! When the things taught by Christ, the Blessed One, were sung in Sanskrit, was that Christ therefore an *Indian* Christ? Again, hardly! Languages have more than ornamental functions; they reflect and construct cultural and religious realities. That's where the metaphor of Egyptian gold seems less than helpful. And so again I ask: in being converted to *Sanskrit*, was *Christ* converted, too? The best evidence I can adduce comes from a much-respected Hindu pandit, Kamalakanta Vidyalankara, who had read the *Shrikhrishtasangita* and knew the author personally. At a farewell for Mill, who was about to return to Cambridge-this was 1837-Kamalakanta recited a piece of ornate Sanskrit poetry celebrating his friend's accomplishments: "Of the works of prosody he is a master, so skilled in regular and irregular metre, in the correct and harmonious combinations of letters that rumour proclaims Kalidasa is once more reborn to the world!" Now, who among the theologians of classical antiquity, I wonder, wouldn't have been tickled to be called a second Homer or Virgil? And in calling his friend a second Kalidasa-Kalidasa, of course, epitomizes all the best in Indian belletristic literature-Kamalakanta was complimenting Mill in the best way he knew how. But of Christ, the Blessed One, the centerpiece of the *Shrikhrishtasangita*, there is no mention whatsoever.

Now, in being myself a Christian-not even, obviously, an *Indian* Christian-my own testimonial on Mill's behalf may be *ipso facto* invalid. I offer it anyway, because there is authentically *Indian* gold in the *Shrikhrishtasangita*, a gleaming *Christian* nugget here and there, if you dig deeply enough. One of these is found in the "Unction of the Son," from which I cited a passage earlier. There is a stanza there that is redolent both of the Gospel and of Vedanta, which reads as follows: "When the forests and mountains of selfishness, which obscure my *saccidananda*, are destroyed, may he who walks the path that John [the Baptist] prepared find that it leads to Me!" While

it would be anachronistic to say that Mill was on the verge of proclaiming, as some today do, a gospel according to Vedanta, the appearance in the *Shrikrishtasangita* of *sat* (for Brahman as *being*), *chit* (for Brahman as *consciousness*), and *ananda* (for Brahman as *bliss*) evokes an ethos at once philosophical, theistic, and devotional, an ethos more congenial than the language of the Creeds he concocted to convey the *homoousion of western antiquity*.

It's all well and good to affirm that *sat*, *chit*, and *ananda* can be "Christ-bearing words," but before we get too excited we need to remind ourselves that, at the point of tangency between Hinduism and Christianity, *sat*, *chit*, and *ananda* already are *Brahman*-bearing words, as it were. Having read the Upanishads, Shankara, and Ram Mohun Roy, Mill was aware of their associations. And, in the idiom of his era, that meant Pantheism, not Monism or Non-Dualism. If I could only pronounce "*Pantheism*" the way he would have, it would send a shudder down your spine. That didn't mean, however, that *sat*, *chit*, and *ananda* were immune to "rectification" (his term). This, I suppose, is why Mill defends himself in the English preface of the *Shrikrishtasangita* against the accusation of syncretism. If he had blundered, so had St. Paul, who, at another point of tangency-the Aeropagus-had recited that tantalizing line from Epimenides, "In him we live and move and have our being," even though, in doing so, the Apostle to the Gentiles was "treading on the verge of that same Pantheistic sentiment which characterizes the theology of heathen India". (MILL, 1837: 802). What was good enough for St. Paul and the early theologians (Gregory, Basil, Chrysostum, and Augustine) was good enough for a High Churchman, especially when, as NOCKLES reminds us, there was a "catholic consent" between scripture and tradition.

And so I put myself on the line and say, the creativity that Mill invested in the *Shrikrishtasangita* was symptomatically High Church; that an Evangelical in his era would have attempted the same seems to me improbable, even though upriver at Serampore William Carey the Baptist invested his own considerable energies into a Sanskrit Bible translation, which was in circulation even before Mill arrived at Bishop's College. Carey himself once used the Egyptian gold metaphor, saying that Sanskrit was like a "golden

casket, exquisitely wrought," but filled-and here's the symptomatic difference between the High Churchman and the Evangelical-with "pebbles and trash." To Mill, in contrast, there was treasure inside, things that were "good and just." (MILL, 1837: 802). To sort them out, as Mill discovered, and to experience transformation in the process, one had to walk a fine line at the point of tangency. That line, however, had been walked before, to good effect, he believed, by the Apostle Paul and the early theologians.

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Case Two

Nilakanth-Nehemiah Goreh, Christian Convert

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In this lecture, I look at the dynamics of Hindu-Christian interaction during the mid-19th century in Benares - the Ganges city sacred to Hindus and more commonly called Kashi or Varanasi - in much the same way as my mentor at the University of Pennsylvania, Wilhelm HALBFASS, who wrote in *India and Europe* (1988: 437) that India discovered Europe and began to respond to it *in being overrun and objectified by it*. To substitute "Christianity," for "Europe" in that statement would not do detriment to it, for in many respects Europe was India's Christianity and Christianity was India's Europe. It may have been too sweeping a generalization for Halbfass to have gone on to say (*idem*), in reference to Indian literatures, that there was "no sign of active theoretical interest, no attempt to respond to the foreign challenge, to enter into a 'dialogue' - up to the period around 1800," but for Benares, I believe that observation continues to be suggestive, for it was here that the brahminical custodians of India's Great Tradition Hinduism were most thickly clustered in a variety of institutions for preserving and perpetuating the traditional Sanskrit learning of antiquity.

Being far from the metropolitan centers of colonial India where Christian missionary endeavors had by this time attained a more conspicuous public notoriety, the edges between Hinduism and Christianity were hardly noticeable in Benares at mid-century. One census conducted around this time put the total number of Christians in the city at 390, most of them orphans, mestizo drummers of the EIC regiments, and outsiders from elsewhere in

India - even though by this time missionaries from the LMS, CMS, and BMS were active in the city, cruising its *ghats*, *chowks*, and *bazaars*, talking up the Gospel and - more often than not - getting *in the way*. For a sample of the Good News they proclaimed, in season and out, I adduce an artifact from the archives of Princeton Theological Seminary, for we American Presbyterians were complicit in these endeavors, having sent out to India some of our finest graduates, including Archibald Alexander Hodge (son of Charles Hodge, the architect of the so-called "Princeton Theology"), who served at the American Mission up the Ganges at Allahabad around this same time. The artifact is a single-sheet broadside printed by the Allahabad missionaries for the Benares missionaries. It reads like this, translated from Hindi: "To the people of Benares. Beloved friends! Reflect on this, that all people deserve to suffer in hell, for all have sinned and provoked God's wrath." A bleak proclamation, indeed! John 3:16, the classic escape clause for substitutionary-atonement theology, comes next, followed by the Ten Commandments, lest anyone mistake the Christian *dharma* for an easy way out. And then a gratuitous slap on the face of Hindu Benares, gloved in the cadences of a Sanskrit couplet for a show of sophistication: "Fools who afflict themselves with the pains of asceticism, who worship idols (*murti*) of clay, metal, and wood, cannot attain supreme peace (*param shantim*)."

When this was how the missionaries presented Christianity, it perhaps comes as no surprise, as Halbfass observed, that there was "no sign of active theoretical interest" in it from the learned communities of Benares, or that representatives of Sanskritic Hinduism, the pandits, were cool toward it and made "no attempt to respond to the foreign challenge, to enter into a 'dialogue'." This was certainly so, but one still wonders why. Fortunately, we have from Benares itself a range of contemporaneous evidence to help us out. First of all, at the high end of this range, the Indian corollary to an "ivory tower" intellectual, I adduce Vitthal Shastri, a Maratha pandit who in this same era taught Samhkya (along with Vedanta one of the classical systems of Indian philosophy) at the prestigious Benares Sanskrit College, which had been established with British patronage in the last decade of the 18th century. "[The] Missionaries [*khrishtadharmapracaropajivin*, lit. and archly, "people

who depend for their livelihoods on the propagation of Christianity]," he explained (BALLANTYNE, 1860: xli), "mistake our silence. When a reply [i.e., to a question] which we think nonsense, or not applicable, is offered to us, we think that to retire silently and civilly from such useless discussion is more meritorious than to continue it. But our silence is *not* a sign of our admission of defeat which the Missionaries think to be so."

