RELIGIONS OF EMPIRE: ISLAMICATE TEXTS, IMPERIAL TAXONOMIES, AND
SOUTH ASIAN DEFINITIONS OF RELIGION

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ABSTRACT

ILYSE R. MORGENSTEIN FUERST: Religions of Empire: Islamicate Texts, Imperial
Taxonomies, and South Asian Definitions of Religion
(under the direction of Carl W. Ernst)

This dissertation explores South Asian, Islamicate definitions of religion, imperial

uses of those definitions, and their relationship to later colonial definitions and uses.

Contemporary debates in religious studies center on the relationship between the

developments of the discipline of religious studies itself alongside European colonial and

imperial missions of the modern period. This dissertation takes seriously these debates,

and offers a South Asian set of examples by which to further consider the term "religion"

and the field of study it spawned. It traces, genealogically, Persianate and Islamicate

understandings of religion (*dīn*) through two primary sources: first, Abu'l al-Fazl ibn

Mubarak's *Āʾīn-i Akbarī* or *Institutes of Akbar* (c. 1590 CE); and second, Mathurānāth's

Riyāz al-maẕāhib or *Garden of Religions* (1813 CE). Both texts demonstrate a robust

structure of classification for universal concepts of religion as well as particular and

varied religions, and in this way demonstrate that definitions of religion are and can be

indigenous to Islamicate and South Asian systems. This dissertation posits two primary

arguments. First, that contemporary debates that focus on "religion" as a foreign

imposition upon non-Western locations, intellectual systems, and cultures ignore

corollaries found within indigenous institutions; I therefore argue that "religion" cannot

be imagined as entirely foreign, but instead must be read alongside indigenous definitions

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and systems. Second, this dissertation argues that Islamicate definitions of religion came

to inform those of European Orientalists through a process of co-imperialism; I therefore

argue that multiple agents of Mughal and British imperial entities crafted, maintained,

and constituted definitions of religion together.

in memory of Bill Skelton,
a skilled teacher and true guru,
who initiated me into the path that meandered here

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I have had the true pleasure to be a part of a community of young scholars whose work has deeply influenced my own and whose generous reads of this dissertation in its many stages made it better than I could have hoped. The Religious Studies Writing Group read several of my chapters. The comments of Brandi Denison, Carrie Duncan,

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

This dissertation utilizes a number of languages that require transliteration, primarily Persian and Sanskrit, though occasionally involving Urdu and Hindi, and—rarer still—Arabic. I have used standard transliteration guidelines and styles for each language.

Well-known proper names are typically listed without diacritic marks (like Varanasi). In the cases of names of lesser notoriety, like Mathurānāth, I have retained diacritic marks. Where a common full name, title, or phrase is listed in a foreign language, I have retained the transliterated style until offering my own commentary (e.g. Viṣṇu and Vishnu).

INTRODUCTION

1813: A Pivotal Year

In 1813, a Brahmin Hindu *pandita*[1] wrote a treatise on the religious groups of Benares—now Varanasi[2]—for the British East India Company in two languages: Persian and Sanskrit. The former comprises the bulk of the body of the text; the latter makes up some of the body, and all of the insertions and marginalia. Prior to 1813, this same Brahmin Hindu *pandita* was a courtly scribe for the Mughal officials of Benares and the surrounding region.[3] He is an emblem of South Asian multiple identities: simultaneously employed by competing imperial and colonial entities, literate in the elite languages of both political and religious spheres, able to discuss religion as a category as well as specific followers of religions. Mathurānāth—his circumstances, his persona, and his text, all of which will be discussed below—reflect a world that is Persian but not limited

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[1] "*Pandita*" literally means "wise one" or "learned" and is most often used in the sense of religious teacher; it is also a cognate with the English word "pundit." Because "pundit" has such obvious negative connotations in our own usage, I have retained the transliterated Sanskrit spelling.

[2] The city of Varanasi, as it is known primarily today, went by Benares during the British Raj and has historically also been known as Kashi. The terms are interchangeable to some, and to others the specific names carry particular meaning. I will use the name "Benares" when I discuss the city during the British period to maintain historical accuracy; otherwise, I will use the current city name, Varanasi.

[3] Mathurānāth's "known history" is cited in the East India Company records.

to those of Persian ancestry, a world that reflects Islamic ideals even for those who are not Muslim. In the words of Marshall Hodgson, he occupied a Persianate and Islamicate world, and because the British sponsored and utilized his work, his profile ultimately suggests that the Persianate, Islamicate sphere of which he was a part inform and shape later European imperial powers and agents. Mathurānāth is not necessarily unique, but he represents a major element of social mobility and religious fluidity and so will be a major subject of this book.

In 1813, Benares was a major stronghold of imperial and religious power for Hindus, Muslims, Mughals and British authorities. The City of Light, as it has been known,[4] has largely been considered one of the holiest places for Hindus; however, in the course of its long history, it also housed nearly 100 mosques.[5] Mughal kings may have ruled from Delhi or, briefly, Fatehpur Sikri, but Mughal elites held long dominated Benares. The British established colonial businesses in the form most famously of the East India Company, well before formally absorbing South Asia into its sprawling empire; Benares was one of a handful of city-based strongholds for the Company. Politically and religiously, this was a city teeming with diversity, elites, and contested power structures—it was also, vitally, a city of overlap, interplay, and shared resources.

In 1813, the Mughals were, by most historical accounts, not nearly as powerful as they had once been. While I resist labeling empires as either rising or falling,[6] there can

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[4] See for example: Diana Eck, *Banaras, City of Light* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[5] Eck, 127-129.

[6] The issues surrounding historical models of rise-and-fall figure rather prominently in chapters 2 and 3, and will be discussed at great length there.

be no doubt that the reach of the empire had shrunk considerably, and in-fighting,

dispersed leadership, and fragmentation had set in by the early nineteenth century. At its

greatest extent, Mughal authority spread, west to east, from the contemporary nation-

states of Afghanistan to Bangladesh and southwestern China; from north to south, it

encompassed almost the entire Indian subcontinent, with influences and lineages

claiming northward Tajik ancestry and victories as far south as the present-day states of

Kerala and Tamil Nadu. In short, it was massive. Mughal rule had nearly always been

typified by a blend of Persianate traditions of court alongside Islamicate norms, which

included mainline Sufi conceptions. It was therefore a diverse, dynamic place, marked

by a confluence of lineages.

The Mughals themselves were Turko-Mongol in origin[7] but Persian in their

literary and social tastes; their subjects were as varied as that, ranging from Brahmin

Hindus literate in Sanskrit to Telugu-speaking fishermen in Andra Pradesh to Jain

merchants along the western coasts. After many years, the court, alongside other local

elites, established its own variety of a Persianate system, one that scholars today widely

refer to as Indo-Persian. The Mughal Empire was massive and broad, comparable to its

contemporary rivals, the Safavids and Ottomans but unlike them, existed as a minority

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[7] Turko-Mongol refers to the subset of Mongol peoples who were increasingly Turkic in cultural norms, linguistic groups, and practices, and were geographically located largely within the Central Asian steppe. These regions and peoples may be characterized by a slow conversion to Islam, and the adoption, in some cases, of Persian cultural elements as well. Besides the Mughal Empire, other Turko-Mongol empires include that of Timer Lang (or Tamerlane in European pronunciation), and, earlier, the Ilkhanate, the Chagatai Khanate, and the Golden Horde.

Muslim ruling elite who fundamentally helped define hallmarks of South Asia, South Asian culture, and South Asian religions.[8]

By 1813, though, the empire's reach comprised significantly less territory, and was no longer contiguous—British stronghold states, princely states, and independent (or defiant) local rulers pockmarked the once-unified area.[9] The official Mughal rulers at this exact moment were Shah Allah II and Akbar Shah II; but Akbar Shah II exercised nominal rule since he was largely in league with, and under the influence of, the British East India Company. Benares itself, as a British-controlled city, would have been under the control of multiple collectors, regents, and even military officials.[10]

In 1813, the British were in the process of both formalizing their control over the subcontinent and losing sole financial authority over the region. Technically, the East India Company operated in league with, but apart from, the British Crown and controlled quite large tracts of land throughout South Asia, centered on trading capitals like Madras (Chennai), Calcutta (Kolkata), Bombay (Mumbai), and Benares (Varanasi). In 1813, however, the British East India Company lost its monopoly rights over India.[11] Obviously, this was a major blow to the financial, entrepreneurial sphere of control for the British in India. Just a few decades later, after the 1857 Rebellion, the Crown

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[8] Stephen F. Dale, *The Muslim Empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[9] See, for example, the British maps of early 19th century India: "India in 1805" in *Royal India Gazette* (reprint, 1907).

[10] Bernard S. Cohn, "The British in Benares: A Nineteenth Century Colonial Society," *Society for Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 4, No. 2 (Jan., 1962), pp. 169-199.

[11] This is due to the Charter Act of 1813. See: Arthur Berriedale Keith, *A Constitutional History of India 1600–1935* (London: Methuen, 1936), 128.

formally took over the East India Company's tracts, redefined India's relationship to the Empire, and in so doing became the largest empire in the world. It also had to rule the most populous Muslim community.

1813 serves as a watershed year for this book, because in what follows I take seriously the local, regional, and global realities that represent themselves most obviously in Mathurānāth's 1813 work, *Riyāz al-maẕāhib* or *Garden of Religions*. By exploring the terminologies that Mathurānāth employs and deploys about religion, one can begin to think through the relationships of religion, empire, and taxonomy. Starting from 1813 and then working backward, I will provide a genealogical framework for tracing the taxonomy of religion as it appears in the South Asian, Islamicate context of northern India. The technical terms I trace appear in Mathurānāth's work, but they find resonances with texts that far predate it and ripple effects that stem from it.

In this book, I will question the relationship between external and internal notions of religion. British Orientalist definitions of religion have often been imported into South Asian definitions and put to imperial uses. While much of the existent genealogical discussion of religion has accepted Western categories, I will challenge and complicate this narrative by looking at the intersection of Western, Islamic, and South Asian constructions of religion. I will engage a *Riyāz al-maẕāhib* or *Garden of Religions* because it is a text paradigmatic of the fluidity of South Asian political and religious identities. On the one hand, it is limited: it is an early-nineteenth century work written by a Brahmin Hindu in both Persian and Sanskrit, commissioned by the East India Company; it mainly describes the religious affiliations of the people of Varanasi, India. Yet I use this text to trace the genealogy of religious terminologies and religious group

definitions to Mughal courtly writings. In doing so, I demonstrate the ways in which precolonial classification systems informed colonial taxonomies. Attending to a distinctive text and its terminological genealogy also allows me to propose an alternative historical model that de-centers British colonial authority and re-imagines Indo-Islamic and Hindu contributions to Orientalist scholarship. Throughout this work, I will argue that Mathurānāth's work exemplifies a Persianate, Islamicate understanding of religion and religions, and that this work in turn contributed to British understandings; in so doing, I will argue that a concept analogous to universal religion exists in South Asia, and its very existence is a contrapuntal challenge to the postcolonial and post-Orientalist critiques of universal religion.

Mathurānāth: Islamicate Incarnate

Let me re-introduce a major protagonist of the story line that animates this book. Mathurānāth was from Benares, and had been employed by local Mughal-affiliated elites before being commissioned in 1812 by the British to write a text describing and delineating the inhabitants of the city. He completed the work in 1813. Mathurānāth was a Hindu Brahmin *pandita*, literate in two languages of authority: first, in Sanskrit, the language of erudite, typically Brahmin, Hindu religious authorities; and second, in Persian, the language of the Mughal—and early British Raj—courts. Why would Mathurānāth, a Brahmin *pandita* and former courtly author to the Mughal Empire, be commissioned by John Glynn, the British East India Company's Benares regent, to write

a book exploring all of the myriad religions present in that city?[12] And how could he write such a book in little more than a year? A blurring of boundaries and possibilities, his difference is astonishing in retrospect but not in his own time. Such a messy confabulation of difference is, I argue, not only a standard trope within South Asian history, but also vitally important to the development of religion, religions, and religious identities.

In many ways, Mathurānāth is not a unique character. Literate elites—especially those employed by or affiliated with the court—throughout the Mughal period (1526-1857 CE) would have had some familiarity with the language of the court, Persian. Further, literate Hindu elites would have received training in Sanskrit. While the population of literates during the early modern period in South Asia was not statistically sizeable, the influence of such figures and the sphere of influence the literati cannot be overstated. Persianate literary culture and Brahmanical literary culture coalesced in northern India, creating a viable, important, and unique Indo-Persian style that spanned custom, literature, and art. Mathurānāth's *Riyāz al-maẕāhib* or *Garden of Religions* is an exceptional text, as I will show, but that does not necessarily make Mathurānāth himself an aberration; instead, he symbolizes and represents a very particular subset of a Mughal elite culture: literate in Persian and Sanskrit, Mathurānāth can be read *as* both Persianate and Islamicate.

Marshall Hodgson explained why he coined the phrase "Islamicate." Just as the term "Italianate" was used largely to describe architectural types that take on Italian form, ideas, and structure but are not actually Italian, so Islamicate "would refer not directly to

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[12] Mathurānāth, *Riyāz al-maẕāhib*, 5. BL MSS 3404.

the religion, Islam, itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated

with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found

among non-Muslims."[13] Persianate has the same connotation, and refers to that which is

not directly Persian, but has, maintains, or is associated with Persia and Persians. The

Mughals, as a Turko-Mongol and Persian lineage, inherited and elaborated upon Persian

forms of kingship, culture, and religion; South Asia during and after the Mughal period

becomes a site of Persianate rule, art and architecture, and culture.[14] Along these lines,

then, Mathurānāth can typify what a *person* might look like if he or she were to reflect

the concepts of Islamicate or Persianate: a non-Muslim living under Muslim rule,

affected by literary forms as well as language itself, he is part of a social, historical, and

cultural matrix that is undeniably associated with Islam and Muslims.

Within this framework, Mathurānāth as emblem stands to reiterate the position of

South Asia within the field of Islamic Studies. Long understood as an outlier or

peripheral sphere, South Asian Islam is comparatively understudied,[15] and South Asian

Muslim rulers are under-theorized precisely within the terms Hodgson suggested. Yet

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[13] Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Volume 1: The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1977)**,** 59.

[14] Bruce B. Lawrence, "Islamicate Civilization: The View from Asia," in *Teaching Islam*, ed. Brannon Wheeler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 61-76.

[15] Many scholars have commented and written about the positioning of ethnically Arab and Arabic-language as central, while non-Arab or non-Arabic forms of Islam, Muslim culture, and practice are peripheral. This mode of center and periphery implies, at its worst, a deviation from "authentic" or "real" Islam, which is *necessarily* Arab; at its best, it understands the ties the ties of Arabic language and the Qur'an as always primary while ignoring or making subservient those local languages, customs, and interpretations. Scholars like Bruce B. Lawrence, Carl W. Ernst, Vernon Schubel, and Omid Safi have, in their writings, personal communications with the author, and public lectures, have specifically criticized this model of center and periphery, instead arguing that South Asian Islam (as elsewhere) is a vital, authentic, and no less central expression of Islam and Muslim life.

South Asia presents a unique location in which to examine the cultural, religious, and linguistic effects of Muslims and Islam within a non-Muslim majority region—it is worth mentioning that the Mughals represent the only such empire within the history of Islam, Muslim rule, and Muslim kings.[16] Mathurānāth, therefore, provides not only a text to analyze but a position, context, and status exclusively South Asian.

Mathurānāth himself is more of an historical enigma than many people in his position. It is, in fact, fairly simple to place him within a context of other literate elites who worked for multiple—and often competing—empires. It is rather difficult, however, to find information relating to his specific life story; he does not write about himself, and as far as manuscripts are concerned, it is only clear that he penned the one text that will comprise a good deal of the study herein, *Riyāz al-maẕāhib* or *Garden of Religions.* This is not to say there is no evidence elsewhere to support a more general portrait of who he may have been. We do know that Robert John Glynn, a regent and registrar for the East India Company from 1808-1823, hired Mathurānāth to write the manuscript.[17] As East India Company records indicate, Glynn had commissioned other local people literate in Persian to write treatises for the Company; it is Mathurānāth, however, who was charged

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[16] Dale, *The Muslim Empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals*, 96-105.

[17] *East India Register and Directory, 1813 1ˢᵗ Ed. 3; corrected to the 30ᵗʰ December 1812; Complete Lists of the Company's Servants, civil, military and marine, with their respective Appointments at the different Presidencies in the East-Indies; With Indexes to the same, and lists of casualties during the last year. Together with Lists of Europeans, Mariners &c., not in the service of the East-India Company; and Merchant Vessels employed in the country trade. Compiled, by Permission of the Honourable East-India Company, from the Official Returns received at the East-India House: by John Mathison & Alexander Way Mason, of the secretary's office, East-India House,* 12, 17, 363.

with doing the survey of the city of Benares, its religions and its religious groups.[18]

Given Glynn's other local contacts, it is reasonable to infer that Glynn's selection of

Mathurānāth may have been based on the latter's particular knowledge, familiarity with

the city, or personal relationship with Glynn; in any event, it is clear Glynn had other

contacts, other options, yet chose Mathurānāth from them. While we may not be able to

pinpoint Mathurānāth's particular personal history, we can piece together his relationship

to the Company, the Mughals, and Glynn specifically using the data available. Further,

as will be discussed in great detail in chapter 3, "Garden of Religions: *Dīn,* Universality,

and Particularity," his text, *Riyāz al-maẓāhib* or *Garden of Religions* stands as the single

largest body of evidence about Mathurānāth as well as about early nineteenth century

Benares' religious activities.[19]

What is known about Mathurānāth indicates on the one hand his distinctive

approach to the religions of Benares in the early nineteenth century. *Riyāz al-maẓāhib*

reads quite like a proto-ethnography: in it, Mathurānāth details the people he happens to

see and know of in the city. For example, he talks about the followers of a particular

[18] Mathurānāth, *Riyāz al-maẓāhib*, 2-3.

[19] In this dissertation, I work exclusively with the version of the manuscript held at the British Library (MS 3404) and available via microform (UNC Libraries, 1-5324, pos. 1).   Other versions of the text exist, and will factor into later studies as well as the book project that will stem from this dissertation manuscript. Two of these are full versions of the text, including, unlike the MS used here, illustrations. One, *Riyāz al-maẓāhib* can be located at the Rampur Raza Library, as listed in this catalogue: *Fihrist-i Makhtutat-i Farsi*, Rampur Raza Library, ed. Imtiyaz `Ali `Arshi et al., introduction by Shayista Khan (Patna: Khudabakhsh Oriental Public Library, 1995). The other is also located at the British Library, but has been entered with a misspelled title and author name: *Riyaz-i al-mazdhib*, Asia & African Studies, Add.24035. Further, an abridged version of the text exists in microform as well: *Kunh-i zat-i majma` al-sifat,* Harvard University library, Harvard Depository Film M 987.
These extant manifold versions point toward the value of the original text, its impact, and Mathurānāth's authorial prowess.

shaykh and, later, about those who worship Ganesha, the elephant-headed deity. He lists

gurus, *pandita*s, shaykhs, and a few imams, as well as a number of *yogis* or *sanyassins*,

ascetic holy men.[20] Mathurānāth typically describes these people and their religious

groups with what might be best called a scientific tone: his is a truly *descriptive*

approach, neither presumptive nor prescriptive. On the other hand, however, this tactic

of description is certainly not new within the context of South Asian religions and

treatises thereof. As will be discussed in chapter 2 "Genealogies and Imaginaries: Abu'l

Fazl, the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī,* and the Impact of Islamicate Definitions," Mathurānāth is very

readily located within a long line of South Asian Islamicate and Islamic histories and

descriptions of religions in South Asia, especially those of Abu'l Fazl (d. 1602 CE),

Akbar's courtly author, and Shahrastānī (d. 1153 CE). Mathurānāth utilizes lineages of

definition—extant taxonomies—to interpret his present-day religious, social, and cultural

milieu. In this way, he is both influenced by Islamicate systems and perpetuates those

systems for his British sponsors.

A Note on Terminology

Although this work directly confronts issues of taxonomy and definitions of

"religion" and "religions," it does not provide a comprehensive summation of all of the

terms and their etymologies that could fit within this rubric. This is to say that I follow

the terms used by the authors in question—especially Mathurānāth and Abu'l Fazl—as

well as those senses of the terms employed by South Asian and Euro-American scholars.

I necessarily focus on the tension between universality and particularity; my aim is to

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[20] *Riyāz al-maẕāhib*, 7-10, 13-30.

weave South Asian terms and their uses, theories of religion that stem from the Euro-American academy, and the tensions between a totalizing "religion" on the one hand and the peculiarities of varieties of religions on the other. In so doing, I privilege some terms over and above others. In this brief section, I simply want to note the terms on which I focus, as well as those that, in future projects, may deserve greater attention; overall, this section aims to delineate the terms I use, why I use them, and the spectrum of terms—both highlighted and ignored here—that can all fit within the exceptionally broad category of "religion."

Religion, in English and in its correlated translations across languages, has myriad applications that can and do range from theological interpretation to customary practice to legal categories across time and space. In many ways, much of the critique of the term and its study—a subject discussed in the next section of this introduction—hinges upon this breadth: a term that encompasses so much, that can be read in so many ways must be viewed judiciously. If it can mean so many different things to so many varied observers, does "religion" as a category, a label, and a site of investigation hold specific merit? As will be shown below, I certainly would not argue that it is a complex, historically contingent term, but I also think it is worthy of attention. I simply argue that understanding "religion"—in English and across, as is the example here, Islamicate languages—requires an examination of the particular uses of the terms in question, as well as an acknowledgement of the spectrum of terminologies that can fit within the rubric of "religion."

For Islamicate languages, authors, and traditions, these terms are varied and multitudinous. As a means to illustrate both the depth and breadth of these words, as well

as their extensive range, it is worthwhile to briefly explore a number of terms that are

relevant to the topic at hand, but do not necessarily figure heavily in the discussion

throughout this dissertation. Many of the terms that can be considered have resonances

with those used in English; the vocabulary we employ to describe myriad associations,

groupings, and belief systems is plentiful, and carries with it both sharp and hazy tones.

"Sect," "denomination," "group," "association," "order," "school," "faith," "belief,"

"philosophy," "spirit,"—these are but a few examples of the ways in which "religion" is

both a specific idea as well as one with a multitude of supporting concepts, which belong

to organizational notions (e.g. "sect," "group") and contemplative ideas (e.g. "spirit,"

"belief"). Islamicate texts employ many of these same ideas. Terms that contribute to

the spectrum of terms associated with "religion" include, but are not limited to: *firqa*

(division, sect); *ra'y* and its plural *ārā'* (view and views); *faqīr* (order, especially of

mendicants); *goruh* (group); *darvish* (ascetic); and *i`tiqād* (belief).[21] Furthermore, while

not expressly part of Islamicate languages, related Indic terms made their way into

Persian texts. For example, the terms *dharma* (religion, order, obligation); *darśana*

(group, philosophical school); and *panth* (order) appear with some regularity in Persian

works completed in South Asia.

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[21] In future studies, an obvious point of investigation will be the *Dabistān-e Maẕāhib* or *School of Religions*, a seventeenth century Persian text which accounts for the religions and sects of Hindustan in its time period. Much attention in the text is spent on Hindu groups, which include Sikhs and Jains. The very outline of the work demonstrates what I have tried to illuminate here: the rich way in which a tapestry of sects, groups, orders, and religions are woven stands to further underscore not only the definitions of those terms and the larger category to which they may belong (i.e. religion) but also the varied way in which thinkers envision and employ that category. For the dated English translation, see: *The Dabistán: or, School of manners, the religious beliefs, observances, philosophic opinions and social customs of the nations of the East*, trans. David Shea and Anthony Troyer, with a special introduction by A. V. Williams Jackson (Washington: M. Walter Dunne, 1901). In Persian: *Dabistan-e Maẕāhib*, Kaykhusraw Isfandiyār; Muḥsin Fānī; Raḥīm Rizāzādah-ʾi Malik Tihran, eds. (Kitābkhānah-ʾi Ṭahūrī, 1362 [1983]).

Of course, beyond terms I do not focus on, there are those upon which I do. Primarily, these are *dīn* and its plural *adyan* (religion/religions) and *maẕhab* and its plural—which appears in the title of Mathurānāth's text—*maẕāhib* (religion/religions, sect/sects). Both terms have incredibly wide usages, and it is not my purpose to explicate those rich histories here. I focus on these terms because they appear frequently in the source material; as will be expounded upon below, I interpret them as such following scholars like W. C. Smith. It is worth mentioning, however briefly, the contours of each term. Perhaps the more complicated of the two is *dīn* and its plural *adyan.* In chapter 3, I spent a good deal of time illustrating how and why I choose to define this term; for now, it is important to delineate the basics of that argument.

Dīn appears in the Qur'an, and as such is, in many ways, foundational to the understanding of religion in Islam, Islamicate contexts, and Islamicate texts. W. C. Smith addresses not only the Qur'anic senses of the term—and the lack of its plural within the text—but also the ways in which this corollary understanding of "religion" can and does speak toward non-Western systems for "religion."[22] However, limiting *dīn* to its Qur'anic meanings would be shortsighted indeed; centuries of commentary, history, and the development of multiple centers of learning within Islamicate contexts certainly assume such a broad term to have multiple glosses. One scholar notes that the term's specific history has not been attempted given this broad range of location, time, and use. He goes on to note that *dīn* functions distinctively in public and private spheres; it

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[22] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: Fortress Press, 1991 [1962]), 80-85. For a different gloss of *dīn* in the Qur'an, see: Carl W. Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'an: A New Guide with Select Translations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

operates differently in intellectual circles focused on law, poetry, theology, philosophy, science, and historiography; and that none of these uses, examined on their own, properly attend to the possible social and cultural treatments, understandings, or deployments thereof.[23]

All of this is to say that *dīn* can be glossed as "religion," as I do in this dissertation, but it also can be glossed in a variety of other ways. I interpret it as such for two primary purposes: first, it places my discussion in a long-standing conversation which aims to bridge Euro-American definitions and uses of religion with corresponding terminologies from elsewhere, especially those found in Islamicate contexts; second, it places my discussion of South Asian religions, sects, groups, and categories within a conversation happening in the Euro-American academy about the broad term "religion." In other words, throughout this project, I mean to connect the terminologies in play in the historic, primary, and secondary sources from and about South Asia and South Asian Islam to those historic and theoretical conversations happening about and around the category of religion.

Beyond *dīn,* the other major term at play in this project is *maẓhab* and its plural *maẓāhib*—which features far more prominently in Mathurānāth's work. Both the plural and the singular have an equally vital history in the context of Islam and Islamicate contexts. Mathurānāth clearly uses the term in the sense of "religions" or "sects," indicating the plurality of groups most often under a larger banner—like Hindu traditions. Most notably in the term's history, though, is the use of *maẓhab* to denote "school"

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[23] Ahmet T. Karamustafa, "Islamic *Dīn* as an Alternative to Western Models of 'Religion'," unpublished paper.

rather than "sect" in terms of traditions of legal interpretation. For example, when one discusses the predominant legal schools in Islam, one notes the four major Sunni *maẓāhib* or, using Arabic transliteration, *maddhāhib* (often published as the singular *maddhab* and pluralized following English rules: *maddhab*s).

Despite the contemporary use of *maẓhab* rather exclusively to denote the legal schools, Mathurānāth's use of *maẓāhib* as "sects" or "religions" is, however, not an anomaly or a misreading; he stands in a longer tradition of Persianate and Islamicate authors and texts who employ the term similarly. Naser Khosrow, an eleventh century author who lived in Central Asia, used the term in his famous work, *Safarnāma* (*Book of Travels*).[24] The *Dabistan-e Maẓāhib* or *School of Religions*, a seventeenth century Persian text which accounts for the religions and sects of Hindustan in its time period, both immediately predates Mathurānāth's work and uses the term in a similar fashion. Though clearly far from an exhaustive list of prominent works that utilize *maẓāhib* as Mathurānāth did, these examples illustrate the ways in which he can be located within Persianate and Islamicate textual traditions. Further, these examples help illuminate predecessor taxonomies of a key term within Mathurānāth's work.

Much like *dīn*, *maẓāhib* can and has been read in a variety of ways over the course of history, and across geographic locations. I suggest that in the course of this project, the understanding of *dīn* as "religion," and of *maẓāhib* as "sects" or "religions," follows the tenor of the manuscript in question. As will be discussed in greater detail in the next section—and again in chapters 1 and 3—Mathurānāth's text oscillates between a

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[24] Nasir Husrau; trans., Wheeler M Thackston, *Nasir-i Khusraw's Book of travels [Safarnama]: a parallel Persian-English text* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2001).

sense of "religion" that looks to be universally applied and experienced, and the expressions of religiosity that are particular and divergent. To capture this relational system of universality and particularity, I have chosen to render *dīn* and *maẓāhib* accordingly. Additionally, the language of "religion" and "religions" further assists is drawing greater comparison, parallels, and analysis between and among the Euro-American system—which dominates nearly all discussions of "religion"—and those Islamicate systems in question here. In other words, I hope that rendering the terms in such a way both holds merit in terms of its linguistic veracity as well as in communicating corresponding definitional systems; in this way, I hope to more obviously place these systems in conversation with one another to explore the historical development of the terms in their contexts and within global, cosmopolitan arenas.

Religion, Religions and Co-constitutive Definitions

Mathurānāth's personal history, his work for the Mughals and the British, and his work help to highlight a number of salient issues within contemporary debates about religion, Islam, and South Asia. The primary, overarching theoretical issue that his text—and context—addresses is that of the nature of religion. Recent work in religious studies has addressed the role of religion itself: scholars have debated whether or not *religion* is universal, real, or an adequate term to describe the cultural, social, political, and even internal experiences of the divine. An important linguistic way of seeing the conversation about and history of the very category of religion is Jonathan Z. Smith's

famous titular articulation of "religion, religions, religious."[25] In this article, he delineates the ways in which *religion*, as one universal concept, was transformed theoretically and in practice to *religions*, a formal recognition of multiple faith and textual traditions; he reads these terms against *religious*, which instead refers to praxis, that is, internal understandings of self and divinity, and, in some cases, dogma. I retain the distinction between religion as a unitary, universal conceptualization and religions as a plural—if not pluralistic—understanding of these phenomena.

I do so for three reasons: first, to follow J. Z. Smith's formulation as a way by which to organize and highlight my contributions to this ongoing discussion; second, to acknowledge and account for the development of the terms in their Euro-American scholastic contexts; and third, to reflect the ways in which the Islamicate texts I interrogate move between concepts of universality and particularity and typically do so by using singular (universality) and plural (particularity) nouns. Most important to the discussion in this book is the differentiation between the singular and the plural; if religion is the category—the overarching umbrella term—then religions refers to multiple elements of that category. For my purposes here, the relationship between a purportedly universal concept and multiple manifestations of that concept will be both theoretically and substantively important, addressed, and theorized. On its surface, this follows J. Z. Smith's distinction between the two terms, but I complicate his insistence that the terms and their distinction stem from a European historical narrative by locating similar terms and distinctions in Islamicate taxonomies.

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[25] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 269-284.

The idea that religion is universal has a long history—and, of late, a long history of critique. Conceptually, one can trace universality in religion—which is to say that all people have religion or the denial thereof—to the seventeenth century. It perhaps goes without saying that universality is tied to Christianity, and Christian commentaries, ideas, and practice; after all, the literal definition of *catholic* is universal. However, the application of universality is best seen, and in fact comes into sharp focus, during the early modern and modern periods—that is, during the colonial and imperial expansion of Europe. A brilliantly illustrative example is the nineteenth century treatise by Samuel Johnson entitled *Oriental Religions and their Relation to Universal Religions*.[26] Here, universal is stated in terms of Church: it is the Church that is universal, and Church here is clearly the metric by which religion is stated and measured.[27] This is not a definition unique to Johnson; rather the idea of the Church—be it Catholic or a Protestant notion of unity—has long stood in for universality. As J. Z. Smith points out, it is this exact connection between the universal and an exclusive tradition that muddies any reality of the inclusivity of religion.[28]

Recent scholarly work on religion as a category debates the utility of the term itself. Likewise, Smith argues that given this muddied history, religion is never universal, always particular, and with reference to non-Christian traditions, necessarily

[26] Samuel Johnson, *Oriental religions and their relation to universal religions* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1885).

[27] Ibid., 267.

[28] Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," 272.

foreign.[29] Other scholars echo this analysis. Wilfred Cantwell Smith critiqued the very

term "religion" because of its inherent essentialism.[30] Timothy Fitzgerald added his

voice to the din of scholars arguing to jettison the term altogether. He claimed that the

term is so broad and incorporates so many and so varied phenomena as to be utterly

useless.[31] Scholars like Russel McCutcheon[32] and Tomoko Masuzawa,[33] among others,

state with varying levels of adamancy the need to abandon the category of religion

altogether. Citing its problematic, seemingly monolithic European history, these scholars

point out the ways in which knowledge about and knowledge of religion has been

dictated by preconceived notions firmly rooted in Christian, Euro-American, and liberal

ideologies. They question whether or not religion exists, as a universal field of inquiry as

well as a universal phenomena.

   The main purpose of these arguments—and they will be discussed in depth in

chapter 1, "Religion and Intellectual Empires"—usually fits within two forms: first, those

that discredit the term "religion" as exclusive, ridden with a problematic Western or

Christian history; and second, those that problematize the academic use of religion as

well as the academic discipline of religious studies.

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[29] Ibid., 273.

[30] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: Fortress Press, 1991 [1962]).

[31] Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[32] Russel McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: the discourse on sui generis religion and the politics of nostalgia* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1997).

[33] Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European universalism was preserved in the language of pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

Furthermore, scholars that deal with religious groups typically affected by colonialism, Orientalism, and the disciplinary legacies thereof have addressed the problems of religion as a field of inquiry. Many of these are part of the postcolonial and decolonial movements which seek to eliminate academic—and political—discourse about Christianity's and the West's religious others from their relational modes. This is to argue that these groups of scholars theorize the looming violence that the very term "religion" has wrought as part of colonial, imperial, or Orientalist processes, and that scholarship should remove itself from the perpetuation of that intellectual violence. Many of these scholars' regional field of study was the traditional Orient: South and Central Asia, the Middle East, Africa. As will be discussed in full in the next chapter, the scholarly movement to historicize the claims about religion is one that weighs heavily within theories of non-Christian populations; specifically for the purposes of this work, I will take on critiques that South Asianist and scholars of Islam undertake on the category of religion.

Critiques of religion, critiques of the discipline, and critiques of colonialism, imperialism or Orientalism are vital for the contemporary study of South Asia, Islam, and the history of the discipline. All of these fields of critique directly challenge the academy—and, to be clear, the academy is located in, produced by, and maintained in and by Euro-American institutions. These challenges almost appear to be self-evident: of course Christianity stands in for "universal" and is the metric by which all other traditions are measured, and this can be easily accounted for by examining any number of texts on

religion, theology, power, progress, liberal philosophy, and even secularism.[34] Talal

Asad's work famously and influentially addresses these very issues.[35] To summarize,

Asad's work—and the scholars who follow him—attempts to locate intellectual,

epistemic violence within the process of forcing all world cultures, religions, ethnicities,

and nation-states to conform to Euro-American definitions of those phenomena. Asad

locates himself within a conversation between critics like W. C. Smith and Edward Said,

all of whom articulate the problem of Euro-American labeling, and the requirement

placed upon non-Western locations to answer, heed, and respond to those very labels in

order to acquire legitimacy.[36]

As important as these critiques have been and remain, they fail in some regard—

especially when considered in light of the topic of this book. These critiques in some

manner ignore, obscure, or simply fail to address the possibility of indigenous, corollary

ideas about, in this particular case, universal religions. While the uses of religion in

scholarship both historically and contemporarily rely on definitions and taxonomies that

are Euro-American and "Western," it is problematic to assume that Euro-American

academic culture is the only institution that has developed notions of religion, the

universality of religion, and even a universal religion.

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[34] See as a number of examples: Ernst Troeltsch, "The Place of Christianity among the World Religions," in *Christianity and the Other Religions: Selected Readings*, ed. John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite. (Glasgow, Scotland: Collins Fount, 1980 [1923]); Talal Asad, *Formations of the secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, *Secularisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

[35] Talal Asad, *Genealogies of religion: discipline and reasons of power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993).

[36] Talal Asad, "Reading a Modern Classic: W. C. Smith's *The Meaning and End of Religion,*" *History of Religions* Vol. 40, No. 3 (Feb., 2001), pp. 205-222.

To be blunt, I do not imagine religion to be part of some transregional hegemonic theme of conquest and conversion. While taking seriously issues of epistemic violence, colonial encounter, and imperial domination, I do not view the category of religion to necessarily *only* reflect such hegemonies. Instead, as this book will demonstrate, I argue that Islamicate and Persianate taxonomies of corollaries for "religion" (namely *dīn*) demonstrate a normative *local* category. Terms for religion and the category itself are deployed and maintained through philosophical, theological, and imperial channels, and are interpreted and used in various capacities over time. But despite these differences, in all cases examined below, I will explore and indeed stress the ways in which "religion" must be understood as a meaningful local category.

In fact, the very issue Asad's work and related critiques attempt to address can be said to be at play here—that is to say the forced labeling, the definition of one's self in light of Euro-American definitions and definitional category is still at work within the critique itself. If the history of religion entails forcing that term and its Christian-centric uses upon non-Western entities, and the critique of religion is therefore to resist labeling any religion as universal or even as religion *per se,* then this resistance—*the insistence that no such universality or terminology is appropriate*—is another example of Western academic ideas imposed upon its Others. Put more simply, while the critique of the enforcement of "religion" globally is absolutely vital, it is equally important that we, in the Euro-American academy, not simply strip the term and concept from non-Western locations; in so doing, we may lose the possibility of seeing how religion actually functions in these places, spaces, and frameworks.

This book directly addresses this very set of issues. As will be discussed throughout the work and especially in chapters 2 and 3, "Genealogy of Terms: Abu'l Fazl, the *Āʼīn-i Akbarī,* and the Impact of Islamicate Definitions" and "Garden of Religions: *Dīn,* Universality, and Particularity" respectively, there does exist corollary understandings of religion in South Asia; furthermore, there exists similar uses of the category to those of the Euro-American lineages. I do not mean to imply that similarity of concepts somehow overrides histories of colonial, imperial, or economic oppression; certainly the historical reality of South Asia as a site of European colonial abuses is well-documented and beyond question. However, what this book will address are the ways in which focusing on the epistemic violence of colonialism and imperialism in South Asia necessarily creates its own definitional violence.

I refer to epistemic violence for two primary reasons. First, it has been a major theoretical way in which to engage with the production of knowledge both of subjects and about objects.[37] This line of reasoning argues that in creating knowledge about, say, South Asia, there are multiple silences from indigenous actors largely due to the importing of foreign categories, terms, and theoretical apparatus on to the subject. These silences are vital, and problematic. I take seriously the ways in which epistemic violence structured and continues to structure the ways in which knowledge is created. I also take seriously, however, the ways in which this model of epistemic violence over-theorizes the production of knowledge in a post-Enlightenment, colonial framework. By focusing solely on the Euro-American intellectual circles that produce knowledge, multiple

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[37] Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture,* Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds. (London: Macmillan, 1988), 44-107.

intelligentsia and literati are ignored. My project traces the production of the category of religion within a Euro-American set of discourses, but also within Islamicate, South Asia discourses as well. In this way, I trace the ways in which parallel conversations about religion and religions create knowledge separate from each other, with multiple nodes of contact. In other words, I take seriously the ways in which intellectual elite create taxonomies of religion and hope to create a space in which intellectual systems—both Euro-American and Islamicate South Asian—create, define, and maintain religious boundaries.

Throughout this book, I will contend with and work against these sorts of rallying cries against the field, study of, and term religion. I argue that jettisoning religion because it comes with the baggage of colonial, imperial and Orientalist history fails to recognize that South Asians—as the primary focus here—maintained, developed, and instituted their own corollary systems. To ignore the correlations and parallels is to fundamentally dismiss the very voices, histories, and contexts critics of religion seek to empower. Not only do South Asian taxonomies of religion matter, but that they stand to better incorporate non-Western traditions into the larger conversation about and study of religion. What might it mean to the study of religion, the study of South Asia, and the study of Islam that the very terms of J. Z. Smith's famous formula "religion, religions, religious" were not necessarily forced upon India, but instead existed in conversation with and with corollaries to indigenous terms and concepts?

Further, given the particular texts in question throughout this book, I will demonstrate that the relationship between Euro-American taxonomies of religion and religious groups are not necessarily entirely unrelated or foreign—as J.Z. Smith stated as

others had previously thought. If, in 1813, it was possible for Mathurānāth to study the religious affiliations of his fellow residents of Benares (Varanasi), to report those findings to the British East India Company in Persian and Sanskrit, and, most importantly, have those findings be understood by his British sponsors, one must envisage a *cosmopolitan* location in which conversations about religion, religions, and religious groups took place. That Mathurānāth was understood demonstrates a relationship between definitional systems.[38] And, as will be discussed later on in this book, it points toward a co-constitutive definition of religious groups, religions, and religion itself.

South Asian Religions: Muslims, British, and Co-imperial Definitions

There exists a widely known, often repeated, and sometimes appealing story about religions, power, and definitional systems in South Asia. It goes something like this: the British, keen to understand and control their Indian subjects, invented strict definitions for religious groups, fundamentally altering religion in the Indian Subcontinent.[39] Before British intervention, India was a place of religious co-existence,

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[38] I realize cosmopolitanism, as a broad construct, has been critiqued for only imagining social elites and the benefits of transregional or transnational intellectual and financial systems. However, other scholars have put forth conceptualizations of a cosmopolitan framework that both acknowledges these challenges and proposes mechanisms for dealing with them. See, as primary examples: Sheldon Pollock, "The Cosmopolitan Vernacular," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (Feb., 1998), 6-37 and Homi K. Bhabha, "Unsatisfied: Notes on Vernacular Cosmopolitanism," in Gregory Castle, ed., *Postcolonial Discourses: An Anthology (*Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd., 2001), 38-52.

[39] Including Vasudha Dalmia, "The Only Real Religion of the Hindus: Vaisnava Self-representation in the Late Nineteenth Century," in *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious and National Identity*, eds. Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Stietencron (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995), 176-210; Christopher Fuller, *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism*

even if occasional misunderstandings, conflicts, and contestations took place. Religious difference, in this story, is relegated to the imposition of British colonial and imperial authority; religious difference between Hindus and Muslims is, at best, exacerbated by Orientalist, racist imperial programs and legal systems and, at worst, created divisions from the ether. While various and strong critiques have been levied against this position, including the works of David Lorenzen, Richard King, and others, it seems that a fundamental stress upon the colonial period as the most formative period in South Asian history still remains.[40] I do not mean to imply that the period of the British Raj is unimportant, or that works that take seriously the effects of Orientalism and colonialism on the postcolonial nation-states of South Asia and understandings of self are outmoded, outdated, or wrong. What I will stress in this book, however, are the ways in which a dialogue between imperial powers—the British and the Mughals—has been understated in the theorization of Indian identities, histories, and historiographies.

