

The Language of Modern
Hinduism: Cognitive Models
and Ethnoscience Analysis

A. Bharati
Syracuse University

When the founding fathers of anthropology, Tylor and Fraser, speculated on the origins of religion at a time when such questions were both permissible and in style, they overrated the cognitive function of religious systems at the cost of their orectic and affective elements. It was for this reason that they regarded primitive religion in the light of nineteenth-century intellectualism and evolutionism, which was the pervasive vogue of the day. Thus they gave good and bad marks, figuratively speaking, to religious practices reported to or read by them from whatever meager and undisciplined cross-cultural material they could find. For them, religion and magic were "pre-logic" or bad science or "pre-science" or whatever; and the notion held and shared by many later writers was that religion was bound to decay to the extent that science provided answers for unanswered questions. Had Tylor and Fraser, or even Durkheim and Weber, heard the astronauts read from Genesis as they cruised back to earth from the moon, they might have modified their contention.

I have come to the conclusion that three separate models have to be used for investigating the cognitive, the orectic, and the affective patterns of religious behavior. For the orectic or conative, decision models such as recently suggested by Izmirlian should be in order;¹ for the affective patterns, some psychiatric models might be useful—I am thinking particularly of the Ganser syndrome.² For the cognitive patterns, however, I suggest that ethnoscience and ethnosemantics provide the most appropriate and certainly the most recent model. I shall be concerned only with the cognitive aspect of religion, using modern Hindu linguistic behavior as my paradigm. During the past few years I have used other models, derived specifically from contemporary ordinary language philosophy of the type propounded by British and American analytic philosophers such as J. L.

Austin, Stuart Hampshire, A. Louch, and others.³ I do not think that ethno-science supersedes the ordinary language-analysis approach, but it most certainly complements it. I very strongly feel that psychological frameworks such as those used by culture and personality anthropologists are quite futile when it comes to subtler points such as the apologetic forensics used by modern Hindus.⁴ The naïve Freudian scales presupposed by Carstairs and the somewhat ludicrous reductionism of P. Spratt obfuscate the issues—they do not even state the issues, let alone clarify them.⁵

Long ago I became quite disillusioned with the time-honored approach of philological Orientalists to Asian religions. Some Indologists that I have known entertain astoundingly naïve views about practiced and about grass-roots Hinduism on the village level, much as they display amazing ignorance about Indian society even when they have spent many, many years in the midst of it. I know an eminent scholar who spent about thirteen years in Benares and is regarded highly by pandits and by his Western colleagues, including myself. Yet he tells me that "there is no corruption in India" and that "caste has been abolished," although "you cannot be hired unless you belong to the caste of the person who hires"—in other words, he accepts quite uncritically the nonsense presented to him by his neighbors in India and by the Indian press. The rude fact is that the Sanskrit, Pali, and Tibetan texts tell us little about contemporary Hinduism and Buddhism; and it was with some puzzlement that I came to realize that Indologists refuse to see what the freshman anthropology student learns in his first course—that doctrines taught by the tradition are but tenuously connected, where they are connected at all, with the practices, beliefs, and ritualistic procedures used by its practitioners. Of course—and I have heard this rejoinder quite often—the Indologist is really not interested in what people do; he is interested in the literary, in the philosophical, and in the "truth" factor involved in the teachings. If this is so, he should really renounce his claim to having a special status different from and higher than that of his colleagues in such better-known departments as Classics, English, and Romance Languages. To the more cynical anthropologist, the German-born professor of German in a German-language department at an American university is an informant about contemporary middle-class German culture, on the same plane as a village smith in Bavaria—what the professor

of German tells us about the Germans is indeed *emic* information. In a somewhat perverse fashion, what the Indian or Occidental Indologist tells us about Indian culture and religion, in informant-stuff, is *emic* rather than *etic*. Therefore, I feel that the social scientist, who has created the *emic-etic* model of observation and analysis,⁶ is more than one up on his Indological colleague, though anthropologists working in the Indian field often display a guilt and/or shame complex for not knowing any Sanskrit and not too much of a modern Indian language. I am satisfied, then, that the new ethnography, utilizing the *etic-emic* approach for its analyses and the more general ethnoscientific attitude toward the informant and toward the message that is given by the informant and is decoded by the anthropologist, can come to grips with some of the subtle, ideological problems that older ethnology could not handle. Of course, that was one of the reasons why older anthropology gave a wide berth to highly literate societies whose ritual and belief systems were closely bound up with the written lore.