I shall return to Vitthal Shastri later, for some of the most interesting cross-cultural intellectual activity taking place in Benares around this time involved the Sanskrit College, and its professor of Samhkya was right there in the thick of it. For a sense of what was happening on the Benares 'streets,' however, I turn to Pratapnarayan Mishra (1856-1894), the editor of a local Hindi periodical, the *Brahman*. In an essay entitled "The Useless Efforts of the Missionaries" (*Padri sahab ka vyarth yatna*), Pratapnarayan tells of having silenced a missionary, who was haranguing a hapless youth, by asking the man to compare the Bible with the Ramayana. Chagrined at having his ignorance exposed, the missionary made a hurried retreat. What makes the anecdote noteworthy, coming from an individual who wanted missionaries to get out of the way and leave Benares alone, is that Pratapnarayan claims - convincingly - to admire Jesus, whose teachings he called "nectar for the soul of man." (DALMIA, 1997: 112).

Like Vitthal Shastri the aloof scholar, there may have been other moderates in the learned communities of Benares who experienced more than a mere flicker of "active theoretical interest" in Christianity, even though the literature is yet to be found that would attest to it; likewise, there may have been other activists like Pratapnarayan Mishra the gallant public defender who responded to "the foreign challenge," even though a single instance of timely intervention only underscores how good and courteous most people were, most of the time. Relations with the missionaries were generally pacific and rarely adversarial; the worst the missionaries complained of was the occasional jeer, taunt, or brickbat. There never was, to my knowledge, any particularly formidable countervailing force, a *dharma sabha*, for instance, for the defense of Hinduism, the likes of which one finds around this same time in all the metropolitan centers of colonial India. It seems all the more noteworthy,

therefore, that when resistance to Christianity began to express itself in the mid-1840s, perhaps for the first time overtly, it was a Maratha youth, a Chitpavan brahmin by the name of Nilakanth Goreh (1825-1885), barely nineteen years old, from a backwater princely state in Bundelkhand, acting alone, who took the lead. Nilakanth did so by taking to the *ghats*, *chowks*, and *bazaars* where the CMS's William Smith (1806-1875; a wool-carder from Yorkshire who had gone out to India in 1830 after being trained at the school for missionaries at Islington) was sure to be found, eager to talk up the Gospel with anyone who would listen.

When Nilakanth took to the Benares 'streets' to confront missionary Smith, it wasn't only because the missionary's no-other-way-than-faith-in-Christ-the-avatar-of-God Hindustani preaching-style irked him greatly - that we know because he later mimicked these very words in comically sarcastic Sanskrit (*ishavatara khrishtakhye vishvasan nanyatha gatih*). More was involved, because for Nilakanth Benares was under spiritual seige, not so much by ordinary mortals the likes of missionary Smith as by the same destabilizing forces lurking in the cosmos that were always undermining *Dharma*. It was a perspective on Christianity that Nilakanth articulated in the idiom of antiquity, drawing on stories from the Puranas about fake avatars (*mohavataras*) who propagate fake religions (*mohadharmas*) - Jainism and Buddhism are generally implied - by propounding fake scriptures (*mohasastras*) to deceive the witless and hapless and establish *Adharma*. A biblical corollary, one that missionary Smith would have known well, for he speaks of equipping himself with the "full armor of God" before going out to the *ghats*, *chowks*, and *bazaars*, would be that of Ephesians 6.12, where Paul says (NRSV), "[O]ur struggle is not against enemies of flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." In short, we see in all this a rather colossal - and probably over-dramatized - confrontation in the making.

It may seem counter-intuitive from what I have just been saying, but Nilakanth, the would-be saboteur, was actually a seeker, and so I need not delay the denouement of his confrontation with missionary Smith by

withholding what you may already suspect, that Nilakanth eventually apostatized from Hinduism and converted to Christianity, receiving at baptism the name 'Nehemiah'. However, once we take into account certain *predictors* of a future conversion experience, then the hunch seems valid enough that events would take this course. The ties of Nilakanth's household to the prestige of declining princely families in rural Bundelkhand, its ties to patronage of the learned communities of Benares, Nilakanth's ties to an over-protective father at whose feet he precociously mastered Sanskrit, his ties to a tyrannical uncle so orthodox and orthopraxic that Nilakanth could not mingle with students of the Sanskrit College where, as I mentioned, some of the action most worth watching in Benares was then occurring - all these ties are indicative of an identity tightly bounded by family and community. But the best evidence that Nilakanth was predisposed toward a decisive change of religious orientation, well before he crossed swords with missionary Smith, is that several years earlier he had already defied convention by declaring himself a Vaishnava even though the household was Shaiva (as the name, Nilakanth, shows).

Obviously, Nilakanth might never have transcended such a tightly-bound identity in the way that he did had missionary Smith not gotten in the way on the *ghats* and in the *chowks* and *bazaars*, offering unsolicited critiques of other peoples' religion and envisioning a new identity for them grounded in a different reality, which necessarily placed the Christian *Dharma* in a relationship of tension with the Hindu *Dharma*. It was, however, in that tension, sometimes destructive, sometimes constructive, that Nilakanth became more keenly aware than before that he could change his mind about life's fundamentals, that his identity need not be communally determined, and that the path he chose for himself could be *personal* and not necessarily *corporate*. Missionary Smith did what missionaries do; Kenelm Burridge, to whose book on the Christian missionary endeavor, *In the Way* (1991), I am deeply indebted, would put it this way: missionary Smith communicated choice. And in the exercise of *choice*, that missionary Smith naturally and enthusiastically encouraged, Nilakanth discovered a personal freedom, the

possibility of an individuated self, a possibility that Europe somehow enhanced - very ironically and inadvertently - by *overrunning* India.

In Nilakanth's case, conversion was also apostasy, and so it can be said that missionary Smith opened up a space on the edges between Hinduism and Christianity where Nilakanth could - if I may play upon the literal meaning of the Greek word *apostênai* - step back from both religions the better to see them more clearly than if he had stood in the middle of either one. What Nilakanth saw at the point of tangency between Hinduism and Christianity were frictions and incongruities, and these would preoccupy him for the next several years - in fact, for the whole of his life. His was not a sudden conversion but a gradual one of the kind that involves issues of a cognitive (i.e., logical) nature, so for now I simply say that his transition to the identity that missionary Smith envisioned for him was essentially agonistic, disorienting, and frightfully wrenching. As Nilakanth himself described it (SHERRING, 1879: 163), "An elephant, before it would trust itself on a boat, examined it well, and if it thought it unsafe, would not go on it."

One could track the trajectory of Nilakanth's transition from pre-conversion indecisiveness, when the contrastive virtues of Hinduism and Christianity pulled him in opposite directions, to post-conversion anxiety of the oh-my-gosh-what-have-I-gone-and-done variety; one could ponder Nilakanth's aversion to cognitive dissonance and marvel at the resilience of his quest for cognitive consonance; one could try to fathom how the belief-structure of Christianity became for Nilakanth both plausible and normative, while for Hinduism the reverse occurred, a reversal which naturally brought him into conflict with the community he then abandoned; one could, like Alan Segal, drawing on the work of Leon Festinger and other social scientists, apply analytical concepts such as the ones I have just now mentioned to the conversion experience of Nilakanth with good effect, just as Segal did in *Paul the Convert* (1990). Along with Burrige's perspective on the missionary as quintessentially a communicator of choice, these are some conceptual tools that could help us interpret what happened after that first "sign of active theoretical interest" in Christianity flickered in Nilakanth's eyes as he encountered missionary Smith on the Benares 'streets," that first "attempt to

enter into a 'dialogue'" with it that Halbfass looked for but did not find in the period prior to this.

As good as these tools and concepts are, the experience of Nilakanth the apostate/convert will remain *his* and never *ours* to fully comprehend.

Fortunately, however, there are literary sources, Nilakanth's own writings, that one can pick apart to reconstruct what Christianity looked like to him as a Hindu and - conversely - what Hinduism looked like to him as a Christian.