While postcolonial and decolonial theories influence my thinking on these issues, I am far more interested in how the language of some postcolonial theorists still preserves

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and Society in India (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); John S. Hawley, "Naming Hinduism," in *Wilson Quarterly,* Summer (1991), 20-34.

[40] See, for examples: Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'* (London: Routledge, 1999); David N. Lorenzen, *Who Invented Hinduism?: Essays on Religion in History* (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2006); Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Selected Subaltern Studies (*New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). NB: David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence's edited volume speaks directly to this too-neat division. See: David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence, eds., *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia (*Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000).

and maintains certain dichotomies, like "West" and "East," indigenous and foreign, elite

and subaltern. Arif Dirlik talks about deploying history to reinterpret the relational nature

between ruled/ruler in the colonial period. He calls his method "multi-historicalism," a

term he says is both inelegant and necessary; by it he means to discuss the ways in which

interactions between multiply varied subaltern and elite are just as historically important

as obvious interactions between imperial elite and indigenous subaltern.[41] Using Dirlik

as one of many theoretical models for my work, what I will do in the chapters that follow

is to reevaluate who exactly *are* the subaltern and who are the elite in the early modern

period of South Asia. I explore the ways in which British and Mughal elite together

constitute an imperialism (or imperialisms) that come to effect their collective subalterns.

One of the many voices that seeks to nuance historical models wherein the British

create religious definitions and taxonomies in South Asia is that of David Lorenzen. In

his oft-cited and influential article "Who Invented Hinduism?" Lorenzen brought to bear

a critique of postcolonial arguments about the role of the British in the development and

creation of religions in South Asia.[42] He argues that

> the claim that Hinduism was invented or constructed by
> European colonizers, mostly British, sometime after 1800
> is false. The evidence instead suggests that a Hindu religion
> theologically and devotionally grounded in texts such as the
> *Bhagavad-gita*, the *Puranas*, and philosophical
> commentaries on the six *darsanas* gradually acquired a
> much sharper self-conscious identity through the rivalry
> between Muslims and Hindus in the period between 1200
> and 1500, and was firmly established long before 1800.[43]

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[41] Arif Dirlik, *The Postcolonial Aura* (Boulder, CO: WestviewPress, 1997), 17-19.

[42] David Lorenzen, "Who Invented Hinduism?" *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Oct., 1999), pp. 630-659.

[43] Ibid., 631.

Lorenzen goes on to state that we should be careful not to imagine that the communalist understanding of history is assumed and prioritized here—it is, after all, a teleology in which Muslims feature as foreign, bloodthirsty invaders to the South Asian subcontinent. He does, however, make abundantly clear that scholarly arguments that ignore, obscure, or fail to recognize Hindu self-fashioning incorrectly prioritize British power, definitional systems, and ideas. Lorenzen, quite simply, wants to make clear that religion in South Asia was not merely a colonial invention or a colonial imposition.

I take seriously Lorenzen's frustration with an historical model that credits the modern period, modern empires, and (typically) European actors with creating the religious identities of their myriad Others. I resist, however, a model in which a dialectic of otherness must be assumed in order to create a religious identity. Even if Hindus and Muslims relate to each other and perceive difference, negative definitions cannot be the only way in which a group comes to have self-consciousness. This is especially the case within South Asia in the medieval and early modern periods, where varieties of praxis, the development of orthodoxies and heterodoxies in multiple traditions, and constant regional, linguistic, and cultural exchange are the reigning norms. This book attempts to further Lorenzen's claim that the British did not and could not have invented religion in South Asia—specifically those of Islam and Hinduism—but it also aims to think more critically about how the mass of religious ideology, cosmology, mythology, and praxis begin to constitute delineated groups.

Even Lorenzen's sense of the relational definitional process—however problematic it could be—is of import here: this project is interested in the ways in which the development of religions is a co-constitutive process. I use co-constitutive to indicate

that, in this case, the parties "work together" to define, delineate, and interpret religious boundaries, but also that their respective worlds are being influenced by each other. This is precisely to avoid a model of dialectic—wherein two (or more) parties advance a position and work to make some sort of mean between the two. The idea of dialectic does not quite work in the formation of ideas and identities for many of the same reasons critics have dismantled terms like "hybrid" or "syncretic;" these assume a definite, obvious, identifiable idea or group that can come together in new ways to make a third entity. However, as many scholars have pointed out, religious identities and religions do not function so neatly, and are themselves each incredibly diverse.[44] Therefore, I use co-constitutive to indicate an ongoing process between and among individuals and groups that are constantly in flux—or, at the very least, have the potential to be in flux. For my purposes in this book, this quite simply means that I take seriously the ways in which many Muslims' articulation of what it means to be Muslim varies, and, in turn, that both affects and reflects Muslim definitions of self, "Others," and religion writ large.

Along these lines, tracing the taxonomy of co-constitutive definitions of religion from Islamicate sources to those commissioned by the British entails thinking through the role of imperial powers, and these issues—of Mughal and British imperial strategies and taxonomies—will be a primary focus in the chapters that follow. The periods in question, as well as primary texts that will be examined in this study, are often understood and thought about in terms of their ruling elite: the Mughals and the British. Far too often, however, the legacies, policies, and influences of the British Empire are understood to be *the* imperial reality of all South Asia. Many scholars have noted—and later, resisted—

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[44] Carl W. Ernst, and Tony K. Stewart, "Syncretism," in *South Asian Folklore*, eds. Peter J. Claus and Margaret A. Mills (New York: Routledge/Garland Publishing, 2003), 586-588.

the ways in which the British Raj in India affected and even devastated many internal, indigenous processes.[45] Certainly the colonial era and its aftermath—including the division of South Asia into India, Pakistan, and, later, Bangladesh—are not to be ignored, overlooked, or under-theorized. However, to imagine the British as the most important imperial power in South Asia fundamentally obscures an obvious but disregarded truism: the Mughal Empire was, of course, an *empire*.

The British, in many ways, inherit a good deal of their property, policy, and, I argue, ideas about religions in South Asia from their imperial predecessors and counterparts, the Mughals. The primary example at play here will be Mathurānāth's *Riyāz al-maẓāhib*; because this text was written by a Brahmin *pandita* in Persian, the official language of the Mughal court, we see in the text's very construction an overlooked aspect of British colonialism: some toleration, even acceptance and respect of the ruling elite, at least in customary practice.[46] By commissioning a text in Persian, the language of South Asian authority, the British acknowledge Mughal power and rule, pointing toward evidence of what is an understudied narrative of colonial influence in India—the relationship between imperial elites. Therefore, this work takes seriously what I will refer to as co-imperialism; I use this term to indicate the ways in which multiple ruling, political, and even religious elites participate in the discourse of

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[45] As examples, see: Alan M. Guenther, "A Colonial Court Defines a Muslim," in *Islam in South Asia in Practice,* ed. Barbara D. Metcalf (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 293-304; Radhika Singha, *A despotism of law: crime and justice in early colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[46] Muhammad Tavakoli-Targhi calls the ways in which historians and theorists ignore he relationship between the British and indigenous elites "Orientalism's genesis amnesia" in *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Historiography* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 18. He also has a chapter of the same name, pp. 18-34.

governmental power and control. An understanding of co-imperialism is key to making sense of the development of religious identities in South Asia. This work will trace Islamicate and Mughal understandings of religion and religions, and, as has been mentioned, hinge upon an examination of *Riyāz al-maẓāhib* or *Garden of Religions*, a text that demonstrates the complex relationship of imperial knowledge to that of local elites.

While I acknowledge that any full portrait of identity would be limited in a single study, this particular study necessarily focuses on elite conceptions of religion, religious groups, and in at least one case individual identity. I have chosen textual sources not merely because they allow one to trace the usage of terms over time, but also precisely because they encapsulate elite discourse. I am interested here in exploring, understanding, and demonstrating the ways in which elite discourse comes to shape the knowledge about and identity of religions in South Asia. I argue that this is not merely a process imposed upon South Asians from British scholars, arms of the state, or armchair intellectuals, but rather an involved process that has its roots within the imperial discourses of the Mughal Empire.

The Mughal Empire, as I stated above, was an empire of sorts. It had a well-oiled bureaucracy that handled tax collection; patronage of the arts that included Hindu and Muslim ateliers; building projects that ranged from imperial homes and courtly edifices to sites of religious import for multiple religious traditions; translation projects; the adjudication of funds, leaders, and weaponry for a standing army; *waqf* or charity organizations; and sponsored intellectual pursuits like places of learning, among many

other aims, projects, and boards. These imperial structures lay the foundations, in many regions of northern India, for British organizational programs that follow.

This work explores the ways in which the dialogue between the British and the Mughals helped shape the very religious taxonomies that so greatly influence religion writ large and religions within South Asia. To do so, I weave contemporary theories of religion, colonialism, imperialism, and postcoloniality with textual and historical evidence. It is clearly the case that contemporary theoretical tools help reshape, rearticulate, and rethink the precolonial, colonial and postcolonial periods; specifically, these sets of scholarship have imagined and reimagined the rupture of the colonial period and the work that does vis-à-vis indigenous populations, institutions, and systems. Here, by way of using these theoretical frameworks alongside textual exidence, I argue that categories once overwhelmingly assumed to be forieign to South Asia do, indeed, have local, normative footing that traces to Islamicate taxonomies. As this argument unfolds over the next chapters, I intend to demonstrate not only the complexity of precolonial and early colonial relationships between power structures and the category of religion, but additionally the ways in which South Asians *and* British agents crafted definitional systems that continue to have meaning today.

Chapter Overview

This book will trace the usage and development of the category of religion, and piece together a genealogy of terms that stresses Islamicate authors as well as European conventions. It will culminate in the examination of a unique text, Mathurānāth's *Riyāz al-maẓāhib* or *Garden of Religions.* I will argue that his work exemplifies a Persianate,

Islamicate understanding of religion and religions, and that this work in turn contributed to British understandings; in so doing, I will argue that a concept analogous to universal religion exists in South Asia, challenging the postcolonial and post-Orientalist critiques of the category itself.

Chapter 1, "The Locative Case: Why South Asia Matters," discusses the place South Asia inhabits within theories of religion, modern periodization schemas,[47] and discourse about religious identity. I argue here that South Asia is distinctively located within histories and theories of religion, as many Euro-American scholars—starting as early as the eighteenth century—have identified this region as a ideological landscape fit for understanding religion, religions, and the religious. Further, in this chapter Islamic and Islamicate definitions, theories, and histories about and of South Asia will be discussed. This chapter aims to demonstrate the ripe location of South Asia as a site of discourse about religion writ large, and Muslim understandings of religious identity and religious boundaries specifically.

Chapter 2, "Genealogy of Terms: Abu'l Fazl, the *Āʼīn-i Akbarī,* and the Impact of Islamicate Definitions," examines the historic text, *Āʼīn-i Akbarī* or *Institutes of Akbar* as a starting point. It is a text widely known and widely cited for its ideological positioning of Akbar as an emperor conscious of religious plurality. Importantly, this chapter focuses on the ways in which Abu'l Fazl, the author of the text, imagines the Mughal Empire and its emperor; further, it explores the ways in which later historians, both South Asian and

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[47] Periodization refers to the process in which history is divided, ordered, and labeled. For example, the Enlightenment as a period of time with an identifiable beginning, range, and ending is part of the periodization of history. I take seriously the effects of such labeling, which stems from Euro-American historical models, upon non-Western sites and histories throughout this work, but especially in chapter 1.

European, come to imagine this empire, its relationship to religion and religions, and its kings as well. The theoretical concept of *imaginaries* will be vital here, and I will spend some time explaining that framework and how it better helps in figuring South Asia and its empires.

Additionally, I will examine the imperial uses of religion and religious difference of the Mughal court, specifically during the time of the great and widely noted emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605 CE). This chapter will specifically address the courtly approach to religion and the variety of religions in South Asia, and deal directly with the genealogy of religion in Islamicate contexts. This chapter sets the historical trajectory that allows for Mathurānāth; in turning to the texts that dominated discourse in South Asia in the early modern period, I will examine the context in which Mathurānāth's proto-ethnography and pluralistic viewpoints come to exist.

Chapter 3, "Garden of Religions**:** *Dīn*, Universality, and Particularity," will deal directly with Mathurānāth's *Riyāz al-maẕāhib* or *Garden of Religions*. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the Islamicate genealogy of his approach to religion as a category as well as the labeling of religious identities; further, this chapter will describe the relationship of these categories of identification and identity to those of the British— the colonial entity for whom the text was commissioned. In this way, I will discuss the connection between imperialisms (Mughal and British) and definitions (religion). This chapter builds on the terminologies and imaginaries explored in Chapter 2. It will explore the terms specific to the text, as well as those that are shared with Abu'l Fazl's. It aims to demonstrate the ways in which religions were mapped by Mathurānāth, and in

that way demonstrate two major issues: first, how Islamicate definitions work as well as structure religious identifications; and, second, how imperial knowledge was created.

The fourth chapter, "Co-Imperialisms and the Co-Constitutive Definition of Religion" will synthesize the previous theoretical, genealogical, and historical treatment of religion, Islamicate definitions, and imperial emphases. It will argue, finally, that definitions of religion certainly predate British or European taxonomies, but also that these very definitions are part of their own empire. By treating the Mughal Empire alongside the British Empire as empires, I aim to demonstrate the nature of elite definitional systems and their relationship to each other. Further, I aim to demonstrate that these taxonomical systems were, in fact, developed with respect to long-standing, premodern trends, raising the issue of whether or not we can truly view "religion" as an entirely Western category of inquiry.

The fifth and final chapter, "Conclusion: Religions of Empire," is in actuality a short summation of the dissertation. It traces the smaller arguments located in each preceding chapter, makes explicit the connections between these arguments, and restates the overarching claim of the entire work as a whole.

Throughout this study my goal is to challenge standing historical understandings of the development of religion and religions in South Asia. It is my primary purpose to rethink the so-called foreign nature of the very category in question by examining, in depth, two primary texts— *Ā'īn-i Akbarī* and *Riyāz al-maẓāhib*—that both draw upon and reimagine Islamicate taxonomies of religion. By tracing the history of the location and discourse about the category of religion as they are used and expounded upon by elites, I will demonstrate that South Asia was a site where parallel and corollary

definitions of religion predated colonial European impositions, rule, and epistemic violence. Therefore, this study suggests that religion itself was co-constitutive over a lengthy period of time, as well as part of a co-imperial process. Religion, religions, and religious identities are constructions of elites—not only foreign imperial elites, but autochthonous elites as well.

CHAPTER 1: THE LOCATIVE CASE: WHY SOUTH ASIA MATTERS

Though South Asia has long been a crossroads of a multitude of ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups, it still may seem an unlikely place to start a discussion about the multiple sources of "religion." Religious plurality, after all, does not necessarily make for intellectual plurality vis-à-vis religion, and it is the latter with which this chapter is primarily concerned. The term and category of religion has a rich and varied history, and it is my contention that in these histories and taxonomies the place of South Asia is under-theorized but can serve as a place to observe the roots of "religion," both Euro-American and Islamicate. As in real estate, as we will see below, for religion it's all about location, location, location: specifically, the location of evidence, the location of definitions, and, most importantly, the location of discourse. In this chapter, I will discuss South Asia as a location for multiple strands of discourse about religion as a category, namely those of Euro-American academic theories as well as those of Islamicate origins. I argue that the location of discourse challenges the typical historiography of the study of religion, which places "religion" within "the specter of the West"[48] and imagines "religion" to be foreign and imposed. As we will see below, the category of "religion" has indigenous taxonomies that stand apart from those of Western scholarship.

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[48] Arvind-Pal Mandair, *Religion and the Specter of the West: Sikhism, India, Postcoloniality, and the Politics of Translation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 5-9.

South Asia has been the site of the study of religion, theorizations of language and its origins, and theorizations of the aftermath of colonialism vis-à-vis religious categorization. Some of our most important figures in the formulations and foundations of the study of religion—theorists and developers of the term—were themselves Sanskritists, scholars of Indic languages and religions. These include, as examples, F. Max Müller and Mircea Eliade, who are both perhaps better remembered as theorists of religion rather than Sanskritists. The process of religious categorization—one that is often attributed to the British or, at the very least, the machinery of colonialism and imperialism—has itself come under scrutiny in the works of scholars like, Richard King, Gyanendra Pandey, and Dipesh Chakrabarty among others. Further, W. C. Smith, Talal Asad and Timothy Fitzgerald have questioned the ability of "religion" to be salient in Islamic or Islamicate locations. All of these authors, among others, take seriously the centrality of religion, of religious categorization, and South Asia or Islamic categories; Islamicate South Asia has proved to be formative within various lineages of the study of religion, both "Western" and non-Western, and it will be vital here as well.

A question remains, though: why South Asia? I believe the answer is rooted in the historical quest for origins that typified much of modern and modernist writings. With the "discovery" of Sanskrit as older than Hebrew, and the development of linguistics and philology in the nineteenth century, racial-linguistic categories turned into meaningful ways by which to measure contemporary issues. Prior to this "discovery," scholars assumed that Hebrew or other Semitic languages were the oldest examples of cogent, intelligent systems of thought; however, Indo-European languages provided a window in which German and English scholars could theorize an identity that was not at

odds with prevalent anti-Semitic[49] tendencies. More importantly, within the context of

the search of origins, if Indo-European languages were older and if those philosophies

were therefore more pure, an Orientalist's link to those languages proved superiority. In

other words, South Asia—as the home of Sanskrit—helps build the space in which a

linguistic-racial link between Europe (i.e. German and English speakers; Anglo-Saxons)

and greater India is imagined. As we will see below, F. Max Müller in many ways

exemplifies a scholar whose work both seeks to understand and order "religion" within a

philological framework.

    Others, however, noting the troublesome links between colonialism or

imperialism and categorizations of religion, call these distinctions into question directly.

This is particularly true, with respect to our purposes here, of scholars of Islam who have

long noted the ways in which "religion" as a category smacks of a particularly Christian

worldview. Famously, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, an eminent scholar of Islam as well as a

respected theorist of religion, declared that religion as a category was essentially bygone

and useless, stating:

> The term [religion] is notoriously difficult to define. At
> least, there has been in recent decades a bewildering variety
> of definitions; and no one of them has commanded wide
> acceptance. In some cases of this sort, a repeated failure to
> agree, to reach any satisfying answer or even to make any
> discernible progress towards one, has turned out to mean
> that men have been asking a wrong question. In this
> instance one might argue that the sustained inability to

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[49] Here I do not imply anti-Jewish rhetoric, but rather a true anti-Semitism: all those peoples
whose languages fell into this category, namely Jews and Arabs and/or Muslims depending on the
source. This is important insofar as linguistic definitions came to shape alongside racial
definitions, and these in turn aided the authorship of "Indo-European" languages, literatures,
religions and lineages. For example, see: Theodor Benfey and G. H. Schodde, "Semitic and Indo-
European Culture," *The Old Testament Student* Vol. 4, No. 4 (Dec., 1884), 170-171.

clarify what the word 'religion' signifies, in itself suggests
that the term ought to be dropped; that is it a distorted
concept not really corresponding to anything definite or
distinctive in the objective world.[50]

Here, W. C. Smith veers toward objectivism, perhaps problematically,[51] but what is far

more on point is his insistence that the term should "be dropped" due to its lack of

correspondence to something definitive. Correspondence is key: the term "religion" has

often come under scrutiny because it lacks a one-to-one relationship with the thing it

describes.

Timothy Fitzgerald perhaps infamously argues that religion, specifically within

the academic discipline of religious studies, has come to reflect a "decontextualized,

ahistorical phenomenon" which is "divorce[d] from questions of power."[52] He goes on to

argue that religion as a field, a category of inquiry "has been exported to non-western

countries in the context of colonialism."[53] Ultimately, he argues that faith traditions—

what we may have called "religions" in the plural previously—are better off understood,

examined, and theorized under the larger, more appropriate umbrella of "culture."[54] In

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[50] W. C. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: a New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 17.

[51] The ability for a scholar to be objective, or to discern some objective reality that is "true" and "actual" has fallen out of favor in more recent scholarship. While critiques of objectivism and objectivity are tangential to this study, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge Smith's tendency in the abovementioned quote. For a fuller picture of these debates, see, as but one example: Satya P. Mohanty, *Literary theory and the claims of history: postmodernism, objectivity, multicultural politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

[52] Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), ix.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid. This comment appears frequently. See, as examples: pp. 10, 17, 235-251.

other words, Fitzgerald has no use for religion as a discipline, namely because of its theological or failed non-theological definitions which ignore issues of power.

While it is indeed well established that colonial (and imperial) regimes utilized ethnic, religious, and racial markers to rule their new subjects, I take issue with Fitzgerald's guiding idea that *all* religious definitions were imposed upon colonial subjects by European powers. As we will see below, there are multiple taxonomies of religion—some Euro-American, some not, and, yes, almost all are part of power systems. Where my position differs greatly from that of Fitzgerald is precisely in recognizing that the process of religious definition, while part of power systems, does not necessarily mean that power may only be Western. Given the role of South Asia as part of a definitional process, it seems, instead, that the location of the discourse and its actors— colonial, imperial, and autochthonous—are of the utmost importance and have, in fact, played a major part in the construction of "religion."

This chapter addresses the space South Asia inhabits as a location of imperial powers as well as a location of discourse about religion. First, I will discuss the genealogy of "religion" and the legacy of Western, Orientalist scholarship. Then, I will trace the history of critique of Orientalism, focusing on scholars whose work stems from the study of non-Western traditions. Finally, I will suggest that the category of religion has proved salient within the South Asian context, and that religion has developed discursively with input not only from the Western terminology but also from the extant, indigenous formulations of religion. This last section of the chapter will parlay into chapter 2, "Genealogies and Imaginaries: Abu'l Fazl, the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī,* and the Impact of Islamicate Definitions," where Islamicate sources, written before and after Mughal

Emperor Jalāl ud-Dīn Muhammad Akbar's reign (1556-1605), establish indigenous, parallel definitions of religion, religions, and religious groups.

"Classify and Conquer": Multiple Taxonomies of Religion

> Let us take the old saying, *divide et impera,* and translate it somewhat freely by "Classify and conquer," and I believe that we shall then lay hold of the old thread of Ariadne[55] which has led the students of many a science through darker labyrinths even than the labyrinth of the religions of the world. All real science rests on classification, and only in the case we cannot succeed in classifying the various dialects of faith, shall we have to confess that a science of religion is really an impossibility.[56]

F. Max Müller, the famed philologist who posited a scientific rendering of the study of religion, is often cited as one of the founders of the modern study of comparative religion. His quest to classify, to create a science of religions and, more specifically, a taxonomy of religions has spawned great debate in the century since it was written. On the whole, his quest has been debunked as a universalist, progressivist one that eschews more than it reveals. However, the study of religion in many ways is still a field where scholars attempt to conjure, concoct, and remold words to better address appropriate definitions; in many ways, while it is doubtful we have produced a science of religion, as a scholarly community we are not entirely far from the essence of Müller's project—to classify and conquer, to fully grasp. The process of classification of religion, religious practice and religious identity is alive and well, and as will be discussed below, tends to

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[55] Ariadne's thread, named for the Greek divinity whose name loosely means "goddess of the labyrinth," refers to the process of solving complex problems (like puzzles or dilemmas) by applying logic to all possible routes and then selecting the best path; it often connotes a process of working backward, which is applicable to Müller's usage in the field of philology and his search for origins of religion.

[56] F. Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (London, 1873), 122-123.

have an unequal historiographic impact with respect to Islamic and South Asian traditions.

The marks of categorization, classification, and taxonomical schemes continue to have resonances not only in the study of Islam or South Asia, but on Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Jain and Buddhist subjects. As such, this chapter will continue to focus on the historical uses of "religion" in both Western academic usages and Islamic and Islamicate systems. In so doing, this chapter will establish a reasonable challenge to the conventional wisdom that religion as a field of categorization and as a classificatory system is distinctively "Western," despite its Western lineage's long-standing and far-reaching impact.

It is important to state outright that this chapter is not interested in parsing multiple definitions of religion to find an adequate one, nor is it the purpose here to come up with a working definition of religion. These conversations are, as I see it, tangential to the overarching purpose of both this chapter and this project. As mentioned in the introduction, this book seeks to examine and theorize the role of ruling elites both in the creation and deployment of the category of religion as well as the effect of that deployment on religious identity formation. As such, how "religion" is important here is precisely as a complicated, contested, and often contradictory discursive category that has multiple meanings over time and place. This chapter specifically and this book writ large serves as a critical genealogy of the term, as it has been used by the Western academy,

Mughal court, and British Empire; offering my own definition would only prescribe something which demands description.[57]

Müller himself offers little in the way of a definition for religion, and instead focuses his philological classifications for a systemized way to think across what we might today call culture. As Tomoko Masuzawa notes, beginning in 1905 scholars of religion credit Müller with establishing the field of comparative religion, one part of his classificatory project that sought to weigh religions against one another.[58] Despite his role as a debated and even debunked innovator—his methods and theories stand as dismissed, dated relics of the early study of religion—his legacy of language and its role in the origins of religion and religious texts is unquestioningly present. Further, and most relevant here, his works center on Sanskritic, Brahmin literatures as "original," and "pure," highlighting an intellectual Orientalism rooted in locating Europeans as inherently superior or, in this case, inheritors of a superior system.[59] What is important here is the understanding of an Indic system as superior, and the use of taxonomical systems to establish that base.

Müller's stance on Sanskritic writings allows for and perhaps even creates space for Indic languages, peoples, and cultures within the history of the world writ large,

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[57] Pierre Bourdieu, "Habitus," in *Habitus : a sense of place,* 2nd ed, Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby, eds. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

[58] Tomoko Masuzawa, *In Search of Dreamtime: The Quest for the Origin of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 58.

[59] We see this in the conversation about and development of the notion of "Aryan race." Müller, *The Science of Language*, pp. 220-227.

despite that space being subservient to European domination, ideas or culture. [60] At the

same time, his study of language sets the stage for later Orientalist applications to culture,

religion, and rule. Müller writes that Sanskrit became corrupted over time, "through a

mixture with the languages of the various conquerors of India, the Arabic, Persian,

Mongolic, and Turkish."[61] He posits the idea that foreign languages—and, notice, they

are Islamicate languages—as they enter India by foreign conquerors change the region

from original and pure to corrupted and base. Müller sets up a scenario in which a direct

link between Indic knowledge and European knowledge is established, as well as a

separate parallel civilizational model—that of Islam—exists.

A parallel and unequal lineage is an incorrect understanding of history, as will be

discussed in greater detail below. As this chapter seeks to trace the study of religion in

the West, following Müller's formative example, as well as its corollary in South Asia, it

will be shown that the uniqueness of the study of religion in the Western academy, and its

subsequent effects on issues of identification of religious groups, is overstated.

One point remains clear, however: because there are multiple taxonomies of

religion, from a variety of locations, and the location of the discourse about religion is

similarly multifaceted, it is all the more important to interpret Müller's original

formulation of "classify and conquer." He clearly used it to indicate one's ability to

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[60] Müller's treatment of Sanskritic, Brahmin literature, language, and texts are far more generous than many other theorists of religion treat their subjects. Though not working specifically on the science of language, for a comparison of the treatment of subjects, see, as examples: Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: a Study in Magic and Religion* (Bakingstoke: Palgrave, 2002); Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischoff (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

[61] Müller, 147-148.

"solve" religious dialects—the language of translation, translatability, and, ultimately, discourse itself is rooted within his statement. Along those lines, however, we must interpret "religion" alongside imperial and colonial entities. Whose classification system conquers whom? Or, perhaps better asked, at what point does Müller's statement—one that foregrounds the intellectual triumph rather than one of a militaristic nature—transform to indicate the conquering of a location? It has been held by many scholars that classification of religion, religions, and the religious has, indeed, led to the conquering of culture, people, states, and territories; moreover, many scholars have argued that this is a unidirectional process, where in Müller and his European ilk classify non-European populations as part of the colonial and imperial process of domination. It is my contention, however, that Muslim empires in South Asia also utilized processes of taxonomies of religion as part of the imperial machine. To classify and conquer remains a key element of this study, but I will expand our definition of *what* actors participate in such discursive and imperial constructions of "religion."

"Religion" in European Scholarship: An Intellectual Empire

A major site of scholarship in Islamic studies as well as within theories of religion over the past few decades has been the nexus where lingering issues of Orientalism and the study of religion meet in the Western academy—an intellectual empire if ever there was one. Edward Said's classic *Orientalism*[62] and Marshall Hodgson's posthumously

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[62] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978).

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published collections of essays *Rethinking World History*[63] both levy critiques that focus on the problems of Islamic Studies as a category of inquiry within the larger framework of historical analysis and religious studies, ostensibly demonstrating the limitations of European, Orientalist historiographies of religion. Further, in his well-regarded and widely-read article "Religion, Religions, Religious," Jonathan Z. Smith argues that all studies of religion are part of an imposition of Western Christian normative ideas about "true" religion as opposed to "extant" religions.[64] More recent work including Tomoko Masuzawa's *The Invention of World Religions*[65] continues the critique of Western scholarship and the development of the field of religious studies—and even the term "religion" itself—in an attempt to historicize our constructs of religion, religious identity, and religious practices. However, despite these leaps and bounds in the theorization of religion and how Islam may or may not fit into this category given its complex history, it appears that little effort has been made to locate historical examples that directly challenge the stated development of religious studies and the very category of religion vis-à-vis non-Western and specifically Islamic sets of knowledge.[66]

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[63] Marshall Hodgson, *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam and World History*, ed. Edmund Burke III (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[64] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 269-284.

[65] Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[66] Wilfred Cantwell Smith's works attempt to integrate Islamic history with Western history, but tend toward generalization. See especially "Islamic History as a Concept," in *On Understanding Islam: Selected Studies* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1981), 3-25.

Let's start, then, with the brief, accepted history of the study of religion and its related taxonomies, which trace its origins to the Latin "*religio*," and in that respect, any trace of its history, is rooted, both linguistically and historically, in a Western, European conversation. It is important to both trace the history of a category and its subsequent critiques, but also to suggest that understanding this particular history is not enough as we move forward as a field. Instead, by evaluating mechanisms in which "religion" (or, more precisely, words that may be translated and defined as such) in Muslim milieus in South Asia develop and function, we may be able to offer solutions to the problems of categorization, Orientalist scholarship, and the idea that "religion" must be fundamentally foreign, as Jonathan Z. Smith argues, to non-Christian traditions and in non-Christian settings. In this way, I hope to suggest ways in which to *further* the ongoing conversation about the study of religion, as well as more fully incorporate Islam and Islamic Studies *within* this conversation.

Religio as a term has its roots in usage as far back as the pre-Christian Roman Empire, where it primarily referred to ritual practice and honoring deities. Over time, Christians (and, to a lesser degree, Jews) who did not see themselves as those who practiced religion (i.e. *religio*) and who instead favored tradition (*traditio*) came to understand *religio* in terms of theistic belief.[67] This marks a shift between, among other possible reads, praxis and doxa; it makes it possible to imagine *religio* within a theistic context, of course, but more importantly it signals the development of *religio* within a specific Christian context. As we move from the ancient period to that of the

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[67] Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'* (New York: Routledge Press, 1999), 35.

Enlightenment, a real shift in the usage of religion takes place: using reason and understanding history as a progression from a dark past to a bright future shifts what was once a mere descriptor to a value-laden symbolic term. Religion is theorized as perfected in Christianity, or even as a Christianity-infused Deism; religions, therefore, are lesser and less rational fashionings of a true understanding of the universe.[68]

It would seem that the continued fascination with the European roots of "religion" on the part of scholars as a category and a topic of inquiry indicates that our collective understanding of the term, its history, and its usage is varied, at best. There has been much theoretical and historical ado about the move from "religion" to "religions," a shift that most claim marks the place in history where the imaginary fundamentally changes: what had been monolithic by its very definition—religion as correct religion, as Christianity and, more specifically, as properly conceived Protestantism—alters in the plural to allow for multiplicity, both within and outside of Christianity. Now, it should go without saying that while this shift in terminology is groundbreaking, it in no way fully allows for what we might call an equal-opportunity "religion," wherein all faiths—mainstream and those on the margins alike—have equal weight in social imaginaries, terminologies, and lexicons.

As an example, let me briefly point toward one of the founding thinkers of religious studies: David Hume (1711-1776). Hume places religious traditions of a variety of stripes alongside each other, seemingly with two aims: first, to historicize "religion" as

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[68] See, as but one oft-cited historical summation: Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History,* 2nd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1986).

it develops within human history and second, to compare religions.[69] In these he includes

our "heavy-hitters": Protestant and Catholic Christianities, Judaism, and Islam, as well as

lesser-known, and lesser-respected, pagan and polytheistic traditions. His point herein is

really to talk about the *progression* from polytheism to theism among the Enlightened,

demonstrating a particularly 18th century, progressivist approach to history—what comes

after what has gone before is always better, what comes after in Europe is better than

what happens contemporarily elsewhere. He writes:

> The mind rises gradually, from inferior to superior: By
> abstracting from what is imperfect, it parts of its own frame
> from the grosser, it learns to transfer only the former, much
> elevated and reined, to its divinity. Nothing could disturb
> this natural progress of thought, but some obvious and
> invincible argument, which might immediately lead the
> mind into the pure principles of theism, and make it
> overlap, at one bound, the vast interval which is interposed
> between the human and the divine nature. But though I
> allow, that the order and frame of the universe, when
> accurately examined, affords such an argument; yet I can
> never think, that this consideration could have an influence
> on mankind, when they formed their first rude notions of
> religion.[70]

Here, Hume very clearly articulates a sense of religion and even religiosity that is based

on a rudimentary understanding of an evolutionary model, which is to say, it is

progressivist in its claims. The mind, he argues, moves forward, better understanding the

universe in terms of a theistic world, but this process exists and speaks to how the notion

of religion came to be formed.

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[69] David Hume, "The Natural History of Religion," in *Dialogues and Natural History of Religion,* ed. with an introduction and notes by J. C. A. Gaskin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 134.

[70] Ibid., 136.

Hume is remembered for and credited with creating a sense that religion is both natural and progressive, but above all else, part of history and its development, in the plural. He traces the development of polytheism, citing that "all nations" with polytheistic practices do so as a base way to understand nature; he lists religions that stem from the Americas, Australia, Asia and India to make his point that all nations, though they are incorrect, have some sense of religion.[71] Eventually, of course, humanity develops, through rationality, theism, and religion from the plural religions. In this way, we see Hume's need and want to explain religion in terms of location, history, and progress; not coincidentally, these very categories of evaluation come to scar, mar, and mystify the myriad religions that do not neatly align as Western, theistic or rational.

Hume's formative work of the mid-eighteenth century obviously predates and thus informs many scholars and writings that follow. The evolutionary model that defines Enlightenment engagement with religious categories and classifications—one that is simultaneously laden with Christian vocabulary and sensibilities but demands even the questioning of Christian doctrine—is, as I have mentioned, most obviously stated within Hume, but we should not imagine he is singular in his pronouncements. Jonathan Z. Smith, one of the foremost contemporary scholars of religion and the history of the field of religious studies, has written at length and with great depth on the issues of how religion developed alongside Enlightenment notions of progress, exclusivity, pluralism, and history. Müller himself seems to draw upon Mendelian ideas of categorization if not Darwinian ideas of evolution for his science of religion. As such, it will be fruitful to examine the history vis-à-vis his analysis; in this way, we might ascertain both the

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[71] Hume, 144-153.

historical landscape of religious taxonomies and usages, and also the contemporary theorizations of those usages by one of the major thinkers on this very subject.

Smith deals directly with issues of taxonomy of religion, locating the problems of definition within the very basic problems of translation itself—as all definitions are, of course, translations and "to translate is to traduce."[72] The issue of religion—of religions—is precisely that the historical links between *religio* and today's usage are mired in a history of defining, of translating. World religions, classically held under the umbrella of Great Traditions (Buddhism, Chinese Religion, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam and Japanese Religion), according to Smith, are placed alongside and often against an "artificial" category of all the ritualistic and theological leftovers that are not Great (religions of antiquity, indigenous religions, new religious movements).[73] But, of course, even the category of "Great" traditions has been developed and constructed over time to inform our current usage, where "world religion" more or less implies a universality, a global domain, and other religions are understood to be local, ethnically or nationally demarcated. To understand the history of religion is to understand, in other words, the competition between what is understood to have wide appeal and what is understood to be small potatoes by contrast. This distinction, and one that J. Z. Smith masterfully explains, will come directly into question later on in chapter 3, "The Garden of Religions: *Dīn*, Universality, and Particularity," where I discuss Mathurānāth's text.

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[72] Jonathan Z. Smith, "A Matter of Class: Taxonomies of Religion," in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 166.

[73] Ibid., 166-167.

Jonathan Z. Smith is important here is largely because of his extensive engagement with the very history of religion as it appears in our field alongside his stated purpose of taking to task the very terms of religion, a project in which Müller's stamp is visible. Taking on thinkers like Hume and Mircea Eliade, Smith attempts, in many of his articles, to deconstruct the edifices of religion: arguing against Hume among others, he problematizes the idea of religion as "natural." He takes to task the idea that any of the multiple (and often competing) definitions for religion could have ever been universal or a given; moreover, Smith directly challenges Hume's progressivist ideology as it relates to religion, stating: "'Religion' fails the minimal requirements for innateness."[74] Arguing directly with Eliade, he discredits the positioning of phenomenological experience *as* evidence (part and parcel of Eliade's classic *The Sacred and the Profane*[75]). Here, Smith almost categorically rejects the understandings of the term "religion" by demonstrating its previous uses to be logically flawed.

Instead, he famously in "Religion, Religions, Religious," states that there is no such thing as native religion—that all definitions of religion are imposed, precisely because religion is imagined by Europeans and projected onto "native" populations. He writes:

> "Religion" is not a native term; it is a term created by scholars for their intellectual purposes and therefore is theirs to define. It is a second-order, generic concept that plays the same role in establishing a disciplinary horizon that a concept such as "language" plays in linguistics or

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[74] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 274.

[75] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion,* trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1959.

> "culture" plays in anthropology. There can be no
> disciplined study of religion without such a horizon.[76]

In short, the term—and the field that stems from it—is dangerously close to hollowness, a discipline without discipline. More important for my purposes here is the fact that this hollow term cannot be native—it is an imposed, concocted idea and ideology.[77]

If religion is in fact a foreign term, then we can place categorizations of religion, religions, and religious identities within a framework of an (intellectual) empire. That is to say, if conquering armies and conquering scholars imposed the category, then Müller's "conquer and classify" process was an important part of empire-building. Smith's argument supports this read; in fact, it seems that he is committed to an understanding of "religion" as necessarily part of empire, expansion, and domination of Europeans and Euro-American systems over and above all others. Likewise, Müller outwardly theorizes and calls for a classification system that allows for the mastery of material—and of subjects. Beyond his academic work, Müller stands as a primary source: he spent a majority of his academic career at Oxford University, working on his Sanskrit translation of the *Ṛg Veda* during the formalization of British rule over the Indian Subcontinent; he is a part of the creation of knowledge systems about South Asia without ever having been there. In other words, Müller, a theorist of religion as well as a Sanskritist—a South Asianist—postulates a system that produces an intellectual regime. Smith's assertion that all religious markers are foreign thus fits well within the traditional historiography of British imperial and colonial rule in India: via the creation or exploitation of previously

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[76] J. Z. Smith, 282.

[77] Much has been said about religious studies as an ideology. As briefly mentioned above, see: Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

vague religious definitions, the British were able to define and divide along religious lines.

This historiography is well established, and has its roots in British colonial imagination. In his (in)famous work, *The Indian Musulmans: Are they bound in conscience to rebel against the Queen?*, W. W. Hunter formulates a particularly caustic evaluation of Indian Muslims based upon an understanding that violent Muslims could not possibly get along with or compete as ideal subjects with docile Hindus.[78] Even earlier, British officers of the Houses of Parliament and Commons requested the presence of East India Company officials, for the purpose of questioning them on all matters India; tellingly, in 1813, members of the House of Lords continued to keep their questions pointed on issues of divisions between the religious groups and their need for morality—something the British could supply in spades to the natives, of course. To this, Warren Hastings, who was to become the first Governor-General of India, said:

> Great pains have been taken to inculcate into the public mind and opinion that the native Indians are in a state of complete moral turpitude, and live in constant and unrestrained commission of every vice and crime that can disgrace human nature. I affirm, by the oath that I have taken, that this description of them is untrue, and wholly unfounded.[79]

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[78] W. W. Hunter, *The Indian Musulmans: Are they bound in conscience to rebel against the Queen?* (London: Trubner and Company, 1871), 9-13.

[79] Warren Hastings, esq. quoted in: *Minutes of Evidence taken before the Right Honourable The House of Lords in the Lords Committees, appointed to take into consideration so much of the speech of His Royal Highness the Prince Regent as relates to the Chapter of the East-India Company, and to the Providing effectually for the future Government of the Provinces of India; and to report to the House; and to whom were referred the Petition of the United Company of Merchants of England trading to the East-Indies, respecting their Charter; and also the several Petitions presented against and in favour of the Renewal of the said Charter* (London: Printed by Order of the Court of Directors of the Information of the Proprietors, Cox and Son, 1813), 2.

Hastings, surprisingly, challenges the British understanding of the Indian population, and even seems to condemn the Londoners' influence over the public perception of India. What is important, though, is not Hastings' defense, but rather the supposition he argues against: he is forced to contend with the overarching, pervasive conceptualization that Indians are being rescued from their own dark existence with thanks to British influence.

British merchants and officers of the East India Company had numerous understandings of the religions of India, and the yearly hearings held at the Houses of Lords and Commons between 1759 and 1856 are an incredible and under-utilized resource.[80] Later, after the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857, which demarcates the formal end to the Mughal Empire as well as the shift from British *control* under the East India Company to British *rule* under the crown, officials necessarily took new interest in questions of the (proper) identities of its subjects. While my study focuses on the early nineteenth century, so as to theorize religious identity before formalized imperial rule of the British but still during formalized imperial rule of the Mughals, most works on the British Raj focus on the *Raj*—the Kingdom, the Rule—itself.

More relevant here, however, are the contemporary scholars who have sought to rethink and perhaps more properly conceptualize British influence in South Asia. Because the British constructed their narrative in terms of civilizational missions, traditional scholarship tended not to posit the problems of British rule, focusing instead

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[80] Ibid., for example. These minutes will be investigated further later on in this book in chapter 2, but they are often disregarded outside of general histories of the East India Company, given the hearings' focus on budgetary issues. However, having studied several years' worth of minutes, it is patently clear that a proper study seeking to understand how the officers understood "religion" and the religions of India is possible and even warranted.

on obvious gains South Asia benefited from under the crown. This is, of course, the very

basic outline of Orientalism: scholars exoticize, eroticize, demonize and exploit the

"Orient," the East, all the while lauding Occidental, Western moral and logical

advancements that occurred under colonial or imperial rules. In the past twenty or thirty

years, much work has focused on fixing the overstated positive influence of the British

(and of other colonial powers in other contexts).[81] In South Asia, much of this

scholarship stands to demonstrate the manufactured nature of Indian cultures. David

Lorenzen famously asked, "Who Invented Hinduism?" suggesting that the myriad

practices, language groups, mythologies and influences all rolled up into one "world"

religion stems from British (and Brahmin) concepts, rather than some indigenous,

popular self-understanding.[82] As will be discussed below, the scholastic critique of

British Orientalism as well as academic Orientalism has been a vital theoretical and

historiographic shift; and, to put it simply, this field of inquiry stands to support J. Z.

