

# Before Hinduism: Missionaries, Unitarians, and Hindoos in Nineteenth-Century America

Michael J. Altman

Cotton Mather believed in a connection between America and Asia. He believed the Native Americans had arrived on the continent from Asia sometime after the biblical flood. He also believed in a world with Christian Europe at its center and the heathen lands of the East Indies and West Indies on the outskirts. Mather's 1721 *India Christiana* reflected the connections he saw between East and West Indies on the boundary of Christendom. It contained a sermon Mather gave to the Commissioners for the Propagation of the Gospel among the American Indians at Samuel Sewell's house followed by two letters, one from Mather to the Dutch Lutheran mission in South India and a response from the Dutch missionary John Ernest Grundler.<sup>1</sup> *India Christiana* highlighted the ways Mather saw the work among the Indian heathens as the same whether it was in America or India. He called his fellow Euro-Americans to "the Promise made unto our SAVIOUR, *I will give the Heathen for thine Inheritance, and the Uttermost of the Earth for thy Possession.*"<sup>2</sup> The New England Puritans and the Dutch missionaries found themselves on the borderlands of European influence, and both had been charged with spreading the "joyful sound" of the gospel in a heathen wilderness. Mather never mentioned Hindus, Hindoos, or Gentoos in his writings about India's religions. Whether in Martha's Vineyard or on the west coast of India, Indians were Indians, heathens were heathens, and they all needed the gospel.

Cotton Mather produced the earliest American writings about religion in India. Mather did not think about religion comparatively. He lumped the people of India into the catchall category of heathenism. Mather presented a global vision where true Christianity triumphed over false heathenism. In Mather's vision, Christians were at work around the world battling Satan and spiritual darkness in a process of Christianization, or, as he would have phrased it, bringing about the

*Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, Vol. 26, Issue 2, pp. 260–295, ISSN: 1052-1151, electronic ISSN: 1533-8568. © 2016 by The Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Reprints and Permissions web page, <http://www.ucpress.edu/journals.php?p=reprints>. DOI: 10.1525/rac.2016.26.2.260.

Kingdom of God. In his diary he outlined this global vision during a time of personal supplication before God.

I represented, that there were Servants of His, industriously at work for His Kingdome [*sic*] in the World. Among these, I particularly mentioned those of the *Frederician* University, and those of the *Malabarian* Mission. But we can do very Little. Our Encumbrances are insuperable; our Difficulties are infinite. If He would please, to fulfill the ancient Prophecy, of *pouring out the Spirit on all Flesh*, and planted His Religion in the primitive Times of Christianity, and order a Descent of His holy *Angels*, and fly thro' the World with the *everlasting Gospel* to preach unto the Nations, wonderful Things would be done immediately.<sup>3</sup>

After pleading with God in prayer for an outpouring that would cover the whole world, Mather "concluded with a strong Impression on my Mind; *They are coming! They are coming! They are coming! They will quickly be upon us; and the World shall be shaken wonderfully!*"<sup>4</sup> From his intimate New England devotional space, Mather envisioned the entire world on fire for God. Mather showed no interest in comparing differing religious beliefs or practices; rather he imagined the Kingdom of God conquering the world and ridding it of false heathenism.

Transnational Protestant networks made Cotton Mather's global vision possible. He corresponded with various Protestants in England, August Herman Francke at Halle, and the Danish mission on the Coromandel coast of southeast India. Historians disagree about the extent of Mather's correspondence with the European Pietists, yet there was enough of a connection to excite Mather's passion for a global Christian movement.<sup>5</sup> Even historian Wolfgang Splitter, himself skeptical of the extent of Mather's connections with Halle, has admitted that, in a letter from 1715, Mather's principal motivation was "to link the Protestant reform movements such as Halle Pietism with the goals of Christian mission and ecumenism, and in this regard he mentions the successful missionary work being conducted among Native Americans."<sup>6</sup> Mather had enough contact with Halle Pietists, Lutheran missionaries, and English dissenters to imagine an ecumenical Protestant missionary movement emanating outward from Christian Europe to the borderlands of the East and West Indies.