That corpus is essentially three-fold: first, the pre-conversion

Shastratattvavinirnaya (A Verdict on the Truth of the Scriptures) in Sanskrit, dating to 1844-45, which I discussed at length in *Resistant Hinduism* (1981)

and will therefore use the least; second, the early post-conversion *Vedant mat ka bicar aur Khrishtiya mat ka sar* (An Enquiry into Vedantism and the

Essence of Christianity) in Hindi, printed in 1853 but probably dating to the very year of his conversion, 1848, or shortly thereafter; and third, the late

post-conversion *Shaddarshandarpan* (A Mirror of the Six Hindu Philosophical Systems) also in Hindi, dating to 1860. The corpus is bigger than this,

however, and addresses a number of English-language, era-specific

theological and ecclesiological issues having to do with Indian Anglicanism's home-grown Oxford Movement, for Nilakanth would eventually become a

High Churchman very much like William Hodge Mill, whom I discussed in the first lecture, and later still an avowed Anglo-Catholic. One could plot the

course of his development, from one identity to the next, to good effect, for

Nilakanth's conversions were multiple and multifarious, but the three texts I

mentioned give ample scope for a diachronic view over a twenty-year period,

most of which transpired in Benares where Nilakanth served the CMS as a

'native' catechist and appropriated the freedom to individuate himself and

assert his identity, sometimes idiosyncratically but always creatively and often

in opposition to the freedom missionary Smith envisioned for him.

Even in these early years, Nilakanth would come into contact with European

Christians who broadened the horizons of his emerging self-identity. I will get

to them momentarily, but before I do it needs to be said, although it may seem

obvious, that Nilakanth did not appropriate the freedom envisioned for him all

at once but gradually (over years, in fact). As one might suspect, the early

post-conversion Nilakanth was virtually the mirror image of missionary Smith, who, to reinforce his new Christian's wavering commitments, had Nilakanth out on the Benares 'streets' in no time, proclaiming the no-other-way-than-faith-in-Christ-the-*avatar*-of-God message that irked him so much initially when he heard it from missionary Smith. For an individual almost pathologically indecisive, the routine and rigor of CMS discipleship was genuinely and instrumentally reinforcing. The dark side to all this, however, was that Nilakanth was plagued to the end of his life, to his very deathbed, by an unshakable regret that his conversion had not been more like the Apostle Paul's Damascus Road experience, which is to say (à la Segal), sudden, miraculous, ecstatic, mystical, and once-for-all or aoristic, according to the conventionalized, idealized account of it that dominated in Evangelical circles, inspired by the Lukan version in the Book of Acts. Conversion had been like that for missionary Smith as a lad in Yorkshire, and from his Islington diaries a portrait emerges of that "religion of the heart" that seems so symptomatically Evangelical. Referring to those diaries, another Benares missionary, M.A. SHERRING (1879: 5), alludes to missionary Smith's "minute self-questionings," "night-long prayers," "agonizing wrestlings with besetting sins," "the presence of the Evil One," "[falling] prostrate on the floor faint and exhausted," followed by refreshment when his colleague experienced "an extraordinary manifestation of the divine love and pity."

Why exactly the Evangelical idiom of *metanoia* resonated so resoundingly with Nilakanth remains unclear to me, because the *Verdict*, his pre-conversion treatise on Hinduism and Christianity talks of sin (*papa*) only abstractly as a problem of theodicy. But resonate it did, and the reason perhaps had to do with fear, the kind of fear that might have been instilled in him by the same bleak message that was conveyed by the Allahabad Presbyterian broadside mentioned earlier; for Nilakanth, later on (but within this same period), was to write (GOREH, 1867: 53), "It was the doctrine of everlasting punishment, which shook my soul from the very bottom" - and, very probably, spurred him into taking the step he had long delayed! And once he took that step, the role of true-to-form Christian convert that he assumed was already being scripted for him by missionary Smith, whose biography of him, called *Dwij* (1850),

fresh off the press almost before the waters of baptism had dried, plays upon the etymological meaning of this common synonym for a brahmin - twice-born (i.e., a brahmin who has undergone the sacred-thread consecration ritual) - to signify that Nilakanth had experienced a spiritual rebirth that conformed to the idealized Evangelical norm. Nilakanth, who anyway was learning to be a Christian by imitating the only available model, took to his role with avidity. This is why the section on Christianity in his first piece of post-conversion writing, the *Enquiry* (43-44, 56) couches itself in the idiom of sin and grace:

Scholar or fool, celebrity or unknown, householder or ascetic, all alike are in the grip of the disease of sin. ... May the Supreme Lord, Savior of the World, bestow his grace upon you, so that you may escape the jaws of death and attain eternal life and the highest bliss.

The text goes on like this, and on, metabolizing Evangelical *metanoia*, into a Hindi idiom for the Hindus of Benares. One finds the same trope in each of Nilakanth's post-conversion writings, but other concerns - more authentically his concerns and not missionary Smith's - start to surface around this same time.

One very interesting concern reveals itself in Nilakanth's post-conversion writings in the emic idiom he uses - the culturally appropriate idiom - to describe his transition from Hinduism to Christianity, which for him was not from *sin* or *darkness* or *death* to *grace* or *light* or *life* but from *ajñana* (ignorance and foolishness) to *jñana* (knowledge and wisdom). What makes Nilakanth's self-understanding of his transition tough to demonstrate, is that the emic idiom doesn't show up all at once, and so to highlight the emerging prominence of *ajñana* and *jñana* I will need to keep them aside for a moment. There was an intermediate stage that I must first clarify, in which the two vocabularies intermingled while Nilakanth disentangled himself from the Evangelical conversion paradigm and discovered his own. The hybridity of his idiom is especially evident in a longish, didactic tirade against Hindu asceticism (*vairagya*) and world-renunciation (*samnyasa*) in the early post-conversion *Enquiry* (32, 53):

People who renounce the world (i.e., become samnyasis) become self-centered, and because they are of no use to anyone they stand before

God as egregious sinners. ... True renunciation is to detach oneself from the things of this world while remaining involved in worldly affairs, loving God above all else and being prepared to surrender everything should God demand it.

The lines I have just extracted exemplify only one of the most spectacular somersaults Nilakanth felt himself required by his Christian mentors to perform in the early phase of his post-conversion career as an apologist for Christianity. Only a few years earlier, in his pre-conversion *Verdict*, he had defended asceticism and world renunciation (6b.83-85, *interalia*, where he says the Wise Ones [*jñānis*], having no sense of self, cannot be, *ipso facto*, self-centered) against the aspersions of John Muir (1810-1882), whose work of anti-Hindu Christian apologetics, the *Matapariksha (Examination of Religions or Test of Doctrines)* had been recommended to him by missionary Smith, thus eliciting from Nilakanth his own work of anti-Christian Hindu apologetics. A moderate Evangelical from Kilmarnock, educated at the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh at the tail-end of the Scottish Enlightenment, Muir had gone to Benares as the acting principal of the Sanskrit College, bringing in his baggage some of the Scottish School of Common Sense for local application. I quote from Michael DODSON, a doctoral candidate here at Cambridge (in the Faculty of Oriental Studies), who has written (2002: 271) that Muir "subscribed to a developmental hierarchy of civilization, in which Britain stood at the top, distinguished by its commercial prosperity, the operation of justice, and a religion supported by, and based in, science and rationality, rather than superstition."