Smith's assertion that "religion" as a category has been a foreign imposition, often

imposed due to the foreign ruling elite's insistence.

     Smith's assertion rings true in many ways, and on its surface elegantly sums up a

lengthy historical period vis-à-vis religious difference: the definitional category, deployed

by foreigners, must itself be foreign. This alien category, which in many cases comes to

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[81] See, as examples: Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak, eds., *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996); Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India, and "The Mystic East"* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Aamir Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007).

[82] David Lorenzen, "Who Invented Hinduism?" in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (1999), 41: 630-659.

singularly define a ruled population, can be called into question on the basis of its history

within Christian circles and scholarship as well as part of the colonial-imperial armories.

However, despite its elegance, Smith's assertion is actually rather limited. As a self-

proclaimed philologist from childhood,[83] Smith, in his own scholastic quest to

appropriately situate the study of religion and its taxonomies, focuses on languages most

closely associated with the Western academy: Latin, Greek, and English. He references

the incompatibility of these languages with those from other regions and religious

traditions, rightfully claiming that the lack of focus on the region-specific terminologies

creates a system wherein "religion" is imposed.[84] This implies, however, that the concept

of religion or, more importantly, religions in the plural, regardless of its home language

or terms, is also a Western construct. While the concept of religion, as Müller so cleverly

stated, was used to classify and conquer, the idea that "religion" is singularly Western is

certainly not the case, as we will soon see below.

"Religion" cannot be Universal: Challenges to Orientalist Usages of "Religion"

J. Z. Smith's assertion is correct, to a certain degree: religion is a term that strives

to be more anthropological than theological, where its characteristics are observed rather

than intuited. And it has, since its first usages in the plural in the seventeenth century and

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[83] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Reading Religion: A Life in Scholarship," Plenary Address, American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA, October 31, 2010. Author's notes. See also a video of the Plenary Address at the American Academy of Religion "Meetings" webpage: http://www.aarweb.org/Meetings/Videos/2010Atlanta/2010_A31-137.asp. Last accessed April 18, 2011.

[84] J. Z. Smith, "A Matter of Class: Taxonomies of Religion," in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

its increasing usage in the plural in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, reflected its own history of the singular, nominative noun. That is to say: the history of *religions* necessarily reflects the history of religion and, more accurately, The Religion—Christianity. Scholars and critics of this history like Marshall Hodgson point out the problems of the relationship of the study of Islam within a framework that understands Christianity as normative. He contends that Islam is often considered as a global-yet-regional entity with little local variation, which is to say Islam is characterized as Arab, in all its iterations by scholars. We see this sort of argument play out in the insistence that Arabic, because of its connection to the Qur'an, is *the* most important language for *all* Muslims; clearly, Arabic has great import for most Muslims, but in terms of scholarship, it is clear that Arabic, spoken by roughly one-fifth of all Muslims worldwide, cannot be the only defining cultural or historical marker for Islam. Hodgson argues, well before Edward Said's classic *Orientalism*,[85] that in order to understand Islam, one must be willing and able to see Islam differently in different places, paying attention to language, ritual, and time.[86]

Furthermore, in *Rethinking World History*, essays published posthumously, he has a series of writings related to Europe as part of global history, and then subsequently describes Islam in the same way.[87] In this collection, Hodgson aims to fracture the idea that Europe sits at the center of the universe, somehow controlling it, dictating the entire

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[85] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

[86] Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Volume 3: Gunpowder Empires and Modern Times* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959).

[87] Marshall Hodgson, *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam and World History,* ed. Edmund Burke III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

world's past, present and future. He argues that special and temporally based relationships between and among European and Muslim people, nation-states, and ideologies have shaped and continue to shape not only "Muslim-majority" areas, but global histories. If we extrapolate and apply these arguments, we can problematize the idea that religion is native to only Europe, created by and for Europeans, as part of a discourse of colonialism and imperialism. In fact, in applying Hodgson here, we should rightfully examine how and why "religion" as a category—instead of other equally viable categories like "economy" or "citizenship" or gender—came to permeate Orientalist scholarship, as well as determine how those categories came to be employed with such success.

Others within Islamic Studies have sought to push the category of religion—and those who use it—to include more honestly and accurately non-Western religions. Notably and as briefly touched upon above, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, in his famous *The Meaning and End of Religion* takes seriously the Latin-roots of religion, the Orientalism that typified the beginnings of the study of Islam, and concludes that religion is not and cannot be universal.[88] Talal Asad's commentary on the work starts by praising Smith's anti-essentialist methodology and approach, but ultimately concludes that he clings to another set of essentialist understandings about religion, ones that obfuscate important issues for comparative studies.[89] Asad argues that Smith's reliance on ideas of reification—the process by which religions are made into "an objective systematic

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[88] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind* (New York: Macmillan, 1963).

[89] Talal Asad, "Reading "Reading a Modern Classic: W. C. Smith's *The Meaning and End of Religion*," *History of Religion* 40, no. 3 (2001): 205-22.

entity"[90]—assume static religions, an assumption disavowed by contemporary scholars.[91] In any case, here, Asad's commentary on W. C. Smith is both a worthwhile critique of the "modern classic," as well as one way to position the term "religion" moving forward. Asad wants the term to reflect its modern usage and modern historical relevance along side its modern "Siamese twin," secularism.[92] In this way, he argues, we are able to understand the term, its deployment within the discipline of religious studies, and importantly, within the work the term does outside academic circles.

Asad's critique in mind, it is important to realize the ways in which the term has been deployed historically, especially vis-à-vis Orientalist scholarship and colonial and imperial rule. The political aspects here are, without question, linked to religion's "Siamese twin" secularism, but importantly as well linked to (invasive) power systems. As we think through whether or not "religion" is always foreign especially within colonial and postcolonial contexts, it is worth mentioning Edward Said directly. He brings to bear what he sees as the real issue of religion as category and its ties to colonialism and imperialism; namely, the ways in which the powerful European's gaze has more to do with the gazer than the people being gazed upon. In other words, what Orientalist scholarship did and its legacy continues to do is create a situation wherein the

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[90] W. C. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 5.

[91] While many post-modernist, anti-structuralist, and post-colonial theories hinge upon the destabilization of objectivism and its counterpart, progressivism, good examples of critiques of stable, objectively observable religions within the field of religious study beyond Asad himself include: Carl W. Ernst and Tony K. Stewart, "Syncretism," in *South Asian Folklore*, eds. Peter J. Claus and Margaret A. Mills (New York: Routledge/Garland Publishing, 2003), 586-588; Bruce B. Lawrence, "Transformation," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 334-348; Walter H. Capps, *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsberg Fortress, 1995).

[92] Asad, 221.

European is both a subject and an object of his own definitions of other; the European, therefore, cannot be subtracted from his definition of the Other.[93] If Said claims that the European's Other cannot fully be said to exist apart from the European, we might be able to say that the opposite is true as well: the Other has inscribed upon him or her the European's understanding. We have seen, over time and across regional areas, this very phenomenon play out: indigenous definitions of self, governance, language, culture and so forth mix with, assimilate, reject, and become influenced by the ruling colonial or imperial definitions.[94]

Perhaps more useful however is to think through the very historiography that comes to determine the study of religion itself. As I outlined above, traditional histories of religion start with the root word, *religio* and its progression from a singular to a plural, its application from narrow and communally based to broad and universally accepted. However, such a definitional scheme seems to take serious liberties with the ways language actually functions: are we to assume that because a word has a root, a history of its own that the words *essence* is that root, that history? Daniel Dubuisson eloquently speaks to the fallacy of logic hidden within the rote repetition of the etymology of "religion":

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[93] Muhammad Tavakoli-Targhi calls the phenomena of the presence of definer within the definition of Other "Orientalism's genesis amnesia" in *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Historiography* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 18. He also has a chapter of the same name, pp. 18-34.

[94] While this is merely tangential here, for scholarly histories that take on issues of identity under colonial or imperial rule, see: Mohammed Arkoun, "Islam, Europe, and the West: Meanings-at-Stake and the Will-to-Power," In *Defining Islam: A Reader,* ed. by Andrew Rippin (London: Equinox Publications, Ltd., 2007), 252-265; Peter Heehs, "Shades of Orientalism: Paradoxes and Problems in Indian Historiography," in *Colonialism, Modernity, and Religious Identities: Religious Reform Movements in South Asia*, ed. by Gwilym Beckerlegge (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), 239-274.

> This manner of proceeding, so habitual as no longer to
> cause surprise, is naïve and often drive by ulterior motives
> that have very little to do with science. On the one hand,
> this is so because it tends to minimize of cancel out the role
> of history (with its continuous modifications or shifts),
> while seeking to preserve an essential (timeless?) tie
> between the current, living acceptance of the word and its
> hypothetical first reception, raised to the status of original,
> founding datum.[95]

Two issues strike out as relevant: first, Dubuisson uses the term "science" to describe the etymology of "religion," which is a clear signal of the imprint of Müller; second, the very etymology taken for granted habitually is for Dubuisson itself a formulation, a construction of history. The idea that religion, despite its grounded, Western ideological history, is a moving, dynamic category on its own is an idea with great cache to the project at hand.

In terms of South Asian historiography, the role of religion is often over-determined, or at the very least, "religion" comes to mean anything remotely related to visible and invisible aspects of life: praxis and doxa, for sure, but also societal organization, inter-group relationships, and the construction of classes, races and genders. This is especially the case in Orientalist scholarship.[96] In the case of South Asia, where

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[95] Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology*, trans. William Sayers (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 22.

[96] Here, Orientalist scholars may be truly of the genre, that is, officers of the East India Company or scholars affiliated with universities who benefited from the seizure of manuscripts, art, dictionaries, etc., from the Company, Crown or other endeavor (be they British, German or French). I also take Orientalist scholars of South Asia to include the generations after the British Raj who are obviously influenced by the precepts laid out by those who came before. See: Ignac Goldhizer, *Muslim Studies (Muhammedanische Studien),* edited by S.M. Stern, translated from the German by C.R. Barber and S.M. Stern (London: Allen & Unwin, 1967); Stanley Wolpert, *A New History of India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Devahuti, ed., *Bias in Indian Historiography* (Delhi: D. K. Publications, 1980); Peter Heehs, "Shades of Orientalism: Paradoxes and Problems in Indian Historiography," in *Colonialism, Modernity, and Religious*

so many religions co-exist, there has been a tradition of truly vexed scholars, unable to place particular individuals, groups and even whole communities into a religious category that made clear, bounded sense. Many scholars came to rely on ideas of "hybrid" or "shared" religions that were necessarily less authentic than the parent traditions from which they stemmed.

It is clear that notions of shared, hybrid, or "middle way" religions originated within Orientalist scholarship, especially where Muslim practices that looked heterodox, and had a distinctively South Asian flair, came to be scrutinized or lauded, depending on the author. For example, one Orientalist asserted that the cult of Sufism "steer[ed] a mid course between the pantheism of India on the one hand and the deism of the Corán on the other."[97] Ideas of shared, syncretic, or hybrid religions came to inform ideas about the religions of South Asia, specifically in the service of the Orientalist search for origins and authenticity. While this had a large effect on how Indic traditions came to be understood, in today's scholarship "hybrid" often refers to much more than practices that appear to have Islamic and Hindu resonances. Homi Bhabha made famous the idea and the state of "hybridity," focusing on a cultural idea and identity. He does not focus on "hybrid" religions per se, but rather hybridized subjects who were simultaneously of the native arena and of the empire at hand. Bhabha contends that hybridity fundamentally altered

Identities: Religious Reform Movements in South Asia, ed. Gwilym Beckerlegge (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008) 239-274.

[97] E. H. Palmer, _Oriental Mysticism: a treatise on Sufiistic and Unitarian Theosophy of the Persians, compiled from native sources_ (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, & Co., 1867), x. Interesting spellings are Palmer's.

power relationships during colonialism, as it shifted identities in ways that hit upon the anxieties of colonial actors.[98]

However, while Bhabha's theory made quite a lot of waves initially and maintains some of its import in arenas like cultural studies, Islamic studies scholars like Carl Ernst, Tony Stewart, and Nile Green have focused on debunking the idea of hybridity and syncretism, as they are two key terms that preserve the idea of stable religions in the plural. In order for varieties of religions to exist within spectra—those strange gray areas that may include, in a contemporary American context, practicing Jews who attend Yoga classes to meditate on OM—scholars have long assumed that two or more "identifiable" religions have commingled to create this plurality. Ernst suggests that this is patently *not* the case, and that this sense of pluralism really just highlights the problem of the understanding of "religions." He argues that having variety that stems from two or more traditions assumes, problematically, that those "original" traditions were static and identifiable in the first place.[99] To take as an example traditions in South Asia that look, simultaneously, rather Muslim and rather Hindu at once—certain Sufi practices, like *qawwali* comes to mind—are certainly influenced by mainline, simplistic understandings of those "parent" traditions; but to assume that Islam is definitively about Five Pillars and Hinduism is about deities assumes that the definitions concocted as part of the European study of religion are accurate, *a priori*, and most importantly consistent over time.

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[98] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

[99] Carl W. Ernst argues this point in a few locations, including: Carl W. Ernst and Tony K. Stewart, "Syncretism," in *South Asian Folklore*, eds. Peter J. Claus and Margaret A. Mills (New York: Routledge/Garland Publishing, 2003), 586-588; Carl W. Ernst, "Situating Sufism and Yoga," in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, 15:1 (2005), 15-43.

Ernst's work is helpful in thinking about the inner-workings of the machine of Orientalist scholarship; the big-picture issues Hodgson and Said take care of well, but here, we are able to see the long-lasting and hard-to-remove legacies of such a categorization. Not only does Smith's sense that religion is foreign play well here, but it also seems to fully highlight the ways in which the definitions of religion come to bear upon later, supposedly more advanced, conceptions of related religious phenomena.

Ernst's work however, more useful than merely pointing out the rippled effects of Orientalist scholarship upon South Asian or Islamic religions. Smith's contention that the very category of religion is foreign is our starting point, and as I merely alluded to above, not necessarily accurate when examining the historical record. It is clear that indigenous definitional, taxonomical systems for religious practice and religious groups *did* exist, and *were* used by scholars and kings alike. Ernst's work on debunking the notions of syncretism stem, in some ways, from his other work on Muslim readings of Hindu texts, specifically insofar as Muslims come to investigate, interrogate, and utilize what scholars—and even some Muslims—may label properly as "Hindu."[100] Furthermore, elsewhere he investigates the ways in which yogic practices carry markers of Islamic influence.[101] The Muslim authors in question in "Muslim Studies of Hinduism?" plainly see themselves as different from their Hindu interlocutors, and seek to both navigate and fully comprehend religious difference; this seems a clear historical

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[100] Carl W. Ernst, "Muslim Studies of Hinduism? A Reconsideration of Arabic and Persian Translations from Indian Languages." http://www.unc.edu/~cernst/articles/translation.htm. Accessed April 2, 2009.

[101] Carl W. Ernst, "The Islamization of Yoga in the Amrtakunda Translations," in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society,* Series 3, 13:2 (2003), 1-23.

example of Islamic thinkers engaged in the study of comparative religion, to borrow terminology from the Western academy. Both of these articles demonstrate fluidity between seemingly cogent religious traditions, but more importantly they both demonstrate an indigenous usage of what we have been calling "religion;" this reflects Dubuisson's position that the term has shifted, gained and lost multiple meanings over time, despite its Latin etymology.

Although religion as a category clearly stems from a Western history and academy, and its deployment has been linked to geo-political power structures, its corollaries elsewhere have not yet been discussed here, nor have they been given the full attention I contend they rightfully deserve. Issues of translation are often cited when parallels are drawn between disparate terms, and certainly those issues warrant attention—but only to a degree. It is clear that "religion," with its multiple meanings across time and place, has not itself been static; "religion" as a category, a descriptive term, and a discourse continues to shift rapidly. In this way, we are always in a process of translation, moving between meanings, reapplying and redefining those meanings as situations present themselves. If we are translating between and among English usages, I see little difference in carefully and with as much accuracy as can be ascertained discussing correlative terms from other languages. After all, the very process by which the study of religion in non-Western contexts comes to represent, in many respects, the history of colonialism and imperialism in the two-thirds world is the same process by which the category opens up, questions itself, and rethinks its (supposed) one-dimensional subject. The colonial experience may have reified religions individually, but religion as a field became infinitely wider. The question before us is, then: is religious

difference the only reason "religion" becomes a salient category, or are there other issues to think about as well?

Islamicate Sources: another Taxonomy, other Empires

Let us begin this section by stating, frankly, that a corollary understanding of religion, as a category of identification, classification and study, existed in the precolonial Islamicate literary tradition. As stated above, W. C. Smith understands that while there is not a *correspondence* between "religion" and that which it describes, there is indeed a *correlation* between the signifier and signified. He writes that "the Arabic language has, and has had since the appearance of Islam and indeed from shortly before, a term and concept that seem to be quite closely equivalent to the Western 'religion.' Indeed this word—namely, *dīn*—is used in all the various senses of its Western counterpart.[102] Even one of the first scholars who called for the rethinking and possible dismissal of the term "religion" acknowledged, in the very same book, that Islam had already had a analogous, useful term and, second, that this made Islam distinctive within the traditional historiography of "religion" and "religious studies." In short, it seems that Smith's disavowal of "religion" stems from both its lack of precision as well as the mere fact that other traditions had indigenous, parallel terminologies; why impose a foreign, imperfect definition when a perfectly serviceable—and "native"[103]—definition already exists?

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[102] Ibid., 81.

[103] I use "native" here purposefully in order to highlight some of the tensions presented by insisting a tradition has its own definitions—representing a closed language or system rather than one in conversation with others. While I do contend that there are Islamicate definitions, it is important to be clear that these draw upon Hodgson's original meaning for the term: related to the rule and presence of Muslims, but addressing cultural, linguistic, and regional variants. As

Further, as important as it is to state bluntly that there existed an understanding of religion and the religious in the precolonial Islamicate context, it should go without saying that there exists a postcolonial, South Asian (both Hindu and Muslim) understanding of religion as a category of identification, classification, and study. In short, there exist a range of terms (in Persian, Sanskrit, Hindi-Urdu, and Arabic[104]), definitions, and usages that both predate and postdate the colonial and imperial encounter; the uses and terms themselves indicate he South Asian cultural milieu had and continues to have ways to classify religions in spite of colonial interventions into local history.

As will be directly discussed in the next chapter, there exists a series of texts from within the Islamicate traditions, both within and outside of South Asia, that takes seriously religious groups and boundaries and set forth to establish and explain related categories. For now, it is relevant to discuss the existence of these texts and their effect upon the current discussion: how, and if, religion can be a term, a category that continues to have use in arenas other than Western traditions. Texts by Muslims that both created and comprised a scholarly tradition that deal directly with the idea of religion as a

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language is in a constant state of development and flux, no one system can be fully formed or immune to dialogic processes.

[104] These terms vary, and will be discussed as they appear in primary source texts rather than as a definitive history, which is fruitless—an issue brought up in the introduction. In the next chapter, full treatment will be given to the specific, formative texts and their terminologies. For now, however, suffice it to say that these terms include, but are not limited to: *dīn* (and *adyan*), *maẕhab* (and *maẕahib*), and, most interestingly, genitive constructions (i.e. "those of the Hindu or Indian path," *panth-i Hind*, in *Riyāẓ al-maẕāhib,* 8.).

category of identification, as well as a means by which individuals navigated space, date

as far back as the late eleventh century. Specifically, I refer to Abu al-Ma`ali's work,

entitled *Bayan al-adyan* or *The Account of the Religions* (c. 1092 CE), which described

the religions (*adyan*) that existed, their basic tenets and the people who followed those

traditions.[105] Here, we see a sense of religion that does not necessarily refer to theology,

but rather to identity, group identity and, most importantly, the language through which a

scholar should express those differences; in other words, Abu al-Ma`ali is *not* a

theologian writing about differences but rather a scholar interested in studying subjects

who happen to be religious. This distinction seems to reflect quite obviously the shift

that is so well examined within Western scholastic circles.

Another Islamicate example of a taxonomical system for religion is Muhammad

ibn `Abd al-Karīm Shahrastānī (d. 1153), whose famous text *Kitab al–Milal wa'l-Nihal*

(c. 1125 CE) or *The Book of Religious Sects and Creeds* in many ways sets a high bar for

this genre of literature.[106] The text is theological in nature but is also comprised of

reports and information drawn from multiple sources that are classical, contemporary and

includes at least one report from a ninth century Muslim traveler.[107] Shahrastānī's work

is notable both in terms of what he says as well as how he says it: the work is neither a

polemic against nor a scathing critique of Indian religions. Instead, Shahrastānī quite

generously compares the religions of India (*`ārā' al-hind*; lit., "views of Hind") to the

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[105] Abu al-Ma`ali, *Bayan al-adyan* (c. 1092) in Schefer, *Chrestomathic Persane*, i. 132-171.

[106] Bruce B. Lawrence, *Shahrastānī on the Indian Religions* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1976) and Shahrastānī, *al–Milal wa al-Nihal*, trans. Daniel Gimaret and Guy Monnot, *Shahrastani: Livre des religions et des sects* (Louvain, Belgium: Peeters, 1986, 1993).

[107] Lawrence, *Shahrastānī on the Indian Religions*, 13.

next-best group to Muslims, the Sabians. The people of Hind—i.e. who we might today call both Hindus and Buddhists—are treated as a viable, worthy (though not correct) and cogent group of religious Others. While the twelfth century text conforms to scholastic norms and expectations of its period, it accomplishes a written, well-read and well-cited record of "religion" as a category of inquiry, part of what an Islamic scholar might need or want to know. Further, it allows another avenue into thinking about South Asia's location vis-à-vis religion, religious definition, and the intellectual or imperial uses of such categories.

Another work, the *Ā'īn-i Akbarī* or *The Institutes of Akbar,* which is the last volume of the last book within the larger Persian work *Akbarnāma* or *The Book of Akbar,* also speaks to local taxonomies of religion.[108] The *Akbarnāma* was written by Abu'l Fazl, Akbar's renown courtly scribe, and it focuses on the events of Akbar's life, his reign, issues in his lands, as well as the people who live there; in the *Ā'īn-i Akbarī*, Abu'l Fazl discusses not only the different religious groups but—and this will be of utmost importance—also Akbar's official courtly policies surrounding different religions and religious groups. Because Akbar has a policy toward religious groups, and bases much of his policies on the religious definitions present within Islamicate literature, his reign might be thought of as one that has many of the features we typically associate with other imperial models, i.e. Europe's colonies and empires.

The *Ā'īn-i Akbarī*, the Institutes of Akbar, penned by Abu'l Fazl, Akbar's courtly scribe, serves as a primary textual source here. The work is the last book of the much

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[108] *Ā'īn-i Akbarī of Abu'l Fazl-i-'Āllami, vols 1, 2, and 3* (Frankfurt am Main: Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe Univ., 1993).

larger *Akbarnāma*, and focuses primarily on issues of the nation: topography, geography, states and regions, learned societies, the make-up of the populace. Importantly, the issue of "religion" is a governmental concern in the *Ā'īn-i Akbarī* —as important aspect of Hindustani life, as a way by which to understand the populace, and as a fundamental data set important to the kingdom. The work is, in short, a governmental document denoting and accounting for all aspects of the empire. Religions of Hindus and Muslims are accounted for, and despite Abu'l Fazl's clear underlying tone that identifies him with Islam and as a Muslim, the accounts are surprisingly even-handed for a sixteenth century text, and it borders more on a proto-ethnography rather than a polemic treatise.

Abu'l Fazl writes: "It is only by meeting on a common platform of study that different religions can be correctly understood and their true worth appreciated. This book will promote that aim."[109] While the language of "true worth" fits well within early modern writings—like Kant and Hume, for example—this is the only marker that suggests this is not a mere study of religion for religion's sake. Given the location of this quote, and the section that follows on what we may call religious demographics today, I suggest that Abu'l Fazl cannot be read to assert opinions, but rather, imperial understandings of its subjects, as well as imperial pronouncements of positions. If this claim holds water, it suggests that the British Empire was not the first empire of South Asia to hold a courtly position on its subject's religion, nor was it the first to

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[109] Abu'l Fazl, *Āin-i Akbarī*, vol 3., 5.

systematically categorize on the basis of religion, as some scholars have stated.[110] These

particular issues will be discussed in the next chapter more fully.

Thinking about Akbar as a king who utilized knowledge about religious groups in

order to govern is not just an exercise in hypothesis. Akbar is largely understood as one

of the four major kings of the Mughal Empire in South Asia, which at its height

incorporated almost all of the modern nation-states of Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and

significant portions of southwest China, and southeastern Afghanistan, and was in power

from 1520 CE under Babur till (officially) 1857 CE. This was a kingdom ruled by

Muslims, with varying interpretations of Islam as well as varying levels of piety, if we

are ever able to measure such a thing. The Mughal Empire immediately succeeded the

Delhi Sultanates, which were another series of short-lived Muslim dynasties that

established power in the Subcontinent starting in about 1220 CE. So, all told, there are

roughly 600 years of Muslim kings ruling over a non-Muslim majority: in short, South

Asia, and especially the centralized, organized Mughal Empire, is a prime ground to

examine how "religion" functioned as an identity marker, and as a category for inquiry,

legislation, and maintenance.

Further, there is substantial historiographic precedent for thinking through the

Mughal Empire, and Akbar's rule especially, as an imperial project more similar in

nature to those of the modern (i.e. post-Enlightenment) era than different. In fact, Akbar

is often regarded as a modern ruler in the early modern period. His policies are often

considered open, tolerant, and almost secular—despite his being born and dying a

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[110] Some imagine pre-British South Asia to be a pluralistic paradise, wherein a lack of definitional boundaries indicates a lack of inter-religious tensions. Of course, this is an ahistoric understanding of both pre- and post-British South Asia.

Muslim many scholars, Western and Islamic alike, have attempted to prove that his

Muslim identity was in name only, and not in practice.[111] Why might this be the case?

Well, for starters, a Muslim king passing egalitarian legislation, if I might call it that, in

the sixteenth century simply breaks with a conventional bigotry that assumes two things:

first, basic presentist and progressivist biases demand that we be suspicious of claims that

something so early could reflect things that Europe did not have until later; second, no

Muslim king has ever been both a "true" Muslim *and* a tolerant, moderate ruler. Akbar,

then, cannot be a true Muslim king if we accept that his policies were open or tolerant.

One of these policies is the famed *Dīn i-ilahi,* or Divine Religion, which was a

collection of world religions' best features, and the ethical system inaugurated by Akbar

in 1581 CE. Amartya Sen notably called him a "liberal," citing his codification of

religious pluralism in the Mughal domains as well ahead of its time. Sen, like others,

tribute Akbar for citing Islam as the rationale for pluralism.[112] There are many studies on

Akbar—he is a polarizing figure it would seem—and most of them focus on his religious

policies and proclivities. For our purposes here, let me draw our attention to his

understanding of *din* or religion, for two distinct reasons: first, it is often said that with

Hume and Kant pluralizing religion to religions, we first see on the world stage an

acknowledgement that other faith traditions have validity and meaning (as opposed to

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[111] We see this in scholarship, as well as in contemporary Indian mainstream culture. See as book examples: Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005); C. M. Agrawal, *Hindu Officers Under Akbar* (Delhi: Indian Publishers and Distributors, 2001); and Annemarie Schimmel, *The Empire of the Great Mughals: History, Art and Culture* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004). In pop-culture, see: *Mughal-e Azam,* directed by K. Asif (1960); *Akbar the Great*, television series, directed by Akbar Khan (1988); and *Jodhaa Akbar*, directed by Ashutosh Gowariker (2008).

[112] Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, 294-297, 334-343.

merely being heretical innovations or legacies), and this novelty in history simply is not novel to Muslims in South Asia; second, Akbar's sense of religion demonstrates both a knowledge *of* other traditions as well as a desire to amalgamate multiple religions into one, true religion—a trend that reflects, quite nicely, the early trends in Enlightenment thinking.

To reiterate, many argue about Akbar's inherent Muslimness, citing his desire to blend traditions into one as a power grab, first and foremost, and religious in name only. I am not attempting to argue that his personal belief system should or could stand in as some sort of example of real religion, of pluralism at its finest, or as blasphemy. I merely wish to demonstrate that his understanding of religion in the sixteenth century relies on the presence of multiple religions; religion as a form of denoting progress of a society; and as a unifying entity when done well. Akbar, throughout his reign but especially after 1581, relied on religious terminology, leaders, and scholars to employ new political devices. One such device, was indeed the *dīn i-ilahi*, the official—even if its rate of participation indicates that it failed—ethical system of the Court, and which was instantiated by Sufis and *qadis* (judges), Brahmin Hindus, learned Jains, and some Christians—both Indian converts and Portuguese missionaries. Akbar commissioned the greatest number of Sanskrit to Persian translations of any Mughal Emperor, with the intent to understand and realize those worthy Hindu teachings as well as understand his populace.

The nexus of post-Orientalist, postcolonial research has continued to focus on the violence, problems, and misreading that the category "religion," with its European and Eurocentric history, enacts on non-Western, non-Christian traditions. J. Z. Smith,

Edward Said, Marshall Hodgson, and Timothy Fitzgerald among others have cited that the problem with the term is that it is placed upon a new culture or tradition, and that tradition has to then be forced into what must necessarily be a narrow definition. What I have suggested is that Muslims have produced, created, revised, and understood "religion" as a category in a way that parallels Western usages, well before the colonial encounters of the seventeenth century onward. In this way, Islamicate traditions, with a preexisting understanding of religion, cannot be said to merely have had an outside force imposed upon them with no vocabulary by which to understand; while the actual word "religion" may have been a foreign imposition, the translated concept was not. Akbar, reigning in the sixteenth century, had himself demonstrated an understanding of Islam, and, more importantly, of religions (in the plural) that closely reflects some of the issues that category poses today: inherit progressivism, the problem of plurality, an impetus to find an original tradition, and a labeling of the Other with practices like quota systems, rigid legalized boundaries, and taxation.

My point has been to shed some light on these issues, as well as suggest the following: how is it that we continue to think about religion and religions as conceived of and understood via Western definitions, when perfectly serviceable—and potentially related—definitions exist in the historical record firmly within non-Western non-Christian traditions? If Islam is so far outside the pale of "*religio*," of that original root word, perhaps we can find inroads for it via Akbar, his religious ideas, and the mechanisms through which he investigates, legally and scholastically, the variety of religious experience in South Asia in the pre-colonial period. After all, if the supposed greatest king of one of the greatest world empires utilized religion as a means by which to

identity, classify, and rule his kingdom, it is important to investigate the ways Akbar may have classified and conquered, to borrow from F. Max Müller once more. In Chapter 2: "Genealogies and Imaginaries: Abu'l Fazl, the *Ā'īn-i Akbarī,* and the Impact of Islamicate Definitions," I will trace the Islamicate terminologies and taxonomies of religion as they appeared in some of the texts mentioned above—the very texts that Abu'l Fazl drew upon and whose ideas came to permeate South Asian scholarship. As we have seen, South Asia was, has been, and continues to be a major site of the discourse and dialogical process of definition with respect to religion, and as such it is time to move to Indic sources to flesh out the understandings of "religion" within that arena.

CHAPTER 2: GENEALOGIES AND IMAGINARIES: ABU'L FAZL, THE *Ā'ĪN-I AKBARĪ,* AND THE IMPACT OF ISLAMICATE DEFINITIONS

As I discussed in the first chapter, South Asia's role as a site of discourse about religion—and about legitimate religions—has greatly influenced the study of religion, the historiography of South Asia, and modern tellings and retellings of South Asian narratives. The discourse is often shaped genealogically, that is, as traceable to an origin (or set of origins). We located the process of genealogy within the modern impetus to categorize and classify, and in these regards spent some time thinking about F. Max Müller's scientific views of religion and of Sanskrit language and Indic cultures. Related to genealogy is the process of imagination: the tracing of roots often has as its goal the locating of potentially real connections that affect one's imagined, created community, nation, culture or, importantly, culturally other. This chapter will take seriously the role of imagined communities and how they help frame a conversation about Mughal rule, the famous Mughal emperor Akbar, and the courtly author Abu'l Fazl's work about this emperor. The purpose of this chapter is three-fold: first, it describes the Mughal era and especially that of Akbar, arguing that the empire existed within multiple historical imaginaries; second, it examines how Abu'l Fazl's *Ā'īn-i Akbarī* or *Institutes of Akbar* draws upon Islamic histories and terminologies, locating it within a lineage of what I will refer to as scholarly legacies; and third it suggests that this text—popular and influential in its own time, the colonial period, and beyond—comes to influence Orientalist and Indic understandings of "religion."

By way of introduction, however, I will begin with a brief outlining of what imaginaries are, and why they are a particularly useful theoretical tool here. Imaginaries refer to, quite simply, the ways in which people envision their existence, writ large—interactions, identities, value systems, norms and modes, and notions that regulate normative behavior. The social imaginary serves to represent the way people perceive their world, and, importantly, seek to craft their world in light of these perceptions; the historical imaginary serves, likewise, to represent the way people—in their own time and as chroniclers—perceived their world and constructed its genealogy. Charles Taylor, following Benedict Anderson's classic work on the subject,[113] remarks that social imaginaries refer to ideas that are "carried in images, stories and legends," are "widely held," and manufacture legitimacy.[114]

It is worth mentioning upfront that Anderson's work highlights the use of social imaginaries to create national identities; in using this theoretical framework, I do not intend to claim that the Mughal Period in South Asia was also a budding nation-state, nor do I claim its courtly authors attempted to forge a national identity. Even if the term "imaginary" began as a way to explain nationalisms, the related terms—social and historical imaginary—provide a useful frame for thinking about Mughal history, Orientalist understandings of Mughals, and identity formation in South Asia. In my read of Anderson, Taylor, and others,[115] "imaginary" functions to give language to commonly

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[113] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983).

[114] Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 23.

[115] See especially Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); and

held conceptions about self, region, community, and—yes—nation, but the notion relies

on the process of production: how these entities hang together coherently relies on

manufactured, maintained, and promulgated legitimacy. Certainly the Mughal Empire

was not a nation-state. But Abu'l Fazl's writings about the empire and its emperor

demonstrate a clear sense of identity, community, and region in a way that I believe

"imaginary" helps us understand. Similarly, as we will see below, as Orientalist scholars

investigated Abu'l Fazl and other Muslim scholars, the Orientalist imaginary became

shaped by these writings. Put differently, the very history of the Mughal Period as

understood both by Mughals and by later British and German historians relies on

imaginaries, or the ways in which people envision their existence and the existence of

others.

In other words, as I will use the terms, the social and historical imaginary may not

represent what is *actual* but rather what has come to be *actualized.* I use the terms to

indicate the process by which social and historical facts come to be produced, interpreted,

and maintained; similarly, I use the terms to describe multiple ways in which historical

and social pasts have been used by later scholars. Drawing upon scholars like Daud

Ali[116] and Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyan,[117] I argue that the development of

Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India 1600-1800* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001).

[116] Daud Ali, "Introduction," in *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia,* ed. Daud Ali (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 4.

[117] Narayana Rao et al., *Textures of Time*.

history and imaginations of history are related to conceptualizations of an historical consciousness.

I also contend, however, that the imaginaries at work in South Asia are both necessarily South Asian (i.e. autochthonous) as well as colonial and even European. This is because the historical imaginary must necessarily interact with and reflect the various histories of South Asia. I accept, wholesale, the keen arguments made by critics of colonialism and Orientalism that state South Asian conceptions of past are not reducible to European modes, and I agree that establishing definitions that are self-generated and localized will ultimately yield the most fruitful examinations of South Asian history, culture, and conceptions of time. However, I also maintain that multiple imaginaries from and about South Asia mediate political, social, and religious actions, and that these imaginaries are generated by South Asians and Europeans alike—among others. For these reasons, this chapter will examine a distinctive case of the precolonial conceptualization of history, empire, and religion as well as a colonial and Orientalist model.

Orientalism itself must be addressed, as it is wound up in ideas of imaginaries. What the Orient was, or even where it was, was rarely *actual* but through processes of study, exploitation, colonialism, and imperialism, became *actualized* in the imagination of the West. In other words: the Orient as actual—as a geographic location, as an historical entity, as an identity marker—has long been critiqued on the basis of its undefined, hazy, and often ahistorical, dislocated borders, boundaries, and even centers. For example: for whom and in what periods are the Near, Middle and Far Easts directionally east? Is the Orient everything geographically from Turkey to Japan? Does

it refer to different places in different times, and, if so, which cultures do we mean by

"Oriental"? In this way, the Orient is not *actual*: it is not a readily defined, clear-cut

singular or set of geographic areas, languages, religions, cultural norms, elite histories,

and so forth; the Orient, as many have pointed out, was created by Europeans who

envisioned the East largely based on constructed differences.[118] But I contend the

Orient's realness—its *actualized* life—exists within historical and social imaginaries.

This is not merely an issue of gaze, to borrow Edward Said's famous phrase; the

imaginary incorporates but is not limited to the act of seeing and interpreting an Other,

which necessarily happens in the mind (or imagination) of the viewer and may not reflect

any real image.[119] The imaginary is manufactured both externally and internally, as a

viewer describes what she views but first has to comprehend and articulate that visage.

This is accomplished by distant viewers, authors, participants and thinkers (foreign and

local) and intimate viewers, authors, thinkers and participants (foreign or local). What I

mean to indicate here is that gaze cannot be limited to some stereotypical image of a

nineteenth century Orientalist: an historian's armchair, a dictionary, manuscripts, a smug

sense of true understanding, and experience in the field limited at best. While this is

often the case—Müller, though an Indologist, famously never visited India—actors and

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[118] Many authors have commented on the nature of East and West, Orient and Occident.
Particularly helpful in laying out perceived dyads between the two is Richard King, "Chapter 1:
The Power of Definitions," in *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial theory, India, and the
'Mystic East'* (New York: Routledge Press, 1999), 7-34. Here, King discusses Orientalism and
mysticism, and traces complimentary characteristics as placeholders for West/East definitions:
masculine/feminine, rational/irrational, secular/sacred, public/private. The classic work on the
subject is, of course, Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

[119] Said, *Orientalism.* For a more contemporary discussion of the gaze and its relationship to
communities and histories, see: Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge,
1994), 121-131.

participants in the historical imagination of our location can, were, and continue to be

South Asian themselves. For our purposes, these actors include Mughals, British

officials, and contemporarily Indian, Pakistani and Euro-American academics influenced

by Orientalist works, as we will discuss more fully below.

Avrind-Pal Mandair's work is directly relevant here, and deals with the idea of

"religion" in South Asia specifically. Mandair uses the language of "specter" to refer to

those entities typically known, however glibly, as "the West" and "the Rest." In so

doing, he both recognizes the ways in which these units are unified, but also the

mechanisms through which they have been and continue to be constructed. He argues

that the "specter of the West"

> has been, and continues to be, produced every time Indians
> retrieve for themselves a mode of identification through
> which they see themselves, and are seen by others, as
> members of a particular "world religion" (Hinduism or
> Sikhism), for in doing so they must rely on a comparative
> imaginary and inadvertently help to solidify that specter
> that calls itself the West.[120]

Mandair here claims that the imaginary operative within contemporary Indian life is that

of a comparative nature: to see oneself, and to be seen by others, as primarily belonging

to a given religion indicates a way in which the West's influence, which itself values and,

by some arguments, created those very categories necessarily participates in reifying

those categories and, in turn, their creator(s). Mandair does not claim that "religion"

itself is untranslatable from Euro-American conventions; in fact, he claims just the

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[120] Arvind-Pal Mandair, *Religion and the Specter of the West: Sikhism, India, Postcoloniality, and the Politics of Translation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 7.

opposite, and argues that religion is constantly translated everywhere.[121] What he argues, however, is that the global imaginary of "religion" and the entities—or specters, to use his term—that imaginary supports has cache, history, and influence within Western contexts. By examining the work of Abu'l Fazl, we can ascertain a precolonial, early modern era imaginary in which "religion" features heavily and holds great influence in areas of identity, government, and self-conceptualization. Further, Orientalists reading Abu'l Fazl's influential work are in turn shaped by his articulation of this religious imaginary.

For Orientalists, the Mughal period and Akbar in particular prove to factor heavily in their imagination of India, Muslims, and their South Asian subjects. But, likewise, for Mughals themselves, a genealogical and Islamic understanding of their lineage shapes their self-imagining; in the case of Akbar, what is *actual* rarely reflects what has been *actualized* in terms of his influence, persona, and legacy. The idea of the social and historical imaginary—the imagination of the past and its communities—helps us have a firmer grip on the multiple narratives surrounding Akbar, and importantly, the major document about his reign. In the next section, I discuss the Mughal era and especially the period of Akbar, arguing that the empire exists within multiple historical imaginaries, all of which are important to the development of religious identities.

The Mughals in History and Historical Imaginaries

The Mughal Empire, formally begun in 1526 CE by Babur, typically represents the height of Indo-Islamic presence, rule, and influence in South Asia. Quite a lot of

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[121] Ibid., 9.

attention has been paid the Mughals: their architecture, which includes the famed Taj

Mahal, has been studied and commented on at length by scholars,[122] travelers,[123] and

ruling authorities;[124] Indo-Persian culture is seen as only theirs in creation and

influence;[125] and their militaristic campaigns and legal rule as an empire are well-

documented and studied.[126] Mughal kings—much like India itself, as discussed in

chapter 1—inhabit a particular place within both global and local imaginaries of South

Asia. Our English word "mogul" perhaps best exemplifies a postcolonial, Euro-

American conception of the empire: its root traces directly to Mughal, and is most often

used in the sense of an important or powerful person, an autocrat.[127] Of course, European

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[122] Exemplary works include: Ebba Koch, *The Complete Taj Mahal and the Riverfronts of Agra* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006); *Mughal architecture: an outline of its history and development, 1526-1858* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002); and *Mughal art and imperial ideology: collected essays* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[123] See for one European example: W. E. Begley, and Z. A. Desai, "References to the Taj Mahal by Seventeenth-Century European Travelers," in *Taj Mahal: The Illuminated Tomb* (Cambridge, MA: Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, Harvard University, and MIT, distributed by University of Washington Press, 1989), 291-300. For a Central Asian Persian example (in translation): Mahmud B. Amir Wali Balkhi, *The Bahr ul-Asrar: Travelogue of South Asia*, ed. Riazul Islam (Karachi: Institute of Central and West Asian Studies, 1980).

[124] On this issue: Gülru Necipoğlu, "Framing the Gaze in Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Palaces," *Ars Orientalis*, Vol. 23, Pre-Modern Islamic Palaces (1993), 303-342.

[125] As examples: Munis D. Faruqui, "The Forgotten Prince: Mirza Hakim and the Formation of the Mughal Empire in India," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient,* Vol. 48, No. 4 (2005), 487-523; Muzaffar Alam, "The Pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal Politics," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (May, 1998), 317-349; and Iqtidar Alam Khan, "Tracing Sources of Principles of Mughal Governance: A Critique of Recent Historiography," *Social Scientist*, Vol. 37, No. 5/6 (May-June 2009), 45-54.