Mather's global vision and Protestant networking divided the world between Christians and heathens. He never used the words Hindu, Hindoo, or Gentoo. Instead, he always referred to the "Malabarians" or the "heathen." He also never mentioned the religion

of the Malabarians because, for him, heathens did not have religion. Similarly, in his letter printed in *India Christiana*, Grundler called the Malabarians “deluded Heathen People.”<sup>7</sup> Mather described the natives of North America, the heathen Indians he had observed himself, in terms that noted the absence of any religion among them, calling them “the most forlorn *Ruins of Mankind*, and very doleful Objects. Their way of living was lamentably Barbarous. Beyond all Expression Dark were their Notions of a God; and *Chepian*, or the *Evil God*, had as great a share as *Kautantowit*, or the *Good God*, in their Adorations, The *Manicheans* (as great a Tribe of *Hereticks* as ever were in the World) may boast of *these*, as being really *Theirs*.”<sup>8</sup> He never used the word religion in reference to the Indians, be they Eastern or Western. They belonged to the heretics. Religion, for Mather, was Christianity, and the Indians of the world had no religion.

The absence of religion that Mather observed in Indians, both Eastern and Western, drew on larger tropes in European thought about the humanity of “natives.” In his writing about South Africa, historian of religion David Chidester described how “the long history of denial in the European comparative religion of maritime and colonial contact produced a multilayered discourse about otherness that identified the absence of religion with images of indigenous people as animals or children, as irrational, capricious, and lazy, as both blankness and barrier to European interests.”<sup>9</sup> Mather’s view of the American Indians followed this trope. Christianity would give the natives religion and humanity. He wrote that the goal of Christian missions was “to *Humanize* these Miserable *Animals*, and in any measure to *Cicurate* them & *Civilize* them” but even more “to Raise these Miserables up, unto an Acquaintance with, and an Experience of, the **Christian Religion**, and bring them not only to *Know* something of their SAVIOUR, but also to *Live unto GOD by Him*.”<sup>10</sup> By giving Indians religion qua Christianity they could be humanized and saved.

As Mather’s writing about the Malabarians shows, American interest in and knowledge of religion in India began with a rejection that there was any religion in India. “Heathensim” marked an absence for Mather. As American encounters with India increased and colonial knowledge of South Asia circulated along Anglophone global networks, Americans began to recognize some sort of religion in India. In the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, Americans used a variety of terms to describe, represent, and imagine the religions of India: *Gentoos*, *Hindoos*, religion of the *Hindoos*, *Hindoo religion*, *Brahmanism*, *heathenism*, and *paganism*. Each term meant different things to different writers at different times. Each term also carried with it different understandings of what counted as “religion.” Regardless, there was

no Hinduism, a world religion originating in India and comparable to others, in America prior to the late nineteenth century. Americans read and wrote about “Hindoos” and “Hindoo religion,” something altogether different from Hindus and Hinduism.

This difference between Hindoo and Hinduism is not simply a matter of spelling.<sup>11</sup> The Hindoo of the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century was not the same as the Hindu of the early twentieth century. Prior to the late nineteenth century, Hindoo (and even Hindu) referred to both region and religion. As Heinrich von Stietencron has argued, “Hindu” and “Hindoo” derived from the Persian *sindhu*, a reference to the people of the Indus River. Inscriptions dating to 517 b.c. attest to this meaning. After Muslims began to settle permanently in the Indus valley in 712 c.e., the term became a way to distinguish non-Muslims from Muslims. When Europeans arrived in India, they used “Hindoo” to refer to the non-Muslim masses of Indians.<sup>12</sup> Slowly, Europeans began to use the words “Hindoo” and “Hindu” to “designate the follower of a particular Indian religion. This was a fundamental misunderstanding of the term.”<sup>13</sup> From Hindu came “Hinduism,” “denoting an imagined religion of the vast majority of the population—something that never existed as a ‘religion’ (in the Western sense) in the consciousness of the Indian people themselves.”<sup>14</sup> Originally used to denote regional location, “Hindoo” and “Hindu” became religious categories as European discourse about religion in India shifted during the nineteenth century and eventually resulted in “Hinduism,” the world religion, in the late nineteenth century.