In the period between the end of World War II and the late fifties, a sort of methodological interregnum occurred, when social scientists such as M. N. Srinivas, R. Redfield, and some of their students and colleagues at Chicago and elsewhere attempted to create a new approach through the "Great Tradition"—"Little Tradition" dialectic. That was fairly fruitful, but it really did not deliver the goods in the long run. I have suggested an improved version of the "Great-Little Traditions" approach with special reference to the Indian situation,⁷ but I think that the ethnoscientific approach now available outdistances all the previous attempts from the standpoints of clarity and fertility. I believe, however, that for our special case—a contemporary religious system of India in its cognitive parameters—the ethnoscientific model has to be supplemented by what I call "cultural criticism."⁸ This means the method of eliciting radical responses from subjects by *challenging* their previous statements about their own culture as not conforming to a superior standard accepted by the informant himself, or by scientific standards that he would endorse were he familiar with them. A very simple example: modern Indians complain about the corruption of officials, the scarcity of doctors and nurses, the lack of altruism, and so forth; and, of course, when the outsider criticizes these things, the friendlier among his Indian hosts will chime in. But you cannot criticize Mohandas Gandhi or Subhas Chandra Bose

or the *Bhagavad-Gita* without risking a head-on collision, dialectically. But it is precisely this sort of confrontation that the anthropologist seeks when using my "cultural criticism" as an elicitive method. This is simple psychology of a nonacademic kind: if you make a man mad, he will tell you the truth, though he may regret it afterwards. The only real danger is that the researcher may lose his visa, or not get another one when he wants to come to India again; but this can happen for many other reasons.

The group that I shall now analyze consists of modern, literate Hindus. For all practical purposes, they are coextensive with the "Indian Intellectual" in the peculiar, but well-taken, denotation suggested by Edward N. Shils.⁹ This term is semantically quite different from the contemporary American or European use of the term "intellectual," which has been studied discursively by Richard Hofstadter.¹⁰ My recent work on the Indian intellectual qua apologist for modern Hinduism sums up many if not most of the problems involved in a sociological survey of the communicative problems involved in mapping Hinduism as it is today—not the grass-roots Hinduism of the villages, which is not my subject here, but the highly eclectic, alienated urban Hinduism.¹¹ Until I began studying this numerically infinitesimal, but operationally supremely important, style of Hinduism, no one in any of the feeder disciplines had really done any work on it. Indologists regard it beneath their dignity to speak about the latter-day saints and preachers of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Bengal, Maharashtra, and Madras, since none of them knew or wrote in Sanskrit; and anthropologists concentrate on "their village." But the Hinduism I am talking about is the belief system of the people who run India and are going to run it for a very long time to come; it is also the Hinduism of the Hindus who go to school in the West and of Hindu expatriates in all parts of the world; and lastly, it is the Hinduism that may very well become the dominant belief system in India, if the contemporary educational authorities succeed in generating the sort of ideological assent that they want to see in the school systems of modern India, on every educational level.

The late Richard Robinson suggested quite rightly that there are really two, and only two, approaches to complex cultural and ideological networks. Using a strategical model, you can surround and encircle your target and move in upon it

from all sides—which of course would be ideal, but is not very feasible when humans and research resources are sparse and the target is large and complex; alternatively, you can use the “parachute-drop” method—you land whatever paratroopers you have in the known vicinity of the target and they then assemble close to it and accomplish their mission. When translated into our research, this implies that when personnel and research facilities are insufficient, random or not-quite-random topics, properly investigated, should provide a sample for more general patterns involved. In eliciting or inferring responses from informants or from cultural objects encountered, the investigator hopes to produce viable samples on the basis of the corpus of information generated by the live or the inanimate “informant”—including the cult-object, text, song, and so forth—as manipulated by the religious specialists or by the laity. The obvious shortcoming of this approach derives from what Malinowski referred to as the “standardisation of optimism,” in a different though related context; we simply have to have a good hunch when we depend on the samples at hand, rejecting those that appear to us to be atypical.

We have dropped down onto religiously fertile soil, somewhere near Kashmere Gate in the residential-cum-business area of Old Delhi—but we might have dropped into similar areas in Lucknow, Kanpur, or Meerut; though we would find somewhat different things in Calcutta, Bombay, or Madras. I shall present six themes which are sufficiently typical to chart the Hinduism of the modern Indian of the urban middle class. First, how does the modern urban Hindu define a Hindu? Next, what are his written authorities? Third, who are his personal, living guides? Fourth, what is his homiletic, exegetical, and, more general, his interactional style in communicating or thinking about Hinduism? Fifth, what is his actual or conceived link to social reality? And, finally, which aspects of the tradition does he reject in the process of vindicating and legitimizing his own involvement with Hinduism?

In all these topics, I shall show the *emic* or *etic* status of varying or alternative descriptions.

What is a Hindu? The traditional answer is pretty clear, though we are all aware that the term “Hindu” itself is not old—certainly much more recent than the ideas that constituted the Hindu belief system at the time when the term “Hindu” was