[126] See Jos Gommans, *Mughal warfare: Indian frontiers and highroads to empire, 1500-1700* (New York: Routledge, 2002) and Farhat Hasan, *State and locality in Mughal India : power relations in western India, c. 1572-1730* (New York : Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[127] *Oxford English Dictionary*, "mogul." This sense of "mogul" first appears in J. Quarles *Divine Meditations upon several subjects. Whereunto is annexed God's Love and Man's Unworthinesse* (London:1655) i. 46. What is important to note here is that the term comes into use during the

visions of Mughals were not limited to marvels at their opulence, wealth, or rule, and we

will examine what constituted typical Orientalist understandings and preoccupations

below. Locally, Mughals still inhabit an imaginary in which South Asia was formed—or

destroyed: South Asian historians, commentators, and textbooks often oscillate between

Mughal rule symbolizing the height of Indian cultural productivity and grandeur and, on

the other side of the pendulum swing, the low point in which foreign invaders took

control and profit from exploiting and, by some accounts, eliminating local culture. The

legacy of the Mughal Empire is oft debated, but what is certain is that their rule,

patronage of the arts, and imperial organization remains wildly important in the historical

imagination of South Asia.

     A dyad of influence—inception and destruction—often permeates

historiographies of the Mughal period as well as commonly held notions of the era. As

mentioned briefly above, Mughal rule is often typified as the rule of foreign invaders,

whose ideas and religion were fundamentally antithetical to Indic value and religious

systems.[128] On the flip side, Mughal architecture is touted as the height of style, royal

sponsorship, and an immaculate blending of Indic and Persian aesthetics into a Indo-

Islamicate or Indo-Persian genre. The Mughals come to be seen, therefore, as a major,

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Mughal period, specifically during the reign of Shahjahan, Akbar's grandson. As the *OED* traces
the development and deployment of English terminology, its definition of and the location it finds
for "mogul" underscores the place Mughals inhabit within Euro-American imaginaries.

[128] Shahid Amin, "On Retelling the Muslim Conquest of North India," in *History and the Present*,
ed. Partha Chatterjee and Anjan Gosh (London: Anthem Press, 2002), 19-32.

patently visible influence on Indic history but are not always seen as a fully integrated, fully local, truly indigenous government.

The reasons for this are numerous, but more often than not relate to Orientalist scholarship and, later, the creation of the nation-states of India and Pakistan. British historians often used documents from the courts of the Mughals to piece together histories,[129] but did so through a lens that can only be qualified as racist at best: Muslims are described prodigiously as barbaric, warlike, and feebleminded, and their rule, subsequently, is seen as problematic and ghastly from its inception.[130] After Partition/Independence in 1948, religious nationalism on both sides of the newly created borders seemed to be invested in historical imaginaries that prove their new homelands to be legitimate; these histories are teleological in nature, but absolutely rampant. One author notes that after Partition/Independence, a

> fresh wave of communalism has swept over the Indian history-writing. Pakistani historians have justified the birth and establishment of Pakistan as a natural and logical culmination of earlier events…The Indian historians have made it a non-Muslim affair. In some irresponsible and politicised historical writings, it was argued that India became free after a lapse of a thousand years.[131]

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[129] See the classic: Elliot and Dawson, *The History of India as Told by Its Own Historians* (London: Trubner and Co., 1867). This work is now available to the public digitally through the GoogleBooks project.

[130] See, for one example: W. W. Hunter, *The Indian Musulmans: Are They bound in Conscience to Rebel against the Queen?* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1871). This work is now available to the public digitally through the GoogleBooks project.

[131] Mohammad Yasin, "Vilification of Indian Muslims," in *Bias in Indian Historiography,* ed. Devahuti (New Delhi: D. K. Publications, 1980), 153-154.

Despite the obvious and well-documented history of Muslims in South Asia, their Delhi Sultanate antecedents, and a wide range of important artifacts that symbolize India, Mughals as Muslims inhabit a place in historiography akin to a double-edged sword: they epitomize South Asia as well as its demise at the hands of outsiders at once.

However, one king's influence and role is distinct: Jalāl ud-Dīn Muhammad Akbar (r. 1556-1605 CE) exists within local and global imaginaries in a way that exemplifies the confused, sometimes contradictory position of Mughals. Scholars of India such as the economist and social critic Amartya Sen characterize Akbar's reign as the "height" of Mughal rule and the emperor himself as "liberal" inasmuch as he is believed to reflect neoliberal values in a premodern ruler.[132] Akbar is thought of as exhibiting a modern, liberal worldview largely because of the way his views on religion and religious difference are perceived. It is a commonly held view that Akbar favored "tolerance,"[133] inclusivity, and open dialogues between representatives of multiple faith traditions.

There is ample evidence to support this conception: Akbar's famed though ill-fated *dīn i-ilahi* or Divine Faith was an ethical, purposefully syncretic system he

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[132] Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity* (New York: Picador, 2005). While Sen uses phrases like "height" and "liberal," I have placed them in scare quotes: as many historians have shown, the rise-and-fall model of history is not fruitful and often obscures continuing cultural, social and imperial networks and spheres of influence. This model of history and its problems are discussed in the next chapter.

[133] I am hesitant to use phrases like "tolerant," and its opposite "intolerant," given the term's lengthy history, which is itself often debated and discussed. To briefly summarize those conversations, many historians, linguists, and theorists see tolerance within its own etymology: that one body could build up a resistance to pain (and later in the term's history, poison), eventually being able to withstand larger and larger doses without disastrous effects. This model of intercultural, inter-religious, or inter-ethnic contact is wrought, therefore, with obvious problems; however, it is a term used by many with regard to Akbar, and so I have included it here. See as but one example: Peter van der Veer, "Syncretism, multiculturalism, and the discourse of tolerance," in *Syncretism/anti-syncretism: the politics of religious synthesis,* eds. Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw (London: Routledge, 1994), 185-199.

attempted to implement in his court. It drew upon multiple religious traditions and theological interpretations, including Islam, Hindu traditions, Buddhism, and some Christian (largely Catholic) notions. The system was, by all definitions, a practical failure: few outside of Akbar's closest advisors joined or pledged allegiance to the *dīn i-ilahi*, and those who chose to engage with its principles were usually critics or denouncers. However, despite its obvious failings, the *dīn i-ilahi* is remembered and cited widely, and is a wildly popular reference contemporarily to Akbar's open, liberal demeanor and policies.[134]

Akbar's unprecedented translation program is the more prudent example, though. He commissioned the translation of scores of Sanskrit plays, philosophical, and religious texts (including the major Hindu epics, *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyana*) into Persian.[135] Further, ateliers sponsored by the Mughal line often depicted Hindu religious imagery—from the epics, regional tales, and trans-regional deities. The Indo-Persian miniatures and illuminated manuscripts have come to typify the Mughal era and South Asian painted art, and their multifaceted, multireligious subjects can be traced in many ways to Akbar's fascination with and insistence upon integrating his empire with its location.[136]

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[134] Iqtidar Alam Khan, "The Nobility under Akbar and the Development of His Religious Policy, 1560-80," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 1/2 (Apr., 1968), 29-36.

[135] M. Athar Ali, "Translations of Sanskrit Works at Akbar's Court," *Social Scientist* Vol. 20, No. 9/10 (Sep. - Oct., 1992), pp. 38-45.

[136] John Seyller writes extensively on these issues. See his works: *Workshop and Patron in Mughal India: The Freer Ramayana and Other Manuscripts Illustrated for 'Abd al-Rahim* (Zürich and Washington, DC: Artibus Asiae Publishers and Museum Rietberg, in association with the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1999), *Pearls of the Parrot of India: The Walters Art Museum Khamsa of Amir Khusraw of Delhi* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), and *The Adventures of Hamza: Painting and storytelling in Mughal India* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002).

Akbar also envisioned his role as king and emperor in what appears to be a novel

way: part of the way he positioned himself was as a king who conformed to lofty,

religiously imbued ideals of universal rule. Abu'l Fazl writes of his kingship as one

whose aim was to "establish peace with all (*sulh-i-kull*[137]) and if he does not think all

classes of men and all factions of religion (*dīn*) with a single eye of favor, he will not be

fit for the exalted office."[138] Within this framework, largely influenced by Abu'l Fazl

himself,[139] Akbar passed a number of laws that would make his empire appear open,

pluralistic, and modern; these include the abolition of the *jizya* tax (c. 1580 CE) and the

eventual admittance of previously persecuted Shi`i groups to perform *namaz* (ritual

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[137] *Sulh-i-kull* is often rendered—as it is here—as peace with all, universal concord, or universal reconciliation. Recent studies have, however, pointed to the term's links to Mongol language and etymology, which carries with it a sense of universal surrender. So, peace and concord may be fair reads, but *sulh-i-kull* may also indicate a sense of concord under forced circumstances, as in the surrender to a conquering ruler. See especially: Reuven Amitai, "Mongol Imperial Ideology and the Ilkhanid War against the Mamluks," in *The Mongol Empire and its Legacy*, ed. Reuven Amitai-Preiss and David O. Morgan (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000), 57-72, and Peter Jackson, "World-Conquest and Local Accommodation: Threat and Blandishment in Mongol Diplomacy," in *History and historiography of post-Mongol Central Asia and the Middle East: Studies in Honor of John E. Woods*, ed. Judith Pfeiffer and Sholeh A. Quinn (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006), 3-22.

[138] Abu'l Fazl, *Akbarnāma*, ed. Agha Ahmad Ali and Abdur Rahim, Vol. 2. (Calcutta: Bibliotecha Indica, 1873-87), 285. *Suhl-i-kull* or "peace with all" is a phrase that, while associated with Akbar and his court, is also associated with Mu'in ad-Din Chishti, a Sufi and namesake of the Chishti order, especially in contemporary India. See for example: Mohammed Iqbal, "Embodiment of Syncretic Traditions," *The Hindu,* May 11, 2008. Accessed online July 21, 2011: http://www.hindu.com/mag/2008/05/11/stories/2008051150230800.htm.

[139] Iqtidar Alam Khan, "Tracing Sources of Principles of Mughal Governance: A Critique of Recent Historiography" *Social Scientist*, Vol. 37, No. 5/6 (May-June 2009), 46.

prayers) in congregational mosques.[140] Further, many label Akbar as "secular," given

Akbar's push to systematize the empire and Abu'l Fazl's great lengths to bolster the

attention that systemization received.[141]

While there is ample evidence that Akbar held views that have been construed—

albeit ahistorically—as liberal or modern, there is also a good deal of evidence to the

contrary. As such, not all scholars, remembrances, or constructed imaginations of Akbar

can be so resoundingly located within a liberal positivistic view; some consider his

actions to have been religiously motivated, "intolerant," and even Machiavellian.[142]

Many criticize the historical imaginary in which Akbar resides—this image of one who

was liberal, modern, secular—making clear that his role as leader of a massive empire

and its armies necessarily focused on the acquisition and implementation of power.

These authors often cite the growth of the empire under his rule, his use of traditional

networks through which to maintain and form power alliances (marriages with regional

elites, courtly and military appointments, control of information, and local interventions),

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[140] It is the case, however, that it is likely that the *jizya* had never been collected before Akbar—making his abolishment of the tax largely symbolic. Cahen, İnalcık, Hardy, "D̲J̲izya." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman; Th. Bianquis; C.E. Bosworth; E. van Donzel; and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, 2012. Brill Online. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 13 April 2012
http://www.brillonline.nl.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_COM-0192

[141] M. Athar Ali, "Towards an Interpretation of the Mughal Empire," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* No. 1 (1978), p. 41.

[142] See as examples: Azam Ikram, *Pakistan and the Indian heritage: a futuristic interpretation* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1983); Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi, *Akbar: the architect of the Mughul empire* (Karachi: Maʿaref, 1978); and Kamal S. Srivastava, *Two great Mughals: Akbar and Aurangzeb* (Varanasi: Sangeeta Prakashan, 1998).

and the use of military technologies against local rulers and their armies and unarmed peasantry alike.[143]

Folktales serve as a different mechanism to view Akbar within the historic imaginary and demonstrate its imprint, lasting framework, and commonly held attitudes. Perhaps surprising to a contemporary reader, many classic folktales in northern India—the seat of Mughal power and influence—feature Akbar. This is quite unlike the myriad Jacks, Jills, and bewitched grandmothers that feature prominently in Euro-American folktales, but the appearance of Akbar in cautionary and moralistic fables is worth touching upon. In these legends, Akbar is most often depicted alongside his servant Birbal. Birbal was one of the *nav ratnas* or "nine gems," Akbar's famed group of courtly advisors and assistants; he served Akbar as *wazīr-i aʿzam* or the grand vizier. In these popular stories, the king, who is unlettered, is very foolish compared to his dear assistant, and makes rash decisions for immediate gain, always failing to see the long-term effects.[144] These stories are fables—meant to demonstrate lessons in amusing ways—but the king here is not the wise, knowing, purposeful thinker Abu'l Fazl would have him remembered; instead, he is a bumbling, old, illiterate man, reliant upon the quick-witted and loving Birbal.

Birbal is not merely a faithful servant of an important king in an important empire; he is, in these folktales, the guide, intellect, and moral center of the Mughal court. As such, Akbar comes to be the perpetual fool—this is, it should be noted, not the

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[143] Farhat Hasan, *State and locality in Mughal India : power relations in western India, c. 1572-1730* (New York : Cambridge University Press, 2004), 21-24.
[144] William Crooke, *Pandita* Ram Gharib Chaube, and Sadhana Naithani, eds., *Folktakes from Northern India* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2002).

wise fool that is a theme common across many Abrahamic traditions and has particular cachet in Sufi circles.[145] Akbar in these stories is merely foolish, silly, and incompetent, and utterly reliant on Birbal; it is Birbal in these stories who is the humble hero, allowing the King to save face in front of his court and subjects. Importantly, Birbal was born a Brahmin, and despite the historic—the *actual*—record of his unorthodox religious ideas, in these stories he is clearly portrayed as the Muslim king's Hindu advisor.[146] These folktales exemplify an historical imaginary in which Hindu and Muslim roles are examined, and ultimately serve to stand as examples of Hindu power over and above Muslim rule. Birbal is the smart, humble, fast-thinking man-behind-the-man who has the *real* power; Akbar is the bumbling, slow-witted, arrogant king unable to rule without his advisor. Muslim rule as intelligent, forward-thinking cannot exist within these paradigms and any "modernness" can therefore be attributed not to Akbar, but his Hindu vizier.

Even if folktales and fables attempt to portray Akbar as one who did not earn the credit he has been given, it is clear that the role of Akbar's court—if not Akbar himself—inhabits a special, pivotal role within Indian historical imaginaries. Whatever the particular vantage point on Akbar, the importance of his empire, his influence, and his role has not come into question; he is a major figure within the historical imagination of South Asia. His legacy—seen within physical structures, the patronage of arts and

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[145] Fools often serve as those who outwardly break rules, transgress social norms, speak out of turn, and practice "wrong" religion, but who inwardly have special knowledge. A common Sufi trope is the "fool of God," or one who is made foolish given his /her love for God. See, as Sufi examples: Baba Tahir, *A Fool of God: Mystical Verse of Baba Tahir*, trans. Edward Heron-Allen (Los Altos, CA: Ishk Press, 1979); Mojdeh Bayat & Mohammad Ali Jamnia, eds., "Fardiduddin Attar: The Divinely Inspired Storyteller," in *Tales from the land of the Sufis* (Boston: Shambala Press, 1997), 48-80.

[146] Crooke, Gharib Chaube, and Naithani, eds., *Folktales from northern India,* 40-49.

artisans, and, to some, seen as the height of pre-colonial Indic power—is one that greatly

enamored his courtly scribe, Abu'l Fazl, as well as British colonial agents and

Orientalists, and continues to cast its shadow on contemporary India. He, like the empire

he helped define, exists within multiple historical imaginaries, be they the purposeful

imagining of his court (as is the case for Abu'l Fazl), British Orientalist visions, or

contemporary South Asian uses.[147] In the Mughal and Persianate tradition, Akbar

bestowed upon his subjects and history a well-kept series of documents, writings, and

records. Important to this study in particular is Abu'l Fazl's *Akbarnāma*, specifically the

last three books which are titled *Ā'īn-i Akbarī* or *The Institutes of Akbar.*

Ā'īn-i Akbarī*: Mughal Genealogies*

Abu al-Fazl ibn Mubārak, widely known as Abu'l Fazl and sometimes referred to

as Abu'l Fazl-i-`Allami,[148] was the preeminent courtly scribe of Akbar, serving the

emperor beginning in 1575 CE until his death in 1602 CE. He writes a short chapter on

his biography at the very end of the *Ā'īn-i Akbarī*, claiming that he had intended to write a

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[147] Though it is beyond the scope of this project, South Asian textbook representations of the Mughal Empire and of Akbar specifically is but one example of where to look for contemporary, South Asian imaginations of that period. See as examples: M.L. Dhawan, *Issues In Indian Education* (Delhi: Isha Books, 2005); Jon Dorschner and Thomas Sherlock, "The Role of History Textbooks in Shaping Collective Identities in India and Pakistan," in *Teaching the Violent Past: History and Reconciliation,* ed. Elizabeth C. Cole (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007); Aminah Mohammad-Arif, "Textbooks, nationalism, and history writing in India and Pakistan," in *Manufacturing Citizenship: Education and nationalism in Europe, South Asia and China*, ed. Véronique Bénéï (New York: Routledge, 2005), 143-169; and Ayesha Jalal, "Conjuring Pakistan: History as Official Imagining," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* , Vol. 27, No. 1 (Feb., 1995), 73-89.

[148] This is the name used by the translators of volumes 1-3 in this collection: `Ain-i-Ākbari of Abul Fazl-i-`Allami*, Vol. 1, trans. Henry. Blochmann (Calcutta: Rouse, 1873), and trans. Jarrett, Vols. 2 (1891) and 3 (1894) as well as Richard Eaton, "Abu al-Fazl," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, Vol. I, Fasc. 3, (1983), 287-289.

separate volume dedicated to his own story to flesh out his personal history—and by extension the history he relates in the full *Akbarnāma*.[149] Abu'l Fazl places himself within a noble lineage of scholars as well as devout and learned shaykhs.[150] He spends a great deal of time discussing his father, Shaykh Mubārak Nāgori. Interestingly, Abu'l Fazl devotes, by my estimate, nearly a full third of the chapter to his father's educational and intellectual merits, stating that he "received a high diploma" at Ahmadābād, in contemporary Gujarat, in fields of law from many of the legal schools, including what we might term the four major legal schools or *madhhabs*—Māliki, Shāfi'i, Hanafi, and Hanbali—as well as Imamiyah, a Shi`i *madhhab,* in addition to a wide range of Sufi texts.[151] The section continues, and Abu'l Fazl describes his wanderings with his father and brother, the famed poet Fayzi, until the trio is able to be presented to Akbar as scholars worthy of court positions and the emperor's trust as learned and properly devout men. Abu'l Fazl is one engrossed with his genealogy and the genealogy of his emperor.

His autobiographical information, laden with family lore and sentimental accounts of his father in particular, may not be entirely trustworthy; however, his self-positioning as an inheritor of *both* an intellectual and religious prowess does weigh on the issues of this book. Abu'l Fazl imagines himself as part of an Islamic lineage not merely of Muslims but of Muslim scholars. Likewise, he envisions Akbar necessarily as part of the

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[149] Abu'l Fazl, *Ā'īn-i Akbarī,* Vol. 3 trans. H. S. Jarrett. (Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1948), 478-524; Abu'l Fazl, *The Ā'īn-i Akbarī of Abu'l Fazl, 58, 2*ed. H. Blochmann (Osnabrück: Bibliotecha Indica, 1985; reprint of Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1877), 191-194.

[150] Ibid., 479-481; 195-196.

[151] Ibid., 198-203.

glorious, religiously sanctioned lineage of rulers; this is, perhaps, to be expected based on contemporaneous, Persianate and Islamicate understandings of kingship. What is interesting, however, is Abu'l Fazl's intense devotion to Akbar as a Mughal and exceptionally qualified king, whose rule becomes demonstrative of high-order ideals like *sulh-i-kull* (universal reconciliation).[152]

Furthermore, and perhaps more convincingly, Abu'l Fazl purposefully and with great dexterity refers to Akbar in the *Akbarnāma* as part of religious worldviews. Akbar is described in ways that reflect a cosmogonic persona—or one whose existence is primary. Peter Hardy comments that "Abul Fazl in effect depicts Akbar as *in* this world of human experience but not *of* this world of human experience."[153] Abu'l Fazl's read of Akbar in this way allows him to position the emperor as part of a valid Islamic reading of kingship; Abu'l Fazl eventually concludes, in his opening remarks, that "there is no greater sign or more honourable element of essence (*gauhar*) [which] has been displayed to man than the precious existence of kings of exalted dignity."[154] In other words, Abu'l Fazl's Akbar—in some ways an imagined, exalted king—holds double importance: he is, at once, the ruler of the mundane, delimited Hindustan, and also the earthly proof of and guide for proper worship, rule, and authority.[155] This is especially evident in the markers

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[152] Abu'l Fazl, *Akbarnāma*, ed. Agha Ahmad Ali and Abdur Rahim, Vol.11, Calcutta, 1873-87, p.285.

[153] Peter Hardy, "Abul Fazl's Portrait of the Perfect Padshah: A Political Philosophy for Mughal India—or a Personal Puff for a Pal?" in *Islam in India: Studies and Commentaries, Volume 2,* ed. Christian Troll (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1985), 114-115. Emphases mine.

[154] Ibid*.,* 115.

[155] Ibid*.,* 116.

Abu'l Fazl uses to describe Akbar. Abu'l Fazl describes the emperor as one who is filled

with light (*furugh*); one who has holy (*qudsi*) goals for himself and the kingdom; and one

who has access (*mahram*) to God.[156] Put rather simply, Abu'l Fazl presents Akbar as the

insān-i kāmil (perfected person).

In traditional philosophic writings, *insān-i kāmil* represents the true personhood of

an individual, most often contrasted against the material form of the person; this is the

view held by Ibn Arabi, who draws and elaborates upon other Sufi ideas about the

perfected personhood vis-à-vis embodied materiality of the self.[157] Other uses of the term

traditionally include *the* perfected person—Muhammad. Still other connections between

insān-i kāmil and oft-cited Islamic sources include the link between the perfected person

and the First Intellect of Arabic/Islamic philosophy.[158] Further, in his noted work,

Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar's Reign, S. A. A. Rizvi notes

that Abu'l Fazl "supported the theory that Akbar was an *Insan-i Kamil*."[159] That Abu'l

Fazl chooses to use such a loaded, specific, religiously rooted term in describing Akbar

demonstrates not only his erudition but also the degree to which his personal feelings

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[156] Abu'l Fazl, *Akbarnāma*, ed. Agha Ahmad `Ali and `Abd al-Rahim, vol. 1 (Calcutta: 1877), 4-6.

[157] I am no expert on Ibn Arabi or his usage of *insān-i kāmil;* and both are, admittedly, tangential topics to this project. For further reference, see: John T. Little, "Al-Insan al-Kamil: the perfect man according to Ibn al-'Arabi." *Muslim World* 77.1 (1987): 43-54; Stephen Hirtenstein, "Ibn al-ʿArabī" *Encyclopedia of Religion,* ed. Lindsay Jones. Vol. 6. 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 4255-4260.

[158] One translator of the *Akbarnāma* makes this connection, as does Peter Hardy. See: Hardy in *Islam in India,* 117; and Henry Beveridge, trans., *The Akbar Nama of Abu'l Fazl, Vol 1* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1898), 15 (footnote 3).

[159] Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Religion and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar's Reign with special reference to Abu'l Fazl (1556-1605)* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1975) 190.

about Akbar and kingship generally come to imbue the whole of the *Akbarnāma* and its extended appendix, and subject of our serious attention below, the *Ā'īn-i Akbarī*.

Abu'l Fazl's strongly worded text stands to exemplify three things: first, the use of Islamic norms and notions within the courtly writings; second, the degree to which Abu'l Fazl's personal interpretation of these norms and notion come to affect the reading of Akbar; and third, the historical imaginary these uses suggest, maintain and create.

It is worth mentioning some basic features of the *Ā'īn-i Akbarī*. It is, first and foremost, an appendix to the *Akbarnāma*, and in this regard it is rather distinctive. To my knowledge, there are scant, if any, preceding examples of such a massive, lengthy, and very much tangential appendix in Indo-Persian or Persianate literature. The *Akbarnāma* itself is a narrative written in grandiloquent, bombastic prose, which becomes a stylistic form for authors who follow Abu'l Fazl. The *Akbarnāma* is a narrative account of the life, court, and thought of the Mughal emperor, though it varies from the other kingly accounts that precede Akbar, namely the *Baburnāma* (an autobiography composed in Turkish) and *Humayun Nāma* (which is pithy by comparison). These two works recount the courts of Babur (r. 1526 – 1530) and Humayun (r. 1530 – 1540, 1555 – 1556) respectively. The *Ā'īn-i Akbarī* is not written in such terms; rather, it is exceptionally descriptive, does not follow a narrative form, and reads as a compilation of factual data. In fact, many contemporary authors that cite the *Ā'īn-i Akbarī* are historians and social scientists who plumb the text for its data more so than its content.[160]

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[160] See for example the works of Indian economic historian Shireen Moosvi: *People, Taxation and Trade in Mughal India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008); *Episodes in the Life of Akbar: Contemporary Records and Reminiscences* (New Delhi: National Book Trust of India, 1994) [Hindi and Urdu]; *Economy of the Mughal Empire - A Statistical Study (*New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987).

The *Ā'īn-i Akbarī* is, in its contemporary form, divided into five sections. Abu'l

Fazl certainly considered the entirety of the work—the *Akbarnāma* and the *Ā'īn-i*

Akbarī—one cogent, fluid masterpiece. But, in its modern editions, translations, and

standardized prints in a variety of languages (including English, Persian, and Urdu), it has

been divided into volumes, books, and sections. For the sake of clarity, and to reflect not

the manuscripts, of which there are few, but the relatively recent publications from which

I am drawing my own readings, I will use the now-standard and widely available volume,

book, and section model.

The first section discusses the divine source of the Emperor's royalty, which

follows the form, function and style of the preceding *Akbarnāma* well. It also deals with

the management of the imperial household, the treasury, and the process of minting

money. The second section gives regulations for the *manṣabdārī* system or Empire's

military. The third discusses the Empire's civil administration, especially the local,

provincial, and central revenue systems. It is this section that has been used by many

economists and historians in understanding the financial workings of the Mughal Empire.

This important section also talks about the revenue programs according to various crops

and regions of North India; it is highly detailed, describing, in some places, the annual

expected harvests of different types of rice and the annual rice consumption of a family,

for example.[161] The fourth section—which is of particular interest to this project—gives

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[161] Elaborate charts accompany written analysis with reference to harvests. Abu'l Fazl, ed.
Blochmann, 334-345.

a geographic, religious and, if I might use the term, ethnographic description of Mughal India. Importantly, it is in this section that Abu'l Fazl treats Hindu philosophy and Hindu social organization at some length. Last, the fifth section contains various sayings of Akbar as collected by Abu'l Fazl; it is, in some ways, reminiscent of Sufi *malfuzat* or utterances of the master, perhaps further locating Abu'l Fazl within various Islamic and Islamicate literary traditions.

I will spend most of my analysis on the fourth and fifth sections. The fourth for somewhat obvious reasons: this is where Abu'l Fazl lists, interrogates, and evaluates Hindu and Indic norms of religion, philosophy, and praxis; this is where I believe he most readily demonstrates what we would recognize as an academic impetus to classify, categorize, and interpret religion and religions. J. Z. Smith's pairing of "religion" and "religions," stemming from larger Western genealogies of the term and discipline, is particularly useful here to indicate that Abu'l Fazl is *not* some modern author, interested in demonstrating the modes by which other actors identify their religions—instead he understands Islam as *the* religion, and acknowledges Hindu traditions within that framework.[162] This functions in a way that is analogous to the more theorized ways in which Christianity stands in for "the religion" and a diversity of traditions, "religions." It also reflects, therefore, the ways in which Abu'l Fazl imagines Islam vis-à-vis power structures (the Mughal Empire), "true religion" (Islam), and demographic realities (non-Muslim majority as subjects).

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[162] J. Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 182, 185-187.

I also focus on this fourth chapter because therein Abu'l Fazl demonstrates what I have been referring to as an historical imaginary: his lists, his interpretations, his assertions all speak to an idealized, perfected and *imagined* Mughal India under his beloved ruler, Akbar. This is most evident in the fifth section of the chapter, where Abu'l Fazl lists collections of Akbar's speeches and sayings. Herein, Abu'l Fazl creates the image from which an overwhelming majority of later conceptualizations of the Mughal Empire stem. He asserts the image of Akbar's idealism as real, and does so convincingly; that Akbar is remembered as modern, "tolerant," pluralist or even enlightened necessarily reflects the ways in which Abu'l Fazl posited him to his contemporaries, future Mughal courts, and British colonial and imperial agents. This affects not only scholarly opinions about the great emperor, but also popular remembrances and collective religious imaginaries. His story is depicted in film, literature, and even comic books,[163] but what is more important here are the ways in which his imagined legacy has become an emblem for governmental, educational, and historical projects.[164]

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[163] The classic Bollywood film about Akbar's reign and his son's love comes immediately to mind: *Mughal-e Azam,* directed by K. Asif, 1960. More recently, another Bollywood film featured Akbar's love story with his Hindu wife Jodhaabai: *Jodhaa Akbar*, directed by Ashutosh Gowariker, 2008. Other popular culture examples of Akbar include, but are not limited to: *Akbar the Great*, produced by Rajshri Kids, Parts I & II, 2010 (children's television cartoon); Amar Chitra Katha, *Akbar,* no. 200 [reprint no. 6030] (Bombay: India Book House Pvt. Ltd., 1979 [2000]) (comic book).

[164] As mentioned in a previous footnote, Indian, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani textbooks alike herald Akbar as one of the greatest Muslim rulers of all time—one who was able to unite multiple religions under religiously appropriate aims. Each contemporary nation-state stresses different aspects of Akbar's character to further its own agenda, of course, but the fact remains: Akbar's legacy is shaped to fit the needs of current historical imaginations of a (glorious) past.

The fourth section of the appendix is particularly fascinating, given our temporal location in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and the abovementioned dyad that surrounds understandings of the Mughals writ large and Akbar specifically. That is to reiterate that Mughals and Akbar are at once invading, conquering, spoiling marauders and also liberal, modern, forward-thinking just rulers. Abu'l Fazl's ethnography—to borrow a much later term—of Hindus, as well as his bent toward comparative study of religions reads in a way that appears modern. He is dedicated to accuracy, to fairness, to intellectual engagement; he even claims to teach himself Sanskrit in order to read primary source texts for himself! In other words, Abu'l Fazl sounds quite like an engaged student of religion rather than a courtly author, paid to demonstrate the Empire's glory, in this fourth section.

Abu'l Fazl introduces this section by asserting, presumably to other Muslim readers, "the author's purpose in writing this account is to show that the religion of Hindustan [i.e. Hinduism] has true and sublime conceptions of God."[165] Abu'l Fazl expresses his desires to talk about his "native land" and his commitment to facts rather than ignorant assumptions. After these brief remarks, he continues what can be called a preface by discussing quarrels between different religions in Hindustan.[166] Much like F. Max Müller nearly two hundred years later, Abu'l Fazl links religion, religious difference, and inter-religious tensions to differences in languages. He claims that his

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[165] Abu'l Fazl, *Akbarnāma*, ed. Agha Ahmad Ali and Abdur Rahim, Vol.11, Calcutta, 1873-87, Book IV, p. 1.

[166] I will retain Abu'l Fazl's terminology while I discuss his work, as "Hindustan" was his—and later—era's name for north India. Where this terminology becomes problematic or loses its descriptor, I will note it.

book, written in the language of the court and seemingly, therefore, a *lingua franca,*

attempts to reconcile perceived differences between religions that are only actually

misunderstandings.[167] In short, Abu'l Fazl here delineates three major issues: first, that

he views Hindus as rightful, reasonable devotees of God; second, that his writing is

erudite, learned, and descriptive; and last, that he believes his work, composed in the

language of empire, will make intelligible various positions of differing religions in a

lingua franca.

  After the introductory remarks, Abu'l Fazl discusses—again—the issues of crops,

harvests, natural features, and seasons. In this way, the larger thematics in the *Āin-i*

Akbarī are evident in the section preface as well; Abu'l Fazl's lengthy appendix often

centers on the intricate particularities of Hindustan and, importantly, its economic

bounties. This is, for our purposes here however, far less central than the succeeding

segments that directly address religion. Abu'l Fazl lists the issues of the caste system,

parsing the Brahmin traditions from those of lower castes—not unlike the theories and

methodologies employed today.[168] He talks at great length about Hindu cosmology,

utilizing Sanskrit philosophical and theological terms;[169] he demonstrates a true

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[167] Abu'l Fazl, Book IV, 4-6.

[168] See, for example, ideas about Sanskritization, the process by which Brahmanical practices—rooted in Sanskrit—come to affect the lower castes in works like: B. R. Ambedkar, *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development* (Indian Antiquary, Vol. XLI, May 1917); M. N. Srinivas, *Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952); Sheldon Pollack, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

[169] In the version of the text from which I am drawing, a compiled edited volume, these words appear transliterated in Persian rather than in Devanagari script. I have not seen or worked with a manuscript of the text, but from all of the commentaries, I believe that he transliterated these terms from the Devanagari to Perso-Arabic script; or, it is possible he utilized oral sources based on Sanskrit texts. In any event, the proper vowels (e.g. long ā or the use of *aleph* in the Perso-

familiarity with traditional Brahmin, Sanskrit sources including *Manusmṛti* or the *Laws of Manu*, as they are commonly known in English, the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, and astrological and yogic texts.[170]

In the next section, Abu'l Fazl describes the philosophical schools, careful to list nine schools, their founders, and their precepts. For example, he goes on at length about Patāñjala, the philosopher most well known today for his texts on yoga. Here again he utilizes key terms from Sanskrit, including *ātman* (soul or self)*, brahman* (transcendent reality)*,* and *karman* (action). While he is certainly not the first Muslim or the first Mughal courtly author to discuss Sanskritic terms, philosophies, or religious texts,[171] Abu'l Fazl's systematic approach to these sets him apart. Abu'l Fazl sets forth clear understandings of each philosopher's contribution, and summarizes each typically with two or three lines, normally stating whether or not this path could lead to liberation.[172] Interestingly, Abu'l Fazl devotes a section to Jaina thought, and it is within this section that he treats Buddhism; I cannot account for this ordering or categorization fully, but

Arabic script) indicate Abu'l Fazl's familiarity with Sanskrit. An example is *mahādeva,* the Sanskrit term that literally means "great God," which Abu'l Fazl takes to refer to the Supreme (*mutakabir*).

[170] Abu'l Fazl, Book IV, 15-28.

[171] Akbar started had a highly successful translation program of Sanskrit texts into Persian in the Mughal courts. His own grandson, Dara Shikoh, famously translated the *Bhagavadgita*. These translations, however, often were purposefully as true to the text as possible, without analytic commentaries. Abu'l Fazl does not offer translations of texts, but rather offers summaries of traditions while demonstrating a mastery of the texts those traditions value.

[172] Abu'l Fazl, Bibliotecha Indica, 89-96.

suggest that it relates to Abu'l Fazl's prioritization of the philosophical sciences,[173] a subject upon which both Jaina and Hindu philosophical systems expound.

This fourth section of the *Āin'i Akbarī* also includes a lengthy description of what we might call ritual foci and practice. Abu'l Fazl enumerates the ten *avatars* or incarnations of Vishnu; he lists rites of purification and those items that will make one's body impure; discusses proper dress; lists proper eating habits and prohibited foods; and writes about ceremonial rites.[174] He goes on in this manner, further listing holy pilgrimage locations and pilgrimage rituals like circumambulation; marriage rituals which included proper jewelry and adornments for both men and women; annual festivals per the seasonal year; and death ceremonies. All of these lengthy, detailed descriptions demonstrate two major issues: first, that Abu'l Fazl took seriously the rich textual, Sanskritic traditions of northern India; and second, that Abu'l Fazl was also interested in the ritual practices of Hindus, Jains, and, to a lesser extent, Buddhists. In so doing, Abu'l Fazl draws upon older understandings of the region,[175] and also maps as well as creates the religious landscape of Hindustan.

Although the *Āin'i Akbarī* departs from the *Akbarnāma* in terms of its prose style, and is most readily characterized by its descriptive language, Abu'l Fazl does not merely list various issues present in the Mughal Empire to no avail, with no direct purpose. As I mentioned earlier, it is only in recent editions of the text that we divide the work into volumes, books, sections, and subheadings. Abu'l Fazl, at various locations in the

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[173] Ibid*.,* 113-120.

[174] Ibid*.,* 138-164.

[175] Bruce B. Lawrence, *Shahrastānī on the Indian religions* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976).

appendix, draws upon the religious language he set forth in the main part of the text. He overtly implies that Akbar's standing as a guide (*rahnamuni*) and his role as *insān-i kāmil* (perfected person) may also affect those members of his empire who do not fall under the umbrella of Islam.[176] Namely, these groups include the renunciant traditions of South Asia, including Muslim Sufis and ascetics (*qalandars*) as well as sannyasis, yogis (*jogis*, in Persian), and others.[177] In this way, as per Islamic and Islamicate norms, Abu'l Fazl makes Akbar more than just the perfected person, as he construes Akbar as a *padshah*, a master of kings, a King of kings.[178] This is to say that Abu'l Fazl postulates Akbar as a symbol of religious significance as well as an invaluable emperor within purposefully Muslim schemas; furthermore, he also insinuates that Akbar's *religious* significance extends to *all* his subjects.

Abu'l Fazl's employment and deployment of religiously significant terms is key. He purposefully utilizes phrases, terms, and concepts in such a way that is both novel and established. One of the chief examples of this, as mentioned fleetingly above, is *sulh-i kull* or universal concord. As Akbar's chief courtly author and ideologue, Abu'l Fazl played an enormous role in shaping the official voice of the Mughal Empire in the late sixteenth century. *Sulh-i kull* stood to be one of the foremost ideas of this voice: universal reconciliation was the intellectual, cultural, and even commercial hallmark of

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[176] Abu'l Fazl, *Āin'i Akbarī* Vol I, 159.

[177] Ibid.*,* 160.

[178] Though tangential here, it is interesting to note that the Sanskrit term *kṣatrapati* (ruler of rulers) is nearly a direct translation of the term *padshah*, and traces its appearance in Sanskrit to the time of Akbar. See Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary: Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Cognate Indo-European languages*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1899.

the Mughal Empire, but the term and concept was not itself new. *Sulh-i kull* has long

reach within Islamicate and Persianate writings[179] Abu'l Fazl, however, pushes the idea

that universal concord, as a specific characteristic of Akbar's reign and of the Mughal

Empire writ large, signals a new, modern understanding of a classically Islamic, Persian,

even Turko-Mongol idea. Abu'l Fazl and the emperor he reflected and represented

therefore purposefully herald Mughal rule as novel—even *modernist* in the sense of

purposefully, meaningfully committed to *the new*—while drawing upon a rich,

multifaceted genealogy.[180]

　　Abu'l Fazl and Akbar were firmly invested ideologically in the dynamism of the

court. By drawing upon multiple facets of their rich backgrounds—Islamicate, Persian,

Turko-Mongol, Indic, and, via philosophical traditions, Greco-Hellenic—Abu'l Fazl

clearly believed such dynamism would both safeguard the empire and demonstrate its

superiority. *Sulh-i kull* particularly demonstrates this imperial predilection. The way that

Abu'l Fazl uses this term marks a purposeful shifting of a classic idea to one of

immediate imperial and cultural import. Akbar's court is often noted for its idealism,

with good reason; Abu'l Fazl pushed an agenda of ideals throughout the *Āin'i Akbarī* and

the larger corpus of the *Akbarnāma*. Along these lines, *sulh-i kull* or universal concord

was used to demonstrate and normalize an atmosphere of religious tolerance, a valuation

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[179] S. A. A. Rizvi compares Abu'l Fazl's concept with an analogous idea of the *imam* in the noteworthy medieval author Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī (d. 1274) famous work, *Akhlaq-i Nāsiri*. Rizvi, 358. See also: Naṣīr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Ṭūsī, *Matn-i kāmil-i Akhlāqi-Nāsiri*, ed. Ibrāhīm Vaḥīd Dāmghānī (Tehran: Muʾassasah-i Maṭbūʿātī-i Farāhātī, 1965).

[180] Rajeev Kinra, "Make it fresh: time, tradition and Indo-Persian literary modernity," in *Time, History and the Religious Imaginary in South Asia*, ed. Anne Murphy (New York: Routledge Press, 2011), 12.

of scholarly endeavor about religion or religions, a set of rationalistic policies about the bureaucracy, and a sense of imperial or regional pride stemming from toleration for the cultural diversity of South Asia itself. Abu'l Fazl reinterprets the term to indicate the preferred, valued, and notable structure of Mughal governance broadly and under Akbar specifically.

Abu'l Fazl writes extensively on rulers and rulership within the larger *Akbarnāma* and the appendix *Āin'i Akbarī.* He very clearly understands kingships and kingdoms within Islamic frameworks; his emperor, Akbar, and those that follow should, by his account, personify lofty ideals: they should be honorable, just, pious, and paternalistic. More importantly here, however, are the ways in which Abu'l Fazl understands the role of the ruler as unequivocally linked to the ideation of the empire. In the case of the Mughals, this entails leading from the position of a demographic minority, as Muslims never came to outnumber Hindus in the subcontinent. The Mughals, like the Delhi Sultanates before them, are in many ways distinctive among Muslim empires: they have to navigate their authority in terms of minority issues. Along these lines, Abu'l Fazl is, throughout the texts in question, firmly absorbed within rhetoric of tolerance, cultural diversity, and just ruling over non-Muslims. He writes that it is the function of the king to "induct universal concord (*sulh-i kull*) and if he does not regard all classes of men and all sects of religion favorably, he will not be fit for the exalted position."[181] Therefore, as one scholar notes, "it is [the king's] function to ensure that religious differences among

[181] Abu'l Fazl, *Akbarnāma*, ed. Agha Ahmad Ali and Abdur Rahim, Vol.11, Calcutta, 1873-87, p.285.

people do not lead to mutual antipathy."[182] Further, it can be inferred that Abu'l Fazl

argues for an emperor that is absolutely powerful *not* in the terms of one religion but

because he is, quite simply, sovereign—that he rules indicates that his rule is absolute.[183]

Most scholars of Akbar tend to cite—and to my eyes, over-cite—the famed and

failed *dīn-i-ilahi* or Divine Religion. This was Akbar's experiment in syncretic

philosophically-spirited religion: the *dīn-i-ilahi* was an ethical system that drew upon

mainline Sunni Islam as well as Sufi precepts, Hindu traditions, Buddhist traditions, Jaina

traditions, and, though to an admittedly lesser extent, Jesuit understandings of

Catholicism. Akbar supposedly wanted this system to become popular, but there is scant

evidence that anyone actually participated within *dīn-i-ilahi* outside his closest advisors.