Debates over the term Hinduism, its history, derivation, and politics have been ongoing among scholars of South Asia. Historian of religion Richard King argued that British colonial power in India constructed “Hinduism” by locating the core of Indian religion in Sanskrit texts and by defining Indian religion according to Judeo-Christian traditions. He has argued further that, prior to British colonial rule and the 1947 independence, “it makes no sense to talk of an Indian ‘nation,’ nor of a religion called ‘Hinduism’ that might be taken to represent the belief system of the Hindu people.”<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, religion scholar Brian K. Pennington has presented a more nuanced account of the development of Hinduism as a category during the colonial period. Focusing on the years between 1789 and 1832, Pennington argued that “in the shadows and under the auspices of the emerging colonial state, Hindus and non-Hindus alike etched the contours of the modern world religion we now routinely call ‘Hinduism’ and its attendant identities.”<sup>16</sup> Pennington persuasively moved back and forth between British and Indian sources, in both English and Bengali, to trace these contours. As he argued, “the

very articulation of the colonial-era concept 'Hindu' was already a collaborative undertaking; discursive interactions between Britons and Indians contributed to the dialogic and heteroglot production known as 'Hinduism.'"<sup>17</sup> Taking the best points of King and Pennington together, Hinduism, as a world religion and pan-Indian system, emerged during the nineteenth century through the conflict and collusion of Indians and Britons and reached its apex with Indian nationalism and eventually the 1947 independence.

But these arguments among South Asianists about the construction of Hinduism in colonial India and the British Empire do not shed light on the production of Hinduism as a religion in American culture. "Hinduism," as a pan-Indian system of religion that could be compared alongside others, emerged in America much later than in India or Britain. Americans did not need "Hinduism" as early as Britons or Indians, because the United States did not have a colonial administration in India. Pennington has pointed out that "the expansion of the colonial administration of India in the nineteenth century also demanded a coherent and stable catalog of Hindu laws, sects, ritual practices, and so forth, an end that an essentialized Hinduism certainly furthered."<sup>18</sup> Americans did not need an essentialized Hinduism for the same reasons Britons did. It suited the desires and aims of some Americans to keep South Asian religions incoherent and unsystematic. Americans did use resources produced by colonial administrators and British missionaries to construct their own representations of "the religion of the Hindoos," but they did not always share the same goals or perspectives as these Britons. Eventually, as American religious liberals began to think of religion as a comparative category and began to isolate a set of religions that could be compared to one another, Hinduism, as religious system and world religion, emerged in their thinking and writing late in the nineteenth century. But American interest and knowledge of Hindus, Hindoos, Gentoos, brahmins, and Brahmanism predated Hinduism the world religion.

Out of this categorical messiness, two competing representations of South Asians and their religion emerged in the early part of the nineteenth century. On the one hand, many Americans represented religion in India as bloody, licentious idolatry. On the other hand, many Americans found much to be admired and shared in the religion of India. For example, the first generation of missionaries from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) sent back accounts of Hindoo idolatry and licentious religious practice that represented Hindoo religion as false religion run amok.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, Unitarian Christians discovered the works of Rammohun Roy in the 1820s and deployed his unified Vedanta theology as proof of the truth of their own Unitarianism.