first used. Traditionally, a Hindu is a person born into a Hindu *jāti*, an actual caste; this alone suffices on all counts. Hinduism is of a sociological order, and—very different from all other extant literate religions—its ideological counterpart has never entered the minimal definition of a Hindu. However, when a traditionalist feels pressed to enlarge the sociological by an ideological definition, he would define a Hindu, in terms of his belief system, as a person born into a Hindu *jāti* who accepts the authority of the Veda (the *śruti* texts, that is) on a par with the other epistemological *pramāṇas*, or cognitive verification principles—that is, *pratyakṣa* (direct perception) and *anumāna* (correct syllogistic inference). This has to be added, even though only implicitly, in order to state the degree of “acceptance” of the Veda—for, of course, “acceptance” is a somewhat woolly, inclusive *sememe* unless it is narrowed down to a genuine one-to-one *lexeme*. Now the modern Hindu’s definition is radically different: There may be many Hindus, particularly in the traditionally more sophisticated and conservative Dravidian South, who would tacitly assume the traditional definition, modifying it by adding some new emphases; but our modern Hindu in the North will not only not accept this sociological-ideological definition, he will tend to reject it quite emphatically. A Gujarati lady-doctor living in Delhi told me, when I asked her for her definition of a Hindu, that “every good person who believes in God” is a Hindu. Did that include Muslims, Christians, Jews, and so forth? Yes, it did, for Hinduism was “all-embracing.” Did it include Buddhists and Jainas, whose doctrine is atheistic? There was some hesitation, but then she said: “Yes, it includes Buddhism and Jainism, for they also believed in God, although they did not say so.” On several occasions after this note was taken (1955), I asked Hindus who had affinal kinship ties with Jainas, if they thought Jainas were Hindus, too. The answer was almost always affirmative, though the stress then seemed to shift to the sociological rather than the ideological segment of the definition; for Hindus and Jainas of the merchant castes intermarry freely. Jaina women bringing along their *kuḷadevatā* (tutelary household deities) and merging them with those of their Hindu husband, and vice versa. Committed Jainas, however, did not share this view and would say that Jainas and Hindus are very different indeed—they would tend to disregard the sociological parameter and stress the ideological contrast. Now the lady-doctor’s view of what makes a

Hindu a Hindu was, of course, quite radically "modern"; it is not shared by most other modern Hindus. On the other end of an imagined continuum beginning with the definition that is least divergent from the traditional concept and ending with that which is most strongly opposed (the latter being represented by the view of the lady-doctor), there are many intermediary notions. In all of them, we can isolate different emphases of the sociological and the dialectical order, with a shift from sociological to ideological definitions toward the radical end of the continuum. "Everybody who believes in God and is a good man" is an *emic* statement of religious assignments, which identifies modern, literate, urban Hindus of northern India. Amazingly, no modern Hindu, unless he happens to be a pandit and a professional Sanskritist, would define a Hindu *etically* in the manner that I did earlier. I will not go into the psychological or historical etiology of this strange shift from a highly restricted definition of the term "Hindu" to what must appear to any student of religion to be an extremely unctuous, wishy-washy, and overly general type of eclectic inclusion. I would only say that this *emic* use of "Hindu" rests on the polemic inherent in reformed Indian religion; the pin-pointing, narrowing, highly structured definitions of the classical tradition are thought to be not only outmoded and socially dysfunctional, but positively immoral.

What are the written authorities to which the modern Hindu refers? In the first place, of course, the average informed layman among urban Hindus knows very much more about, and is much more highly motivated toward, theological quest than is the average non-Indian, urban, middle-class person in most other areas of the world, including Asia. Still, this does not mean that the modern Hindu has more than a fleeting idea about the texts. I would say that the average middle-class Hindu in North India has read the *Bhagavad-Gita* in a Hindi or English translation and has listened to some standard Vedic prayers and formulas. He may also know some vernacular religious songs of the *ķirtan* and *bhajan* type, which are not scripture but are postmedieval creations; and he will, more often than not, hum a *filmi* version of these. I own a rather large copy of a Hindi book *Mirā bhajans to be sung to the tunes of Anārķali and Mahal*.¹² With members of the Arya Samāj and its more involved sympathizers the situation is quite different—they despise the entire non-Vedic pattern by decree, as it were, having

their own fundamentalist, highly formalized and simplified Vedic ritual, both domestic and congregational. But I am excluding the Arya Samāj and its membership from this study, even though they do form an important middle-class segment in some cities of the North. Since their handling of the tradition is aggressively predefined, as it were, and their belief and ritual systems highly structured, they are really atypical for our purpose, although their ideological style has diffused, to a very thorough degree, to non-Arya Hindu groups (*sanātani* being the North Indian term to distinguish them, meaning "eternal"—that is, conservative), especially in the Punjab and the adjacent urban areas of western Uttar Pradesh.

Our North Indian, urban, modern Hindus, then, regard the *Bhagavad-Gita* as the "Bible of Hinduism"—I enclose the expression in quotation marks, since it is an *emic* term in modern Hindi-English. Etically, of course, this is quite wrong, since the *Bhagavad-Gita* does not have canonical, or *sruti*, status; it belongs to the epic and has therefore only *smṛti*, or noncanonical, conventional status. There are easily traceable historical reasons, for this, which I shall not go into here.¹³ I must emphasize this contemporary perception of the *Gita*: it is the most quoted, the most often translated, and most easily accessible of all scriptures; it has been read widely outside India, and this fact is very well known. It was Gandhi's vade mecum, and even the pronounced secularists of the political and administrative echelons regard it and refer to it as the sacred guide to secular action. In fact, some important political and educational figures have identified "Hinduism," as a set of beliefs, with the content of the *Bhagavad-Gita*. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, founder of the rightist and potentially fascist Hindu Mahasabha, used to say that a Hindu was a person who believed in rebirth and the *Bhagavad-Gita* and was a vegetarian.¹⁴ This sentiment has been reiterated by at least one extremely wealthy and influential industrialist,¹⁵ and it is somehow the ideological underpinning of the staff and the administration of Benares Hindu University, the most important "secular" institution of higher learning in Northern India, outside of Delhi. Now if you combine the *emic-etic* technique with that of cultural criticism, responses are acute and fertile. If you suggest to the subject that the *Bhagavad-Gita* is noncanonical, *smṛti* rather than *sruti*, most informants will either deny the knowledge of such distinction—and, of course, this denial is quite sincere, as none but pandits know the dis-