Much ado has been made about the ways in which we remember Akbar as religiously

tolerant or even pluralistic vis-à-vis this ethical system; and equal ado has been made to

explain the historic insignificance of this very system. What has escaped many scholastic

explications of Akbar and his court is Abu'l Fazl's insistence upon *sulh-i kull* (universal

concord).

I argue that this concept is demonstrative of the type of reality Abu'l Fazl hoped

to portray; therefore, it reflects a major historical imaginary, wherein Abu'l Fazl draws

upon particular histories and genealogies to create a new interpretation that claims a long

history. Further, this imaginary—wherein Akbar is progressive, and the Mughal period is

characterized by a stress on widespread harmony—is concretely shaped not, I contend, by

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[182] Iqtidar Alam Khan, "Tracing Sources of Principles of Mughal Governance: A Critique of Recent Historiography," *Social Scientist* , Vol. 37, No. 5/6 (May-June 2009), 45.

[183] Irfan Habib, *Medieval India: The Study of a Civilization* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2007), 186.

the ill-fated *dīn-i-ilahi* but rather within Abu'l Fazl's *Āin'i Akbarī*. It is religiously

located within a long Persianate tradition, but interpreted through the dual lenses of Abu'l

Fazl's religiosity alongside a South Asian religious milieu. For Abu'l Fazl, this is of

paramount importance: as I mentioned above, Akbar's very legitimacy relies upon the

fact that he is dedicated to *sulh-i kull*; his legitimacy is necessarily Indic as well as

Islamic.

We see particular references to Islamic ideas and concepts outside of *sulh-i kull*.

The idea of religion or *dīn* is important within Abu'l Fazl's *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, as well. *Dīn* as

an understanding of religion will be a central theme for Mathurānāth, to whom we will

return in the next chapter. Here, however, Abu'l Fazl's use and understanding of *dīn* is

relevant—and in the next chapter, we will investigate how his use relates to that of

Mathurānāth. As discussed above, Abu'l Fazl devotes a majority of the fourth section of

the *Ā'in-i Akbarī* to the religions of Hindustan. Herein, he often uses the word "*dīn*" to

mean "religion," but, as will be more fully discussed in the next chapter, it is also evident

that he uses the term to refer to multiple religions as well.[184] He very clearly understands

Hindu traditions as essential not only to the empire but also to the process of salvation or

liberation; he uses terminologies that reflect Sufi cosmologies, and that purposefully find

meaning and value within certain Hindu practices, like yoga.[185]

Abu'l Fazl writes with empire in mind. In fact, it should go without saying that

the *Akbarnāma* in its entirety is a document of empire, perhaps even of state: it was

commissioned by the emperor; penned by his leading court author; documented the life

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[184] Abu'l Fazl, *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, 4, 8-10, 34.

[185] Ibid., 291-302.

of the ruler and the history of the empire; and, in the appendix *Āʾin-i Akbarī,* delineated

demographics of the empire. Some scholars have suggested that many of Abuʾl Fazl's

assertions are inaccurate, that they are far too bombastic to be taken as anything but

hyperbolic; they are necessarily strongly worded accounts in order to glorify his perfected

person (*insān-i kamīl*) Akbar and his universally peaceful (*sulh-i kull*) empire. To return

to the language I used above, these scholars would argue that much of Abuʾl Fazl's

articulations are, in fact, not *actual*. However, as we will see in the following section,

much of Abuʾl Fazl's assertions about religion and religions, about Akbar's religiously

imbued reign, and about the sovereignty of a tolerant empire become *actualized* in later

reads of the empire, especially from the perspective of some Orientalists.

Āʾīn-i Akbarī *& its Afterlife: Lasting Legacies of Abuʾl Fazl's Text*

Akbar, his rule, and his persona hold a special place in the imaginary of South

Asia widely and Mughal rule particularly. One commentator, Richard Garbe, wrote:

> At the first glance it looks as if the Emperor Akbar had
> developed his entire character from himself and by his own
> efforts in total independence of all influences which in
> other cases are thought to determine the character and
> nature of a man. A Mohammedan, a Mongol, a descendant
> of the monster Timur, the son of a weak incapable father,
> born in exile, called when but a lad to the government of a
> disintegrated and almost annihilated realm in the India of
> the sixteenth century,—which means in an age of perfidy,
> treachery, avarice, and self seeking,—Akbar appears before
> us as a noble man, susceptible to all grand and beautiful
> impressions, conscientious, unprejudiced, and energetic,
> who knew how to bring peace and order out of the
> confusion of the times, who through out his reign desired

the furtherance of his subjects' and not of his own interest, who while increasing the privileges of the Mohammedans, not only also declared equality of rights for the Hindus but even actualized that equality, who in every conceivable way sought to conciliate his subjects so widely at variance with each other in race, customs, and religion, and who finally when the narrow dogmas of his religion no longer satisfied him, attained to a purified faith in God, which was independent of all formulated religions.[186]

For Garbe, a German Orientalist,[187] Akbar fulfills a romantic visage of the modern, erudite man who, by only his own gifted, special, and noble characteristics, could lead as a shining light in the premodern period.

Garbe sees Akbar as one who *actualized* the equality across his empire, defeated the "narrow dogmas" of Islam, and perfected his faith independently—that is, apart from and without reference to other dogmatic religions. Garbe here, one must deduce, references Akbar's ethical system, the Divine Faith or *dīn-i-ilahi*. As I mentioned in the previous section, this was, historically, an absolute flop: some have argued that no more than six people proclaimed their adherence to the system.[188] In any case, however, Akbar never disavowed Islam, and was by many accounts a fairly devoted man; certainly, as we just saw, Abu'l Fazl considered him perfected in his faith.[189] Garbe's idealization of Akbar certainly denotes an imaginary that deems Islam backward, incompatible with

[186] Richard Garbe, "Akbar, Emperor of India: A Picture of Life and Customs from the Sixteenth Century," *The Monist*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (April, 1909), pp. 164-165. Accessed September 7, 2011. Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/27900171?origin=JSTOR-pdf.

[187] Kaushik Bagchi, "An Orientalist in the Orient: Richard Garbe's Indian Journey, 1885-1886, *Journal of World History* Vol. 14, No. 3 (Sep., 2003), pp. 281-325.

[188] Iqtidar Alam Khan, "The Nobility under Akbar and the Development of His Religious Policy, 1560-80," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 1/2 (Apr., 1968), 31.

[189] K. A. Nizami, *Akbar & Religion* (Delhi: Idarah-i-Adabiyat-i-Delli, 1989), 209-212.

civilization or civility. This imaginary deems freethinking, deistic religion pure, and equality paramount. In other words, Garbe's Akbar epitomizes a modern liberal paradigm in which the enlightened ruler breaks the shackles of oppressive religion (or perhaps *the* oppressive religion, Islam) to embrace egalitarian, just principles.

The West knows Akbar largely due to Abu'l Fazl's courtly writings, and it is this body of literature that helped Akbar grab the imagination of many Orientalist authors and scholars. As part of the processes of colonialism, Orientalism, and imperialism, many Mughal-era documents and manuscripts became the focus of British, French, and German inquiry; the well-detailed records of the Mughal courts held a particular interest to many early researchers of a variety of national origins as well as British East India Company officials. It should be no surprise, then, that Abu'l Fazl's widely known and very lengthy *Akbarnāma* held special attention. The *Ā'in-i Akbarī,* in its descriptive, statistical, nearly ethnographic form, has figured heavily in Orientalist scholarship: Abu'l Fazl may have written bombastically in the main text of the work, but his true utility to later generations is in the appendix and is, no doubt, his heavy-handed data collection—a modern and imperial fixation. Therefore, many authors and translators, like Garbe,[190] believed that Abu'l Fazl personally stood out as a scholar and as a documenter—unlike other, lesser volumes written by other, lesser authors (and, notably, for other, lesser kings).

Much of Orientalist scholarship dismisses indigenous forms of knowledge in favor of its own, presumably external and objective, understandings of the given area, language, culture, religion, and so forth. Richard King, on the topic of mysticism, points

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[190] Garbe, "Akbar, Emperor of India,"183.

out that this relationship deals with the public, external, rational, male sets of knowledge whereas private, internal, irrational/emotional and female sets of knowledge cannot be trusted; this latter set of characteristics most often describe the Orient.[191] While there is some recognition of the multiple types of Orientalists and Orientalisms—namely, those who are *phobic* and those who are *philic*—the issues of objectivity reign supreme.[192] Muslims, Hindus, and other dominated groups were routinely held suspicious interlocutors and rarely trusted to fully understand their own tradition, and it is without question that British, German, and French scholars considered South Asian self-authored histories dubious. Many scholars from the Persian or Indo-Persian literary traditions wrote in the style of praise, where long, flowery tributes to patrons were preceded by praises to God, Muhammad and other luminous figures (both Muslim and non-Muslim). These purportedly irrational, subjective writings were discredited outright. Abu'l Fazl was different according to some, however.

For example, Blochmann, a well-known translator, stated that the *Āīn'i Akbarī* is indispensable to understanding the Muslim Mughal Empire, claiming that "it is not merely the varied information of the A'in that renders the book so valuable, but also the

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[191] Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial theory, India, and the 'Mystic East'* (New York: Routledge Press, 1999), 16.

[192] Many point out that critiques of Orientalism wage war on negative imaginings of the Orient, Muslims, Hindus, and South Asia (as is pertinent here) but these negative assertions were not the intent of the author. In fact, many who participate in Orientalism—that is, the production of knowing the East—purport great affinity for their subject, even going as far as to deem it better than the West. For these discussions, see: Tomoko Masuzawa, "Our Master's Voice: F. Max Müller after A Hundred Years of Solitude," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, Volume 15, Number 4, 2003 , pp. 305-328; Will Sweetman, "Colonial All the Way Down? Religion and the secular in early modern writing on South India," in *Religion and the Secular*, ed. Timothy Fitzgerald (London: Equinox Publishing, 2007), 117-134.

trustworthiness of the author himself," citing Abu'l Fazl's highest position in the empire and his relationship to Akbar.[193] He continues:

> [Abu'l Fazl's] love of truth and his correctness of
> information are apparent on every page of the book, which
> he wished to leave to future ages as a memorial of the Great
> Emperor [Akbar] and as a guide for inquiring minds; and
> his wishes for the stability of the throne and the welfare of
> the people, his principles of toleration, his noble sentiments
> on the rights of man, the total absence of personal
> grievances and of expressions of ill-will towards
> encompassing enemies, show that the expanse of his large
> heart stretched to the clear offing of sterling wisdom.[194]

Surely the nineteenth century prose of our translator reads as hyperbolic to us as the Indo-Persian style must have seemed to him; however, what is evident in this introduction is that Abu'l Fazl was considered to be a scholar of the utmost integrity and values—an extraordinary and unexpected combination. I believe that this attitude toward Abu'l Fazl helped place Akbar's court front and center within Orientalist scholarship and helped construct an historical imaginary of South Asia for European Orientalist scholars.

Of course, the underlying British interest in Mughal rule—especially that of the famed Akbar—speaks to their primary role as an empire. Before British scholars studied India, Sanskrit, Hindu traditions, and other South Asian languages and traditions for the sake of studying them, the British Empire hired scholars—and in some cases turned East India Company employees into scholars—for the express purposes of rule. The Mughals were an empire with all of the machinery of empire: taxes and efficient tax collection; standing armies; imperial, militaristic expansion; official languages of court; courtly

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[193] Blochmann, introduction, trans., *Ā'īn-i Akbarī of Abul Fazl-i-`Allami*, vii.

[194] Ibid., vii-viii.

interest in and sponsorship of arts, literature, and scholarly pursuits; and grandiose

wealth, with formidable imprints of capital dotted throughout the kingdom. To inherit or

conquer such an empire meant to inherit such systems. The British, as they had done

elsewhere, aimed to exploit the extant infrastructure for their individual colonizers, the

colonizing project writ large, and imperial officials ranging from Company workers to

the Queen herself.

As a part of the process of learning about the infrastructures of Mughal Empire,

Akbar and Abu'l Fazl's detailed *Ā'in-i Akbarī* must have figured prominently. The value

placed upon Akbar's rule and his courtly scribe's description thereof is explained nicely

here:

> In the A'in, therefore, we have a picture of Akbar's
> government in its several departments, and of its relations
> to the different ranks and mixed races of his subjects.
> Whilst in most Muhammadan histories we hear of the
> endless turmoil of war and dynastical changes, and are only
> reminded of the existence of a people when authors make a
> passing allusion to famines and similar calamities, we have
> in the A'in the governed classes brought to the foreground:
> men live and move before us, and the great questions of the
> time, axioms then believed in, and principles then followed,
> phantoms then chased after, ideas then prevailing, and
> successes then obtained, are placed before our eyes in
> truthful, and therefore vivid, colours.[195]

Blochmann contends that Abu'l Fazl has accomplished two primary items: first, he has

provided an accurate depiction of the empire; and, second, he has done so in a manner

that manages to divulge the character of the people who lived in that time. In other

words, he has accomplished a history that imagines subjects as part of that history—that

is to say, he has taken a humanistic approach. We should be careful to understand that

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[195] Blochmann, vi.

humanism, as an ideology, is not something that would have existed in South Asia in the late sixteenth century; it was a relatively new movement in Europe at the same time. More prominently, one of the primary similarities we see in Orientalist work and in colonial or imperial writings is the idea that "natives"—past or present, and likely future as well—would be incapable of such high-order, progressive, and modern conceptions. I contend that Akbar's court and his scribe, Abu'l Fazl, are interpreted by Blochmann and other Orientalists as distinct and valuable precisely because they *do not* appear premodern, savage, or, frankly and most importantly, Muslim.

Blochmann views Abu'l Fazl as wholly different from his Muslim, South Asian context(s). Abu'l Fazl, despite some Persian qualities in his writing, has managed to escape his own culture and therefore can be a trustworthy interlocutor, a viable historian, and one who provides dependable accounts of Akbar and the Mughals. Abu'l Fazl plays into the Orientalist imaginary by way of negative definition: he is precisely *not* like his counterparts; he is the exception that proves the rule. Blochmann, Garbe, and their contemporaries do not claim that because Abu'l Fazl is a gifted, honest historian of a truly notable king that their opinions about Muslims, Mughals and Indians must be mistaken. Rather, they bolster Abu'l Fazl's accomplishments as evidence that he and his king, Akbar, must necessarily be strange aberrations. Accomplishments aside, Abu'l Fazl stands to reify an Orientalist historical imaginary that posits rationality, positivism, and egalitarianism as modern, European constructs precisely because he appears so very different.

Orientalist opinions about Abu'l Fazl may seem an unwarranted divergence from our present study. They are not. As the British move from collecting data, translating

texts, and buying and planting tea to full, expansive, imperial rule of India, the very

historical imagination of the Mughals come to bear on their policies, procedures, and

systems. The colonial and imperial ramifications of understanding the Mughal Empire

have been the subject of some scholarly debates, many of which focus on the distinction

between European modes of history and those of their various subjects. Relevant to my

purposes here are those case studies which think critically about the mechanisms of

history and historicity within South Asian or Islamic locations. One author writes that

> Historical learning and reflection as a necessary step
> towards aristocratic respectability was widely pursued in
> medieval India, where divergent ideas of human nature and
> divine ordinance had come together in the making of an
> Indo-Persianate polity and culture initiated during the
> period of the Sultanate and later exemplified by the Mughal
> regime in India which lasted for well over three hundred
> years.[196]

I take seriously the fact that Abu'l Fazl considers history and historicity his primary

concerns; he may mediate these objectives within language that suits his early modern

period—like using Islamic ideas to support his claims about kingship—but overall his is

a work concerned with authenticity, import, and the future. Therefore, I find it to be of

little surprise that his work, and especially his data-filled appendix, remains vitally

interesting to modern and contemporary scholars. In fact, it is fundamentally important

that his goals and his emperor are taken on and recognized by European scholars, even if

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[196] Sudipta Sen, "Imperial Orders of the Past: The Semantics of History and Time in the Medieval Indo-Persianate Culture of North India," in *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia,* ed. Daud Ali (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 232.

their understandings of time, history, and empire were themselves different in meaningful and irreconcilable ways.[197]

Within the famous 1919 *The Oxford History of India,* Vincent Smith demonstrates the sort of Orientalist imaginary I had mentioned above. That is, he articulates a teleological history of India, wherein the "natural" India was represented by a Hindu-dominated past; this natural condition was violently changed when the subcontinent was usurped by foreign Muslims; and, finally, British imperial conquests serve to both liberate Hindus from Muslim clutches as well as bring true civility to the subcontinent. This is, of course, part and parcel of the wider Orientalist, colonialist, and imperialist models that govern the modern, post-Enlightenment age of empires, and cannot be said to have all its roots within Indic or Islamicate writings. That said, there is ample room for connections to be made by the exceptional Akbar; if he is consistently exonerated from his genealogy and honored for his forward-mindedness within an otherwise perilously harsh, Eurocentric teleology, it is fruitful to explore how and why he is seen as incomparable.

Vincent Smith's work supposedly takes the reader from "prehistory" in the ancient past all the way until 1911, approximately a half-century after the British

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[197] Without reducing long-standing debates to a mere footnote, it is necessary to mention a historiographical debate that has been best summarized, in my opinion, by Philip Wagoner: he claims that some argue for South Asians to have had a hand in forming the colonial state, while others—namely, post-colonialists—tend to see British or European actors as uniquely and utterly responsible for state formation. See: Philip Wagoner, "Precolonial Intellectuals and the Production of Colonial Knowledge," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, 4 (2003); 783-814. Of course, the role of colonialists and colonialisms is related to the subject at hand, but it remains tangential. What is important in this context is that there was ample intellectual space for later Mughals, British, and even contemporary scholars to create imaginaries wherein Abu'l Fazl and Akbar are necessarily participating in crafting history.

formally came to rule India. He mentions Akbar in a free-standing lengthy chapter under the heading "The Mughul Empire." Akbar is the first king in any period or region covered within the *Oxford History of India* to receive his own treatment; only four Mughal kings of all the other kings and dynasties—including that of Queen Victoria—are given their own sections and treatment in this manner.[198] Noticeably, Akbar's section is the longest given to any king, and within it, Smith first outlines the basics of his coming into power; this is told in fairly distant language, where the boundaries of the empire's territory and his coming to the throne are recounted plainly. But then the tone shifts. Smith describes Akbar *personally*, citing Akbar's ambitions,[199] religious predilections,[200] and relationships to his sons, courtiers, and, interestingly, the Jesuits of his court.[201] When mentioning these personal details, he makes frequent reference to "his [Akbar's] biographer," who is, of course, Abu'l Fazl.[202] What is most fascinating about Smith's account is that he includes a section for Akbar entitled "Akbar's personal qualities."[203] Herein, he seems to extemporize on Akbar's character in way that is unseen elsewhere. He writes:

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[198] Predictably, these four are the so-called "Great Mughals": Akbar, Jahangir, Shahjahan, and Aurangzeb. It has been suggested that Smith's work served to formalize this periodization of the Mughal Empire.

[199] Vincent Smith, *The Oxford History of India* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1919; reprint, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 340-342.

[200] Ibid., 342, 346-347, 348-351.

[201] Ibid., 347.

[202] Ibid., 346.

[203] Ibid., 356-358.

> [h]e honestly desired to do justice, and did it to the best of
> his ability in the stern fashion of his times, taking
> precautions against the too hasty execution of his
> sentences. … Intellectually, he was a man of boundless
> curiosity, and endowed with extraordinary versatility of
> mind.[204]

Smith's otherwise descriptive, distant tone seems in these examples to have been betrayed by an affinity for the man.

Moreover, Abu'l Fazl's conceptions of *sulh-i kull* (universal concord) figure within Smith's tome. He explains the concept to the reader, and then, once again, extemporizes in a way unmatched elsewhere in the lengthy work. He writes:

> The avowed principle of both Abu-l Fazl and Akbar was
> universal toleration (*sulh-i kull)*. During the latter half of
> the reign that principle was fully applied in favour of
> Hindus, Christians, Jains and Parsis, who enjoyed full
> liberty both of conscience and of public worship.[205]

Smith seems to write here with more emphasis and vigor than elsewhere. What is most interesting, however, is that in order to cast Akbar as especially intelligent, just, and forward-thinking, he strips Akbar of his religion. According to Smith, Akbar "was never thoroughly orthodox,"[206] and had an affinity for Sufism—which, importantly, does *not* fall within the broader religious category of Islam. It is, instead, a mystic tradition and that alone; Akbar's status as a "mystic for all his life" who even "saw visions which

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[204] Ibid*.,* 356.

[205] Ibid*.,* 358.

[206] Ibid*.,* 357.

seemed to bring him into direct communion with the Unknown God" are not evaluated in terms of Islam, but are left simply as monotheistic, mystic affinities.[207]

The outright refusal or tacit elision of Sufi traditions as Islamic traditions is, of course, not limited to Smith. Many have made and some still maintain this claim. However, Smith, because he cites Abu'l Fazl throughout his work, must contend with Abu'l Fazl's assertions of Akbar's religion; in other words, he actively and purposefully construes Abu'l Fazl, too, as *not* Muslim but rather *only* Sufi. In this way, Smith stands to demonstrate the ways in which Abu'l Fazl's portrayal of Akbar lends credence to a British historical imaginary wherein Akbar's appearance as *modern* or *enlightened* demands his status as a Muslim be rethought. Smith very nicely demonstrates in *The Oxford History of India* as well as in his other major work *Akbar, the Great Mogul, 1542–1605* that he sees Akbar as *from* his many contexts—Muslim, Mughal, Indic, Persian—but not really *of* them.

Smith implicitly, if tacitly, suggests that Akbar has qualities of a modern author or reader when he writes that Akbar had "a special taste for endless debates on the merits of rival religions, which he examined from a strangely detached point of view."[208] Smith here accomplishes two things: first, he demonstrates that Akbar's detachment from the often-ferocious debates between religious "rivals" suggests Akbar is not a member of *any* of these sects; and second, Akbar's ability to maintain distance is "strange" precisely because any objectivism in light of his social, political, and cultural locations is unfathomable.

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[207] Ibid.

[208] Ibid.

Orientalists like Smith may utilize Abu'l Fazl and Akbar to their own devices, but it is clear that these two figures factor heavily within the British meaning-making about India. As Garbe noted, Akbar was truly distinctive: there were none other like him, he was unequivocally masterful as a leader who overcame his own obstacles—notably, his dual Muslim and Mongol lineages—to succeed in leading a progressive blip within India's history. For Blochmann, our knowledge about Akbar, who was supposedly illiterate, itself relies on the steady, trustworthy voice of Abu'l Fazl; while Blochmann, as a translator of Abu'l Fazl's primary works, has obvious personal stakes in this debate, it is nevertheless the case that he repeatedly defends and champions the courtly author. Abu'l Fazl's writings are the way by which later generations come to know Akbar at all—be they Muslim, Hindu, Mughal, Indian, Pakistani, British, American, or anyone else, for that matter. He is not the only biographer of the emperor; `Abd-ul-Qadir Bada'uni was not only an infamous rival of Abu'l Fazl, but an equally infamous critic of Abu'l Fazl's beloved emperor Akbar. It is Abu'l Fazl's text, however, that gains political and imperial cache to the extent that it is the major source—and in some cases, like that of Smith, the only source—that an author cites. The *Ā'in-i Akbarī* and the longer *Akbarnāma* are invaluable parts of a British, Orientalist imaginary of South Asia; this imaginary guided their rule of India, their rationalizations for rule, and even claims that they were to restore the just, egalitarian era of Akbar to the subcontinent.

Conclusion

Abu'l Fazl's work—informed by Islamic philosophy, Sufism, and other Mughal courtly documents[209]—has great influence on other Indic and Indo-Persian writings. In other words, Abu'l Fazl was not merely paramount to European scholars, but rather his work helped shape the very image of the Mughal Empire from the inside out.

For one, Abu'l Fazl's *Akbarnāma*, while part of a tradition of books about kings and kingly rule, shaped those that followed: the *Jahangirnāmā* (or *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri)*, an autobiography rather than an account, made certain to list in great detail the inner workings of the state apparatus, something was previously only done within the account of Akbar's life and times.[210] The *Akbarnāma* itself has a long tradition in India and South Asia: it has been translated from Persian into English, of course, but also Hindi, Urdu, and, in one abridged version, Sanskrit.[211] Moreover, the work accomplished by Abu'l Fazl within the whole of the *Akbarnāma* and within the appendix *Ā'in-i Akbarī* sets the stage for future, similar works that document religions, religious groups, and religious names. In the next chapter, we will explore one such text. For the purposes of this chapter, it has been important to underscore that the ways in which Abu'l Fazl shaped the very ability for Akbar to be remembered is what, I have argued, makes this text both distinctive fascinating for indigenous histories as well as those of Europeans.

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[209] The *Akbarnāma* is, of course, within the genre of literature documenting the king's life, rule, and influences. Before Akbar, the *Baburnāmā* and *Humayun-nāmā* depicted the rule of the first and second Mughal kings, Babur and Humayun.

[210] *The Jahangirnama: Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*, tr. Wheeler M. Thackston. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[211] *Sarvadeśavṛttāntasaṅgrahaḥ or Akbarnāma : being an abridged Sanskrit rendering of the Persian Akbarnāma,* eds. and trans. Jha Subhadra and Maheśa Ṭhakkura (Patna: Patna University Publications, 1962).

As mentioned above, Abu'l Fazl's *Akbarnāma* in its entirety affected not only the courtly documents that followed but also the ways in which Akbar's court and even the Mughal Empire came to be imagined. Abu'l Fazl utilized key ideas from Islamic, Indic, Persianate, and even Turko-Mongol and Greco-Hellenic sources in such a way that firmly rooted the Mughal Empire and its emperors within antique, celebrated lineages; simultaneously, though, he shaped these ideas to purposefully accentuate Mughal ideals. One such example was *sulh-i kull* or universal concord, a guiding ideal of Abu'l Fazl and Akbar, and one that still informs the ways in which historians and average folks alike look upon his reign. Akbar is, of course, remembered as just, tolerant, pluralist, syncretically minded, and even modern. Many of these assertions cite the openness it required to have enacted policies rooted in achieving "universal reconciliation" between the myriad religions, traditions, and sects present in South Asia. Abu'l Fazl imagined the Mughal Empire—and that of Akbar specifically—in terms of *sulh-i kull*, which was in and of itself a novel concept to apply to an entire reign. In so doing, he fundamentally altered the ways in which we are able to recount the *actual* history of Akbar.

Orientalists were quick to label Akbar's reign as one of the most important in all South Asian history. As evidenced by Smith's decoupling the era and military pursuits from the king; when he describes Akbar in the famous *Oxford History of India,* Akbar gets the longest, most thorough treatment, and is the first king of any era to be listed on his own. Importantly, Smith cites Abu'l Fazl repeatedly in the body of the text, and even lists his work first in his closing paragraph, subtitled "Authorities."[212] Further, Smith himself writes another full-length volume on Akbar, and therein again sings his praises;

[212] Smith, *Oxford History of India*, 362.

however, as mentioned previously, he noticeably and purposefully strips Akbar of his Muslim identity in order to explain his seeming progressiveness.[213]

The recollections of Akbar—the histories, legends, and pop culture references— all speak to an historical imaginary crafted and envisioned in large part by Akbar's biographer, Abu'l Fazl. Even if Akbar's commitment to pluralist, open, just ideals is overstated, the historicity of such claims has, in many ways, become irrelevant: the ways in which Akbar is remembered, recalled, and, indeed, *imagined* all come to shape later ideas about what South Asia was, is, and should be.

In the next chapter, I will more fully discuss Mathurānāth, the Brahmin *pandita* presented in the introduction, and his proto-ethnographic work *Riyāz al-maẕāhib* or *Garden of Religions.* As one who wrote for both the Mughal and British Empires, and as one describing the multitude of religions present in Varanasi, India, he will provide a case study of depictions of plurality rooted within Islamicate and Persianate terminologies. His work articulates not only a description of Varanasi in the early nineteenth century, when the city was in flux between Mughal elites and British colonial regents, but also its own distinct imaginary. Like Abu'l Fazl and others before him, Mathurānāth envisions India as a place of religion and religions—universal ethics and aesthetics overlaying particularities of praxis stated in an inimitably Indic, Islamicate, Persianate vernacular.

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[213] Vincent A. Smith, *Akbar the Great Mogul, 1542-1605* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1917), 40-65.

CHAPTER 3: THE GARDEN OF RELIGIONS: *DĪN*, UNIVERSALITY, AND PARTICULARITY

The introduction to this work began by highlighting 1813 as a pivotal year. It was a year that held significance because, in it, a work entitled *Riyāz al-maẓāhib* or *Garden of Religions* was produced. On its face, this may not seem all that significant: *Garden of Religions* is not—nor ever was, seemingly—some temporal and cultural equivalent of a *New York Times* bestseller. It was rather a work that I both interpret and present here as paradigmatic: sponsored by the British, solicited by an East India Company officer, written in Persian with Sanskrit marginalia by a Brahmin who had previously been employed by the Mughal court, *Garden of Religions* materially demonstrates the fluid, permeable, and reflexive nature of north Indian boundaries in the nineteenth century.

The question of boundaries is central to this chapter and, indeed, this work—and it is a major reason that 1813 can symbolically represent the nineteenth century politics of power, identity, and history. In the early nineteenth century, the Mughal Empire had waned from its geographic and economic prowess of previous centuries; its once-centralized imperial structure had become more disparate, more distant; and its peripheral fiefdoms increasingly acted as individual, lone actors, quite apart from the Mughal reign. At the same time, colonial actors—mostly British, though French and Dutch were active as well—bought, administered, and inhabited more land; they set up stronger, more centralized executive offices; and they capitalized upon the seeming decline of Mughal power. 1813, as a pivotal year, is our backdrop; it highlights, foregrounds, and underscores the questions of imperial as well as religious belonging.

1813 is pivotal not merely because it is the year in which Mathurānāth, *Garden of Religion*'s author, finished the text. It is also the year in which the British Parliament passed the Charter Act. This Act ended the East India Company's legitimate, legal monopoly over trade in India, and is widely understood as "a significant event in the emergence of British commitment to free trade."[214] It is also a moment where global history helps us process the opening of trade routes: weary and financially strapped from war in the New World—what we Americans call the War of 1812—Britain's concern was to create new markets in its foreign lands, rather than merely understand foreign territories as locations for the harvesting of raw materials, including labor.[215] In other words, 1813 is both the year in which an East India Company official commissioned a manuscript on the religions of Benares as well as the year in which the East India Company formally loses its monopolization rights; the Company and its primary strongholds—including Benares—were in flux, and reflect with British global economic, military, and governmental concerns.

1813 was not merely a year of far-reaching changes in British policies and financial self-understanding. It was also a year in which Mughal kings and kingship were still reeling from the dynastic battles, divisions of property and landholdings, and the financial and physical encroachment of the British. What had just a century—even a half-century, depending on the historian[216]—before been a very centralized authority

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[214] Anthony Webster, "The Political Economy of Trade Liberalization: The East India Company Charter Act of 1813," *The Economic History Review,* Volume 43, Issue 3, August 1990, p. 404.

[215] Ibid., 405.

[216] Scholars debate both the rise and fall model of history, as well as when the Mughal Empire's influence, reign, and culture began to wane. Most historians acknowledge the Battle of Plassey in

structure was now decentralized, disenfranchised, and in some places authoritative in title and symbol only. After Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707, d. 1707), the vast majority of successors to the throne failed to hold power for much longer than a decade, with the notable exception of Muhammad Shah (r. 1720-1748). The eighteenth century saw many contestations over power, territory, and, of course, succession: Nadir Shah (d. 1747) from Persia and Ahmed Shah Abdali (d. 1773) from Afghanistan led repeated raids on Delhi, the Mughal seat of power; Marathas, Nawabs, and Nizams—major groups of elites both affiliated with and dissenters of the Mughal central authority—began to voice local authority over their princely states; and, as has been mentioned, the colonial presence grew in both size and scope.[217]

As I have discussed above, I do not necessarily subscribe to a model of history that privileges the rise and fall of empires; instead, I take both the formal reign of any empire alongside the influences, sources, and legacies of it. In other words, while the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries mark a period of great flux in the power

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1757 as a decisive victory, one that ushered in an era marked by the British collection of revenue in Bengal. Many others cite the Battle of Buxar in 1764 as the formal end of the Mughal rule in any real capacity, as this was the true victory for the armies of the British East India Company in Bengal; further, it marks the beginning of British dominion and legal rule in India, and the formal weakening of Mughal authority. Others, however, cite the failed Sepoy Rebellion of 1857 and the subsequent dismantling of even the role of Mughal king in title. This places the "fall" of the Empire within 100 years, depending on one's vantage point. See, as examples of this range: Annemarie Schimmel, *The Empire of the Great Mughals: History, Art and Culture* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004); Agrawal Ashvani, *Studies in Mughal History* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983); Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subramanian, *Writing the Mughal World: Studies on Culture and Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

[217] John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 253-271.

dynamics, institutions, and formal heads of state, it is remarkably limiting to claim that

the Mughal Empire *ends* or *falls* in 1857, the most traditional end date for the empire.

Certainly this is not to say that the Mughal Empire continues without Mughals, or

without individuals identifying as Mughal; this is also not to imply or wrongly suggest by

extrapolation that all histories are continuously ongoing somehow. I merely wish to

indicate that the Mughal Empire's lasting effects cannot be contained neatly within the

dates its kings formally controlled armies, land, and imperial establishments. This

approach to history is vital both as a theoretical framework, but also as an aspect of data

collection. Should we privilege the fall of the Mughals—should we take seriously any of

the various expiration dates given for their collapse—it would be very difficult indeed to

recognize the networks of power, influence, prosperity, and administration that remain at

work well after the genealogy of kings no longer claim thrones.

It is vital, in fact, to maintain what Finbarr Flood so importantly—and with a

certain poetry—calls "'routes not roots' and 'networks not territories'" as a

historiographic approach.[218] Flood stresses the importance of interconnectivity between

the routes that ideas, philosophies, and cultures follow, as opposed to stable, static

genealogies, lineages, or familial roots in the charting of histories. Further, he pushes his

reader to rethink the bounded nature of any given territory as necessarily contiguous, and

instead focus on networks between and among locations. This approach is useful and

fitting in the context of the early nineteenth century because it allows for an

understanding of Mughal, British, and South Asia—as well as the expanded oceanic and

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[218] Finbarr B. Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval "Hindu-Muslims" Encounter* (NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 9.

colonial networks—that is necessarily reflexive, conversant, and fluid.[219] Therefore, it is

by pursuing routes and networks that one is able to more fully flesh out the contours of

cultural, linguistic, religious, and material exchanges, transits, and connections. In other

words, Flood's conceptualization of history in terms of routes and networks is especially

helpful in avoiding language of rise and fall.

   In turn, avoiding this language helps me avoid an historical model in which

Islamicate institutions, ideas, legacies, and practices inevitably cease with the advent of

British authority and control. As stated above, the colonial period is often read as a

discrete era in Indic history, one that is utterly dissociated from that which preceded it.

This model only makes sense in two historical narratives: first, one that imagines the fall

of the Mughals entirely; and second, one that imagines the British period as extremely

revolutionary (as in histories that stress modernization and industrialization) or awfully

foreign (as in histories that credit or blame the British for contemporary realities, issues,

and hardships).[220] Neither of these models tells a rich story, however, between the

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[219] I should note that while I use Flood's catchy articulation of useful theoretical models for history (routes not roots, networks not territories), Flood's focus also importantly includes one more pair: "things not texts." He prioritizes objects and materiality over texts and textuality. Routes and networks over roots and territories makes theoretical and historical sense for this project; things over texts, here, will only be useful insofar as the manuscript I will discuss below is *both* a written work that demands critical inquiry *and* an object unto itself.

[220] As examples of those that stress the revolutionary aspect of British rule, see: John Keay, *India Discovered: The Achievement of the British Raj* (Leicester : Windward, 1981); Jayeeta Sharma, *Empire's Garden: Assam and the Making of India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Andrea Major, *Sovereignty and Social Reform in India: British Colonialism and the Campaign against Sati, 1830-1860* (New York: Routledge, 2011). As examples of those that stress the foreign nature of British rule, see: Denis Judd, *The Lion and the Tiger: The Rise and Fall of the British Raj, 1600-1947* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Rahul Sapra, *The Limits of Orientalism: Seventeenth Century Representations of India* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011); Stanley Wolpert, *Shameful Flight: The Last Years of the British Empire in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

disruptions and continuities between eras, empires, or communities. I avoid the language

of the fall of the Mughal Empire precisely because it obscures continuities between

Mughal rule and British rule, Mughal elites and British elites, global trends, imperial

institutions, and—importantly—cultural, religious, and linguistic identities.

The language of rise and fall clearly overstates the role of ruler in the lives of the

ruled, but, I argue, also simultaneously understates the role of courtly practices, customs,

and sensibilities in both elite and non-elite circles. Specifically, the language of

Islamicate—the term I borrow from Hodgson and defined above as that which is

influenced by Muslim actors but is not necessarily religiously "Islamic"[221]—works nicely

to underscore the problems with current historical narratives of South Asia. If we accept

Hodgson's definition at its broadest, then the influence of a court ruled by Muslims can

extend well beyond the rule of Muslims in India. When the British both inherit and take

vast swaths of South Asia for their empire, they may have been able to depose the kings,

queens, and princes, but they certainly did not—and could not—topple all of the cultural,

religious, linguistic norms. In this way, Mughal influence—Islamicate and Persianate

influence—can be said to have continued well into another dynastic era.

This chapter explores the work *Riyāz al-maẓāhib* or *Garden of Religions* as but

one example of the myriad ways in which the early nineteenth century was a time of

disruption but also continuity. I am necessarily more interested in continuities than in

ruptures given the previous academic stress on the latter.[222] The *Garden of Religions* was

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[221] Marshall Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, 59.

[222] For examples and critiques of this trend see: Sumit Guha, "Speaking Historically: The
Changing Voices of Historical Narration in Western India, 1400-1900" *American Historical
Review* 109/4, pp. 1084-1103; Bernard S. Cohn, "Regions Subjective and Objective: Their

produced as part of the process of change and connection between, arguably, the two

most important dynastic periods in South Asia. Sponsored by the British but written by a

former Mughal official, it retains the Mughal courtly language, style, and terminologies.

Flood calls this process of mutual affectation and reflexivity "transculturation,"

borrowing the term from Fernando Ortiz,[223] stating that it "denotes a complex process of

transformation unfolding through extended contact between cultures," and that

transculturation "has gained currency as a term that emphasized the multidirectional

nature of exchange."[224] As I will argue below, Mathurānāth translates the city of

Benares' religion, religions, and religious identities not just from a local Hindi dialect

into Persian and Sanskrit for English speakers, but also in so doing translates religion,

religions, and religious identities themselves.[225]

Relation to the Study of Modern Indian History and Society," in Bernard S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist Among the Historians* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 100-135; and Gyan Prakash, ed., *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

[223] On Fernando Ortiz, see Rafael Rojas, "Fernando Ortiz: Transculturation and Nationalism," in *Essays in Cuban Intellectual History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

[224] Flood, *Objects of Translation*, 9.

[225] Bruno Latour's interest and focus on translation as a problematic indirectly informs this work, especially in terms of translation within and between cultures, what he calls "a mediation between two already constituting worlds." Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 11. Other theorists—especially postcolonial theorists—have also pushed this understanding of translation to include and account for the creation of *new* cultural forms. See: Stuart Hall and Sarat Maharaj, *Modernity and Difference* (London : Institute of International Visual Arts, 2001); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York : Routledge, 1994); and Patrick Manning, "The Problem of Interactions in World History," *American Historical Review* 101/3, pp. 771-782.

This chapter explores *Garden of Religions* as a part of multiple historical narratives about religion, religions, and religious identity. Below, I will discuss how the *Garden of Religions* both nicely demonstrates the construction of religious identities and knowledge about religions as well as the ways in which it does so within a lineage of Islamicate thought. Mathurānāth is both author and marshal; he crafts inimitable ideas about religion as well as positions ideas that come well before his time within his contemporary context. I will also explore the ways in which Mathurānāth exemplifies— perhaps personifies—the very concept of Islamicate. As a Brahmin *pandita*, fluent in the languages of social and religious elites—that is, in Persian and Sanskrit—Mathurānāth represents the possibilities inherit in elite culture that do not overstate the role of religion or religious difference. Last, this chapter delves deeply into the ways in which Mathurānāth articulates J. Z. Smith's articulation of the categories of religion, religions, and religious—the framework with which I have approached these issues in the South Asian context. In short, I will spend time offering short translations and interpretations of Mathurānāth's categories, terms, and understandings of his world, the religions in it, and how those do (and occasionally do not) reflect that which came before. I borrow, below, Smith's key terms for the thematic structure of this chapter.

A Few Notes on the Manuscript

Before more fully delving into the thematic issues and particular examples *Riyāz al-maẕāhib* highlights, a few words are warranted on the basic structure, content, and flow of Mathurānāth's work itself. It is a manuscript, and the version from which I will

draw selections and information is housed at the British Library.[226] Based upon a number

of manuscript catalogs, I have located only this version and two others; additionally, one

summary of the text also exists. One complete manuscript is currently housed at the Raza

Library in Rampur, India, and another, as well as the summary, at the British Library.[227]

     To offer a few words on the material nature of the work, physically the

manuscript from which I am working is not very large; it is approximately five inches by

seven inches in size (with the text written in approximately four inches by six inches of

each page), and is comprised of 167 leaves or 334 pages.[228] The first fifty-six pages of

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[226] Mathurānāth, *Riyāz al-maẕāhib*. British Library: MS I. O. 3404, 1813. Microform, UNC Library, 1-5324, pos 1. Persian.

[227] I must credit Carl Ernst for what truly were his serendipitous catalogue finds. The reference to the catalogue listing is: *Fihrist-i Makhtutat-i Farsi*, Rampur Raza Library (in Persian), ed. Imtiyaz `Ali `Arshi et al., introduction by Shayista Khan (Patna: Khudabakhsh Oriental Public Library, 1995), p. 43: MS no. 1167 mawjudat, shumar 294H. NB: While this is listed in the library's catalogue in print and online, numerous attempts while I was in India to visit the library and work with the text were met with answers of "the book you are searching for is not here," personal email communications dated 21 May 2011, 12 June 2011, and 7 July 2011. The second is: *Riyaz-i al-mazdhib*, British Library Add.24035. This version contains thirty-nine miniatures. Despite spending nearly two full work days with a librarian at the British Library, we were each unable to locate this second text—one imagines due to the misspelling of both Mathurānāth ("Mathsuranath") and the title (*Riyaz-i al-mazdhib*). The abridgement, *Kunh-i zat-i majma`-i sifat*, which is credited to Mathurānāth, also located as a microform at Harvard University: Lamont Microforms, Film M 987. Future research—and the monograph manuscript that will come from this dissertation—will hopefully address both of these other manuscripts as well as the abridgement.