This, indeed, was the very bias that oozes out of the *Examination* in Sanskrit, in which Muir became a world-renowned authority, when he implies, between the lines, that India would never rise higher on the ladder of nations without renouncing world-renunciation, which is not only detrimental to India's economic development, because people get the things they desire by exerting themselves (*shramena vidyate siddhir naranam vishayarthinam*) but also religiously wrong (e.g., as in the Vedantic maxim *aham brahmasmi*; YOUNG, 1981: 79). The indictment of brahmin gymnosophists is as old as antiquity - "a good for nothing, useless sort of people," it used to be said - except that in antiquity the ones who were indicted for being like the brahmin gymnosophists

were the Christians! (REEVE, 1889: 118). One hears in the idiom of Muir's indictment an echo of , *Theological Orientalism* - perhaps of *Presbyterian Orientalism*! - and, as such, it belongs to what postcolonial scholars call the 'discourse of domination.' That is to say, Muir was committed to the colonial project and justified British colonialism by depicting Hinduism's traditions of *jñāna* (wisdom) as too mystical, too impractical, and too effeminate to empower India to rise to the level reached by European - Christian - civilization. In the lines I extracted from Nilakanth's *Enquiry*, we find him unwittingly mimicking this bias, but not for long, because the trope of world-affirmation versus world-renunciation vanishes without a trace from his follow-up post-conversion writing, the more elaborate , *Mirror*, even though the agenda otherwise remains the same. I would suppose it was dropped because Nilakanth was becoming aware, for the first time, of the ascetic/contemplative traditions of western Christianity, even eventually becoming a Christian *samnyasi* himself.

To see more clearly that Nilakanth was neither a subaltern of Evangelicalism nor a subaltern of Orientalism, and to get a feel for the idiom that was more authentically his own and not a hybrid mishmash, one must add to the list of Europeans with whom he interacted a third figure. That would be James Robert Ballantyne (1813-1864), a Scot from Kelso who came to Benares to superintend the Sanskrit College after Muir left. Although Ballantyne and Muir resemble each other in many respects, since both were shaped by the Scottish Enlightenment, the differences matter too. Although an Orientalist, Ballantyne was by no means a *Presbyterian* Orientalist. He was, in fact, openly anti-Calvinist and in frequent conflict with the likes of missionary Smith, whose ignorance of Hinduism irked him the way it used to irk Nilakanth. It was in interacting with Ballantyne, sometimes up close as his personal pandit, sometimes from a distance as a critical observer of Ballantyne's projects at the Sanskrit College, that Nilakanth finally succeeded in disentangling himself from the Evangelical conversion paradigm of sin and grace, darkness and light, life and death and found his idiom more congenially in *ajñāna* and *jñāna*. Thus did he begin to remake himself in the image for which he was known thereafter - that of a Benares pandit, transformed by *Christian* wisdom and

called by God to make that wisdom *Indian* wisdom. In responding to this call, we shall see that Nilakanth's post-conversion exegetical strategies for engaging the textual traditions of Hinduism change in *substance* but not in *method* from the ones he learned as a ,*Hindu* pandit (on Paul's use of Pharisaic exegesis to serve new purposes in consonance with his Jewish past, see SEGAL, 1990: 117, 277).

Recall, if you will, what I was saying earlier about the action at the Sanskrit College being well worth watching, because the project Ballantyne was implementing within its precincts exemplifies a very different methodology for eliciting a response from the pandits of Benares to Europe and for encouraging a 'dialogue' with Christianity than Nilakanth had observed either in missionary Smith or orientalist Muir, who now recede into the background as Nilakanth himself responds to that methodology and defines himself in opposition to it. Ballantyne's methodology was one of invoking Indian antiquity to affect Europe's modernity, to poke it, prod it, and push it forward toward the civilizational embodiment of scientific and religious progress that Europe represented *to* India *in* India through Anglo-Indian institutions such as the Benares Sanskrit College itself, where European science, philosophy, and Christianity were being taught in Sanskrit and English under his supervision. Ballantyne saw in this juxtaposition of the two traditions of scholarship creative possibilities for expanding the horizons both of India *and* Europe, for his was a project that was dialogical in the ideal form he envisioned. It was also transparently - and unapologetically - biased toward Europe and Christianity.

The Ballantyne project unfolded progressively from secular knowledge to sacred wisdom with dazzling systematicity, commencing in 1848 with *Lectures on the Sub-Divisions of Knowledge* (logic, science, history, *et cetera*) and culminating in 1860 with *The Bible for Pandits*, which, as a work of exegesis, was intended to undo the damage inflicted on Christianity by the likes of missionary Smith. Chronologically, the Ballantyne project spans perfectly the period from Nilakanth's conversion in 1848 to the second of his post-conversion works of Christian apologetics, the *Mirror*, which appeared in 1860. Although Nilakanth had a role in the project, it was evidently minor

(Vitthal Shastri, whom I mentioned earlier, was the primary collaborator), and his interest in it becomes evident only at the penultimate stage, which is where Ballantyne first addresses the subject of sacred knowledge in *Christianity and Hindu Philosophy Contrasted* (1860b). The school of Hindu philosophy that Ballantyne most explicitly engages in this text is Advaita Vedanta, the monistic Non-Dualism of Shankara, for which he felt a deep affinity (1860b: 45-46): "Theologically, the Vedântin, asserting that the Deity is *nir-guna*, and the Christian, asserting that God is *immaterial*, are asserting the very same fact in terms of separate theories. ... Instead of holding, as [the Vedantins] have been accused of holding, that God has no attributes in *our* sense of the term, they hold in fact, that He is *all attribute*, - sheer existence [*sat*], sheer thought [*chit*], sheer joy [*ananda*]." In the entire Ballantyne corpus in Sanskrit, which is vast, I have yet to find that he actually used Brahman as the name of God. On the contrary, God is always named Parameshvara (Supreme Lord) and is said to be *saguna*, endowed with countless attributes (1856: i) such as justice (*nyaya*), goodness (*sadhubhava*) and truth (*satya*) and not only *sat*, *chit*, or *ananda* (1860a: lxiii), which all signifies that the transformed Vedanta Ballantyne envisioned would not be *monistic* but *theistic*. Legend would have it (viz. the *shastri* legend, from the honorific title that Christians later gave him) that Nilakanth was an authority on the whole range of Indian philosophy before his conversion. I take exception to that, for it seems more accurate to describe him as a sectarian Hindu, a Vaishnava whose affinities were more for the *bhakti* of the Puranas, especially the *Bhagavata*, than the philosophical abstractions of the *darshanas*, although his *bhakti* would have been tintured with Vedanta, for that was the norm. Frankly, therefore, I find it puzzling - and not a little disappointing - that Nilakanth reacted so vehemently against Ballantyne and defined himself in opposition to him, for Ballantyne was engaging Vedanta in a way that was new and original, - perhaps even essentially right - but that was what he did and in so doing Nilakanth found the theological voice that was most authentically his, even though it is not necessarily the voice I would most like to hear. Nonetheless, for him there was no middle ground between the Vedanta and Christianity, and for Ballantyne's mediation between the two,

even though the Vedanta was to be encompassed by Christianity, not the other way round, Nilakanth feels only disdain and refashions his early post-conversion work of Christian apologetics into the *Mirror* to restore to the Vedanta all the concrete particularity and otherness that Ballantyne - a foreigner bedazzled, in Nilakanth's view, by his discovery of philosophy in India, which he had not expected to find - had drained from it. The text of the *Mirror* is far too complex to summarize briefly or easily, but let me sort out three strands of argument from it and hope that my discussion will rehabilitate the image of Nilakanth, which has suffered enormously in recent years when so much Christian thinking has been invested in the quest for a fundamental rapport with the Vedanta.

First, if Brahman is the only actually existing reality, then relationality becomes problematic. Time and again, Nilakanth admonishes the Vedantins to follow their hearts instead of their heads, for he knows, because he was himself a sectarian Hindu who accommodated *bhakti* to the Vedanta, that intellectual monism rests uneasily on a foundation of intuitive theism. One can go at least part way with him in this respect, and if one looks into contemporary Christian engagement with the Vedanta, one will know the problem of relationality is much addressed, as for instance in the discussion of Vedanta in S. Mark Heim's *The Depth of the Riches* (2001).

But to go with Nilakanth into his second major argument - actually a whole cluster of interrelated arguments - is virtually impossible without a technical knowledge of Indian philosophy, because he draws not from Scottish Common Sense philosophy but rather from the anti-Vedantic arsenal of the theistic Sâmkhya of Vijñana Bhikshu of the late 16th century (sometimes called Renaissance Sâmkhya) to argue that Advaita monism invalidates each element essential to it by presupposing a cognizing self (viz. the *jivatman*) and a power different from the transempirical Brahman (viz. *maya*) to account for empirical (*vyavahara*) reality. In short, duality is implied, though not admitted (cf. DAS GUPTA, 1922-55: 495).