inction—or they will assert that the *Bhagavad-Gita* is the true *śruti*. Some of them may quote a famous self-eulogy of the *Gita*, a verse ascribed to Vyāsa, the legendary author of the epic: "All the Upanishads are the cows, Krishna is the cowherd . . . the *Gita* is the milk" (*sarvopaniśado gāvo dogdhā gopālanandana*). There are two alternative explanations: either the speakers do not understand the definitional status of *śruti* and *smṛti* in terms of their relation to the belief system of the Hindu tradition; or they do understand it, however vaguely, but they reject the distinction systematically. I tend to believe that the latter alternative is the correct one. Several highly informed spokesmen for modern, urban Hinduism made it quite clear to me, independently of one another, that the distinction between *smṛti* and *śruti* was out of place, wrong, outmoded, a "superstition" (about this important term and its use, see below). The obfuscation or eradication of the distinction is "systematic" in Russell's sense—that is, it is dialectically necessary for the purpose of legitimizing further statements—statements, that is, that encode the modern, urban Hindu belief system. To put this into the simplest and most unambiguous form, the Upanishads and the *Veda saṃhita*—that is, the *śruti*—are quietistic; they stress *jñāna* (intuitive knowledge), which entails withdrawal from society, emphasizing the virtues of the recluse, and so forth. There is little or no *bhakti*¹⁶ in those texts, no *karma-yoga*¹⁷ worth mentioning, and hence no social incentive. On the other hand, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, which is a soldier's pep talk to another soldier, etically speaking, generated all these values—heroism, intensive social activity and involvement, singlemindedness in secular pursuits, and so forth. At least this is how the modern Hindu, following Vivekananda and other interpreters of this century, sees it. More learned, conservative readings of the *Bhagavad-Gita* are simply not known; Shamkarācārya's *bhāṣya* (commentary, about A.D. 800), which makes the *Gita* out to be a text that teaches withdrawal and contemplation, or Sri Aurobindo's commentary (1946), which reads it as a text for integral yoga, are known only to experts and have no operational influence on the modern Hindus modally selected.

Next to the *Bhagavad-Gita*, which tops the scriptures in the Hindu's mind, rank the medieval and modern texts, poetic and homiletic, which have been written and communicated by the agents of the Hindu Renaissance since about A.D. 1500—for example, the founders of the *bhakti* movements, including Sik-

hism, Kabir, Mirā, and others, and, more importantly, the writings of the latter-day English-speaking saints, the swamis *since* Vivekananda. I say "since" because he established a tradition the importance of which is vastly underrated for reasons that I have pointed out in my article on the Hindu Renaissance.¹⁸ The swamis of the Ramakrishna Mission; the Aurobindo people; the Divine-Life Society around Sivananda; the Self-Realization League around Yogananda Paramahansa; Sāi Baba; Meher Baba, Swami Chinmayananda; and, of course, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, erstwhile guru of Mia Farrow and the Beatles—their sayings and writings, whatever their literary and exegetical merit, have scored total success with our audience. When modern Hindus speak about the *Bhagavad-Gita*, or the *Upanishads*, the great majority among them have some swami's exegesis in mind. Again, I am not talking about the Arya Samāj, with its large middle-class following in Northern India—their lore is certainly not the English "pony" used by the collegiate and sub-collegiate swamis of the land, but that of Dayānanda Sarasvati, who did not know any English and was quite overtly hostile to English-language use.

This takes us smoothly into the third theme of our study of legitimation in modern urban Hinduism: the spoken word. By the spoken word we mean the word of the lay and monastic teachers who live in the cities and move between the cities. They carefully avoid the village, which is left to grass-roots practitioners, both monastic and sacerdotal. They also avoid, though apparently to a decreasing extent in the last decade, the rostrums of learned Brahmanical dispute and erudition, the *pandāl* of Brahmin and monastic scholars, and the traditional *sāstrārtha* (exegetical disputation), which has been and still is the vehicle of learned, Sanskrit-based dialogue and is highly exclusive and totally unregenerate from a modern, critical viewpoint.