[228] NB: While I have traveled to the British Library and worked with the original manuscript (British Library, India Office Collection, MS 3404), I am working directly from a microform of the original (UNC Davis Microform 1-5324 pos. 1). The microform was scanned incorrectly: it has been scanned as if it opened like an English-language book, rather than a Persian or Arabic work, which is to say it is bound on the wrong side. Further, there are pages missing, duplicate pages, and minor stains in the original have been magnified in the scan, making some pages unreadable. This has created a very convoluted numbering system in the digital copy. Furthermore, in the manuscript itself there are penciled in numbers, but these include all bound pages, from the blank front pages to the blank end pages. These penciled in numbers also appear on the scanned copy, of course. Thus, where I number pages for citations, for the sake of clarity I have ignored the page numbers written onto the microform digitally. Instead, I simply begin with page 1 as the first page of Mathurānāth's written text and count forward to avoid any confusion,

the work have precisely twelve lines of text each; pages that follow in the text have exactly seven.[229] The version I interrogate is not illustrated, and is written largely in black ink, with some terms, marks, and occasionally whole sentences in red ink; this is the autographed copy of the work. These physical variances within the text will be discussed below where important, however it is my contention that in most places there is no particular pattern or reason red ink appears as opposed to black ink with one notable exception.[230]

Mathurānāth's manuscript follows a number of conventions found in other similarly dated Persian manuscripts from South Asia. He utilizes a catchword—the first word from the following page—at the bottom of most leaves to ensure proper binding. He writes in the *Nasta'liq* script, a hallmark of Indo-Persian manuscripts. Mathurānāth's text features a colophon, which is a statement about the work's publication as well as an author's imprint found at the end of a manuscript.[231] Further, overlines (lines above the text, rather than below it as an underline) appear frequently in both red and black ink. I mention these conventions not only to list features of the singular manuscript—and its

contradictory numbers between the digital and penciled versions, and omissions, mis-numberings, and missing or repeating pages (of which there are four). The numbering system I use, therefore, is mine, and does not correspond exactly to that available in either the microform or manuscript. All errors are mine.

[229] Page 56 is marked by another iteration of *bismi-llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm*, and therefore acts as a new starting point, complete with new page formatting (to borrow a computer-age mode of thinking). This shift will be discussed in great detail below.

[230] For example, on some pages Mathurānāth records dates in red, and on others he does not. The exception is in his overlinings: these marks in red nearly always appear at the first mention of a new religious group or leader, in addition to a number of other places.

[231] Mathurānāth, 335.

microform—from which I draw data below in an attempt to make real its physicality to the reader, but moreover to demonstrate that Mathurānāth followed established, recognizable standards of manuscript writing. That he follows such standards serves to further elucidate his entrenchment within Islamicate systems, institutions, and customs writ large. It also stands as evidence that these conventions were themselves navigated—perhaps even translated—by and with Mathurānāth's sponsors, the British. In fact, one illustrative example of the way in which Mathurānāth's speaks to multiple audiences, styles, and histories is his use of dates: while only mentioned once, Mathurānāth lists, using Persian digits, the year in which he was commissioned to write the text as 1812, the calendar year using the Gregorian dating system.[232] Later, on the same page, he also includes the *hijri* date for the commission, 1226. This indicates, once again, the ways in which this text was certainly intended for a British readership but still follows Islamicate stylistic norms.

It is important to note, of course, that Persian is not the only language in Mathurānāth's *Garden of Religions*. Sanskrit also features heavily in the early part of the work, most often as marginalia. To be clear, however, the marginalia is not always relegated to the physical margins—on a number of occasions, Mathurānāth writes in Sanskrit in between the Persian lines, using what could be equated to an editor's caret. This is particularly the case within the first fifty-six pages;[233] in what I am calling the second part of the work, Sanskrit appears far less frequently, and when it does, it is in the

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[232] Ibid., 4.

[233] As examples: Mathurānāth, 3, 6-11.

physical margins.[234] Here, too, Mathurānāth follows convention, and where his Sanskrit

appears, it appears as marginalia: whether or not these words, phrases, and even short

sentences appear in the actual margins, they do not supercede the main Persian text—

there is never a doubt whether or not this is a Persian manuscript as Persian text and

Persianate conventions are primary. In other multilingual Persianate works, the

secondary language appears similarly.

As illustration, much of the Sanskrit marginalia restates proper names, especially

place names. It is reasonable to assume that this is a practical insertion: because Persian

characters and language do not necessary allow for all of the vowels (and consonants, for

that matter) to precisely convey the local pronunciation of a given person, place or thing,

Mathurānāth, like others, both transliterates the noun and then inserts the Sanskrit. As

Mathurānāth describes his focus on Hindu groups and practices at the very start of the

text, he lists areas and princely states wherein those groups may be found. He both

transliterates the place name and includes, in Devanagari script, the term. For example,

he writes: "in the territories of Maharastra and Karnatika…" and below the Persian,

transliterated place names, writes in Devanagari script, "Maharaṣṭra," and

"Karnaṭaka."[235] Given the messiness of the transliteration, it can be assumed that

Mathurānāth merely wishes to be clear, and therefore explicates the proper nouns with a

language system that articulates each vowel and the precise consonants.[236]

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[234] Mathurānāth, 78, 97, 135, 188.

[235] Ibid., 5.

[236]Both Persian and Sanskrit have multiple consonants that, in English, we would render with
one; this, of course, is the purpose of diacritical marks in English, and can be demonstrated by the
difference in "d," "ḍ," and "ḏ." These differences are not merely cosmetic or arbitrary, but

Apart from the physical and stylistic attributes, overall the manuscript is, in many ways, much like an early ethnographic, descriptive text: Mathurānāth spends a good deal of the work simply listing what he sees around him, especially in terms of the ways in which people of Hindustan generally and Benares specifically were grouped religiously. This will be discussed in much greater detail below, but as a structural, content point, it is worthwhile to note that many of his descriptions—indeed, his categorizations—are very closely aligned to those that we have seen previously in Abu'l Fazl's *Ā'īn-i Akbarī*. Similarly, the very order of the text is quite like that of Abu'l Fazl as well. The *Ā'īn-i Akbarī*, as was discussed at length in the last chapter, has a lengthy preface, even though it is in actuality an appendix to the already lengthy text, *Akbarnama*. Mathurānāth's *Riyāz al-maẕāhib* also has a lengthy preface—the first fifty-six pages of his work serve this very function.

As a general rule, Mathurānāth does not subtitle what we might call sections of the work. He does mark shifts in focus, however. Along those lines, what I would term the major subheadings for *Riyāz al-maẕāhib* include references to the types of religions (*maẕāhib*). Among these, Mathurānāth includes: religions of Hindustan (*maẕāhib-i Hind*); religions of the Sikhs (*maẕāhib-i nihang*);[237] Sufis (*ahli ḥāl,* lit., the people of ecstasy); and ascetics (*sadhū*). It is interesting that Mathurānāth differentiates between religions of Hindustan and Sikh traditions, as contemporary scholars—let alone

typically related to pronunciation (especially in Sanskrit) and occasionally etymology (as in Persian words originally from Arabic).
[237] *Nihang* typically refers to an armed Sikh order, but it is the term that Mathurānāth uses before he begins to list Sikh gurus, including, prominently, Nanak and Gobind Singh. See pp. 83-90.

contemporary South Asians—typically list Sikh traditions under the umbrella of South Asian religions. I take Mathurānāth to understand the religions of Hindustan to center around broadly Hindu practices, as is evidenced by the luminaries he mentions in those sections, including Ramanuja[238] and Vallabhāchārya.[239]

That being said, this project focuses on but one of the manuscripts, as I have mentioned above. The other known two—one in Rampur and one at the British Library—are illustrated editions; the illustrations of the edition at Rampur have been cataloged, and indeed may offer a general sense of the text's construction, order, and focus. In future study, I intend to examine the other manuscripts, and more fully explicate the relationship between the textual manuscript in question here and those that were illustrated. The Rampur illustrated manuscript contains thirty-six watercolors, composed in the Company style.[240] These watercolors were added at the insistence of H. H. Wilson for his work, "Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus"—which will be discussed in the next chapter—and can therefore be assumed to have been added in later editions of the manuscript, possibly written and commissioned between 1813 (the year of the original manuscript's publication) and 1828 (the year of Wilson's first publication).[241]

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[238] Mathurānāth, 78.

[239] Ibid.

[240] On Company style, see: Victoria and Albert Museum, Mildred Archer, and Graham Parlett. *Company Paintings: Indian Paintings of the British Period* (London: The Museum, 1992); Yale Center for British Art, and Morna O'Neill. *Company Culture: British Artists and the East India Company 1770-1830* (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 2003).

[241] W.H. Siddiqi, *Catalogue of the exhibition of paintings of Rampur Raza Library : held at India International Centre, New Delhi on 6th-12th October, 2006 in collaboration with IIC* (Rampur : Rampur Raza Library, 2007), 119.

Simply to illustrate the types of figures, themes, and groups Mathurānāth portrays, I will briefly both list and discuss the depictions found within the Rampur manuscript. They tend to follow, broadly speaking, two major trends: images of major historical religious figures and images of contemporary religious figures. In the first category, a number of very prominent, recognizable figures appear. For example, Rāmānuja, the eleventh century Vedantic philosopher, is specifically mentioned in the text, and is the first illustration within the Rampur manuscript.[242] Similarly, Vallabhāchārya, fifteenth century Vedantic philosopher, also has his imagined likeness appear within the early parts of the Rampur edition.

While both of these figures are prominent Vedantists, they are not necessarily part of the same interpretive tradition; where Mathurānāth's taxonomies and explications shine, in fact, is in illuminating the differences between orders, sects, and traditions. Rāmānuja is widely understood as the main proponent of *Viśiṣṭādvaita*, or qualified non-dualism; this school of thought understands Brahman (the supreme, underlying essence) as singular, but evident in its multiplicity. Typically, we can compare this school to qualified monism. Practically, however, it tends to indicate a belief in one supreme essence that is evident in the form of a particular diety, typically Vishnu.. Vallabhāchārya, on the other hand, is remembered as a major figure within the development of *advaita* or non-dualist philosophy; he therefore imagined no other reality beyond Brahman, and thus no difference between the supreme essence and other other entity. In both cases, the men come to be deeply tied to the schools of thought they helped create and propigate; though different—and even rival—schools of thought, both

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[242] Ibid.

men are undoubtedly influential within the development of Hindu practice, theology, and philosophy.

But philosophers are not the only historic religious figures that Mathurānāth outlines in the text in question here, nor are they the only personalities chosen for illustration in the Rampur manuscript. Religious luminaries like Kabir, the fifteenth century poet, appear early on in both works as well. Kabir's poetry is most often described as iconoclastic and anti-religious; he routinely demands that his readers and listeners move beyond limited, specific, and privatized forms of God—calling, by name, upon Muslims and Hindus to rid themselves of sectarian names and practices.

The other category of figures included both in the text and in illustration are those of local, contemporary import. This is not to say that they are less important than the historic figures; indeed, if Mathurānāth found them worthy of mentioning in the same text, it stands to reason that they were envisioned by him in a similar light: vital, symbolic of a given trend or group, or popular. In the Rampur manuscript, a number of these local figures are illustrated, including: Vāmī, Kaḍalingī, and Rukhad, each of which dons attire that marks their particular ascetic lineage and caste.[243] Interestingly, at least one figure is locally important *and* historically influential. Mathurānāth describes Ramānanda, and Wilson presumably asks that his illustration is included. Ramānanda was based in Benares in the early fifteenth century, and is widely considered a leading figure in the *bhakti* or devotional movement that swept north Indian religious practice in the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries. Unlike Rāmānuja and Vallabhāchārya, Ramānanda was specifically committed to one particular deity, Vishnu, above all others

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[243] Ibid.

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and at the insistence of his preeminence; in other words, he was a Benares-based Vaishnava, much like we assume Mathurānāth to be. Unlike some other historic figures, Ramānanda wrote in Hindi instead of Sanskrit, demonstrating one of the trends of the *bhakti* movement—the prioritization of vernacular expression—as well as the ways in which he was both historically influential and locally revered.

The illustrated manuscript will be a source of great information when I am able to expand the current project to include it. While I do have access to the catalog of thirty-six illustrations that span historic and local religious figures of note, it should be mentioned that in the textual manuscript, Mathurānāth does not call or subtitle these pages as such. This is to say that these categories appear to be at play, but are not explicitly stated by our author. Likewise, there is no indication in his work that he has purposefully written an introduction as opposed or in contrast to the body of the work. Rather, these are distinctions and labels I use to make intelligible the format, structure, and content of the work. The first section, comprised of these fifty-six pages, explains the sponsorship of the work, the city in which it was produced, and the unique contours of religion in Hindustan broadly and within that city. Specific points and general themes of the content of the text will be explored in depth below, but for now it is important merely to note that Mathurānāth, like Abu'l Fazl before him, writes what might rightfully be termed a preface or an introduction to his exploration of categories. This appears to be supported, as well, by the appearance of illustrations in the Rampur manuscript: the illustrated manuscript found in Rampur does not contain any illustrations before the thirty-first page, which might correspond to the fifty-six page "preface" I have indicated.

As I mention these categories of religion, it is time to make note of a few general trends employed by Mathurānāth. Based upon his work's title, it is clear that he is concerned with religion and the divisions within religions. Using the academic and theoretical language of imaginaries developed in chapter 2, I argue that Mathurānāth's work *imagines* Benares as his titular garden of religions; he takes great pains to describe, with a lot of detail, the rich, multi-religious landscape of the city. For him, it seems, both Hindustan on the whole and Benares in particular are not merely places wherein individuals practice religion. Instead, Benares is a site of perfected, contested, and convoluted religious identities, all of which speak to the idea of universal religion, both in favor of such a conception and against it.[244]

Throughout the *Garden of Religions*, Mathurānāth typically oscillates between two ideas: first, that religion is something universally held as important and possessed by all individuals; and, second, that most individuals follow a religion or religious leader. This last point is fairly complex, and, again, will be given a detailed, full treatment below by way of textual examples. For the purpose of a broad overview, it is sufficient to mention that Mathurānāth lists Islam and Christianity as the only major religions that we would recognize; while he himself is a Brahmin, he only very rarely uses the term "Hindu." Of course, the term "Hinduism," a grammatical construction based on Greek and Latin forms is not present within the Persian and Sanskrit work.[245] Instead, when

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[244] I should note that the first noun of the title, *riyaz*, is actually the plural of *rauẓat*. All manuscript categories, however, translate the title as "garden" singular. Steingass follows this, and notes that "*rauẓat*" is the singular, but *riyaz* is the "p[lural], often used as s[ingular]."

[245] Scholars have debated whether or not the British invented Hinduism, as has been discussed in earlier chapters. I am uninterested in that question in this work, but merely point out that Mathurānāth does not use the term " Hinduism," as it is a necessarily foreign term. Instead, he

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referring to groups we may very well recognize as Hindu, he uses caste and *jāti*

distinctions (e.g. Brahmin, *chamar*)[246], or, equally often, he refers to a swami, guru, *pir* or

other religious elder as a leader of a "religion" and, therefore, his followers as members

of that elder's group. It is clear that at many points, Mathurānāth's sense of *what* or *who*

someone was or to what group someone belonged likely differed radically from how that

agent may have described himself; further, by no means should we take his description as

a complete or even robust understanding of early nineteenth century Benares.[247]

Despite what looks like other early modern attempts at what we might call an

early demography and even in light of its proto-ethnographic style, the *Garden of*

Religions does not boast a scientifically precise structure; his work resembles many that

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seldom uses "Hindu," but more frequently refers to those individuals we might today recognize as
Hindus by their caste affiliations.

[246] Caste (*varṇa*) typically refers to the four (or five) tier system of *brāhmaṇaḥ* (Brahmins or
priests), *kṣatriya* (warriors or kings), *vaiśya* (merchants), *śūdra* (laborers or artisans) and/or
untouchables. Some argue that the *śūdra* caste contains within it untouchables, others that
untouchables are necessarily outside the caste system entirely (hence their untouchability). *Jāti*s
or *jāt*s are the myriad communities that make up a particular caste, and can be centered around
traditional job (e.g. a *chamar* was a leather tanner), language (a dialect of Hindi as compared to
another, say), or even particular religious belief (as in the case of Sri Vaisṇavas). It is estimated
that the *jāti* system can allow for hundreds of affiliations in any one location, and that the
valuation of a given *jāti* can change from region to region. For example, one might find fishers to
be highly valued along the coast, but greatly devalued inland. A monograph on the subject is: Bal
Kishan Dabas, *The Political and Social History of the Jats* (Delhi: Sanjay Prakashan, 2001).

[247] Certainly early 19th century Benares included women, both in and out of the public sphere.
However, Mathurānāth entirely references only the practices, appearances, and categorizations of
men. I do not wish to indicate that women, women's practices, and women's religious identities
were irrelevant, but in the context of this work—and, alas, among many of this period—the
primary source material simply does not lend itself to interpretations or understandings of
women's roles. Further, as will be discussed in depth below, Mathurānāth is labeling people from
afar; his categorical choices are interesting and the focus of this book, but they are not to be taken
to be based upon agential self-reporting in any manner.

come from the early modern and modern periods, but it is not a formal treatise on the religions of India, meant to be read with such an eye. He is, of course, sponsored by the British but not necessarily of that system. Much as Mathurānāth follows many formal Persianate writing styles and forms, his work also begins in a way that reflects his Mughal, Islamicate acculturation. His manuscript begins with the classic formulation and invocation "*bismi-llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm*," which is typically rendered as "in the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful."[248] And, where his text shifts from twelve lines to seven—where he finishes the first major section and moves to the second—he reiterates the phrase "*bismi-llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm*."[249] On the surface, we might not expect such a formulation given the author (a Brahmin priest) and sponsor (the British East India Company), but if we understand this work as produced within the networks of Mughal, Islamicate elite, such an opening invocation can be seen as anything from culturally relevant to linguistically appropriate to appropriation to cultural norm; the fact that Hindu authors commonly praised God and the Prophet Muhammad becomes fully understandable as a part of these networks.

That Mathurānāth uses the *bismillāh,* the Arabic-cum-Persian praise of God, is notable beyond its mere existence. As a Brahmin *pandita*, Mathurānāth surely would have known Sanskritic invocations that may have better lined up with his particular religious identity or personal predilections. He neither includes a Sanskrit invocation outright *instead* of the Arabic prayer, nor does he include a Sanskrit invocation anywhere within the work, even in places of less prominence than an introduction or in locations

[248] Mathurānāth, 2.

[249] Ibid., 56.

that might be contextually apt, like where he lists Hindu temples. However, that he does

not include a Sanskrit invocation within a primarily Persian-language and Persianate text

is not altogether surprising. Additionally, given that *Garden of Religions* was sponsored

by and written for the express and singular use of the British, it even stands to reason that

Mathurānāth could have dropped the Muslim prayer altogether as neither party,

presumably, had much invested in such a devotional pronouncement. But Mathurānāth

does include the *bismillāh* twice, both times using it as a marker of a new section of his

work. His choice to include such a hallmark of Muslim manuscripts even though he

himself was not Muslim and neither were the sponsors of this text robustly expresses the

depth to which Islamicate norms and mores dictate proper composition, comportment,

and even inform the very modes of thinking at work in the text itself.

Mathurānāth's work continues in a way that also reflects those works that predate

his own: he thanks and praises his sponsor, Robert John Glyn, and the East India

Company, and then goes on to praise what I understand to be local elites of Benares,

including, primarily, the title "*nawab.*"[250] In other words, he thanks both the formal

sponsor and economic powerhouse by name (Glyn) and office (East India Company) as

well as the cultural and historical ruling elite (the *nawab*).[251] In its first few pages,

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[250] "Robert John Glyn" is the English spelling, of course. Mathurānāth has transliterated this name into Persian characters; rendering the English name in transliterated text here seems uncalled for and clunky, at best. *Nawab* is typically rendered historically and linguistically as a Muslim ruling prince; it is sometimes also seen written in northern India as *nabob*. *Nawab* comes from the Arabic singular *na'ib* or viceroy, governor.

[251] In a few other places, Mathurānāth also references individuals with the honorific title "*niẓām.*" Typically, this was a title bestowed by a higher-ranking noble, most often a vizier, to a lower one, and it formalized a connection to and some leadership in the ruling elite system. In its South Asian usage, this title is most often associated with *niẓāmat* states in southern India, especially that of Hyderabad, but the title is found in other Islamicate areas like the Ottoman Empire.

Mathurānāth's composition both reflects and acknowledges the conflated, overlapping sense of rule present in early nineteenth century north India writ large, and Benares in particular.

The manuscript serves as an example of Persianate, Islamicate texts because it draws upon the style, form, terminologies, and general worldview of those texts that precede it. Further, it serves as an example of the flux in the early nineteenth century politics, power dynamics, and religious identity. Mathurānāth utilizes taxonomies of religious sects fully present in Abu'l Fazl's seminal *Ā'īn-i Akbarī* , and he presents them to his British sponsor factually; in other words, Mathurānāth's exposition on religion, religions, and religious affiliations draws upon extant systems of taxonomy and repackages them for a new imperial sponsor. To paint in broad strokes—and maintain the titular metaphor—the *Garden of Religions* is Mathurānāth's depiction of the flowering, survival, and harvest of the religious crop of Benares.

Having spelled out some of the physical, textual, and technical aspects of his work, I will use J. Z. Smith's formulation "religion, religions, religious" to guide the interpretation of the work. Without question, J. Z. Smith's work is seminal, but that does not make it beyond reproach. Without fully embracing all of the text's problems—as have been discussed extensively above—I do support his formulation of religion, religions, and religious as a clever, helpful, and important use of vocabulary *as* theoretical construction. Smith articulates religion as universal; religions as the myriad attempts at religion; and religious as the focus upon the universal.[252] I expand his

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[252] J. Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in Mark C. Taylor, ed., *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 281.

adjectival "religious" to "religious identity," arguing that the social, group dynamic as well as the categorization of belonging is as important as the individualized practice.

Mathurānāth, interestingly enough, utilizes similar conceptualizations, though in a manner that nearly unravels Smith's ultimate conclusion. Smith argues that

> "Religion" is not a native category. It is not a first person
> term of self-characterization. It is a category imposed from
> the outside on some aspect of native culture. It is the other,
> in these instances colonialists, who are solely responsible
> for the content of the term.[253]

Smith thus contends that religion is necessarily always foreign given its largely Christian, definitely European formulation and deployment elsewhere in the world. But I will demonstrate below that Mathurānāth cites, employs, and advocates corollary understandings of "religion," especially as universal; particular religions; and taxonomies of religious groups. Even if the word "religion" is neither Persian nor Sanskrit, the idea and even ideology it represents is no more foreign to South Asia than Mathurānāth himself.

Religion

Some fifty years ago, Wilfred Cantwell Smith wrote the *The Meaning and End of Religion*.[254] In it, he articulates a strong critique of the study of religion, and the ways in which it had, to date, been studied. Specifically, he takes to task the very term "religion" and the ways in which scholars have asked fundamental questions about it, writing

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[253] Ibid., 269.

[254] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962).

> [r]ather than addressing ourselves to the problem 'What is
> the nature of religion?', I suggest that an understanding of
> the variegated and evolving religious situation of mankind
> can proceed, and indeed perhaps proceed only, if that
> question in that form be set aside or dropped, as inapt.[255]

W. C. Smith finds it plainly wrong to ask questions about the nature of religion writ large

and specific religions—these questions are "inapt." He continues on, very bluntly

arguing that

> [n]either religion in general nor any one of the religions, I
> will contend, is in itself an intelligible entity, a valid object
> of inquiry, or of concern either for the scholar or the man of
> faith.[256]

There can be no mistaking his language here: W. C. Smith does not consider religion to

be fully knowable, and he doubts rather strongly the ability for the concept and construct

of "religion" to be a delimited, delineated subject of study.

While I have already discussed arguments about religion as a category in previous

chapters, and have even contended with critiques of W. C. Smith himself,[257] it is

nevertheless important to reiterate the strength of Smith's argument as it continues to

have reverberations today. Smith rightfully points to the myriad definitions, scopes, and

disciplines that contend with—or claim to contend with—religion, and he notes that few

scholars have come up with a meaningful definition of their subject; indeed, ultimately,

Smith argues that no one definition of religion is possible.[258] This line of reasoning is

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[255] Ibid., 12.

[256] Ibid.

[257] See especially, Talal Asad, "Reading a Modern Classic: W. C. Smith's *The Meaning and End of Religion*," *History of Religions*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Feb., 2001), pp. 205-222.

[258] W. C. Smith, 30.

remarkably similar to that of Timothy Fitzgerald and Russell McCutcheon, among

others.[259] Importantly, however, W. C. Smith does not merely disregard "religion" as a

category because of the ways in which *scholars* have studied it; he is, in many ways,

equally interested and frustrated by the conceptualization and reality of a man of faith's

perception, use, and misuse of the term as well.

In the abovementioned quote, Smith condemns both scholar and faithful person

for his assumption that the category of religion writ large or any specific religion may be

understood in its entirety. For contemporary critics, the person of faith—and I should

hope those scholars would include women in their pronouns and schemas—does not

factor into the equation at all. Fitzgerald and McCutcheon are primarily and perhaps

solely interested in the discipline of religious studies as it creates, constructs, and moves

definitions of its object(s) of inquiry. Nowhere in their evaluation of the field do the

other usages of the term—that of the laity, the uninitiated non-academics, if I may—

come into play.

In some critiques of the field of religion, especially in the case of Islam, scholars

do in fact demand for a rethinking of the subject. Some of these works, however, posit

scholarly opinions alongside insider appeals for change. Famous, perhaps, is the work of

Fazlur Rahman, who sought to describe the phenomena of modernity and modernism

within Muslim practice and thought, but simultaneously posited what was "appropriate"

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[259] Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies,* 3-5; McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion*, 4-6, 127-134.

or "good" religion.[260] Mohammad Arkoun has bluntly called for the reinstitution of

ijtihad or interpretation, linking the legacies of Orientalism to stagnant processes within

Muslim thought. The problems of such a position are manifold, but suffice it to say here

that Arkoun takes seriously the negative, lasting impact of Euro-American systemization

of religion that necessarily excluded and derided Islam, but finds a solution to the

problem in thinking and rethinking Islam. He writes that his paper

> argues for a new *ijtihad* for Muslim as well as non- Muslim
> scholars to initiate a process of new thinking on Islam with
> tools such as history of thought rather than political events
> or fixed parameters; to make unthinkable notions—a
> historical rather than a religious postulate—thinkable; and
> to relate secularism, religion, and culture to contemporary
> challenges rather than substituting one for the other.[261]

Arkoun therefore argues that the way around the problem of "religion" and the epistemic

violence it does to Islam as a category, faith, and identity marker for both groups and

individuals is for Muslims and non-Muslims alike to "modernize" how they imagine

Islam.

The poles presented as ways by which to deal with the problem of "religion" as a

category vis-à-vis Islam in particular are fairly unhelpful. On the one hand, scholars like

Fitzgerald, McCutcheon and, though to a lesser degree, W. C. Smith call for the term and

the category, field of inquiry, and discipline it stands for to go the way of the dinosaur.

Scholars like Rahman and Arkoun, on the other, want to dismantle the Orientalist

methodologies inherent in the study of religion by way of reforming, changing,

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[260] Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

[261] Mohammed Arkoun, "Rethinking Islam Today," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science,* Vol. 588, "Islam: Enduring Myths and Changing Realities" (Jul., 2003), p. 18.

modernizing, or rethinking Islam from the inside out. The former group's desire to dismantle the category ignores the ways in which actual practitioners utilize and value the term "religion;" the latter group's emphasis on reform strikes an inharmonious tone between studying subjects and changing a subject's tune altogether.

W. C. Smith, though, provides a middle ground later on in his work. As evidenced in the abovementioned quote, he takes seriously and in many places within *The Meaning and End of Religion* locates the practitioner as central, thereby giving voice to those who find meaning in "religion" and those—like himself—who find the category problematic. It is the intertwined relationship of religion to academic and "man of faith" that is most viable for this study given the particular nature of our genealogy of interlocutors. Mathurānāth, as the interlocutor in focus here, reflects a middle ground within the critiques of "religion:" he uses a corollary term "*dīn*" in various ways, providing another parallel between Euro-American debates about "religion" and the discourse in and about South Asian religion/s; and he thinks and rethinks religion and religions as he describes Benares. He makes claims, as we will see shortly, about universality, particularity, and even identity that do not lend themselves to readings of "religion" as either foreign or imposed, but certainly as multifaceted, complex, and contested.

While most contemporary critics of religion or of Smith focus on the introductory, theoretical aspects of *The Meaning and End of Religion*, I take his work in the same book on Islam to be of equal significance. Throughout the work, and especially in the fourth chapter,[262] Smith takes great pains to mark Islam as necessarily different from other

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[262]W. C. Smith, "The Special Case of Islam," in *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 80-118.

religions as well as remarkably similar in other ways. The purpose herein seems to be to examine the limits of universality, while also noting the "non-Western" understandings of the same concept *apart from* the colonial experience/encounter. He spends a good deal of time linking religious terminologies to proof texts, largely in an attempt to root Muslim understandings of their own religion and its relationship to other religions from the time of its origins. He notes that "Islam" is itself a word mentioned in the Qur'an, making it a religion engaged in a process, immediately upon inception, of self-naming.[263] This line of reasoning stems from Smith's focus on the wobbly nature of religion precisely because of the frequency with which outsiders name insiders, as is the case with Jews, Christians, and Hindus. He argues that Muslims, because they are engaged in self-labeling from the start, have a more delimited sense of religion and religious identity.

More importantly, though, his specific focus on Islam in *The Meaning and End of Religion* highlights a corollary to the term "religion," and it is this term—and argument—that holds the most importance for the present work. Despite some fifty years having passed, Smith's work remains the most comprehensive, focused study of the term "*dīn*" and its relationship to the term "religion," as well as the study of religion in the Euro-American academy. Smith notes that not only does the Qur'an name religion for Muslims and in terms of propriety and singularity,[264] but the way in which the Qur'an names religion is both overarching and vernacular—and, above all else, it has a word for religion.

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[263] Ibid., 80.

[264] Ibid., 81.

Dīn or "religion" in both Arabic and Persian is the term in question. Smith writes

that *dīn*

> is used in all the various sense of its Western counterpart.
> It carries the sense of personal religion: the classical
> dictionaries give *wara`, '*piety' as an equivalent, a word
> that never has a systematic or a community meaning and
> that cannot have a plural. It carries also, however, the sense
> of a particular religious system, one 'religion' as distinct
> from another. In this sense it has a plural (*adyan*). This
> plural is not in the Qur'an, but is traditional. Furthermore,
> the word in its systematic sense can be used both ideally
> and objectively, of one's own religion and of other
> people's, the true religion and false ones.[265]

Smith articulates *dīn* as traditionally singular, referring to both the true religion (in this

case, of course, Islam) and other, "false" ones. What is most important, however, is that

Smith understands and rightfully points out that *dīn* functions in very similar ways as

does "religion." Despite its publication fifty years ago, Smith's chapter about "religion"

and Islam, and its particular focus on the term "*dīn*" remains one of the only meaningful,

complete, and robust interrogations of the subject. This is important not only because

Smith demonstrates a corollary term and provides a linguistic and cultural pathway to

investigate corresponding ideas between supposedly Western and non-Western ideas. In

the particular context of this book, Smith's study of religion and of *dīn* is vital because

dīn is, in fact, the term Mathurānāth uses most frequently when he refers to religion.

Mathurānāth uses the word *dīn* approximately forty-five times in the entirety of

Riyāz al-maẓāhib.[266] Even though this is a numerical approximation, there is no other

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[265] Ibid.

[266] NB: Even the microform is not digitally searchable, which means my count is based upon my
own repeated skimming and tallying the number of times any given word appeared. I must
confess that I had a difficult time making my estimate any more precise than a rough estimate, as

term that appears as often; the term *maẓhab* (the singular of the titular *maẓāhib*) takes

second place for number of appearances with approximately thirty, including both the

singular or the plural variations of the term. As Smith points out, *dīn* is both singular and

universal as well as emblematic of one (true) religion among many (presumably false

ones). The former is the sense of the term Mathurānāth most often uses, and the use of

dīn as universal certainly begs our attention.

While *Garden of Religions* is by no means a treatise on universal religion,

Mathurānāth curiously invokes universality in a number peripheral ways that indicate it is

a underlying idea within his work. For example, he writes:

> In Benares, all men are pious [*pārsā*], and all upright
> [*āzāda-dil*] men have religion [*dīn*].[267]

His use of broad inclusive terms like "all" is interesting given his own background, that

of his present and former patrons, and the subject of his work. He does not, for example,

paint only Christians or only monotheists as "upright men" who "have religion" in light

of his British sponsors; similarly, he also does not articulate a preference for Islam or

Muslims as properly upright given his history with the Mughal Empire and direct

my counts varied. Therefore, I must vociferously underscore that forty-five is an approximation
and not a definite number of times the term *dīn* appears. Likewise, where I list other appearances
of other terms (like *maẓāhib*, for example) the same insistence on my count being nothing more
than an estimate stands.

[267] Mathurānāth, 47. "*āzāda-dil*" most literally means "free of heart" or "liberated of the heart"
but I have taken it as upright or noble based upon context and following both Steingass and
Dehkhoda.

invocation of Allah in two places in the work. Instead, he seems to imagine "good" men as men with religion.

It seems we could read this in two ways: first, good men are religious, pious men; and second, religion is a quality of personhood—that is, because they are men, they have religion. In either scenario, *dīn* functions here as a universal concept: it is applicable to all men, be they Muslim, followers of a particular swami, Christians, or Brahmins. I must underscore that for Mathurānāth *dīn* is employed in a variety of situations, and not only in those which feature the so-called "big T" Traditions like Islam or Christianity or even Brahmanism. As but one example, Mathurānāth writes:

> In this quarter of the beautiful city, one who looks may
> find, indeed, many pious [*pārsā*] followers of the Guru
> Ravananda, whose religion [*dīn*] is strong [*mutaqawī*].[268]

Guru Ravananda's history and background are unknown to me, and his mention in the text is fleeting.[269] Nevertheless, he and his followers are recorded by Mathurānāth, and stand to demonstrate the complex religious milieu of Benares in the early nineteenth century. Furthermore, Guru Ravananda is a standalone guru of no given religious affiliation; Mathurānāth does not list his assumed caste or *jāt*, nor does he attribute his status to that of a *pandita* or yogi. He does, however, use the term "*dīn*" in his description. *Dīn*, and one's possession of it, does not only apply to recognizable religious

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[268] Mathurānāth, 128.

[269] As is and will be discussed in this chapter, Mathurānāth makes mention of a number of gurus, swamis, *pirs*, and other religious leaders or elders by name. It stands to reason that, at one point, this was a meaningful distinction and the sponsors of the text would have understood Mathurānāth's references. However, most of the identities, beliefs, and communities of these individual leaders and holy men have been lost with time.

systems or institutions, but also to those unique, unfettered individuals that feature within Mathurānāth's text.

Here again, W. C. Smith's gloss of the term *dīn* proves valuable. Mathurānāth characterizes upright, pious men as those with religion; he also labels the followers of unaffiliated gurus, swamis, and shaykhs as having religion, even if he does not simultaneously apply an umbrella, "Great Tradition" category to these individuals and their followers. He therefore uses *dīn* in a way that Smith theorizes is possible. Smith remarks that *dīn*

> is used, finally, of religious as a generic universal, in both senses: as generalizing personal religiousness or human piety at large, and as generalizing the various systematic religions as ideological or sociological structures.[270]

Smith's understanding of the term *dīn* is surprisingly close to the way in which Mathurānāth uses it. At once, it describes a broad personal piety as well as a system in which that piety exists. Mathurānāth consistently uses the term across a wide variety of religious actors who are described in terms of their differences but are not assumed to be differently pious. In other words, *dīn* for Mathurānāth is that which all individuals partake in, even if their specific means of participation are diverse.

I do not mean to imply that he is some sort of pluralist before such a concept meaningfully exists, but I do wish to highlight the ways in which *dīn* functions as a universal in terms of both religiosity and the structure within which religions can be classified. This, I believe, is further supported by Mathurānāth's use of the term *niẓam* (system). Once again, W. C. Smith is on point here, as he argues that the use of the

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[270] W. C. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 82.

language of system (*niẓam*) in conjunction with that of religion (*dīn*) reveals a corollary,

Muslim or—in the case of Mathurānāth—Islamicate use, conceptualization, and

taxonomy of religion.[271] Mathurānāth employs the term *niẓam* in a number of locations,

and typically does so in such a way that locates an individual actor within an overarching

tradition. For example, when he mentions a shaykh called Salim ud-Din from Benares

and his followers, he writes that he is a part of the system of Islam (*niẓam-i islām*).[272]

That Mathurānāth employs terms both for the universal system of religion and for

the universal applicability of religion begs a few questions, not the least of which is: what

does this mean for the study of religion writ large? As this chapter progresses, and as we

more fully uncover and delve into Mathurānāth's text, it will be an important question to

which I will return frequently. At this stage, it calls for a generalized attempt at an

answer: like W. C. Smith, I posit that the term "religion" as it is currently used and

understood is far less robust than would be desirable. I similarly concur that a history of

"religion" that only focuses on the Euro-American academy's study thereof, or on a

history that traces terms only through their Latin etymologies, is, by definition, more

pithy than is appropriate.

Mathurānāth's use of *dīn* as indisputably universal stands as evidence not, as W.

C. Smith would hold, to dismantle "religion," but rather to push back on such destruction.

Mathurānāth's *dīn* demonstrates, if nothing else, that universality and the specific

universality of religion is not the private property of one intellectual tradition. Further,

given his role as courtly scribe and East India Company hire, can we even state that the

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[271] Ibid.

[272] Mathurānāth, *Riyaz al- maẓāhib*, 144.

universality of religion is the private property of European power structures? Instead,

Mathurānāth's text and usage of *dīn* in light of his connections to multiple imperial

powers demands that we reevaluate what we mean by "universal" and who we imagine to

be able to participate within it.

Of course, while Mathurānāth uses *dīn* in an inclusive manner—*all* have access to

or fundamentally are part of religion—this does not necessarily mean all use the term

similarly. As James Laine points out, just as "religion" fluctuates and shifts given period,

speaker/author, or purpose, so too does the term "*dīn*."[273] While it is neither the purpose

of this study nor within its current scope to trace the complete history of the term *dīn*

across time and space in all Muslim or Islamicate writings, it is nevertheless appropriate

to mention that the way Mathurānāth deploys the term is both part of a long-standing

conceptualization and a distinguishing feature of his work. As I have mentioned,

Mathurānāth draws upon taxonomies of religion that most readily reflect Abu'l Fazl's

magnum opus, *Ā'īn-i Akbarī*; Abu'l Fazl's work itself, of course, reflects the older

treatises by Shahrastānī, Abu al-Ma`ali, and Bīrūnī. He is, no doubt, part of an Islamicate

genealogy and that his taxonomies draw upon it. This should not suggest that

Mathurānāth does stray from those that precede him, though.

In what I have called his introduction, Mathurānāth writes:

> "The religion [*dīn*] of Benares fortuitously is plentiful, and
> this has never changed; should this ever change, the city
> would become altered in a manner unfitting."[274]

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[273] James W. Laine, "The dharma of Islam and the dīn of Hinduism: Hindus and Muslims in the Age of Śivājī," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* , Vol. 3, No. 3 (Dec., 1999), 300.

[274] Mathurānāth, 28.

Here, he characterizes Benares as a city with plenty of religions, but uses the singular *dīn*;

Abu al-Ma`ali, for example, frequently used the plural of *dīn*, *adyan* in these

circumstances. Mathurānāth, in my reading of *Garden of Religions*, does not employ the

plural of *dīn* once. I read this as Mathurānāth applying the term religion as universal in a

distinctive way—for him, Benares has *a* religion, it is a characteristic of the city itself.

Yet he continues on in the work to list the myriad religions (*maẕāhib*) of that city. When

Mathurānāth refers to *dīn*, it is most often like the abovementioned example: he uses the

singular, and does so in a manner that implies ubiquity. On the other hand, when

Mathurānāth indicates "religions," he most often uses the term in his title, *maẕāhib*. In

other words, I argue that while Mathurānāth utilizes *dīn* in ways that have important

precedents, because he never pluralizes the term, he fundamentally uses it to indicate

universality. This is a distinctive and important contribution of his writing.

However, Mathurānāth does not only write about religion in its universal form.

He spends most of the text dealing with the religions of Benares and the individuals that

adhere to them, and it is to these aspects of *Garden of Religions* I will turn to next.

Religions

Mathurānāth does not only discuss religion as a broad concept, a general category,

or a specific, universal phenomenon. He talks about specific religions, as well. In fact,

the majority of his work deals with religions and, as will be seen below, religious groups.

As I mentioned above, he does not pluralize the term "*dīn*" to "*adyan*" in order to discuss

religions, he instead prefers the term featured in his title *maẕāhib*.[275] Most of the descriptions of religions he offers in *Garden of Religions* fit rather well with those Islamicate, Persian texts that precede his work and time period. He, for example, makes a note of Muslims' practice, some Sufi orders, presence of legal schools in Benares, and also the presence of individual shaykhs or *pir*s.[276] Similarly, he makes frequent note of Brahmin *pandita*s, specific gurus, yogis, or swamis, and mentions a number of devotional temples.[277] In no uncertain terms, Mathurānāth locates a number of religions and religious groups within umbrella terms, in a way that resembles both the taxonomies of Shahrastānī, among others, and some contemporary Euro-American categorizations.

Quite often, we imagine the problem of "religion" or religious studies as a field to be either related to religion's assumed universality, as discussed above, or to the seeming infinite number of religions possible. The famous logical endpoint of this particular line of reasoning is "Sheilaism," the hyper-individualized, extremely individualistic personal religion of Sheila Larson, as mentioned in Robert Bellah's classic *Habits of the Heart*.[278] If so many worldviews, ideas, philosophies, and practices can each be a religion, and if each religion can in turn look radically different from another, the question Sheilaism puts forth is: How do scholars—or practitioners, for that matter—meaningfully identify a discrete, delimited object of study or marker of identity?

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[275] By my count, *maẕāhib* appears approximately forty times. This makes it quite analogous to the appearance frequency of *dīn*.

[276] For example: Mathurānāth, 92-94.

[277] For example: Mathurānāth, 112-117.

[278] Robert Bellah et al, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

J. Z. Smith most beneficially and eloquently describes the problem of "religions" within the larger context of the development of the category "religion" and its history of study in the Euro-American academy. He asks:

> A different set of taxonomic questions were raised by the
> "religions" and became urgent by the nineteenth century:
> Are the diverse "religions" species of a generic "religion"?
> Is "religion" the ultimate beginner, a *summum genus*, or is
> it best conceived as a subordinate cultural taxon? How
> might the several "religions" be classified?[279]

Smith identifies the relationship between "religion" and "religions" as primary, especially within the development of the field of religious studies or history of religion. He goes on to remind his reader that the plural "religions" begins to appear and, in fact, becomes "urgent" in the nineteenth century because of increased literacy, study, and colonial and imperial expansion globally.[280] The questions for Smith coalesce around linguistic appearances of terms, historical contexts, and usage. What is important to note, however, is that for Smith "religions" points to the overwhelming problem of a ubiquitous "religion." That is to say, Smith uses the plural ("religions") to continue to question the primary uses of the singular ("religion"). To reiterate what has been mentioned above, Smith bluntly, definitively states that religion is not universal, and insists that it is, in fact, necessarily alien to the very contexts that give cause to pluralize the term.