The third argument challenges the reasonableness of Vedanta on a number of particulars, none of which need to be adduced, and seeks to demonstrate, sometimes in mind-numbing, knit-picking syllogisms, the logical absurdity of

radical Advaita monism. Note here, that in Nilakanth's pre-conversion persona as the author of the *Verdict*, his work of Hindu apologetics, he had declared Advaita off-limits to rational enquiry because Brahman can only be declared by the Veda, revelationally, and to appreciate the revelatory truths of the Veda one must have faith (*shraddha*), which is divinely given. But instead of faith, one hears a great deal about reason (*upapatti, tarka*) from Nilakanth the convert and about humankind's innate powers of intelligence (*svabhavik vivek*), which Vedanta deadens and Christianity enlivens. Revitalization of the intellect is for Nilakanth very much what the Good News is all about. The emic idiom of the argument is less alien and more culturally appropriate than it might seem, because Nilakanth draws from the theological anthropology of Hinduism, for which reason is that which differentiates 'man' (*manushya, purusha, nara*) from all other forms of life. But that is where the argument stops, the Vedanta in pieces and Christianity intact, only because Nilakanth has declared Christianity off-limits to rational enquiry because God can only be declared by the Bible, revelationally, and to appreciate the truths of the Bible one must have faith.

And so the circle becomes complete. A latent substratum of Vedanta, evident in the subordination of reason to revelation, re-metabolized for Christian purposes, emerges and enables Nilakanth to speak in his most authentic voice, which was hardly that of Ballantyne, whose Benares project engaged the sacred knowledge of Hinduism and Christianity with the exhortation, "Let professing scriptures be examined!" (*tattatpurushabhimatani shastrani parikshyani*, 1856: 151). This was exactly what Nilakanth objected to, the subordination of revelation to reason. Since Nilakanth seems so blatantly guilty of a double-standard - reason for Vedanta, faith for Christianity - chalk this up to his bending of a symptomatically Indian style of disputation, called *vada-vitanda*, to suit his own purposes. As B.K. MATILAL observes (1998: 55): "[I]t is quite feasible for a debater (or skeptic) to conduct an honest (non-tricky) form of debate consisting only in refutation. Such a debate ... can be undertaken by a genuine seeker after truth." The *Mirror*, is *vada-vitanda*, through and through, but because of my need to condense it, it seems more

relentless and confrontational, less amicable and respectful than it really is. More than anything else, the *Mirror* reflects Nilakanth's most authentic image. Who would dare to speak in such a voice nowadays when so much Christian thinking is being invested - as it should be - in the search for a fundamental rapport with the Vedanta? The question that Max Müller raised after meeting Nilakanth in Oxford for the second time - Nilakanth by this time had become an Anglo-Catholic and was about to become a Christian *samnyasi*, - should be asked again (MÜLLER, 1899: 70-71): "Men such as Dr. Henry Brown were Christian Platonists at Cambridge; why then should there be no Christian Vedantists, such as Nehemiah Goreh [could have been] in the beginning of his career?" There is no denying that in certain respects Nilakanth seems an obsolete figure in Indian Christian theology and that his post-conversion works of Christian apologetics seem a retrograde model for engaging Vedanta in dialogue today. Even from this distance in time, however, the *otherness* of Nilakanth Goreh poses serious challenges for serious Hindus and serious Christians who need to understand more clearly the transformative power that comes from being situated on the edges between Hinduism and Christianity.

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Case Three:

Somanath Vyas, Hindu Savant

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Once again, my lecture focuses on a particular individual, Somanath Vyas - an individual whose name will hardly register, even among Indologists. In recent years, however, Somanath's work has elicited interest among scholars in the region of Central India where he lived, especially the *Kalandikaprakasha*, an ambitiously encyclopedic treatise in ,*wissenschaftliches* and *religionswissenschaftliches* Sanskrit, if I may so describe it, on the whole range of knowledge, scientific and religious, that the author, a traditionally-educated Hindu pandit - a *savant*, as it were - deemed worthy of knowing, including a knowledge of Christianity. I find fascinating, because this was still the era of interreligious apologetics and polemics, and Somanath himself had at one time endeavored to counteract the exclusivistic claims that Christians were making on behalf of their religion.

Over the years, my research has often involved the reconstruction of microrelationships between missionaries and the indigenous scholars who tutored them in the languages of India and the fine points of Hindu belief and practice. For better or worse, such scholars became implicated in, or enmeshed with, the faith of their Christian counterparts and their evangelistic projects. I know of some, like Ram Ram Basu, a Vaishnavite Kayastha who brought down upon himself the wrath of the Baptist William Carey, whom he tutored in Bengali and for whom he even authored tracts and hymns, because he resisted Carey's demand that he declare himself a Christian. Dismissed from the Serampore Mission, Ram Ram then faded into oblivion, despised by all, by Christians for being too much a Hindu and by Hindus for being too much a Christian (YOUNG 1987). But there were others, like the Shaivite

Vellala from Jaffna in Ceylon, Arumuka Navalar, who assisted the Wesleyan missionary Peter Percival in a renowned but ill-fated translation of the Bible into Tamil, only to launch a revival movement of his own, which swept across the island and the Indian mainland. Navalar declared himself grateful for the missionaries, convinced that God - Shiva - had "providentially" sent Percival to Jaffna to "chastise" the Tamils and make them better Shaivites (YOUNG and JEBANESAN 1995). And there were others yet, others who fell between these two extremes, like Ramachandra, about whom I spoke in the first lecture, who was somehow ineffably touched, if not altogether transformed, by Jesus the Christ, the *Shabdavatara*, the Incarnation of the Word. And then the rarest of the rare, at least among those in the higher echelons of the caste hierarchy, who, like Nehemiah-Nilakanth Goreh, embraced the Christian faith in a way that made it authentically *theirs*, as we saw in the previous lecture. Instances like these could be multiplied.

Were encounters such as these on the edges between Hinduism and Christianity, which were rife with friction and incongruity, always enabling? Merely by virtue of having occurred at the point of tangency between religions, were the experiences of these individuals transformative? Could the individuals involved really see each religion more clearly than if they had remained at the center of either one? Not necessarily. I feel warranted in saying this much, however, that, were you a Hindu of the era under review in these lectures, your encounter with a Christian missionary would leave its mark on you; you could not be diffident about it, for, as often as not, these were individuals who were indefeasible; as a people of *the Way*, they might show you the way, *theirs*, or they might simply get in the way, *yours*; but that the Christian religion they exemplified might simply be *a* religion worth knowing about for its own sake, that is to say, as a religion notwithstanding its claim of being *the* religion, seems an unlikely response to the frictions and incongruities that the missionary propagation of Christianity almost invariably produced. That, however, is precisely the kind of response to Christianity that my subject Somanath Vyas, exemplifies - a response that interests me because of its *religionswissenschaftliches* features and because of its being the kind of response to Christianity that we hear so little about because

missions studies scholars, myself included as the "chief of sinners," pay an inordinate, although understandable, amount of attention to those individuals who converted to Christianity, as I did in my previous lecture, overlooking the many others who didn't, but who nonetheless allotted at least a niche to it in their understanding of things religious, as we shall now see. To see it, however, we will need to go beyond the routine boundaries of mission studies into India's larger intellectual encounter with Europe, especially its sciences. Because science leaps more easily across cultural barriers than religion, it was with empirical truth that the dialogue with Christianity about *transempirical* truth most often began - but also rarely ended.

Somanath Vyas (1807-1885), a Nagar brahmin, hailed from Shajapur near Gwalior in Central India (now in Madhya Pradesh), to which his ancestors had migrated from Gujarat. Somanath's father, Omkar Vyas, by whom he was educated, had become a *sannyasi*, a world-renouncer, as Somanath eventually would too, under the name of Brahmatarakatirtha, in the time-honored pursuit of knowledge, although the knowledge worth knowing was for him worldly and empirical as well as salvific and transempirical. The surviving fragments of Somanath's past are very few, however, until the year 1839 when he left Shajapur for Sehore, a small town (also in Madhya Pradesh) where the East India Company's "Resident" (or "political agent") responsible for affairs with the nearby Muslim state of Bhopal resided. Somanath made the move to Sehore because he had been invited to teach Sanskrit in a school that had been privately established less than a decade earlier by the former Resident, a Maj. Hendly, but at the time was under the care of Hendly's youthful successor, Lancelot Wilkinson of the Bombay civil service, who would become Somanath's enabler in a variety of ways.