The ramifications of modern oral lore and its sustenance are perfectly amazing and partly grotesque. Consider the modern religious "calendar art." As to the artistic merit of this type of artifact, there is virtually no debate. Let me only say that its demerits are simply not recognized, or are not acknowledged, by modern Hindus, with the exception of some modern art schools in Bombay and Calcutta, but *not* with the exception of university scholars, lawyers, and professionals. "A picture of God is a picture of God," a Delhi businessman told me; and that, I believe, wraps it up as a modal statement. These poly-

chromes abound in every niche and nook in India and Southeast Asia and wherever there is a sizable number of Indian expatriates—I have seen them in dozens of Punjabi Sikh houses in British Columbia and California and in East Africa. Ainslie Embree, when he was a professor at Columbia University, once hung up half a dozen of these polychromes in his office, eliciting responses from visiting Indian graduate students and faculty over a period of three months. There was only one negative response, and that, as I found out later, was made by an Indian anthropologist who had heard me talk about these oleographs. He suggested that there was an Embree-Bharati imperialist conspiracy to downgrade Indian aesthetics. More important, however, for our purpose, are the doctrinaire implications so well displayed on the picture; modern Hinduism and its teachers are radically eclectic. This has to do, in a narrower context, with the systematic confusion between *śruti* and *smṛti*, which feature is either part of the etiology or part of the consequence of that eclecticism. Personally, I feel that the *śruti-smṛti* confusion is etiological; for once the *smṛti* obtains a de facto equivalent status with the *śruti*, the much more rambling and eclectic assemblages of ideologized ritualistic and theological-mythological themes are automatically absorbed into the total corpus constituting the belief system. It would then appear quite natural that new elements, such as those derived through occidental contacts, could be amalgamated without trouble, particularly if some sort of indigenous mantle could be given to them.

On the syncretistic matrix underlying the whole system, the Swamis, following Vivekananda, have successfully established the notion that Hinduism is *tolerant*, that it does not reject any religion, that it is based on the truths contained in all the religions of the world, or, conversely, that all religions of the world are true since they derived their inspiration, in however distant a past, from India. The whole complex of total diffusion of all cultural and technical goods from Vedic India derives from this pattern: atomic weaponry and airplanes were known to the heroes of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*; the Germans made away with Vedic secrets, which Hitler then channeled into his victories; *Arjuna* went to Pātāla, hence that part of the world is called "Argentina"; and so on.¹⁹ Statements made by highly erudite Indian scholars about the age of the Veda, the origin of the Aryans, and the impact of Indian ideas on other parts of the world have been highly embarrassing and frustrat-

ing to Occidental students of India, whose reaction has either been one of indignation or of sarcasm, or a mixture of both. I do not think that these ambiguous sentiments need to be nurtured in the light of the new ethnography. I suggest that all statements that express the modern Hindu belief system—for example, "India is spiritual, the West is materialistic"; "Hinduism is scientific"; "Hinduism is the oldest religion in the World"; "Every good person who believes in God is a Hindu"; "Every person who believes in rebirth, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, and purity of Mother Cow is a Hindu"; and so forth—are *emic* and as such are not further analyzable as to their "correctness." When we use an *emic* technique, we perform a better job as anthropologists, though not necessarily as philosophers. We can counter and refute these statements by *etic* devices—such as my own method of "cultural criticism"—telling any of these informants that what *they say* makes a person a Hindu simply doesn't make him one by the standards set by the people who formulated that part of the tradition to which they, the modern Hindus themselves, grant authority. But this means undercutting the anthropologists' intention to report faithfully cultural behavior as it is, not as it should be.

I think it can be shown that the chief agents of Neo-Hinduism are the sadhus, not the Brahmins nor the college teachers and writers on Hindu philosophy in English. Not all sadhus, however: the orthodox—or better, the "orthopractical"²⁰ sanyasins and other ordained members of highly hierarchical and specialized monastic orders—have a hold on the villager and on the grass-roots scholars. But there is very little more than a polite exchange between these monks and the train-and-plane-traveling jet-set sadhus who formulate Neo-Hinduism and whose audience, proportionately very small when compared to the grass-roots Hindus of the village and the shrine, nevertheless runs India. Pandit Nehru was extremely antagonistic toward the orthodox sadhus; he called them loafers, parasites, fissiparous individuals, and others things, in angry Indian English. But he gave high respect to the Ramakrishna Mission, and he saw Swami Nikhilananda of New York to the car outside the prime minister's residence in New Delhi. The Ramakrishna Mission has the full confidence of state governments; large sums are entrusted to it for famine relief, control of epidemics, and social work. This, of course, is due to the fact that Vivekananda Westernized his monastic order—there is little of the Hindu-

Buddhist monastic tradition in the Ramakrishna Order, and it is run, efficiently and smoothly, on the lines of Christian charitable missions; in fact, Vivekananda hardly denied this scheme. But when it comes to a showdown, the modern swamis are certainly not taken seriously by the agents of the grass-roots tradition. At the *kumbhamela*²¹ in Allahabad in 1954—where I had the honor of being appointed *sevak*²² to his late Holiness Swami Bharati Krishna Tirtha, Samkarācārya of Govardhanapitha-Puri—two Ramakrishna Mission swamis from the Allahabad Center wanted to join the *akṣhārā*²³ for the procession and the ritualistic dip in the holy river, the highlight of the occasion. They were refused admission into the *akṣhārā* and were told to take their dip afterwards with the lay pilgrims, who numbered roughly a quarter million. "These people," a senior monk of the Dasanāmi Order told me later in his tent, "pick up the excrements of the sick and carry leather briefcases, and wear stitched shirts—why don't they join the government? Why do they pretend to be sadhus?"