As I discussed in the first chapter, South Asia is a particularly fertile place for early scholars of religion to test out theories of the history of religion or the plurality of

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[279] J. Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," 275.

[280]Ibid.

religions.[281] What is more relevant to this particular chapter is J. Z. Smith's sense of what

pluralizing the term does—what work it accomplishes, what biases it betrays, and what

thinking it avoids. Smith argues that a pattern quickly developed and is still widely in

play today: "the history of the major 'religions' is best organized as sectarian history,

thereby reproducing the apologetic patristic hereosiological model."[282] Linking the

plurality of religions to the singular, universal conceptualization of religion in view of a

particular Christian theological history provides strong evidence that "religion" is

necessarily foreign to all traditions outside the Christian pale. That being said, however,

because Smith traces only the Euro-American genealogy and taxonomy of religion and

religions—because he only examines the term "religion" and its philological,

etymological development—he fails to imagine the possibility of both in non-Western

contexts. In short, he fails to imagine that any other language or cultural system might

possess a corresponding term or concept to that of the Latinate "religion."

        We have already discussed the ways in which the privileging of "religion" and its

Western, Christian lineage is important both theoretically and in terms of universality, but

it is again of particular relevance with respect to "religions." Of course, translation

always begets the typical issues: direct correspondence between terms or ideas, linguistic

and philological contexts, and those cultural patterns of speech and usage that may be

ultimately untranslatable. Those basic research problems being stated and with due

diligence to carefully navigate such terrain, we may still investigate those ideas that are

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[281] This is especially the case, as was discussed above, for "high" religions, "natural" or
"primitive" religions, and "new" religions.

[282] J. Z. Smith, 275.

comparable, corollary, or in any way related. This is especially vital if we take J. Z. Smith seriously: if "religion" and its plural "religions" are phenomena, categories, and problematics stemming from Euro-American academies and expansions, what are we to do with indigenous terms, concepts, and norms that do, in fact, appear rather similar?

Mathurānāth utilizes a plural that W. C. Smith argues has links to the early ninth century—a full ten centuries before J. Z. Smith rightfully cites the European surge of interest in the very topic.[283] Mathurānāth also uses "religions" as a plural between and amongst groups we might, at first glance, assume to be amalgamated, as well as those that appear both to our contemporary eyes and those of our author—with little differentiation between these two types of usages. Mathurānāth's use of "religions" is important and worthy of attention both because it lines up nicely temporally with J. Z. Smith's European examples—Mathurānāth writes in the early nineteenth century, when Smith believes the need to deal with plurality becomes "urgent"—and because it is a counter-example to the solely European lineage Smith cites.

Mathurānāth very generally refers to a multitude of "religions." In some cases, he is specific that a particular person or religious leader is a member of a certain caste (in the case, most often, of Brahmans or, speaking categorically, Brahmanism),[284] a particular lineage (with Sufi *tariqa*s or orders as examples),[285] or within very similar broad umbrella groupings like Islam. For example, this is to say that he often recognizes Muslims (*musulmān*) as Muslims, or in a few odd places as followers of the religion of Islam (*dīn-i*

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[283] W. C. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 84.

[284] Mathurānāth, 78, 90, 192, as examples.

[285]Ibid., 134-135, as examples.

islām).[286] He also references at least two Christians: one is his sponsor, Robert John

Glyn, and another is presumably a Protestant missionary living in Benares—Mathurānāth

makes clear this gentleman is "not Portuguese or of that church," but does not go as far as

to name any other particular denomination.[287] In both of these examples, Mathurānāth

refers to "high" or "great" religions, as Smith characterizes these historical taxonomies;

to borrow scientific taxonomical language, he refers to the genus rather than the

particular species often enough to indicate that such an understanding exists. Put

differently, Mathurānāth conceives of his world and many of his subjects as

simultaneously possessing particularities (i.e. "religions") while being part of larger,

overarching milieus (i.e. "religion").

To illustrate, Mathurānāth spends a good deal of time on delimited ascetic

communities in Varanasi. It is helpful to remember that the location of Varanasi is on the

Ganges River, a significant holy site often associated with its goddess namesake, Ganga,

who is sometimes understood as a consort of Shiva. The banks of the Ganges have been

the site of pilgrimage, worship, and ritual for many hundreds of years, if not longer.[288]

Mathurānāth does not reflect on any of the large festivals or *mela*s that continue to draw

pilgrims to the city today,[289] but he does observe a pilgrim (*ziyāratī*) he claims visited the

city to "bathe in that holiest (*aqdas*) of water."[290]

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[286] Ibid., 32-33, 55, 148.

[287] Ibid., 161.

[288] Diana L. Eck, *Banaras, City of Light*, 40.

[289] *Mela*s happen across India, and some of the largest happen along the banks of the Ganges,
both in and near Varanasi and distant from the city. One such *mela* is the famous Kumbh Mela,
which has three iterations in four locations along the sacred river: the *Ardh* (half) Kumbh Mela

Interestingly, it is in his description of ascetics generally and individuals who are followers of a guru, swami, or yogi more particularly that we see both the continued cultural framework of Islamicate and Persian definitions as well as the insertion of Sanskrit comments. For example, very early on in the work, in the section that I have called an introduction, he describes the religious landscape of Benares. He writes:

> This city, city of lights, is in fact a city of light (*nur*) and all
> of the men are properly pious. There are Muslims
> (*musalmān*) at mosques (*masajid*), and Christians at the
> large church (*bī `at*)[291]; followers of Guru Narayana
> (*muttabi `-i guru narayana*), Swami Hariradkar (*swami
> hariradkar-i*), and Swami Yoginder (*swami yoginder-i*) are
> to be seen near the ghats daily.[292]

On its own, this passage is fairly unremarkable. It is located in what I have called the introduction, and I would further state that this selection comes in the few pages where Mathurānāth has finished praising his sponsors and transitions to discussing the project at hand. What makes this selection interesting is that for the guru and two swamis, Mathurānāth has inserted Sanskrit in the margins. Next to the mention of the guru, which happens to fall near the margin, he translates "follower of Guru Narayana" from Persian

celebrated every six years; the *Purna* (complete) Kumbh takes place every twelve years; and the *Maha* (great) Kumbh Mela which comes after 12 complete (*Purna*) melas, or every 144 years, is held at Allahabad. As a point of reference, the Mela Administration of the Indian Government estimated that the 2007 Ardh Kumbh Mela attracted 70 million pilgrims. See: http://ardhkumbh.up.nic.in/ganga.htm (Accessed January 21, 2012.)

[290] Mathurānāth, 79.

[291] Mathurānāth does not mention this church by name. The largest church in Varanasi is St. Mary's, which is an Anglican Church and was built starting in 1810.

[292] Ibid., 8.

(*muttabi `-i guru narayana*) into Sanskrit (*guru nārāyaṇasya*).[293] In Sanskrit, he has

literally written "he of Guru Narayana," which indicates that he has translated his

statement or clause from Persian to Sanskrit, and felt the need to include it in the margins.

He does the same thing with the two swamis mentioned above, as well.

Because these insertions happen frequently with the mentioning of proper

names—proper non-Muslim names, I should specify—it is possible he does so to reflect

their difference. It is also possible he does so because he is unsatisfied with

transliterating their names—in the case of Guru Narayana, for example, he would be able

to indicate the difference between the "n" consonants,[294] and because Narayana is another

name for Vishnu, it is possible this was important to Mathurānāth, a Brahmin *pandita*. In

either case I am merely speculating, but it is the case that where Sanskrit appears it is

most often with respect to a proper name that, on its surface, can be characterized as non-

Muslim.

Regardless of the language in which he presents these individuals, it is clear that

Mathurānāth imagines "religions" to be a rather broad category. In the same sentences,

he references Muslims, Christians, swamis we may assume come from Hindu traditions

and a guru, also a Sanskrit honorific title.[295] Noticeably he does not call the swamis or

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[293] Ibid.

[294] Sanskrit has four "n" consonants, five if we include a nasalized "m," which are known as the *anunāsika* or nasals. "Narayana," for example, employs two of these four: *na* and *ṇa*.

[295] I am hesitant to outwardly state that the guru and two swamis are necessarily Hindu. The swamis are most likely from Hindu traditions, and even more specifically, those of ascetic orders prominent in Varanasi. However, because "guru" just indicates, at its base, a teacher, it is possible this is a teacher from some aspect of the Hindu fold, but it is also possible that this is an honorific title. Because I cannot be sure, I do not want to fall into the trap I am trying to portray: religion and religions are not fixed!

guru "Hindu," which brings two issues to bear: first, as other scholars have demonstrated, while Hindu is often used by Indians to describe themselves, it is not necessarily a primary term of religious belonging[296]; and, second, Mathurānāth envisions "religions" in a way that is not limited to the categorical term. The followers of the guru are not understood *secondarily* as followers and *primarily* as, for example, Hindus; they are primarily and singularly defined as his followers. Along these lines, we can extrapolate based on the selection I have provided and a host of others[297] that Mathurānāth recognizes religions to encompass large, powerful, historic institutions with many adherents (Islam, Christianity) and small, local, unaffiliated groups of unknown numbers (followers of gurus, swamis, and sometimes, though rarely, Sufi shaykhs).

Mathurānāth makes clear that "religion" exists in a non-European setting and can be universal, even if he understands universality differently than his European sponsors. By including the followers of swamis and gurus who are now unknown to us—groups small enough to have lost their import to time—Mathurānāth demonstrates that "religions," too, is a concept at play within Islamicate and Persianate taxonomies and cultures. If J. Z. Smith's first two categories have relevance and meaning within

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[296] David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence, "Introduction," in *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*, eds. David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2000), 2-4.

[297] For the purposes of space it is obviously impossible to offer even a dozen of the examples that are relevant here. Mathurānāth rarely uses the term "Hindu" and instead lists any non-Muslims and non-Christians (though Christians themselves are highly rare) in terms of their leader.

Mathurānāth's *Garden of Religions*, in the next section I will explore whether or not the third category—religious—has similar cache.

Religious (Identity)

If religion is the singular and religions the plural noun, then, grammatically, religious is the adjective at play within J. Z. Smith's essay, and part of the structure I have chosen to use in this chapter. Smith somewhat indignantly laments that on its own "religious" is an adjective without a noun to modify. He writes that "the 'religious' (the unknown that the scholar is seeking to classify and explain) becomes an aspect of some other human phenomenon (the known)."[298] He goes on to define—if I may call it that— religious as that which "most frequently" is identified with "rationality, morality, or feeling."[299] Smith is accurate: historically and certainly in common use, "religious" most often refers to a spectrum of actions, thoughts, texts, and customs, among many other broad categories, that may or may not refer back to any particular theological tradition, be it orthodox or heterodox. But while Smith gives short shrift to the adjectival use, as a category it carries far less weight than either "religion" or "religions."

While acknowledging the sheer breadth of applications of "religious," Smith seems to use the unwieldy adjective to demonstrate that its parent category—religion—is itself untenable. He does not spend nearly as much time developing the term's history or its post-Enlightenment uses as he does with the other related terms; he merely disregards

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[298]J. Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," 274.

[299] Ibid.

it as imprecise, the perfect proof of the root-word religion's inherent ambiguity. As has been demonstrated above, I do not find "religion" untenable even if it is expansive, nor do I imagine its adjective to be such. Instead, following Smith's philological lead, we simply need to investigate its uses with reference to specific nouns the adjective modifies. In the case of South Asia, I argue that "religious" most often modifies identity. This relatively short section will set about proving that argument, and I will continue to use Mathurānāth's *Garden of Religions* as a primary source and primary example thereof.

Before I launch into the ways in which Mathurānāth uses "religious" adjectivally, it is prudent that I make a case for the use of "identity" as the noun that it modifies. Questions of identity gain scholarly attention in recent years and most often circle around ideas of politics (having an identity's effects), self-naming (the process and fact of determining one's own identity), and the labeling of others (determining identity for someone else or a group, based on a host of markers). Identity in South Asia nearly always focuses on religious identity. As Arvind-Pal Mandair argues, the relationship Indians have with "religion" reflects a self-labeling in light of a colonial past which privileged religious identity; contemporary India is rife with politics of religion, even when actors claim secularity.[300] I do not necessarily hold his overarching point—that "religion" is ultimately *only* part of the West's specter—but his articulation of the intimate links between religious identity and South Asian subjectivity is exactly on point.

Mandair argues that, in South Asia, both insider (the individual) and outsider (anyone else) use religious identity as a primary way by which to mark people, and I suggest it is possible to expand that notion to places as well. Mathurānāth is but one

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[300] Arvind-Pal Mandair, *Religion and the Specter of the West*, 7.

example of an author who imagines his location to be part of a sacred, religiously

identified cosmology. Peter van der Veer links questions of religious identity to the

development of religious nationalism, and articulates careful, thoughtful connections

between the end of the British Raj, the rise of nation-states in South Asia, and reifications

of Hindu and Muslim group identities.[301] Religious nationalists in South Asia—be they

Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Christian or Buddhist—often articulate their mission in terms of

location; most famously, of course, are the articulation of India as Bharat Mata or Mother

India, and imagine the nation-state boundaries as that of a deity.[302]

Religious identity in South Asia extends well beyond its implications for

nationalism, however. The politics of religious identity, as well, extend beyond elections

and parliamentary sloganeering. Religious identity is a powerful tool of politics, of

course, but it is also a powerful element of self-labeling and group-labeling. As scholars

have pointed out, the reification of religious identities, theologies, and even the

terminologies used to express identity (i.e. "Hindu," "Lingāyat," "Sikh") gain steam

during the colonial period;[303] I have argued throughout this book that while the colonial

period is important, it is not the only period in which religious identities are developed,

maintained, and important. Mathurānāth's early nineteenth century work prioritizes the

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[301] Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

[302] See as one excellent example: Sumathi Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

[303] As examples: Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Dan A. Chekki, *Religion and Social System of the Virasaiva Community* (New York: Praeger, 1997); Alan M. Guenther, "A Colonial Court Defines a Muslim," in *Islam in South Asia in Practice,* ed. Barbara D. Metcalf (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 293-304.

labeling of individuals as belonging to one group or another, and it has implications for the category of religious identity.

To be clear, Mathurānāth does not discuss his fellow inhabitants of Varanasi in terms of identity. He speaks most frequently of religion (*dīn*) and religions (most often, *maẕahib*). I infer, however, the issue of identity and identities from the way he labels individuals on their own and with respect to which groups they (might) belong. I suggest that the politics of labeling individuals as part of and possessing a religious identity—the very politics at play in the colonial period—are not unknown to the early nineteenth century. If we imagine identity politics and processes to be the domain of the colonial period as well as its legacy, we run the risk of omitting complex understandings of self and community that predate British influences and control. Instead, it is vital to examine the ways in which Mathurānāth both imagines and assigns religious identity to individuals and groups in Varanasi.

Mathurānāth in a number of locations takes pains to explain the ways in which a given individual may or may not fit within a broader religious category. For the most part, as mentioned above, he labels individuals by a generalized, overarching category (caste, religion, *jāti*) or a specific affiliation (Sufi order, follower of a given swami or guru). To do so, he most often labels individuals by describing their appearance, location in the city, or something that might be called known facts—he lists "facts" that might more readily be termed assumptions about particular *jāti*s and sects especially. He also, grammatically speaking, labels individuals in terms of their master or teacher;

Mathurānāth describes individuals as "followers of" a number of local—and presumably locally recognizable—figures.[304]

For example, Mathurānāth makes mention of styles of dress with some regularity. He does not always mention an individual's clothing, but it happens with some frequency. He notes the color of garment occasionally, and in so doing differentiates between appearance as well as religious identity: he mentioned white-robed Sufis[305] and orange-robed devotees of Shiva.[306] He also, though less frequently, comments on a garment's style. He writes: "the followers of this Guru are not known to wear the orange *lungi*, but instead dress themselves in *pancha*."[307] Here, Mathurānāth differentiates between a *lungi*, an article of men's clothing that is a piece of cloth tied at the waist (known in America more often as a sarong), and a *pancha*, which is another article of men's clothing that, similarly, is a single piece of cloth tied around the waist that covers the legs entirely. Little difference is ascribed to these garments today, but must have been meaningful to Mathurānāth given his abovementioned quote.

Along similar lines, Mathurānāth also makes mention of styles of prayer. He does not spend a good deal of time on what we might call ritual, but he mentions rituals

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[304] Grammatically speaking, Mathurānāth uses both of the major ways one expresses possession in Persian to accomplish this: he relies on the *ezafe* construction (as in "*muttabi `-i guru ramasekar,*" or "follower of Guru Ramasekar," p. 201) as well as pronominal genitive enclitic (as in *hartāspash* or "his devotee," p. 198).

[305] Mathurānāth, 88.

[306] Ibid., 164.

[307] Little difference in meaning is ascribed to these articles today, despite their differences in appearance; but, these differences must have been meaningful beyond style to Mathurānāth. He writes: "the followers of this Guru are not known to wear the orange *lungi*, but instead dress themselves in *pancha*," (Mathurānāth, 165).

periodically, begging our brief attention. He mentions the seeking of alms by ascetics,

describing the ways in which these "noble men" commit themselves so fully they cannot

eat, and how Benares' pious "obligingly fulfill their piety" by feeding them.[308]

Mathurānāth also mentions the prominence of the congregational mosque and its

popularity on Fridays.[309] In only one location I have found reference to what might be

called Sufi ritual: Mathurānāth describes a scene in which a visiting Chishti shaykh

arrived from Mirzapur, and in his honor, white-robed Sufis held a ceremony and sang

until daybreak.[310] He does not mention the shaykh's name, but does describe him as a

Chishti shaykh (*shaykh chisthiyya*). This description sounds rather uncannily like *zikr*;

literally *zikr* means "remembrance," but as a ritual ceremony it most often describes

chanting or singing done to focus one's mind on God. Whether named or not, the process

of giving ascetics alms and of Sufi participation in *zikr* reflect both long-standing

traditions rooted in textual and social pronouncements as well as local iterations of those

very practices.

Each of these examples demonstrates apparently meaningful difference in

clothing or ritual: Mathurānāth uses these differences to define and categorize his

subjects, and he chooses these details among others to present to his sponsor—a foreigner

unfamiliar with Varanasi. These examples also therefore demonstrate a meaningful

ascription of religious affiliation and identity. Mathurānāth may not consistently focus

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[308] Mathurānāth, 167.

[309] Ibid., 180. Mathurānāth identities this mosque as "*Jāmi' Masjid,*" or Friday Mosque, a common term for congregational mosques in South Asia and beyond. It does not help identify the mosque itself, however, as most mosques have proper names alongside their "nickname" of Jāmi' Masjid.

[310] Ibid., 88-89. Mirzapur is approximately 31 miles from Varanasi.

on the garb or praxis of any of his individual subjects or the groups to which they belong, but when he does it is always with a purpose: these individuals and their groups perform difference, and are able to identified as distinctive because of those differences. It does not matter that the caliber of difference varies, as in what is a small dissimilarity between a *lungi* or *pancha* or more salient differences like Sufi ritual as opposed to those of Hindu ascetics. Mathurānāth uses these differences to identify and, in turn, summarize the identities of his religious subjects. Religious identities come to have great import in the late colonial period and continue to dominate discussions of South Asian politics, but they cannot be said to have their roots within Euro-American or Orientalist discourse. Mathurānāth's descriptions, labeling, and ascription of meaning proves that Islamicate categories were in full use to define, classify, and categorize not only religion and religions, but also religious identities.

Conclusion

The field of "religion" and, in fact, the term's very meaning, has been a major point of theoretical investigation of this book. Specifically, the claim that "religion" is necessarily European—and does not have autochthonous iterations—is one that I have challenged. Mathurānāth's *Riyāz al-maẕahib* stands as but one example of the use, employment, and development of premodern taxonomies of "religion," "religions" and—though it requires our inference—"religious" identity. As such, the *Garden of Religions* stands as evidence of both indigenous (South Asian) and trans-regional (Persianate, Islamicate) definitions and interpretations of religion (most often for Mathurānāth, *dīn*). Mathurānāth draws upon older concepts and terminologies as well as boundaries and

divisions distinctive of his analysis and linked to older, prominent works, like that of

Abu'l Fazl. The *Garden of Religions* demonstrates the complex nature of "religion" in

South Asia, but also beyond; as a text with genealogical connections and exceptional

understandings of Varanasi's cultural landscape, it is one answer to J. Z. Smith's

contention that "religion" is always European, a product of the colonial encounter, and

necessarily part of those discourses of power.

The taxonomies of religion present in nineteenth century South Asia stand apart

from those that were debated, constructed, and maintained by contemporaries in Europe.

Such indigenous systems indicate a robust self-understanding of religion, both of one's

own community and those that are present locally. For Mathurānāth, this included his

fellow Brahmin *pandita*s, on which he expounds in a few notable sections,[311] and the

followers of myriad gurus, shaykhs, swamis, and other elders as well as Muslims,

Christians, and Jains. Mathurānāth expounds upon the affiliations of numerous

individuals in terms that speak to both universality and particularity: all men are assumed

to have religion (*dīn*) as well as a community (*jumhūr*).

This is to say that religion is both universal and particular, and has both the

singular noun usage and the plural—much like the Euro-American situation J. Z. Smith

so eloquently describes. Mathurānāth's *Garden of Religions* stands to demonstrate the

ways in which "religion" may not be able to be universally applied, but can exist in non-

Euro-American contexts and, in those contexts, articulate a parallel understanding that

religion is universal. Put differently, the "religion" deployed by colonial actors in their

colonies may not have been universal, but that should not indicate that no other literary,

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[311] Mathurānāth, 61-66, 101-103, 249-252.

intellectual, or cultural tradition proffered its own term and understanding of religion that was meant to be totalizing.

The *Garden of Religions* was written at a time of great flux: the Mughal Empire was certainly waning in the face of internal and external pressures; the British East India Company continued to make territorial and economic gains across the Indian subcontinent; and, globally, the nineteenth century marked a time of a great shift of power, largely due to European and American expansion. Mathurānāth's work took just one year to complete, demonstrating not only his productivity and command of Persian, but also his superb command of the Persianate literature that he draws upon; he must have necessarily had these works at his mental disposal in order to be able to implicitly reference them. Similarly, Mathurānāth referenced Islamicate and Persianate taxonomies of religion not for his Mughal sponsors, but for his British ones. It is clear that both sets of his sponsors provided space for and demanded information on the study of local religion, religions, and religious identities. In short, they demanded and supported universality and particularity, and Mathurānāth had the scholarly lineages and local expertise to provide exactly what was asked of him.

In 1813, Mathurānāth completed and submitted the *Garden of Religions* to Robert John Glyn, a registrar and regent for the East India Company in Benares, who will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. In 1813, Mathurānāth was an imperial agent between empires, both of which were concerned with religion. In what follows, I will explore the relationship between these two empires—the British and the Mughal—in order to flesh out their mutual interest in and definition of religion and religions in South Asia. Much like the overvaluation of the genealogy and taxonomy of the Euro-American

use and definition of "religion," the legacy of the British vis-à-vis religion, religions, and religious identity is overstated in South Asia. By exploring the relationship between imperial entities and their shared interests in religion—and even their shared discourse about religion—I suggest it is possible to uncover a more robust understanding of how religious identities came to be formed, informed, and solidified. In so doing, I will demonstrate that the Mughal and British empires shared information, scholars, interests, and, ultimately, taxonomical systems for religion in a process I call co-imperialism.[312]

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[312] I will define this term and outline why I think it is useful, necessary, and on point in great detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: CO-IMPERIALISM AND THE CO-CONSTITUTIVE DEFINITION OF RELIGION

The entirety of this work has, at its broadest, both demonstrated and explored the complex relationship between Euro-American definitions of religion and the related field of religious studies alongside South Asian, Islamicate definitions of religion and the scholars who employ those terminologies. I have discussed South Asia as a discursive location for the interpretation, definition, and study of religion; I have demonstrated the historic Persianate and Islamicate taxonomies of religion present in the *Ā'īn-i Akbarī* by Abu'l Fazl; and, in the last chapter, I addressed the use and development of Abu'l Fazl's categories in Mathurānāth's *Riyāz al-maẕahib*. In each of these chapters, I have investigated multiple genealogies of "religion," the production of imaginaries and their effects on "religion," and the relationships between these genealogies and imaginaries. A major aspect of the above has been the parallel and corresponding Islamicate definitions of religion as evidence that the very category "religion" may not be as foreign, bankrupt, or outmoded as others have stated.[313] This final chapter examines the ways in which these parallel taxonomies inform each other with respect to the auspices of imperialism. I

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[313] Throughout, I have primarily used the works of Timothy Fitzgerald, Russell McCutcheon, J. Z. Smith, and W. C. Smith as examples of this scholarly position. Other examples include: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

argue that definitions of "religion" are constructed, manipulated, and reified co-constitutively through a process of co-imperialism.

Co-Constitutive Definition(s) of Religion

The theoretical underpinnings and terminologies of this chapter's argument deserve some unpacking. I contend that historical evidence demonstrates that "religion" and its Islamicate corollary "*dīn*" do not inhabit intellectual, cultural, or imperial silos. Though they develop in separate geographic locations, languages, and cultural milieus, these terms and their uses are not sequestered poles apart from each other. Rather, by processes of intellectual and economic contact as well as conflict and especially the process of transculturation delimited above,[314] the agents who employ these terms do so in a way that is informed by both European and Islamicate taxonomies. This is increasingly the case as we examine these terms independently and in relation to each other diachronically; over time, not only do we see more models and examples of encounter in the South Asian sphere, but we also see a greater global interest in knowing an other.[315]

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[314] "Transculturation" has been defined in the previous chapter. Following Flood and Ortiz, it describes the multidirectional process of change, emphasizing neither conflict nor peaceful encounter models that assume two wholly separate and distinct groups coming together but rather the interaction amongst centers, peripheries, and spheres.

[315] While Orientalism has been well studied and well theorized, its corollary Occidentalism remains relatively underrepresented in scholarly work. Notable exceptions include: Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Historiography* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Couse Venn, *Occidentalism: Modernity and Subjectivity* (California: SAGE Publications, 2000); Hamid Bahri and Francesco Canadé Sautman, "Crossing History, Dis-Orienting the Orient: Amin Maalouf's Uses of the 'Medieval'," in *Medievalisms in the postcolonial world: the idea of the Middle Ages outside Europe*, eds., Kathleen Davis and Nadia Altschul (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 174-205.

As we have seen throughout this book, the eras in focus have been marked by a shift in interest in the category of religion and the scholarly arguments about what counts as religion for both South Asian authors like Abu'l Fazl and Mathurānāth and Euro-American scholars. The deployment of parallel terminology and its development in the same period in seemingly disparate locations begs the following question: if "religion" is European, and "*dīn*" Islamicate and Persianate, how do we account for the coinciding use of, interest in, and institutionalization of these categories?

Many have argued that this is a result of the colonial expansion of European powers. As but one example, David Chidester specifically locates the development of comparative religion within "colonial conflict."[316] He argues that the development of the study of religion is rooted in three processes of understanding: first, frontier comparative religion, which was about local control; second, imperial comparative religion, which served the purpose of global control; and last, apartheid comparative religion, which sought local control applied with global terms.[317] He writes that scholars

> can only document and analyze the process of discovery,
> or, more accurately, the process of invention, through
> which knowledge about religion and the religions of the
> world was fashioned on colonial frontiers.[318]

This line of reasoning stresses the new and the discovery or invention of the new—colonialism and the frontiers of empire begot new power, new encounters, new "natives," new rituals, new languages.

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[316] David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), 1.

[317] Ibid., 3-5.

[318] Ibid., 16.

It is also a model that understands colonial expansion as a revolutionary historical moment, but also as a series of revolutionary discoveries; to be blunt, the model of history that understands the interest in "religions" as related to colonial expansion misunderstands the complex networks of trade, exchange, and encounter present well before European powers existed. Of course, I do not wish to devalue the colonial enterprise nor the experience of colonialism—certainly, as many scholars have far more eloquently proven than I am able to do here, the colonial period is one that continues to bear its mark on formerly colonized geographies, lands, and—as Said would have it— minds.[319] What I do wish to state is that our historical imagination for colonial agents inventing religion and religions is incredibly limiting for scholars of history, religion, and the development of these categories and their uses; furthermore, it strips meaningful and historically present agency from those colonized historical actors.

I refer, more precisely, to one of the subjects of this book: Mathurānāth. By all historical definitions, Mathurānāth is a colonized subject: his city, Benares, was colonized and under heavy foreign economic and institutional control; he presumably chose to work for the East India Company as opposed to the Mughal and local elites he had previously served, making him part of the colonial apparatus; and his work contributed to imperial forms of knowledge, whether or not he planned for this. In the early nineteenth century, as British colonial agents began to shift toward imperial functions, they asked local intellectual elites to help map South Asia. The question of

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[319] See: Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Jacob T. Levy, ed., with Iris Marion Young, *Colonialism and its Legacies* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2011).

religion was obviously present, and one answer to that question is Mathurānāth's *Garden of Religions.* If we are to imagine the colonial production of knowledge as a solely foreign enterprise, one that is focused on the new, radical discoveries, and purposeful subjugation of local people, customs, and processes, I suggest that we necessarily lose the indigenous voices, intellectual structures, and institutions that help shape the colonial knowledge base.[320]

The very subject of this book has been, first and foremost, the existence of an indigenous Islamicate corollary for "religion" that predates European colonial intervention in South Asian history. The secondary project has been the ways in which that category comes to inform that of the British colonial enterprise. While it is but one example, Mathurānāth's work stands to represent the myriad volumes, interlocutors, and studies commissioned, consulted, and mined by the British; Mathurānāth is a scholarly informant whose work is both inherently Islamicate *as well as* evidence for his British patrons of religion's inherent import. In other words, I suggest that Mathurānāth is not merely sponsored by the British in some innocuous way, but is a colonized actor whose definitions and taxonomies come to be part of the British knowledge system; his work is part of the colonial machine that so many scholars credit—or fault—for the invention of religion. I suggest that this machine, as it is comprised of colonized and colonizing actors alike, cannot be understood as exclusively alien.

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[320] On the issue of production of knowledge and production of epistemologies, I am obviously indebted to Michel Foucault. While much of his writing deeply addresses these issues, I have been most influenced in my own historical thinking about knowledge, power, and agency by *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd ed., trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

Instead of reading history as a series of set pathways, I again turn to Flood's use of "routes not roots, networks not territories"[321] line of thought: imagining networks of scholars, imperialists, and theologians rather than diametrically opposed individual scholars, empires, or theological systems allows us to more fruitfully investigate a term like religion, its impact, its use, and its indigenous iterations. By focusing on the complicated networks of north India from, as I have suggested, the time of Akbar through the early nineteenth century, we are able to understand "religion" not necessarily as a foreign, invasive concept, but as one with corresponding, autochthonous lineages. The process of transculturation necessarily implies that the multiplicity of interactions between and amongst individuals, groups, religions and empires impact on each other— this is not a unidirectional relationship even if it is often uneven or unequal. Religion in its European and South Asian articulations could not be confined with borders or boundaries; from Akbar's time, Jesuits in the court debated "religion" and "religions" at the imperial level,[322] and the multidirectional effects of these conversations, encounters, and processes is the co-constitutive definition of religion in question here.

Contact, encounter, and transculturation most clearly create spaces wherein multiple actors of diverse backgrounds construct, maintain, and develop ideas about

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[321] Flood, *Objects of Translation*, 9.

[322] While not a specific focus here, much scholarship has noted the relationship of European Catholics, especially Jesuits, to South Asian empires and, as is especially relevant here, religion. See as examples: Ines G. Županov, *Disputed Mission: Jesuit Experiments and Brahmanical Knowledge in Seventeenth-Century India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999); John Correia-Afonso, ed., *Letters from the Mughal Court : the first Jesuit mission to Akbar (1580-1583)* (St. Louis : Institute of Jesuit Sources; Anand, India: G.S. Prakash, 1981); Pierre Du Jarric, *Akbar and the Jesuits: an account of the Jesuit missions to the court of Akbar* (New Delhi : Tulsi Pub. House, 1979); and Antonio Monserrate, *Embajador en la corte del Gran Mongol: Viajes de un Jesuita Catalán del siglo XVI por la India, Paquistán, Afganistán y el Himalaya* (Lleida : Editorial Milenio, 2006).

religion. Therefore, I suggest that "religion" comes to be informed by multiple

taxonomies—indigenous and foreign, Islamicate and European—and, in turn, so do

"religions" and "religious" identities. Not only is religion present in South Asia, the

indigenous definitions thereof come to inform the very definitions assumed by some to be

applied from the outside.[323] Put differently, I suggest that colonizers and colonized

agents together constructed knowledge about religion, and this is what I indicate by using

the phrase co-constitutive definition of religion.

I have explored Mathurānāth's work as one example of this phenomenon:

utilizing Islamicate definitions and Persian literary norms, he presented Robert John Glyn

with the information requested—a summary of the religions of Benares. This summary

fully, robustly described religion, religions, and religious identities in a way that we must

consider in terms of its effects: with so many East India Company officials stationed in

and around Benares in the same period, we must reason that any number of them could

have observed their own surroundings and prepared a report, as they did elsewhere.[324] In

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[323] As touched on in chapter 1, these include scholarly works where the British or other European colonists or imperialists are imagined to have invented a religion or a religious identity and imposed it upon a population, either by rule within a colonized territory or by intellectual epistemological violence and the institutionalization of knowledge. See as examples: Gyanendra Pandey, "'Encounters and Calamities': The History of a North India *Qasba* in the Nineteenth Century," in *Selected Subaltern Studies,* eds. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 89-128; Vasudha Dalmia, "The Only Real Religion of the Hindus: Vaisnava Self-representation in the Late Nineteenth Century," in *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious and National Identity*, eds. Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Stietencron (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995), 176-210; Christopher Fuller, *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); John S. Hawley, "Naming Hinduism," in *Wilson Quarterly,* Summer (1991), 20-34.

[324] The gazetteers of India are one place where European agents—especially British, Scottish, and Irish authors—wrote articles about life in South Asia, which often included discourse about religion. For a catalogue of these series, see: *Gazetteers of India in the British period*, Leiden, The Netherlands: IDC, 1991.

the same year that Mathurānāth presented his work to his sponsors, Warren Hastings, the once-Governor General of India and former head of the East India Company, testified before the House of Lords and House of Commons about the religions in India, among other things. He stated:

> What I have to add must be taken as my belief, but a belief impressed by a longer and more intimate acquaintance with the people than has fallen to the lot of many of my countrymen. In speaking of the people, it is necessary to distinguish the Hindoos, who form the great proportion of the population, from the Mahometans, who are intermixed with them, but generally live in separate communities; the former are gentle, benevolent, most susceptible of gratitude of kindness shewn them, than prompted to vengeance for wrongs inflicted, and as exempt from the worth propensities of human passion as any people upon the face of the earth; they are faithful and affectionate in service, and submissive to legal authority; they are superstitious it is true, but they do not think ill of us for not thinking as they do. Gross as the modes of their worship are, the precepts of their religion are wonderfully fitted to promote the best ends of society, its peace and good order; and even from their theology, arguments may be drawn to illustrate and support the most refined mysteries of our own. The intolerant and persecuting spirit of Mahometanism has spared them through a course of three centuries, and even bound them into union with its own professors, without any ill consequences that I have ever heard resulting from it. I verily believe both classes would unite in resisting any attempts, should any be made, to subvert the religion of either.[325]

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[325] Warren Hastings, esq., as quoted in *Minutes of Evidence taken before the Right Honourable The House of Lords in the Lords Committees, appointed to take into consideration so much of the speech of His Royal Highness the Prince Regent as relates to the Chapter of the East-India Company, and to the Providing effectually for the future Government of the Provinces of India; and to report to the House; and to whom were referred the Petition of the United Company of Merchants of England trading to the East-Indies, respecting their Charter; and also the several Petitions presented against and in favour of the Renewal of the said Charter* (London: Printed by Order of the Court of Directors of the Information of the Proprietors, Cox and Son, 1813), 2. Interesting spellings are the property of the original text.

Clearly, the East India Company and the British Parliament had their own fellow, trustworthy British informants from which to draw and construction knowledge of South Asia. Back home in London, both the Company and Parliament saw fit to interrogate those informants as part of the annual review of the East India Company and its holdings in India and the East Indies.[326] But these informants were not the only ones asked that year to offer their estimation of the religious milieu of India.

The locally based regents of the East India Company, presumably just as capable of offering their own observations about religion and the populace of India as their more renowned colleagues did before Parliament, asked the capable Mathurānāth to offer *his* observations. Mathurānāth did so in the imperial Mughal style—that is, using Persian language and Persianate forms. We must deduce that Mathurānāth's *Garden of Religions* was an attempt by the British to understand the religions of Benares—if not the religions of India writ large—on the account of its own scholars.[327] In turn, the account of Mathurānāth—read here as but one example of many like it[328]—should be understood as evidence that British officials determined their categories of religions based upon indigenous actors. This relationship demonstrates the co-constitutive definitional process at work.

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[326] While I quote from the 1813 hearings to purposefully highlight their contemporaneous nature with respect to Mathurānāth's work, it should be noted that these hearings began in the seventeenth century and continued until 1867.

[327] A famous albeit Orientalist (and dismissive) example of the use of Indian historians is: Sir Henry Miers Elliott, *The history of India, as told by its own historians. The Muhammadan period*., ed. John Dowson (Calcutta: Susil Gupta [1956]).

[328] Nicholas B. Dirks, "Colonial Histories and Native Informants: Biography of an Archive," in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, ed. Carol Appadurai Breckenridge (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 290.

In this vein, it is important to note a bit about John Glyn's personal story. Because he worked for the East India Company, there exists quite a good bit of detail about his life.[329] He was born Robert Thomas John Glyn on September 5, 1788 to Richard Carr and Mary Glyn, and was baptized about a month later, in October 1788 at the Parish of Saint James, Westminster. John Glyn starting work with the Company in 1807 as the Assistant to the Register of the Provincial Court of Benares, and proceeded to move up within Company hierarchy rather quickly; in 1810 he became the Register of Benares, and in 1813 he was both the Register and a Judge and Magistrate of Bundelcund, a region that spans the contemporary states of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh which was under the jurisdiction of Benares during the early nineteenth century. He left India for London in 1817, but returned a year later to Meerut, a city approximately forty-five miles northwest of Delhi. Glyn's service "in-country" with the Company ended in 1823, but he continued to work at the London offices until his retirement in 1828 at the age of forty.[330] Glyn is reported to have commissioned the work in question here, *Garden of Religions,* as well as a work on glassmaking.[331]

John Glyn's long and successful career with the East India Company, and his patronage of at least two separate works, demonstrates an Orientalist aid in the

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[329] The British Library is currently and continually updating its East India Company Office Records, which includes family backgrounds, birth certificates, baptismal records, and so forth, not only for serving officers but also their family (born either in the United Kingdom or India).

[330] From online India Office Family Records, British Library. Last updated 9 Sept 2010: http://indiafamily.bl.uk/UI/FullDisplay.aspx?RecordId=014-000106202. Accessed 10/19/10, using reader number and login.

[331] Ghulam Yahya, *The Eleven Illustrations*, or *The Illustrated Book About Makers Of Glassware, etc., And A Description of Their Tools,* edited, translated and introduced by Mehr Afshan Farooqi. http://www.library.upenn.edu/collections/sasia/crafts1820/. Accessed April 17, 2012.

production of knowledge. In fact, aspects of the Orientalist production of knowledge are part of the vocabulary, sources, and ideas that form co-constitutive definitions of religion. Whether or not Orientalist scholars looked upon their subjects with the same critical approaches we value today is irrelevant for the moment; what is relevant are the ways in which Orientalist scholars prided themselves on having indigenous, "authentic" knowledge in their formulations of history, philosophy, and philology. It would not be an oversimplification to suggest that most of the Orientalist works—including dictionaries,[332] histories, (proto-) ethnographies, translations, and biographies—draw upon indigenous sources.[333] In fact, it would be entirely accurate to describe a very particular, purposeful valuation of the use of indigenous sources in both official and scholarly narratives and monographs. This demonstrates the ways in which colonialists and colonized people are necessarily imbricated in the production of knowledge.

Acknowledging this imbrication is of particular import with respect to the category of religion writ large as well as the development of taxonomies of religions. By asserting that the construction of religion is co-constitutive, I suggest that South Asian agents—be they Muslim, Hindu, high or low caste, or otherwise—directly inform the categories British imperialists use in their legal, economic, and cultural understandings of India. I believe that acknowledging and demonstrating the imbrication—as was one

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[332] As examples of dictionaries specifically committed to the use of original or authentic Persianate or South Asian sources: Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English dictionary etymologically and philologically arranged with special reference to cognate Indo-European languages* (Oxford The Clarendon Press, 1899); Arthur N. Wollaston, *A complete English-Persian dictionary; compiled from original sources* (London: John Murray, 1904); John T. Platts, *A dictionary of Urdū, classical Hindī, and English* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1997 [1884]).

[333] Many histories, ethnographies, biographies and texts in translation have been listed and examined above, so I will not repeat them here.

purpose of delving into Mathurānāth's work—helps recover indigenous, Islamicate

narratives of self-definition; further, this is a recovery of agency often stripped of local

persons and groups in scholarly and popular accounts of the colonial period.

Additionally, taking seriously the ways in which Orientalists did not necessarily concoct

realities without respect to indigenous voices is an important point: while Orientalists,

colonists, and imperialists often misuse—even abuse—local knowledges for their own

purposes, the issue here is that we fully acknowledge that they *use* local knowledges.

This flies in the face of rhetorics that would depict the British colonial period as one that

necessarily ignored indigenous voices, histories, and customs. Instead, I suggest that

these knowledges inform the processes of knowledge production, especially with respect

to religion.

Many scholars have investigated the ways in which Orientalists construct religion

in South Asia from the vantage point of Hindu traditions. In some ways, those histories

and critiques are perfectly fitting here: after all, Mathurānāth was a Brahmin *pandita*, a

Hindu presumably entrenched within a particular religious community of other

Brahmins.[334] A typical understanding of Indian contributions to British definitions of

religion—and especially of Hinduism—is summarized neatly as follows:

> Indians adopted some of the Orientalist and colonial ideas,
> combined these with elements from their own (pre-
> colonial) culture and used this combination for their own
> purposes. Two elements are generally identified as the pre-
> colonial foundations of Hinduism, namely Brahmanism or

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[334] Mathurānāth does not mention, beyond his caste affiliation, to what, if any, *jāt* he belongs, and what his personal or familial religious predilections might be. In many cases, Hindus have a particular deity to which great value is assigned or follow a subset of philosophical, praxis, or temple affiliation most closely. For example, Śrivaiṣnava individuals are typically Brahmin whose *jāt* indicates a deep devotion to Vishnu.

the Vedāntic religion of the brahmans, and a pre-colonial Hindu self-awareness.[335]

Mathurānāth certainly fits the bill in terms of a viable interlocutor; as a Brahmin, presumed to have special knowledge about religion, he and his knowledge could be deemed valuable to the British colonial regime. While scholars have taken this neatly formulated history to task on the grounds that "Hinduism" and "religion" is far too complicated to ever be this neat,[336] a major set of categories remain absent: Islam, Muslims, Islamicate power and Islamicate definitions.