Wilkinson (1804-1841), one of those much-maligned monsters, the Orientalists, was a pragmatic visionary, an inveterate do-gooder whose improvement projects were deeply suffused with Christian values and Enlightenment ideals. Wilkinson had gone out to India after passing through the East India Company's training college at Haileybury, to which he was sent from the quiet Cumbrian village of Crosby-Ravensworth where he had been reared. Sehore, it turned out, was a much livelier locality, on which more in a

moment. The first trace of Wilkinson in India I find is from the first year of his service when, as a lowly *kaccheri* clerk, he affixed his signature on a proposal by Thomas Best Jervis, the Collector of South Konkan and himself one of the foremost advocates of providing India with "useful knowledge," to establish a local school society. Throughout his career, vernacular education was Wilkinson's great crusade, and Wilkinson was one of its last and most ardent advocates at a time when the Anglicizers had the upper-hand with William Bentinck, the Governor-General. As he moved from post to post, Wilkinson mingled with local scholars, those especially who were conversant with the exact sciences of Indian antiquity, astronomy (*jyotihshastra*) in particular. Such individuals had never been numerous and in those days were fast-becoming an endangered species, but from them he acquired a knowledge of certain astronomical texts, especially the 12th-century *Siddhantashiromani* [The Crest Jewel of Astronomical Systems] of the astronomer Bhaskara, an extraordinary exemplar of Indian science at its most mathematically sophisticated, whose treatise, historians of science tell us, was the equal of Ptolemy's *Almagest*.

Wilkinson became convinced that the distance from Bhaskara to Copernicus, from Geocentrism to Heliocentrism, was but a hop, skip, and a jump - a transition which the rational traditions of Indian antiquity could easily affect. Standing in the way, however, were the imponderables of religion, faith, and theology, just as dogma had dogged the progress of astronomy in Europe; for in India the obstacles were the same: the cosmology of the exact sciences differed diametrically from the cosmology of the people at large, whose opinions were shaped by revealed and otherwise authoritative texts, the *Puranas* especially, which, besides being geocentric, perpetuated the notion of earth as a flat, circular plane. Bhaskara *redivivus*, the revivification of Bhaskara and the tradition of Indian rationality he exemplified became Wilkinson's driving obsession - and the indications are that his endeavors were stunningly successful. Since my own knowledge of the exact sciences is embarrassingly inexact, let me bypass the technicalities of how Heliocentrism explains the retrograde motion of the planets better than Geocentrism. Instead, allow me to concentrate on the religious and cultural dynamics

engendered in Sehore by Wilkinson's project, since these dynamics had very few parallels elsewhere.

Going back for a moment to Sehore itself, it needs to be said that this was hardly a somnolent backwater; for sure, it was distant from the great metropolitan centers of colonial India where we usually think the action most worth watching was occurring. But Benares and Mathura were close by in the east and Ujjain and Jaipur were a short distance to the west, all of which in antiquity and as recently as the 18th century under Sawai Jai Singh had been noteworthy for patronizing learned communities that cultivated the exact sciences. An in-between-somewhere-and-somewhere-else sort of place, Malwa, as the area surrounding Sehore is called, was a crossroads on the Indian information highway (BAYLY, 1996: 259-60), as it were, in all sorts of ways, scientifically and otherwise. When Wilkinson was assigned to Bhopal in 1832, however, Sehore was nearly deserted; with the collapse of Maratha power in the previous decade came depopulation and civil unrest. Maj. Hendly, Wilkinson's predecessor, had founded a school for the few children who remained, but the school was dysfunctional by the time Wilkinson arrived. This was the opportunity he had yearned for, I would surmise, since he took the situation in hand with avidity and dispatched his *kaccheri* accountant and court clerk, both Muslims, to teach Urdu, Persian, and Arabic at the school in their off-hours, while he himself, when he wasn't suppressing banditry or adjudicating property disputes, sat with the students and taught them the rudiments of mathematics, astronomy, and geography.

And if he wasn't actually teaching, he busied himself promoting the interests of the Sehore school in petitions to the General Committee of Public Instruction in Calcutta for financial assistance, which seems to have tired of hearing from him and finally granted a small subsidy. With some diplomatic arm-twisting Bhopal and the smaller Rajput principalities of Narsingarh, Rajgarh, and Khilchipur agreed to make up the deficit. The Sehore school still exists and in hushed tones the locals refer to its foremost patron reverently as "Lar" (Lord) Wilkinson.

A report to the Committee in Calcutta, filed by Wilkinson, tells us that 159 students were enrolled in 1836, of which only 8 studied the exact sciences of

Indian antiquity, while the others devoted themselves to the languages of Islam. Although in its heyday the Sehore school was perceived by outsiders as a Sanskrit *pathashala*, a traditional academy of Hindu learning, in certain respects it was closer to being a Muslim *madrassa* - and to top it all off the school had as its headmaster, or *guru*, an avowed Christian. It was not for its ecumenism, however, that the Sehore school is remembered, but for its revitalization of the exact sciences and especially the integration of Indian and European astronomy. In his pursuit of these ends, Wilkinson was pedagogically imaginative but also, on occasion, politically ruthless, and his actions give some credence to the ideologically-driven discussions of "colonial science." A case in point would be the dismissal of a "teacher of Hindoo mathematics" because the individual proved to be

wholly ignorant of the true bearing and shape of the sciences he professed. He knew how to calculate an eclipse, but he had learned the calculations by rote and believed the earth to be an immense circular plane 400,000 miles in width and that the moon was twice as far from earth as the sun is, as asserted by the Poorans. This entailed upon me the trouble of teaching him *the rationality of his own science from his own books* and as much of our system as he could be made to comprehend. (05/06/1836, Sehore School, Board's Collections, f/4/1635, no. 65465, Oriental and India Office Collections, British Library.)

Here we have a symptomatic instance of a certain pedagogical maxim that I think emblematic of Wilkinson's pragmatic Enlightenment Orientalism if I formulate it this way: *to affect modernity one must first invoke antiquity*. Over the decade that Wilkinson tinkered with the Sehore school and turned it into a clearing house for the Copernicanized exact sciences of Indian antiquity, he exercised enormous influence over the magisterial institutions in the region, including the Benares Sanskrit College. To that institution he eventually sent one of his own graduates, Bapu Deva Shastri, to become the first professor of Indian *and* Western astronomy. When candidates for the professorship in astronomy at the Pune Sanskrit College were being screened, essays had to be submitted in reply to questions on Bhaskara's *Siddhantashiromani* that Wilkinson evaluated. Knowledge *is* power and Sehore wielded so much that pandits were wary of getting on Wilkinson's bad

side, knowing that his blessing or his curse could affect their livelihoods. Then there are the hard sayings of Wilkinson, as it were, the intemperate criticisms of the semi-sacrosanct *Puranas*. It might be politically correct to dismiss all this as "colonial science," but that would be to overlook how much actual science was being done at Sehore dialogically, with no other coercive power than India's own time-tested traditions of rational enquiry for the testing of hypotheses in the exact sciences: is the heliocentric model, for instance, a better explanation for the retrograde motion of the planets (*kaksakrama*) than the geocentric model?