The fact is that modern Hindus take their ideological cue from the swamis who "pick up the excrements of the sick," literally or metaphorically, and who espouse social service, and so forth, declaring Hinduism to be a religion that is both "scientific" and humanitarian. This, incidentally, accounts for the wrath that anthropologists encounter from modern Hindus when they study and report grass-roots Hinduism, which is summarily rejected as "superstition" by modern urbanites.

As a participating observer, you can watch a modern swami perform. Swami Chinmayananda's *jñāna-yajña* is something that has to be seen to be believed. These "wisdom-sacrifices" in the large cities of India assemble ranking political and business leaders in town, with civil servants of all grades. There is a lot of social display, and classical terminology is used for denoting very modern activities. I wanted to see the swami somewhere, as I happened to be visiting the place where he was conducting his *yajña*. "His Holiness has gone for *bhikṣā*," a devotee told me. *Bhikṣā*, of course, is the process of going the rounds to obtain food by begging. As it happened, he was having lunch with the governor of the state at the latter's palatial mansion; the devotee knew this, but then *bhikṣā* is an *emic* term for any food that any sadhu takes anywhere.

Philip Singer calls this process "*sadhuization*,"²⁴ a term emendatory to "Sanskritization," "Hinduization," "Parochializa-

tion," "Westernization," and so forth—terms that have been in vogue among anthropologists writing about religious behavior in South Asia. He claims, quite rightly I believe, that the sadhu is not really a charismatic in Weber's sense; in fact, I would say charisma as we understand it has no *emic* equivalent in India. A sadhu is a saint by ascription, quite without regard to his personal powers, his attraction, or his learning. By ascription he has the eight great *siddhis*;²⁸ he is in the state of *samādhi*²⁹ or any of its equivalents at all times; he needs no proof of his powers—there is no possible way to disprove them, since nothing he does, or fails to do, can repudiate his ascribed status. The only condition is that he have an audience, and it is this which decides whether people will refer to him as a saint or as a fraud. This being so, the term "saint" (North Indian *sant*) is a descriptive term, contrasting with the evaluative use of "saint" in European languages. A person who is ordained in any order or who lives a full-time religious career can and will introduce himself as "Saint So-and-so," and there will be no smiles and no frowns in a North Indian audience.

The ritual conducted by the sadhus is not Vedic, nor does it really fit any formalized standards; it is largely of the *kīrtan-bhajan-kathā* variety,³⁰ with formal lectures over electronic sound systems becoming more and more frequent. From the highly literate type of *kīrtan* described by Singer³¹ to the occasional *bhajan* party at the house of some "householder" (*grhas-tha*—a technical Sanskrit word which has become a common vocable in the urban Hindu Renaissance), there is a wide range of performances of this informal type of ritual. This is in contrast to the formalized Vedic and other Sanskrit ritual, which, except for Arya Samāj practices, is thought to be reactionary and basically undesirable.

This takes us to the problems that anthropological jargon has circumscribed as processes of "Sanskritization";³² quite briefly, the term connotes ritualistic and pararitualistic activities that tend to absorb bookish, ultimately Sanskrit-based ceremony and that utilize Brahmanical lore and Brahmin personnel for the performance in question. It does *not* mean the learning of Sanskrit or the use of Sanskrit for religious dialogue—quite the contrary, "Sanskritized" persons or social groups often denigrate the importance of Sanskrit as being reactionary and antimodernistic and as perpetuating the old order from which India should desist and separate. The term "Sanskritiza-

tion" properly applies to rural and tribal communities rather than to urban groups—tribes and low-caste rural groups invariably "Sanskritize" their ritual and their way of life (by abandoning the eating of meat, by the remarrying of widows, and by certain other "non-Sanskritic" acts and customs) with the sole object of improving their lot and their social status. One might assume that the urban groups in question are situated at the upper end of the "Sanskritization" process, where different options and newer loyalties are available, including the modern media, formal education, and so forth.

The modern English-speaking sadhu is, in a somewhat paradoxical fashion, the agent of Sanskritization in spite of the fact that most modern sadhus do not know Sanskrit, although most of them pretend that they do. They can get away with it in the cities, so long as they operate within their middle-class, service- and trade-centered audiences. As was noted above, they avoid the holy places as well as the top-level grass-roots monastics, whose Sanskrit erudition is a known fact, but who are tagged as old-fashioned, reactionary, or even "superstitious," as we shall presently see, partly due to their stress on the homiletic and exegetical use of Sanskrit. Middle-class women in Delhi chant OM and learn two or three verses from the Sanskrit scriptures by heart—a thing that used to be totally unthinkable and still is in the more orthopractical regions of high-caste Hindu India: no woman is supposed to pronounce OM or chant Vedic texts, since by traditional definition any woman, even a Brahmin lady, is "like a *sūdra*"; she has no *samskāras*, that is, initiations entitling her to the ritualistic use of the Vedic lore.