The debates about the category of religion, the ways in which British colonial power structured those initial debates, and the role of agency is one that, I suggest, focuses almost solely on Hinduism. A few scholars even suggest that Islam, as an identifiable system, was not entirely part of the discourse about religion in South Asia; more often, however, scholars root Hindu self-identification within a discourse of opposition to or with Islam. For example, David Lorenzen notes that the term "Hindu" comes into wider use and, in fact, gains a religious connotation during the period of Muslim rule. He continues on to argue, "much of modern Hindu identity is rooted in the history of the rivalry between Hinduism and Islam."[337] Lorenzen makes very clear the

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[335] Marianne Keppens and Esther Bloch, "Introduction," in *Rethinking Religion in India: the Colonial Construction of Hinduism* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 7-8.

[336] There has been much productive debate about the nature of "Hinduism," whether or not it is a useful category, one of total fabrication by outsiders, or one with inherit and indigenous meaning, as has been discussed above (see especially chapter 1). A few highlights of this debate include: S. N. Balagangadhara, *'The Heathen in his Blindness…': Asia, the West, and the Dynamic of Religion* (New Delhi: Manohar Press, 1994 [2nd ed. 2005]); Wendy Doniger, *"*Hinduism by any other Name," *Wilson Quarterly*, 1991, 15: 35-41; R. E. Frykenberg, "Constructions of Hinduism at the nexus of history and religion," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History,* 1993, 23: 523-550; Richard King, "Orientalism and the modern myth of 'Hinduism'," *Numen* (1999), 46: 146-185.

[337] Lorenzen, "Who Invented Hinduism?" 631.

historical groundings of this claim, and I do not doubt that the development of "Hinduism" and "Hindu" as religious categories both comes into fashion during Muslim rule as well as sharply informs modern conceptualizations of "rivalry" between the groups.

In this midst of this important literature, what stands out, however, are the ways in which few scholars have brought the pre-colonial set of definitions that were either instantiated by Muslims or heightened by their political presence into the conversation about category construction, both in and outside South Asia. I suggest that, were we to imagine a binary, both sides of this discussion—internal articulations of self and external categorizations—are directly impacted by Islamicate and Persianate definitions, which can be and have been imagined as both internal and external modalities. As I have noted above, and as Lorenzen notes as well, Muslim scholars used the term "Hindu" and referred to the "religion of Hindustan" well before a European colonial presence emerged in South Asia; the earliest of these appears to be al-Bīrūnī, who clearly mentions the religion of Hindus and Hindustan.[338] Scholars have rightfully pointed to the role of Muslims in constructing or furthering the definitional schemes which included "Hindu" or "Hindu religion;" but the role of not only Muslim scholars but of Islamicate scholarship has been under-theorized with respect to its relationship to the overarching category of religion developed in and in response to South Asia. To be a bit more blunt, Muslims and Islamicate systems are either under-represented or missing altogether from the conversation about South Asian religion and religions.

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[338] al-Bīrīnī, *Alberuni's India*, trans. E. C. Sachau, 2 vols in 1 (New Delhi: S Chand, 1964).

In light of this, I suggest that acknowledging that South Asian agents participated in co-constitutive definitions of religion serves to better theorize not only "religion" as a concept and discipline, but also the individual religions of South Asia themselves. Specifically, the integral role of Islamicate, Persianate categories, norms, and institutions alongside the actors who employed them demand further attention as they influenced epistemologies of religion for South Asians of diverse backgrounds as well as later colonial agents. In some ways, what I suggest is that in recognizing the co-constitutive nature of religion, it is possible not to escape Western uses of "religion," but rather to add local epistemologies to a heavily critiqued field. In so doing, we gain not only historical voices that had previously been silent (or silenced), but we also manage to demonstrate the ways in which local, vernacular, indigenous categories came to inform supposedly foreign entities.[339]

One such historic example would include that of Horace Hayman Wilson, who wrote a number of books, articles, and lectures on the subject of Hindus and the various iterations of Hindu traditions.[340] Like many Orientalists and Sanskritists of his time, Wilson's works seem preoccupied with charting, classifying, and formulating the patterns of praxis and doxa within Hindu traditions. Unlike others, however, Wilson directly cites

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[339] Sheldon Pollock makes a similar observation about ideas, their transferences, and the spheres of influence they exhibit, albeit about Sanskrit in an earlier historical period. See, as a theoretically savvy historical example: Sheldon Pollock, "The Sanskrit Cosmopolis, 300-1300: Transculturation, Vernacularization, and the Question of Ideology," in *Ideology and Status of Sanskrit*, ed. Jan E. M. Houben (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 197-247.

[340] Wilson was widely published, but most relevant to the discussion here are two works: H. H. Wilson, *Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus*, from "Asiatic Sketches," vols XVI and XVII (Calcutta: Bishop's College Press, 1846) and *Essays and lectures on the religions of the Hindus, Volume 1* (London: Trüber & Co., 1861 [1828-1832]). Both are currently available digitally through the GoogleBooks Project.

Mathurānāth's *Garden of Religions* as one of two primary sources vital to make his case.

He writes that it would have been "impossible" to read all of the numerous works on the

different "sects of the Hindus," and so instead made due with reliable sources from South

Asia.[341] Wilson nicely demonstrates the co-constitutive process of definition by noting,

in the first person, that:

> I have been obliged to content myself, therefore, with a
> cursory inspection of a few of those compositions, and to
> depend for much of my information on oral report, filling
> up or correcting from these two sources the errors and
> omissions of two works, on this subject professedly, from
> which I have derived the ground work of the whole
> account.[342]

Wilson continues, stating:

> The works alluded to are in the Persian language, though
> both were written by Hindu authors; the first was compiled
> by Sital Sinh, *múnshí* to the *Rájá* of Benares; the second by
> Mathurá Náth, late librarian of the Hindu College, at the
> same city [Benares], a man of great personal respectability
> and eminent acquirements: these works contain a short
> history of the origin of the various sects, and descriptions
> of the appearance, and observances, and present condition
> of their followers: they comprise all the known varieties
> with one or two exceptions, and, indeed, at no one place in
> India could the enquiry be so well prosecuted as Benares.[343]

Wilson goes on to note that "the work of Mathurá Náth is the fullest and most

satisfactory," and, in so doing, clearly acknowledged the breadth, scope, and import of

Garden of Religions and its author.[344]

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[341] Wilson, *Essays and lectures on the religions of the Hindus, Volume 1*, 8.

[342] Ibid.

[343] Ibid., 8-9. Emphases, diacritical marks, and punctuation in original.

Wilson's lengthy passage on the worth of the texts he uses to form the foundation of his own work on the variety of Hindu traditions demonstrates a few key issues broadly speaking as well as with reference to this book. First, he notes that Benares is distinct among other Indian cities, claiming that at no other location would such studies of religion be possible or done with such high standard. This is, in many ways, reminiscent of the argument I made in chapter 1 about the particular location of South Asia and Benares as a site of discourse for and about categories of religion. Second, Wilson notes the special case of Mathurānāth, citing the fullness and quality of his study, *Garden of Religions.* Last, Wilson demonstrates simply by recognizing the two Persian texts as foundational the ways in which his conclusions, observations, and categorizations are fundamentally based upon the voices of South Asian scholars. It is clear that Mathurānāth stands as an important part of the definitional and categorization processes both within his own context and as part of the broader colonial conversation.

If we imagine the process of definition to be one of translation and reflexivity across time and place, we are able to better envision religion, religions, and religious identities of South Asia not as imposed by imperial elites—be they Muslim or British— but rather part of a multifaceted, multidirectional discourse. The role of an imperial power, imperialism, and individual empires in the definitional process is an important one, and it is one that I address next in the following section.

Co-Imperialism: Definitions, Connections, and Significance

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[344] Ibid., 9.

Much as definitions of "religion" that traced their origins to European or Islamicate foundations do not exist and did not develop in mutually exclusive silos, these definitions do not appear in or from vacuums. Rather, many of the treatises on "religion" and its plural "religions" are part of what I termed intellectual empires in the first chapter. Patronage by colonial and imperial entities, official governmental or imperial studies, and courtly debates all structure many of the early works on religion. Furthermore, these works—including those of Abu'l Fazl and Mathurānāth—are read and employed by colonial and imperial entities as part of the process of rule and definition. This is all to say that the role of *power* in shaping, constructing, and reifying taxonomies of religion cannot be ignored. Not only did imperial and colonial agents commission works on religion, they also used existing works to further support working definitions as part of rule.

I suggest that the imperial modes of knowledge are not limited to one empire or another in the case of South Asia, but rather extend to and exist among both empires directly in question here, Mughal and British. Because imperial power, knowledge, and patronage are heavily intertwined with definitions of religion and religions, I contend that these definitions are part of a process of co-imperialism. I use co-imperialism to indicate two related but admittedly different issues: first, this term denotes the historic realities of nineteenth century north India; and second, the process through which information, identities, and this very history were produced. Therefore, I define co-imperialism in two related ways: first, as a descriptor of an era in which an individual could be the subject of multiple courts; and second, as the very avenues through which Mughal and British

officials, policies, and cultural norms affect each other and produce knowledge, information, policies, and norms together.[345]

To better flesh out this term and the two related ways in which I use it, let me explicate each thread a bit more. The first aspect of co-imperialism is descriptive: it indicates a time period in which any one agent could be the subject of multiple crowns. Co-imperialism can be used descriptively to indicate the historical milieu and power structures of north India, especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, because it was a time in which Mughal power structures overlapped with those of the British.[346] Given the long history of the East India Company and its agents, and their battles, skirmishes, and contestations for control, the idea of stable imperial boundaries is flawed; while we today imagine a globe divided in dark, uninterrupted lines to demarcate

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[345] "Coimperialism" or "coimperialisms" are terms that are very seldom used. In fact, I have found one English-language citation of the term, which itself draws from a Spanish-language article. These usages both discuss Cold War-era understandings of Soviet and US policy, actions, and diplomacy. I use the terms as stated above, in terms of the historic realities of north India as well as the process through which north Indian realities were produced; by using these terms in these ways, I realize I may be using a neologism. The Spanish-language source is: Maria Elena Rodríguez de Magis, "Una interpretación de la guerra fría en Latino-américa," *Foro internacional* 4, no. 4 (April-June 1964). The English-language work in which this was cited: Jorge I. Dominguez, "Consensus and Divergence: The State of the Literature on Inter-American Relations in the 1970s" *Latin American Research Review* , Vol. 13, No. 1 (1978), pp. 87-126.

[346] While a hilarious commentary and great stand-up routine, Eddie Izzard's sense—and that of many traditional narratives—that the British conquered the world by "showing up," planting flags in the name of the Queen, and immediately ruling South Asia does not hold historic water. (See his bit in *Dressed to Kill*, 1999). Rather, control was won, often in the form of physical battles as well as those of a more economic nature. As has been mentioned above, the East India Company traces its roots in India to the early 17th century, and slowly accumulated land and the power that comes from land-holding within the Mughal system. That being said, however, British power, dedicated armies, and institutions gained quite a bit of steam in the 18th and 19th centuries, coming to a head after the 1857 Sepoy Rebellion, which marks the time India went from being a colony to being a formal part of the British Empire.

autonomous states, this was hardly the case until very recently.[347] The presence of

frontiers and borderlands that may oscillate between hazy, distant, poignant, or forceful

control from a political or economic center makes it reasonable to envision that

individuals interacted with multiple ruling institutions or moved between and among

spaces structured by rival entities.[348] This is especially true in the period in which the

British hired Mathurānāth—after he had previously worked for the Mughals.

In the early nineteenth century, Mughal authorities still reigned, even if in

comparatively diminished capacities to early periods; likewise, the early nineteenth

century marked a time in which British power increased dramatically across the Indian

subcontinent.[349] Multiple seats of imperial power therefore typify this period. Some of

these seats of power are geographically defined, as in the British colonial and imperial

use of Calcutta (Kolkata) and Madras (Chennai) as bases, which were peripheral to the

Mughal regime or outside of it altogether. Others of these seats of power can be defined

in terms of competing interests, as in the example of Benares, where both ruling elites

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[347] For discussions of the politics and imaginaries created by mapping, see as examples: Arthur Jay Klinghoffer, *The power of projections: how maps reflect global politics and history* foreword by Harvey Sicherman (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2006); Jeremy Black, *Maps and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); and Ash Amin, "Regions Unbound: Towards a New Politics of Place," *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography*, Vol. 86, No. 1, Special Issue: The Political Challenge of Relational Space (2004), pp. 33-44.

[348] Richard Eaton deals with the issue of frontiers and borderlands in great detail, though from the vantage point not of the Mughal and British contestations for control, but that of Bengal and the Mughal centers. See: Richard Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 40-49, 137-193.

[349] Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subramanian, "Eighteenth-Century Historiography and the World of the Mughal *Munshī*," in Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subramanian, *Writing the Mughal World: Studies on Culture and Politics*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

had stable articulations and positions of authority.[350] In any case, when I use co-imperialism as a descriptor it is precisely these formations I wish to illustrate: the sometimes shared, sometimes contested, but ultimately overlapping spectra of authority between Mughal and British imperial agents, institutions, and structures. I mean to indicate a time period in which individual subjects could be imagined to be subject to more than one center of authority.[351]

I suggested that co-imperialism is not merely a term used to describe an historic milieu or period, but additionally indicates the *production* of information, policies, institutions, and norms that comes about as a result of the presence of multiple authorities. Above, I have used Marshall Hodgson's term Islamicate to indicate the myriad effects of the rule of Muslims; Islamicate represents the complex nature of an area, its ideological framework, and its cultural production that is influenced directly by Muslims, the rule of Muslims, and the legacies of the rule of Muslims. In a similar vein, I use co-imperialism to denote the ways in which multiple seats of control affect an area, its ideological framework, and its cultural production—but instead of imagining one overarching specter of power, I reserve space for multiple specters to exert influence. In this case, of course, I refer to those realms of Mughal and British control, and the products of that control.

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[350] Diana L. Eck, *Banāras: City of Light* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 83-93.

[351] I do not expect "co-imperialism" to take off as a term, but I do hope, in other work, to explore the ways in which it can be used to describe historical realities outside of the time period on which my work currently focuses. By no means do I wish to indicate in defining my term vis-à-vis the case study I cite that this is somehow unique; there are many examples, in South Asian history and elsewhere, of competing, overlapping, and contested authority over a populace. In fact, it is this flexibility of "co-imperialism" to describe geographic regions in history that are in flux that I think makes it a compelling and useful term, to be used alongside the theoretical frameworks that frontiers, borderlands, and boundaries already provide.

Certainly, others have theorized and argued that the very process of colonization created new epistemologies, discourses, and even selves. Postcolonial and decolonial scholarship is the most relevant set of examples, here; many of these works have taken a very critical stance toward the ways in which superiority in the colonial period came to be. The idea proffered traditionally—that "civilized" Europeans went to foreign lands to help in the civilizing process—is the most heavily critiqued idea and historical narrative.[352] Specifically, that Europe was itself well articulated *before* the colonial period has been a hallmark of these critiques. Frantz Fanon stated this most sharply: "Europe is literally the creation of the Third World."[353] Scholars and commentators have been quick—and correct—to point out the reflexive way in which creating colonized others created colonizers. Fanon's point is apt, here, because the existence of colonized foreign lands defined Europe; it is a co-constitutive, reflexive, relational identity.

I contend that co-imperialism as I have defined it does not negate the work of postcolonial or decolonial scholars; rather, I use the term to highlight the very relationship they have articulated so well. The affiliation between colonized and colonizer is one that necessarily affected both parties: this defines European alongside Indian, to use the relevant examples. However, in retaining "colonized" and "colonizer"

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[352] As but a few examples of very many, see: Homi K. Bhabha, "The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism," in Houston A. Baker, Manthia Diawara, Ruth H. Lindeborg, eds., *Black British cultural studies: a reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 87-107; Ian Copland, "The Imprint of the Past: Reflections on Regime Change with Particular Reference to 'Middle India', c. 1947-50," in Dipesh Chakrabarty, Rochona Majumdar, and Andrew Sartori, eds., *From the Colonial to the Postcolonial: India and Pakistan in Transition* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 287-309; Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); and Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[353] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* translated by Richard Philcox; with commentary by Jean-Paul Sartre and Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Grove Press, 2004 [1965]).

as the primary descriptors of the populations involved in these contestations for power, we lose the historic, indigenous landscape of power, rule, authority and authorities, and empire. In other words, as is the case study in question, co-imperialism purposefully denotes the presence, importance, and influence of indigenous imperial powers (Mughals) alongside and in conversation with foreign imperial powers (British). I see the term co-imperialism building upon the reflexivity of power dynamics expressed by other scholars, but specifically incorporating and providing space for autochthonous authority and elites. By doing so, I maintain that we are better able to account for South Asian agency in the face of British colonialism and imperialism, the legacy and influence of Islamicate systems, and a more robust history of the mechanisms of colonialism and imperialism in India.[354]

Mathurānāth's *Garden of Religions* is, in many ways, an ideal example of a product of co-imperialism. As an author of the Mughal court (*munshī*), he inhabited a very particular sphere of elites, and, as we saw in chapter 3, produced a work that demonstrated a high level of familiarity with Islamicate and Persianate texts, norms, and styles. In 1812, he was commissioned to write by John Glyn—which indicates his local notoriety as well as a British practice of hiring courtly authors. There is no need to repeat

[354] While I certainly see both Mughal and British Empires as empires, both capable of and culpable for expansion, exploitation, and centralization of power, I should note that these empires' historical contexts make them different as well as similar to one another. While some have suggested that these differences lie within the Mughal's expansion against the British's foreign center, the primary difference, to my eye, is in the deployment of a purposeful conception of *difference*, especially vis-à-vis conceptions of race. For a much more developed understanding of race and racialism as it relates to colonialism, see: Gail Ching-Liang Low, *White skins/Black masks: representation and colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1996) and Harald Fischer-Tiné and Michael Mann, eds., *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission: Cultural Ideology in British India* (London: Anthem Press, 2004).

the details that have already been discussed above, but there is a good deal of theorization that still requires our attention. Specifically, the structures and processes that allow for a work like *Garden of Religions* demand careful consideration.

Mathurānāth cannot be thought of as an historic anomaly. As a number of scholars have demonstrated, the British purposefully—and fruitfully—hired accomplished South Asians, especially those previously acculturated into the Mughal courts, as part of the processes of colonialism and imperialism.[355] While he serves as my primary example, he and his work cannot be imagined as oddities, but rather represent a pattern of imperial practices, Persianate and Islamicate as well as British. Bernard S. Cohn's widely read *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge* spends a great deal of time and space articulating the ways in which British authorities came to know—and to reify—India, Indians, and more broadly, its Others. He specifically mentions the production of knowledge, albeit in slightly different language, stating:

> The conquest of India was a conquest of knowledge. In these official sources [those of the East India Company] we can trace the changes in forms of knowledge which the conquerors defined as useful for their own ends. The records of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries reflect the Company's central concerns with trade and commerce; one finds long lists of products, prices, information about trade routes, descriptions of costal and inland marks, and *political information in about the Mughal empire, and especially local officials and their actions in relation to the Company*.[356]

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[355] See: Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 180-188; C. A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire (The New Cambridge History of India),* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 45-78; and Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge, MA: The Bellknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 174-181.

[356] Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*, 16. Emphasis mine.

While the work of Mathurānāth is certainly not within the scheme of trade and commerce, his work deals with political realities of the late Mughal regime when we consider the ramifications of religion, religions, and religious identities to imperial structures. If we take a more cynical view of Glyn, we can reasonably conceive that he hired Mathurānāth in order to flesh out the political and religious landscape of Benares for the purposes of stronger, more pointed Company or British control; more generously, perhaps, we may simply see his actions within a program of collecting information for the specific purpose of building knowledge for the Company's use. In either case, Cohn's point is apt: British officials used indigenous knowledge for the purposes of conquest, control, and authority. Mathurānāth's work can be read as a transaction within this framework.

The realm of intellectual productivity is not the only place where we see transactions between British and Mughal elites; as Cohn mentions, trade and commerce are central features of the colonial period. One scholar comments on the economic ties between East India Company officers and the *nawab* or princely state authority of the lingering Mughal regime:

> [A]ssociates, representatives and beneficiaries of the nawab
> of Arcot continued to exert pressure on Company politics
> for years: some contemporary observers have suggested
> that as many as twelve members of Parliament—most of
> them with Parliamentary seats purchased with money from
> Arcot—continued through much of the [late eighteenth]
> century to advance the interests of the nawab.[357]

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[357] Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 12.

In this instance, the ruling elite, affiliated with the Mughal Empire, purposefully paid off East India Company officials in order to gain favor in and from Parliament. Of course, these payments and gradual accrual of debt ultimately led to the economic demise of many South Asian elites, but it temporarily turned the tables: while Company officials exerted power and control over India, some nawabs used financial influence to gain power and control in the very seat of Empire, the London-based Parliament. While uneven, this relationship still maintains reciprocity and reflexivity—both parties participate in it and get some benefit from it.

This example is in many ways the inverse of the relationship garnered between Glyn and Mathurānāth: in our primary case study, the Company officer paid an intellectual elite affiliated with the Mughal Empire in order to gain information relevant, presumably, to both imperial entities. From the East India Company records, we know that Mathurānāth was paid to write his survey of religion in Benares *because* he had previously been affiliated with the Mughals—the record indicates his affiliation specifically.[358] Further, H. H. Wilson takes Mathurānāth to be the best and most reliable resource for information on the sects of Hindus, demonstrating the particular use of this specific text as well as the demand for such a work more broadly.[359] In both our primary

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[358] *East India Register and Directory, 1813 1ˢᵗ Ed. 3; corrected to the 30ᵗʰ December 1812; Complete Lists of the Company's Servants, civil, military and marine, with their respective Appointments at the different Presidencies in the East-Indies; With Indexes to the same, and lists of casualties during the last year. Together with Lists of Europeans, Mariners &c., not in the service of the East-India Company; and Merchant Vessels employed in the country trade. Compiled, by Permission of the Honourable East-India Company, from the Official Returns received at the East-India House*: by John Mathison & Alexander Way Mason, of the secretary's office, East-India House, p. 363. BL location: OIR 354.54.

[359] H. H. Wilson, *Essays and Lectures on the Religions of the Hindus,* 9.

example and the abovementioned, the relationship between the British and the Mughals is one that both used for their own definitions of profit.

These relationships—financial, commercial, intellectual—are reflexive, reciprocal, and coinciding, even when they are uneven, distorted, or inherently designed to be advantageous at another's expense. In fact, I am relatively unconcerned here with the imbalanced flow of power between the Mughal elites and Company officials; that they are in a relationship, however dysfunctional, demonstrates the very fact that South Asians had agency within the colonial structures, even as the British gained and took more and more control over time. It is in this way that I hope co-imperialism speaks to the exceptionally complex processes of authority; while Cohn's work is amazingly useful and impressive in its scope, in focusing on the construction of knowledge of the colonists, he only briefly pays attention to the sources from which colonists draw their knowledge—South Asian and often Mughal affiliated elites. Cohn's work purposefully explores but one side of a multifaceted issue. If we are to better approximate the complexities of shifting authorities in South Asia, thinking critically about multiple imperial entities is a place to start; thinking through these entities and their effects upon each other simultaneously is the process I propose as co-imperialism.

The contours of historical analysis that privilege victors and kingships tend to privilege the rise and fall model of history discussed in chapter 3. A model of co-imperialism purposefully aims to avoid this model of history insofar as one lineage—one narrative thread—is not placed squarely at the front; instead, as is relevant here, the multiplicity of authority and the myriad ways it acts upon agents and institutions are taken seriously. In this model, we do not necessarily have to read Mathurānāth as

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jumping ship from the Mughals to the British as part of the overarching decline of one
and gain of the other, where he may have had little choice in the matter of employment.
Mathurānāth can instead be read as an actor engaged, presumably, in his own self-
betterment—he accepts the patronage of the British over that of Mughals, and we might
presume this to be the case based upon the ebb and flow of power, money, and prestige.

But beyond a model for analysis, I contend that co-imperialism offers a
mechanism through which to view the production of knowledge—especially with respect
to religion, religions, and religious identities. In the next section, I will address the ways
in which this is plausible, as well as evidence that supports the model of co-imperialism I
suggest is valuable.

Conclusion: Co-imperialism and the Making of "Religion"

Thus far, I have discussed the co-constitutive definition of religion, and how
"religion" cannot be thought of as a foreign, imposed category on South Asia. Above, I
made this claim by citing the existence of taxonomies of religion present in Islamicate
literature alongside the uses of indigenous texts by Orientalists. I have also discussed the
definitions and utility of co-imperialism, a term I believe helps capture an historical
moment as well as the ways that moment came to be produced. In this section, I will
address the ties between co-imperialism and the definitions of religion, and I aim to
demonstrate why the two are imperatively linked. I argue, finally, that the relationship
between elites, elite intellectual cultures, and imperialisms are integral in the construction
of the category of religion in South Asia, and that Islamicate taxonomies of religion (*dīn*)
informed those of British scholars and officers. Moreover, ignoring these intertwined
definitional systems underestimates South Asian agency and Islamicate systemizations,
and overstates the creative power of British colonizers and imperial authorities.

Historians have long argued that India was governed with ideas imported from Europe; recent scholarship, however, has sought to reevaluate the foreign nature of such ideas.[360] Of the latter, some have demonstrated the Orientalist reliance upon traditional Indic sources. Michael S. Dodson summarizes the debate well:

> It has often been argued that British orientalist research in India during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries served to consolidate and authorize the rule of the colonial state, and contributed to an emerging European-authored narrative of global history. While it is now evident that orientalism served principally to construct forms of European power, it is often unrecognized that orientalist scholarship in India drew much of its authority from the cultural standing and intellectual expertise of the "traditional" guardians of Sanskrit-based knowledge, the *brāhman pandita*s ("learned men").[361]

Dodson points to the issue with which I wish to conclude this chapter: namely, the role of Indians in contributing to the scholarship of Orientalists as well as the lack of recognition of non-Brahmin scholars—or, like Mathurānāth, the Brahmin scholars fully invested in Islamicate norms. The construction of the category of "religion" was part of Orientalist research, and was part of collaborative, corresponding, and co-constitutive projects.

During the time period in which definitions of religion were formed, maintained, and eventually enforced, governmental power structures were in great flux. What this indicates—beyond a complex, dynamic landscape upon which definitions were inscribed—is that parallel power structures were influenced by and has great influence over the development of categories. Dodson notes that Orientalism can be thought of

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[360] Jon E. Wilson, "Anxieties of Distance: Codification in Early Colonial Bengal," *Modern Intellectual History,* 4, 1 (2007), 7.

[361] Michael S. Dodson, "Contesting Translations: Orientalism and the Interpretation of the Vedas." *Modern Intellectual History,* 4, 1 (2007). 43-44.

having "double" practices: first, scholars and officers aimed to understand, utilize, and ultimately redirect modes of indigenous expertise for their own uses; second, scholars and officers sought to usurp the position held by the very systems from which they gained information.[362] There is little use denying this doubly-edged function of the colonial enterprise in India; Orientalists, Company officials, and, later, officers of the British Empire relied upon Indian sources—living interlocutors as well as material texts and artifacts—in order to comprehend and dominate their new populace, land, and political landscape.

It is important to highlight the ways in which South Asians participated in the creation of colonial knowledge.[363] As mentioned briefly above, Cohn has masterfully argued that the creation of knowledge as part of colonialism did more to shape European states than their colonies.[364] Certainly, though, the effects of co-constitutive definitions of religion are manifold—and work in both directions. Because Orientalism, as a category of inquiry, relied so heavily upon Indian texts, artifacts, scholars, traditions, and norms, the intelligentsia provided a way by which to empower the colonial state; simultaneously, though, they forged new ideas and visions for the very categories the British were interested in from extant resources. These existing sources included, of

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[362] Ibid., 44.

[363] For an extensive study, see: Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). Of course, South Asia is not the only site of colonialism, and its inhabitants are not the only colonized agents to affect the colonizing entity. For a broader, classic consideration of the affects of colonialism on both colonized and colonizer, see: Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

[364] Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge,* 160-162.

course, Sanskritic literature and mores, as many have indicated.[365] They also necessarily

included Islamicate literature and mores, as our primary example demonstrates.

Mathurānāth existed between what some insist are competing realms: clearly

educated in Sanskrit and Sanskritic literary forms as well as Persianate and Islamicate

ones, he superficially appears as one who moves between "Hindu" and "Muslim"

modalities. I am uncomfortable with such categorization, because it implies—and indeed

insists—that specific religious affiliations were static, maintained their own special sets

of intellectual projects, and existed within mutually exclusive public spheres. Instead,

Mathurānāth far more clearly represents what it meant to participate in and construct an

intelligentsia: knowledge of multiple languages, courtly practices, and literary customs

mark the South Asian topography. Abu'l Fazl himself claimed literacy in both Islamicate

languages as well as Indic ones, namely Sanskrit. Assuming a fundamental division

between Hindu and Muslim, and their associate languages and literary traditions, makes

little historical sense.[366] Mathurānāth existed not between competing realms, but as part

of an iteration of identity within northern India.

Mathurānāth's familiarity with Persian cannot be understood as novel. As the

official language of the Mughal court, we would necessarily expect a man of

Mathurānāth's station to have been trained in the language; moreover, because we know

he was a one-time servant of the court, it is absolutely clear that he would have needed

Persian for this task before being hired in any capacity. Further, his use of Persian while

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[365] Dodson, "Contesting Translations," 45-46.

[366] For many related takes on this very issue, one volume maintains its pivotal position. See:
David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence, eds., *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious
Identities in Islamicate South Asia* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000).

serving the British is not in and of itself remarkable: the British retained Persian as their

official language of government until 1837—a full twenty-four years after Mathurānāth

finished *Garden of Religions.* By using the language of empire, the British were able to

communicate generally with princely states and other political—and religious—

authorities. This included the negotiations of treaties and alliances; the training of

armies; and the administration of their holdings, which itself consisted of royal and

judicial courts, tax collection, and some civil services.[367] While the British and other

Orientalists imagined Sanskrit as *the* religious and erudite language of India, it is

nevertheless true that Persian was afforded great value as well.[368]

However, that Sanskrit is imagined as inherently "religious" and Persian as

"courtly" itself belies a larger theme that has been the subject of this project: these

imaginations of belonging are not necessarily part and parcel of actualities as they were

lived. Mathurānāth wrote *about* religion and religions in Persian and Sanskrit,

maintaining courtly norms of *both* empires—the British in India and the Mughals. *Riyāz*

al-maẕahib should not be categorized as a religious text akin to Qur'anic or Vedic

exegesis because it does not refer to these proof texts, nor does it really offer more

general, proscriptive statements about worship, deities, or philosophical truths. And yet it

contains a healthy dose of Sanskrit; Sanskrit used, I might add, to describe scenes in

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[367] It is important to note that, even before officially becoming part of the Empire, Indians were hired as mercenaries. In fact, at its most basic, the Sepoy Rebellion, often understood as the watershed between colonial and imperial India, was a battle in which Company mercenary soldiers organized and revolted against their British employers. Later, as part of the Empire, Indians were conscribed into military duty, which formally fell under the British Armed Forces. See: K. M. L. Saxena, *The military system of India, 1850-1900* (New Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 1974).

[368] Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge*, 22.

Varanasi and clarify imperfect Persian—in other words, Sanskrit imagined as better suited to explain issues the supposedly administrative language could not adequately encapsulate.[369] Of course, classifying a particular language as "courtly" or "religious" does not necessarily hold water, much in the same way classifying a concept or term as innately the property of one intellectual tradition or another does not reflect historical realities. What matters here are the ways in which Mathurānāth reflects an elite culture that utilizes markers of identity far more fluidly than some expect; and, moreover, participates in producing knowledge in multiple vernaculars.[370]

The British, as an empire establishing itself in South Asia, used Persian as its language of business. This can and should be seen, at once, as pragmatic as well as something more; that the British did not immediately, forcibly change the language of court to something utterly foreign indicates, perhaps, a common sense approach to establishing authority.[371] But, it also suggests that all of the things languages codes and carries were also part of the early British enterprise in South Asia: language, of course, is more than words, it is a way through which entire systems are conveyed.[372]

It is this understanding of system, translation, and language that directly speak to religion and a process of co-imperialism. In retaining Persian as a language of business and government, the British do not merely ingratiate themselves to local elites or even

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[369] Mathurānāth, *Riyāz al-maẕahib*, 12, 16, 30-32, as examples.

[370] Pollock, The Cosmopolitan Vernacular," 9-10.

[371] Catherine Asher and Cynthia Talbot, *India Before Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 270-273.

[372] Paul Ricoeur, *On Translation,* translated by Eileen Brennan; with an introduction by Richard Kearney (London: Routledge, 2006).

integrate themselves to long-standing institutions of authority, but they also participate within Persianate and Islamicate customs, milieus, and knowledge systems. The conditions present in this period that allow for British economic and political control— waning Mughal centralization, increased interest in Indian products, European trading companies' establishment along coastlines, and a rising discontent from *jāt* communities near the Mughal center—create possibilities for networks of participation between and among British and South Asian elites.[373] This participation can be read pragmatically, but I think it is equally fruitful to read it in terms of networks and the construction of knowledge: how the British come to establish imperial authority within South Asia is directly linked to their participation within extant South Asian—i.e. Islamicate and Persianate—imperial authority.

As we have seen, Islamicate definitions of religion or *dīn* existed, were acknowledged by imperial structures (as in the case of Akbar and Abu'l Fazl), and were part of the ways in which elites identified and interpreted their communities (as in the case of Mathurānāth). Similarly, we have seen that Mathurānāth, as an informant for the British, interpreted Islamicate categories and fortified them for his patrons, carrying with him the cache of Mughal affiliation, elite Sanskrit community, and literary prowess. This parallel definitional system of religion is, therefore, in many ways not entirely parallel— during the early colonial period, at least, we have evidence that nodes of contact between these two lineages intersected.

Specifically, the intersection happened with the benefit, mark, and sanctioning of the two primary imperial entities: the Mughal intellectual tradition represented and

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[373] Ibid., 263-266.

translated by a *munshī* as well as the British East India Company patronage system which sponsored that *munshī* and demanded his *local* understanding of religion, religions, and religious identities. During a period in which political and economic authority was very much contested and contentious, the production of knowledge about religion came from imperial institutions working in tandem and participating within Islamicate and Persianate norms; co-imperialism structured the co-constitutive definition of religion.

Acknowledging that agents of the Mughal and British Empires worked together to craft ideas about, boundaries between, and definitions of religion allows for a comprehensive appraisal of how "religion" came to operate in South Asia. More importantly, perhaps, it bestows agency not only to South Asian actors, but also to the structural institutions of the Mughal Empire, which far outlasted their centralized rule. If we are to imagine Islamicate not in terms of a descriptor of Muslim rule, but rather the complexity of networks affected by the rule and influence of Muslims, even over non-Muslim populations and power structures, then we must also imagine the ways in which Islamicate systems come to affect, inform, and shape later empires in South Asia—including that of the British. I have suggested moving away from a narrative that imagines the colonial period as a shattering rupture to one that insists upon multiple imperialists negotiating power through processes of transculturation and co-imperialism. Following Hodgson's lead in many ways, I suggest that the impact of Islamicate categories far outlasted the rule of Muslims in South Asia, and indeed helped shape those supposed foreign definitions of religion.

In the next section, I will conclude the dissertation by way of summarizing my evidence and my findings, and returning to questions of historiography, imperialism, and

taxonomies of religion.

CONCLUSION: RELIGIONS OF EMPIRE

Through the investigation of two primary manuscripts, archival research, and theoretical investigation, this dissertation has demonstrated two primary issues: first, imaginaries of South Asia were a site of discourse in the development of the category of "religion" in Euro-American scholarship; and second, Islamicate and Persianate taxonomies of "religion" pre-existed the colonial period. I suggested further that Islamicate definitions of religion informed later British and Orientalist definitions by citing historical trends as well as the particular case study of Mathurānāth's *Riyāz al-maẕāhib* or *Garden of Religions.* In so doing, I have argued that definitions of religion are far from foreign, as many have stated, but were instead co-constitutive, created through a process I termed co-imperialism.

Theories of religion that developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries rarely took seriously non-Christian traditions as anything but varieties, deviations, or unformed ideas opposed to the *one* religion. Scholars that shaped the discipline of religious studies, like Max Müller, aimed to classify and systematize the plurality of religions; as J. Z. Smith pointed out, as the colonial enterprise grew, so did the impetus to order the practices, belief systems, and textual traditions of colonized peoples.[374] What these theories often took seriously was the specific example of South Asia: India served for many as a site of difference, a site of comparison, or a foil to the site of Europe—but

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[374] Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," 273.

in all of these iterations, India served as a site of discourse in the development of the category of religion. Müller's drive to "classify and conquer"—to figure out a scientific manner by which to talk about religion—was innately related to his expertise in Sanskrit and Indic literature. In any event, we see that early discussions about religion, even through the eyes of Orientalists, hinge upon an Other, and specifically a South Asian Other.[375] I suggested that classification systems which imagined India as central affected definitions of religion as created by Orientalists and later Euro-American scholars, but were not the only set of taxonomies of religion.

To assume that "religion" was an invention of European philosophers and scholars ignores the possibility that non-Europeans may have had similar, corresponding systems of categorization. This is especially the case with respect to South Asia: if this region and its traditions featured so heavily within early conceptualizations of "religion," it would seem outlandish to suppose that indigenous systems had no way of thinking about such a topic. Further, it is deeply problematic to attribute contemporary understandings of self and of the category of religion solely to colonial interventions; while these encounters inform the contemporary era, certainly the colonial period does not mark the first time South Asians recognized similarities, differences, or institutions related to what we call "religion." Indeed, during the reign of Akbar (1556-1605), Abu'l Fazl was already articulating a sense of "religion" (*dīn*) as well as describing the religions of others, namely Hindus.[376] What is more are the ways in which he did so as part of official, royal documentation of Akbar and the Mughal Empire. This demonstrates an

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[375] In many ways, this is the basis of Said's *Orientalism*: the gaze of Euro-American scholars upon the "East" structures the "West."

[376] Abu'l Fazl, *Ā'īn-i Akbarī,* 198-203.

imperial development and use of a corollary for "religion." The fame of Akbar, the importance of the *Ā'īn-i Akbarī,* and its later afterlife for Orientalist researchers also indicate a relationship between the Mughal documents and European ideas that help shape definitions of religion. The position of South Asia and its Islamicate institutions inhabit an imaginary in which "religion" featured prominently, no matter how foreign the English-language word "religion" is to Persian-language systems.

Islamicate taxonomies of "religion" center on the term "*dīn.*" As W. C. Smith argued fifty years ago, *dīn* functions in both the singular, universal as well as the particular variation represented, in English, as "religion" and "religions." Mathurānāth's *Garden of Religions* certainly features *dīn* as a primary term for the category of universal religion; he assumes all people to "have religion," and sees his task as explaining the myriad ways in which religion is performed (i.e. *maẕahib* or religions).[377] The text helps demonstrate the local ways religion and religions were categorized within Islamicate frameworks, as Mathurānāth clearly draws upon genealogies of definitions from older texts. This also helps illuminate the ways in which Islamicate influence need not be limited in its scope to the temporally bounded reign of Muslims; the early-nineteenth century marked a time in which Mughal rule was seriously diminished, and yet Mughal-era norms, mores, systems, and imaginaries persisted.

Mathurānāth was more than just a courtly scribe, citing Islamicate and Persianate taxonomies: he was hired by the British East India Company, and in this way, serves to represent autochthonous informants to colonial and imperial English regimes. More importantly, Mathurānāth helps co-author the very understanding of religion scholars like

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[377] Mathurānāth, *Riyāz al-maẕāhib*, 32.

J. Z. Smith insisted are necessarily foreign; he participates in constituting information required to define religion, religions, and religious identities in Benares and, indeed, the East India Company's South Asia. In fact, it is reasonable to assert that he was a conduit through which Islamicate and Persianate definitions were themselves interpreted and translated to his own definitions and usages, and in turn, used and translated to his British sponsors. This is the process of the production of knowledge, which is itself a major aspect of what I have called co-imperialism—the process through which Mughal and British elites constructed, contoured, and maintained definitions of categories like religion.

In light of seminal works like Edward Said's *Orientalism,* many scholars have formulated important and meaningful critiques of the production of Euro-American knowledge. Particularly, the subject of "religion" has featured prominently in such critique, and with good reason: there can be no doubt that trajectories of the category of "religion" start, in Euro-American contexts, from a place of comparison with Christianity—comparisons of unequal footing, where non-Christian traditions, practices, and people are consistently imagined as Other.[378] There is also little doubt that because

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[378] Most notable among these critiques, and those that have figured prominently in this dissertation, are: Talal Asad, "Reading a Modern Classic: W. C. Smith's The Meaning and End of Religion," *History of Religions* Vol. 40, No. 3 (Feb., 2001), 205-222; Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996); Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology (*Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies (*New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'* (London: Routledge, 1999); Arvind-Pal Mandair, *Religion and the Specter of the West: Sikhism, India, Postcoloniality, and the Politics of Translation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Russell McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: the Discourse on sui generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); J. Z. Smith, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion (*Chicago:

"religion" is largely studied in the Euro-American academies that the definitions forged within these scholarly lineages have taken precedent within historic and contemporary research. It would be folly, however, to assume that because this particular taxonomy of religion has been privileged that it is the sole taxonomy, or unique to the West at the exception of non-Western locations. It would be further folly, as I have argued, to assume that Euro-American scholars invented "religion" in their home countries and exported it to places like South Asia, only to leave South Asians with no choice but to respond to such categorization. This narrative may help unravel Orientalist historical models as well as acknowledge epistemological violence inherent in Orientalist knowledge production, but it obfuscates indigenous agency, self-definition, and the affects of South Asian articulations upon Orientalist definitions. Islamicate and Persianate taxonomies of religion not only existed before colonialism, they informed colonial power, authority, and definitions through a process of co-imperialism.

Abu'l Fazl and Mathurānāth demonstrate the presence of an alternate, parallel, and corollary taxonomy of religion. The conversations, interactions, and exchange of ideas present between Mughal and British elites demonstrate the plausibility of a co-constitutive definition of religion; Mathurānāth's text speaks directly to the ways in which local agents informed, shaped, and dictated British definitions of religion. The legacy of colonialism and imperialism upon religion, religions, and religious identity is well established, but few have taken seriously the role of Mughal taxonomies of religion;

University of Chicago Press, 2004); and W. C. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: Fortress Press, 1991 [1962]).

the affects of Islamicate imperial structures upon religion have consistently been imagined as secondary to those imperial impositions and constructions of the British. If we imagine, instead, a co-constitutive process forged within an era of multiple imperialisms, we can better envision the religion—and religions—of empire: Islamicate, Persianate, and indigenous *as well as* part of colonial and epistemological patterns of domination.

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