Especially in the early years, "conversions" to Copernicanism - if I may call the radical consequences of a paradigm shift a conversion - were never abrupt but always gradual, in some cases occurring over a period of years. That was the case with Soobajee Ramachandra Bapoo, the preeminent advocate of Heliocentrism in the circle of traditionally-educated pandits that Wilkinson assembled in Sehore. Soobajee was an Alladi brahmin from Andhra who had officiated at a temple in Chandrapur (Chanda, in Maharashtra) where the recitation of the *Bhagavata Purana* had been performed by his Vaishnavite forebears for generations. Knowing nothing of the exact sciences of antiquity until he met Wilkinson, but being intimately familiar with the popular cosmology that the *Bhagavata* perpetuated, Soobajee was able to "touch every prejudice" of his coreligionists "with the soft hand of a friend" when he finally embraced the new paradigm and composed a widely-disseminated commentary on Bhaskara's *Siddhantashiromani*, demonstrating its updatability and compatibility with Copernicanism (Wilkinson to General Committee of Public Instruction, 10/06/1836, Sehore, Misc. Vols., 1834-40, West Bengal State Archives). In contrast to the "soft hand" of Soobajee, there was the "iron fist" of another Sehore pandit, Omkar Bhatt, an Audambar brahmin whose forebears had migrated into Malwa from Gujarat. Very much over-awed by Europe and its sciences, Omkar denounced the *Puranas* in his treatise on terrestrial geography, the *Bhugolsar*. where empirical matters are concerned, he claimed, the *Puranas* are full of lies (*jhut*).

Whether it was the "soft hand" or the "iron fist," the revisionistic, demythologized, and detheologized science propagated by the Sehore

advocates of Copernicanism provoked a firestorm of protest from traditionalists who perceived, rightly or wrongly, that transempirical verities were being endangered by the differentiation of science from religion. Wilkinson's pandits were threatened with expulsion from caste, their books were banned, public debates were held, and the anti-Copernicans of Pune and Benares engaged in a desperate and doomed campaign to defend the non-contradictoriness of the *Puranas* and the exact sciences of antiquity. In the frictions and incongruities that the ensuing brouhaha evinced, however, there was nothing essentially new; India's own domestic dialogue over religion and science had been conducted from deep antiquity in ways that were both adversarial and agonistic. Although it was India as its own "other" that India was confronting as much as Europe itself, standing at the point of tangency between the two traditions of rational inquiry enabled the Sehore circle to see both the exact sciences of India and Europe better than if they had remained in the center of either one, for what they saw was that science is essentially the same, whatever its cultural context.

Something must be said, however, for the anti-Copernican reactionaries who bedeviled Sehore's radicals. They were astute at least in recognizing that transempirical verities are indeed affected when paradigm shifts in science occur. Let's be clear about it, Wilkinson's agenda went beyond empirical matters to faith, morality, and the spiritual reform of Hinduism. In short, the whole Sehore project was deeply implicated with Christian values and Enlightenment ideals, as I mentioned earlier. Even his inner circle could go only so far with him in this respect. Wilkinson crusaded tirelessly for the abolition of female infanticide, which was common in Malwa among the Rajputs, and enlisted Omkar Bhatt in his campaign, who in his characteristically "iron fist" fashion, composed a tract that lampooned the Rajputs, saying they could never compensate by "penance or pilgrimage" for "their avarice in killing their daughters to save the expense of giving a dowry" (W.H. Wathen, Secretary to Gov't, undated memorandum, Bombay Political Proceedings, 1834, Z/P/3347, Oriental and India Office Collections, British Library). When Wilkinson turned his attention to another gender iniquity, constraints upon widow remarriage, Soobajee fired off a broadside in favor of

it for girls who had not yet reached the age of puberty. But when it came to attacking caste, Soobajee balked. Wilkinson had put into circulation an anti-brahminical tirade attributed (wrongly) to the Buddhist Ashvaghosha, the *Vajrasuchi*, which had been around for centuries, because he envisioned a science-induced leveling of society that would insure access for all communities to the knowledge emanating from Sehore. Let the non-brahmins have all the science they want, Soobajee argued; science won't make anyone a brahmin, any more than neighing will make a donkey a horse. And with this disappointing bit of sarcasm from an otherwise fascinating figure, I return to Somanath Vyas who, better than any other Sehore pandit, exemplifies the resistance that Wilkinson's more overtly religious projects could engender, for it was one thing to measure India's sciences by Europe's, but quite another to measure the Dharma by Christianity. To appreciate the re-entry of Somanath into this discussion, a few more things about Wilkinson need to be said first. There is one respect in which I have been less than forthright about Wilkinson, because even though he interacted with his pandits in a remarkably egalitarian manner, the entire Sehore project was riddled with a certain hubris. After all, India's antiquity was being invoked to affect Europe's modernity. There were some who bought into this and were overawed by Europe, while others kept their distance and registered their dissent. Nevertheless, Wilkinson's efforts were rewarded with so much success - he was called by his Sehore circle the *yavanacharya*, the "barbarian teacher," a backhanded compliment that evoked associations with the Greeks savants of antiquity whose sciences had influenced India's - and his influence over institutions and appointments was so far-reaching that as the years passed he aspired to become a *dharmacharya*, a teacher of religion and morality whose invocation of Hinduism might affect its conversion to Christianity. As you might suppose, Wilkinson was not an Evangelical; he was a Christian Theist whose concerns were not salvation-oriented but ethical. Whatever label fits him best, he was a gradualist who envisioned a Christianization of Hinduism from within, without invoking Jesus, just as the astronomy of antiquity had been Copernicanized without invoking Copernicus: "The strange things we [Christians] teach, not also taught in their own books," he once declared, "are

but few"; "I [therefore] always argue as far as possible within the range of Hindu comprehension." And the following quotation tells us what Wilkinson would have invoked from India's spiritual heritage to affect its spiritual regeneration (10/06/1836, Sehere, to General Committee for Public Instruction, Misc. Vols., 1836-40, West Bengal State Archives):

The works of Kubeer, of Dadoo Punth, of Ramdas, Soor Dur Das, Nanuck and Gobind Singh and other sectarians ought to be more studied by gentlemen having the moral improvement of our Hindoo subjects at heart, than they are. They give us exactly that assistance in the moral department which the Siddhants do in the intellectual and mathematical departments. They decry rituals and ceremonies and pilgrimages and the ordinance of caste as Christ did and attach merit only to that which deserves the name - universal charity ... - a code of morality, the Christian's code, might and ought to be formed, from Hindoo authorities - old or new - and used as a schoolbook.

That book was never written, insofar as I know. If it had, it might have altered the course of events at Sehere. Instead, a classic compendium of anti-Hindu Christian apologetics in Sanskrit, the controversial *Examination of Religions* of John Muir, discussed in the previous lecture, was put into the hands of the Sehere pandits. Muir's *Examination* exemplified even better than Wilkinson's "hard sayings" the classic "civilizing mission" justification for colonialism. Because Europe's scientific progress and technical prowess were the by-products of Christianity, India's development in these respects was impeded by Hinduism, which was collapsed into Muir's Orientalized version of Vedanta, a philosophy characterized by him as denying reality to the world of empirical transactions inhabited by humanity. In short, the *Examination* conjured up an image of India as a madhouse of naked, ecstasy-seeking gymnosophists, unlike industrious Britain where people prospered because they were Christians and worked hard. In short, Christianity had "practical utility," Hinduism didn't.

To Somanath, who in his first year at Sehere had already enrolled in Wilkinson's Copernican advocate corps and had put into quick circulation several texts, including a drama propagating Heliocentrism, this was all very risible. To rebut Muir's contentions, Somanath composed the *Mataparikshashiksha* [A Lesson for the *Matapariksha*], which upheld *dharma*

as the foundation of a people's identity, not their machines. As a religion, Christianity might be a good fit for the average "skilled mechanic," the engineers and entrepreneurs who went out to India from England to build steamships to ply the Ganges and hot-air balloons to float through the air; it might be a match for people in public administration (*niti*) - a dig, I suppose, at Wilkinson and Muir - but it was ill-suited for Hindus like himself who discerned in all religions, including Christianity, an overarching, transempirical unity (*mataikya*) and non-contradictoriness (*matavirodha*).

That is to say, where Muir saw only a discord of doctrine, Somanath saw a concord of function; and on the capacity for being able to discern that higher, transcendent concord Somanath staked his claim to Hinduism's superiority. Standing at the point of tangency, this was how Somanath reduced the frictions and incongruities between Hinduism and Christianity to insignificance. Some of you may associate this way of resolving the dilemma of religious plurality with the Neo-Hinduism of a later era - and that would not be off the mark because the resolution does indeed anticipate subsequent developments - but what intrigues me here is the same thing that intrigues me about all forms of Neo-Hinduism: Somanath evinces no interest at all in the particularity of Christianity. Indeed, his energies are entirely invested in demonstrating the very opposite, that Christianity is merely a form without a specific content that one needs to know in order to understand it. His concern is only to deflate its exclusivistic claims inclusivistically and subordinatingly, the better to put this pushy, queue-cutting religion into its proper place behind and below Hinduism, *the Eternal (sanatana) Religion (dharma)*.