However, unbeknown to the creators of Sanskritization terminology, the modern urban Hindus in northern India really fit eminently well into the stipulations of this terminology. Though they are more or less hostile to Sanskrit, they tend to toe the Sanskritic line—they tend to abandon meat-eating entirely or they confine it to minimal, clandestine consumption. Even Sikhs, known for their gusto for meat dishes, tend to become vegetarians under the ubiquitous influence of urban Hinduism. This sometimes operates via economic success: I have observed four cases, three in India and one in East Africa, where a Sikh became extremely wealthy and ceased to eat meat after some time. Women in urban Hindu caste-society seldom ate meat anyway, but before the emergence of what we could call Renaissance Power, or "swami power," eating only vegetarian

food and reading or listening to the *Ramayana* and other texts in Hindi was felt to be for the ladies. This is bound to change quite rapidly now. It will result from the pull of the new eclectic Hinduism; but also the fact that schoolchildren in northern India learn highly Sanskritized Hindi at school will mean that they can now teach their parents, as it were, to understand the Hindi newscasts and that they can transmit a highly neologistic Sanskritized idiom to their fathers, who, until independence, preferred Urdu and Persian to Hindi and Sanskrit, leaving the latter two to the women about the house. Urdu, which used to be the hallmark of the middle-class urban North-Indian Hindu, is losing to this two-pronged attack—men over forty still read Ghalib and drool when they hear Urdu *ghazals*; their sons and daughters shrug it off, and the speech form that their fathers used is now being regarded as an idiolect and is doomed to become defunct in another generation.

Finally, I would like to select a single term to illustrate the parlance of modern urban Hinduism. I have treated this specific term in a separate publication,³⁰ but let me summarize my point and emend it for the purpose of accumulating material for the study of religious epistemology. The term "superstition" as used by modern urban Hindus is an *emic* term; it does not have the English dictionary meaning at all, and whatever lexico-semantic overlap there is, is of a trivial sort and does not in any way weaken my argument. Modern Hindus use "superstition" to denote, primarily, any activity, attitude, or thought pattern that is traditional and that is allegedly impervious to the postulates of modernization. This does, in a marginal fashion, include *etically* superstitious acts—except, of course, that we have to be careful about "superstition" in general, for it seems to me that this term, like "mental illness," is always *emic*; and if I were to elaborate my basic cynicism in these matters, I would posit that "superstition" really means any belief system that the speaker does not approve of, provided that it is tied to a culturally postulated extrahuman agency. However, in our specific case the term is applied to the official line of action and ideology, to secularism as propounded by the Indian leadership, to a de-ritualized, Protestant-ethic-directed cognitive religion of the eclectic sort as discussed earlier in this chapter, and to deemphasis on sectarian and primary-source-related theological argument. In practice, this means that the highly Sanskritic daily *pūjā* of the *engagé* Brahmins—all temple ritual, but also the persistence

of dowry, of expensive wedding feasts, and the emphasis on any ritual-linked divinity and its service—are “superstitions.” The only exception seems to be astrology, which is accepted and consulted as “scientific” by virtually all Indians, not just Hindus. Now, there is a fine exercise for the ethnosemanticist: What Indian term is translated as “superstition” by speakers of the modern Hindu Renaissance? None. Just like certain other phrases, which are *emic* Indian English, “superstition” as used by these speakers does not really translate any Indian term, hence they would use the English term even as they speak in a vernacular. Swami Dayānanda Sarasvati, the founder of the Arya Samāj, used a Sanskritic neologism not in vogue in Hindi before his time (around 1870-1880): that word is *andhavisvās*, literally “blind faith”; but here, as is almost always the case in the experience of the anthropologist, the etymology of a word, or of a phrase, is not only irrelevant but is highly obfuscating. The English usage of “blind faith” does not cover anything denoted by *andhavisvās*. Since Dayānanda, the word has come into vogue among Hindus, with its core reference being that of unreformed, unenlightened, traditional-ritualistic behavior without concern for social improvement. Now the term is used in a way that philosophical analysis calls a “recommendatory” use, and this use is wider than the “persuasive” use suggested by Charles Stevenson.⁸¹ When a modern Hindu who knows English calls a type of thought or action *andhavisvās*, he has the literal meaning of “blind faith” in mind. When he then refers to such actions as daily domestic ritual, Sanskrit rote learning and recitation, and also processes of supernatural curing, sooth-saying, and witchcraft as *andhavisvās*—literally “blind faith”—he thereby *recommends* that these things be thought of as superstitions. If he does not know English, then the pattern of expression follows the line set by the nineteenth-century reformers, who wrote and preached in the vernacular, particularly Swami Dayānanda. Since *andhavisvās* was a vernacular neologism using two Sanskrit morphemes that had never been compounded before, the meaning that Swami Dayānanda gave to this new compound has become the meaning now current in North Indian languages. Because it is a term of recent origin, there is little semantic ambiguity in its use, since there has not been enough time to aggregate new sememes to the lexical compound. We probably have here a very clear case of the Whorff-Sapirian syndrome—words preceding concepts: *andhavisvās* was not a

"state of mind" or a type of action until reformers and their votaries pointed it out by generating a neologism that would specify an attitude that was to be condemned.