Somanath nonetheless retained a residual respect for Wilkinson as a *bhakta* (devotee) of the Lord Jesus Christ, as he referred to him in a generously ecumenical gesture in the colophon of one of his treatises on the revolution of the earth around the sun. What is more, over time, he began to find a knowledge of the particularity of Christianity itself worth knowing. How one accounts for this, however, is a question that I cannot answer unambiguously. Was it because of his long acquaintance with a Christian *bhakta* who had widened the horizon of his awareness in many other respects? Or was it because Christianity seemed somehow less threatening and the Dharma

more resilient? Whatever the reason, this was a stunning and intrinsically interesting *volte face*. To my knowledge, no one else went so far in presenting Christianity in its own way, on its own terms, without succumbing to it, ridiculing it, or finding in it a basis for a thorough-going reconceptualization of Hinduism (as Ram Mohun Roy, for instance, did).

To illustrate this reversal, I adduce Somanath's magnum opus, the *Kalandikaprakasa* (SHARMA 1993), an encyclopedia of empirical and transempirical knowledge, which allots a sizeable niche to Christianity, along with several other non-Indic religions. I would like to cite at length the passage that deals with Christianity, but one must first be clear on what kind of text the *Kalandikaprakasa* is. In its own idiom, the text purports to be a *vidyachakra*, that is to say, a circle drawn around all knowledge worth knowing at the time. In our own idiom, one might call it a treatise in systematics, but more is involved here than theology because the sciences of Indian antiquity are there and those of Europe too. At the center of Somanath's circle are the revealed, transempirical verities of the Veda, but as one works one's way outward toward the periphery, the more empirical the knowledge becomes, which is where one finds the sciences. Structurally, one might say that knowledge at or near the center *saves* (*paramarthikavidya*), while knowledge at or near the periphery *edifies* or *improves* in being *useful* (*samsarikavidya*).

Where, then, in the *Kalandikaprakasa* would one find Christianity? Far from its Vedic core, at the outermost limits of transempirical knowledge, following a discussion of the heresies of the Buddhists, Jains, and Materialists, under the rubric "Religious Beliefs of the Barbarians" (*Mlecchamata*). The context of the passage I extract should be understood to include not only Christianity but also Judaism, Islam, and Zoroastrianism, which Somanath regarded as emerging from a common prophetic matrix. I enter his discussion at the point where he describes Judaism's transformation as it spreads through the Roman empire and interacts with Mediterranean religions, giving rise to new forms of belief (*mata*):

In every part of the Roman empire there were wise men learned in all forms of religious belief. But, seeing the contradictions between these beliefs, they were unable to distinguish truth from falsehood. Atheistic materialists became prevalent throughout the land. There was a hope,

however, that the Messiah (Masiha) would descend into the world to make the way of salvation (mokshamarga) known. [...]

Without delay, then, Jesus descended into the world and was conceived in the miraculous womb of the young maiden Miriyam. Saying "I, Son of God (ishvarasya putrah), teacher of the way of salvation, King of the Jews, will make atonement (prayashcitta) for sin with my own body," he began propagating his own beliefs among the people. When these beliefs began spreading, the Jewish authorities, thinking him opposed to Judaism out of envy, put him on a cross. On the third day, he went to heaven (diva), having revealed his form (rupa) to his disciples in that country, saying "I will return to judge [the world] with your help."

From the form of the Almighty God (vishvesha), one can discern a Trinity (trika): God the Father (pita), his Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit (sadatma). The substance (vastu) of the Trinity, however, is godhood (ishvaratva). Godhood is absolutely unitary, in the same way that Brahman is.

In the Christian religion, two rituals are performed. One is called Baptisma, the distinctive feature of which is immersion in water (varmajjana) of the body of the convert (svikara) to Christianity. The other is called Yukarista, meaning "Our salvation will come from Jesus," from which one also gets the idea of "gospel" (harshavarta). Originally, it was food and drink given by Jesus before he ascended the cross. It is understood as eating the flesh (mamsa) and drinking the blood (rudhira) of Jesus. It is the Christians' teaching that the Yukarista should be taken when one enters their religion and at other times when Christians assemble. One should, moreover, always pray to God as follows: "Give each of us our food and drink. Forgive our sins (aparadha). May we be diligent in performing our worldly duties," and so forth.

[...] *As time passed, a number of discrepancies arose between the paths (patha) being propagated by the many followers of this religion. The Greeks among them say that Jesus is the Buddhi [lit., mind, intellect, reason; = Logos] of God. They add to this, however, that neither the Buddhi nor the Self (atman) are superior to, or identical with, God.*

Not only is the language apropos for discussing Christianity, it comes close to being *religionswissenschaftliches* Sanskrit, a Sanskrit symptomatic of a descriptive, empathetic approach to religion as a datum of human experience worth knowing on its own terms and in its own way. Consider, for example, that Somanath ascribes to the Christian God the very same names Christians themselves had appropriated to their own vocabulary of faith, for these terms are indicative of the highest divinity in Hinduism: *parameshvara, paresha, ishvara, prabhu, jagadishvara*, etc. The terms for salvation, *moksha* and *mukti*, likewise signify Somanath's recognition that Christians present themselves as aspiring to nothing less than the highest felicity that Hinduism - or his version of it - offers: absolute (*paramarthika*) liberation, not merely a brief reprieve in heaven before another rebirth in the world of human transactions. I submit, therefore, that even though Christianity was relegated to the outer reaches of Somanath's circle of knowledge, it had become for him a religion worth knowing in its particularity. How things had changed! - from, say, the 16th century when the Vedantic systematizer, Madhusudana Sarasvati, explicitly excluded the religions of the barbarians from his treatise called the *Prasthanabheda* on the grounds that being outside the Veda (*vedabahyatva*) disqualified such religions from serious attention, for they could neither be conducive to worldly happiness (*purusharthanupayogatva*) nor salvific - which is to say, *extra vedos nulla salus*.

As one who somehow instinctively understood that *religionswissenschaft* should be differentiated from "normative" theology, Somanath knew that his beliefs should not impinge upon his descriptive discussion. Once that discussion ended, however, the *Kalandikaprakasa* moved from the "scientific" study of religion into theology to address the problem of religious plurality.

This was resolved in one bold stroke: "The possibility that even barbarians (*mlecchas*), heretics (*pashanda*), and others can be saved is not so strange if we consider that they - like us - worship Him [viz., Vishnu or Rama] whose powers (*shakti*) are infinite and unfathomable, who is their God (*ishvara*) and their *Atman*." In short, salvation outside the Veda is possible, although unlikely! I say this because Somanath's discussion ends unexpectedly on a note of discord: "Glory to Him, Lord Vishnu! By taking refuge in Him, even sinners such as the *Kiratas, Hunas, Andhras, Pulindas, Pushkasas, Abhirakankas, Yavanas, and Khasas* are purified!" These names are those of the castes and tribes customarily considered debased and fallen by the brahminical elites of Somanath's era - the corollaries of the "pagans" and "heathens" of the Christians. Anyone can be saved, even Christians - that's the point.

But to put the point more finely, and conclude, Somanath recognizes in Christians the capacity for *bhakti*; Christianity therefore elicits his empathy and imbues his quest for understanding of its particularity with a certain urgency. Did this happen because Somanath recognized in Lancelot Wilkinson a kindred spirit - a *Christian bhakta*? As much as I would like to offer a definitive answer to that question, I can't. All I can do is remark again on the transformative possibilities of being situated on the edges between religions, because it was there, at the point of tangency, that many individuals - not only Somanath but also William Hodge Mill, Nilakanth-Nehemiah Goreh and others too - found that they could understand Hinduism and Christianity better than if they remained in the middle of either one.

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