Let me briefly summarize the main conclusions of this investigation: urban, modern Hinduism has little to do with the two types of grass-roots Hinduism with which anthropologists have so far concerned themselves—it is not the "little tradition," the local ritual and belief system of the villages, with regional deities assuming all-Indian pantheonic features; nor is it the learned, scholastic Hinduism of the pandits and the orthodox sadhus. It is the highly eclectic brand of reformist pamphleteering, combined with the world view held and propagated by certain sermonizers around the turn of the century, particularly Vivekananda and, a bit earlier, Dayānanda Sarasvati. This urban Neo-Hinduism denigrates ritual of the traditional kind and rejects the scholastic subtleties of traditional theological dispute. It incorporates much of the Christian missionaries' teachings from around the turn of the century, without being conscious of this fact; and it regards the modern sadhu as a religious cynosure. On the ideological side, it rejects the quietistic, contemplative, recluse-oriented themes of the canonical texts and replaces them with selective noncanonical passages and texts that seem to stress social engagement and action. And finally, in order to solidify these radical deviations from the grass-roots tradition, it uses processes of partly conscious dissimulation, such as blurring the distinction between *śruti* and *smṛti* (canonical and non-canonical texts) and by using pejorative neologisms, in a commendatory fashion, to attack traditional grass-roots modes of religious belief and ritual systems.

NOTES

1. Harry Izmirlian, Jr., "Structural and Decision-Making Models: A Political Example," *American Anthropologist*, 71.6:1062-74 (Dec. 1969).

2. The Ganser syndrome is well known in psychiatry: a person pretends to be insane—and when he persists, he actually develops psychopathological symptoms. This is one version; a more sophisticated reading, as given by Prof. Th. Szasz and Dr. R. Leifer, holds that the distinction should not be made in the first place, for the distinction between "being insane" and "acting insane" is linguistic, not substantive.

3. See A. L. Louch, *Explanation and Human Action* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1967).

4. I am thinking specifically of John J. Honigsmann, Anthony F. Wallace, and Victor E. Barnouw—all three of whom have written texts entitled *Culture and Personality*. Prof. Francis Hsu calls this approach *Psychological Anthropology* (he edited an anthology with this title, published by Dorsey Press, Inc., 1961).

5. G. M. C. Carstairs, *The Twice Born* (Bloomington, Ind., 1958); Philip Spratt, *Hindu Personality and Culture* (Bombay, 1966). See also my reviews of this book in *Journal of Asian Studies*, 26:519-20 (May 1970), and in *American Anthropologist*, Feb. 1968, p. 142.

6. The use of the *etic-emic* model belongs to what Marvin Harris calls the "new ethnography." The terminology was created by Kenneth Pike, for of course it is a linguistic model in the first place. Though somewhat opposed by other ethnoscientists and ethnosemantics, Harris's definitions of the *etic* and the *emic* are perfectly sufficient for our purpose: "Emic statements refer to logico-empirical systems whose phenomenal distinctions or 'things' are built up out of contrasts and discriminations significant, meaningful, real, accurate, or in some other fashion regarded as appropriate by the actors themselves [i.e., by the native subjects we are talking about; italics supplied]. An emic statement can be falsified if it can be shown that it contradicts the cognitive calculus by which relevant actors judge that entities are similar or different, real, meaningful, significant, or in some other sense 'appropriate' or 'acceptable'" (Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* [New York, 1968], p. 571). "Etic statements depend upon phenomenal distinctions judged appropriate by the community of scientific observers. Etic statements cannot be falsified if they do not conform to the actor's notion of what is significant, real, meaningful, or appropriate. Etic statements are verified when independent observers using similar operations agree that a given event has occurred. An ethnography carried out according to etic principles is thus a corpus of predictions about the behavior of classes of people" (*ibid.*, p. 575).

7. A. Bharati, "Great Tradition and Little Traditions: An Anthropological Approach to the Study of Some Asian Cultures," in *Anthropology and Adult Education*, ed. Th. Cummings (Boston, 1968), pp. 72-94.

8. See A. Bharati, "Cultural Criticism as a Tool for Social Studies," *Quest* (Bombay), 33:15-22 (1962).

9. Edward N. Shils, *The Intellectual between Tradition and Modernity: The Indian Situation* (The Hague, 1961).

10. Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-intellectualism in American Life*, Vintage Books Vol. 317 (New York, 1966), pp. 18 ff.

11. A. Bharati, "The Hindu Renaissance and Its Apologetic Patterns," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 29:2:267-89 (Feb. 1970).

12. *Andhāli* and *Mahal* were two of the most popular Hindi movies in the fifties; the songs, numbering roughly a dozen, have been sung and whistled by nostalgic males both in India and among Indian emigrants on all continents ever since.

13. But see this author's chapter, "Gandhi's Interpretation of the *Bhagavadgītā*," in *Gandhi: The Man and His Work*, ed. S. N. Ray (Philadelphia, 1970).

14. Transcript of a speech delivered by Malaviya at the convocation of Benares Hindu University in 1935.

15. Jugal Kishore Birla, eldest of the Birla brothers, now deceased.