I turn to these two narrow examples as representative of the two larger tropes through which antebellum Americans represented religion in India. Religion in India was either contemporary heathen idolatry or ancient Vedic religion. These two examples also show how American Protestants deployed representations of Hindoo religion to bolster their claim to “true Christianity.” These early nineteenth-century debates and representations also reveal the development of “Hinduism” as a category for religion in American culture. More important, the Unitarian and ABCFM representations of Hindoo religions offer an example of how Protestantism established the ground rules by which something would be considered a religion in America. American Protestants imagined and represented religions according to their own internal concerns and debates during the nineteenth century, culminating in the set of religions recognized as “world religions” at the 1893 World’s Parliament of Religions.

### “Obscenity and Blood”: Hindoo Religion as Heathen Idolatry

An angel named Serenus visited Eugenia, the narrator in the story “Fragment of a Vision,” and whisked her away to “present a fairer prospect of the unbounded love of Christ.” The angel carried her along sunbeams through “regions of ether” until they landed on the “fertile plains of India.”

I looked and with amazement beheld innumerable crowds of the swarthy inhabitants of Hindoostan celebrating an idolatrous festival. The barbarous rites, the horrible clangour [*sic*] and confusion, with the dread of superstition of the poor, blinded votaries, displayed to my imagination a scene that rent my heart and filled my breast with sorrow and tumult.<sup>20</sup>

Eugenia pitied the Indians in her heart while her ears “were pained with the loud and noisy babblings of the multitude.” The angelic travel guide directed Eugenia’s attention to the banks of the Ganges River where she saw devotees bathing themselves in the waters and heard “the feeble cries of the helpless infants, who in vain struggled against the swellings of the flood.” The scenes deeply disturbed Eugenia. She said a silent prayer for God to save the people of India.

Sensing Eugenia’s distress at these sights and sounds, Serenus took her to the home of a dying Indian man. At first it appeared to be another scene of calamity, but, though he was dying, the man’s soul “as if unwilling to quit the body, still lingered to breath the last

testimony of Jesus' love." The Indian man was a Christian and exclaimed with his dying breath,

"Tell them, I bowed to idols; but did I put my trust in idols now, I should sink lower than the grave. Tell them, I performed the rites of the Ganges; but there is no water that cleanseth from the sin, besides the water of the river that 'proceedeth out of the throne of God and of the Lamb!'"<sup>21</sup>

And then he died. When the man died, the vision of India fled, leaving Eugenia with "the grateful recollection" of a soul won for Christ.<sup>22</sup>

Published in the *Massachusetts Missionary Magazine*, "Fragment of a Vision" contained many images and themes through which American evangelicals would represent South Asians in the first third of the nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> Just as the angel Serenus whisked Eugenia to a foreign land, the missionary print culture of the early nineteenth century brought evangelical readers to the mission field. In the pages of missionary print, evangelicals encountered "the religion of the Hindoos" as bloody, obscene, and idolatrous and the "Hindoos" as in need of the rational and divine light of the gospel to save them from their deluded heathenism.

*The Massachusetts Missionary Magazine* was one of many evangelical periodicals that sprang up in New England during the first decades of the nineteenth century. Revivals in upstate New York and the Cumberland River valley consisted of camp meetings full of Methodists and Baptists. But in New England, evangelicals channeled their fervor into various religious societies, including missionary societies. With each new missionary society came a new missionary journal with news of the heathen overseas. These journals brought New England evangelicals a global vision for Christian revival. As historian Oliver Wendell Elsbree described it, "With the rise of the missionary journal proper, as the official organ of the local missionary society, the public was educated on the subject of foreign missionary enterprises with ever increasing effectiveness. It was the period of world politics, and serious people were thinking in terms of humanity as never before."<sup>24</sup> Evangelical missionary zeal also coincided with New England theological controversy, as the debate about Unitarianism and liberal religion heated up in the early part of the nineteenth century. At the same time evangelicals began to establish the institutional structures for a global missionary movement, they also engaged in theological controversy with their liberal Protestant cousins as the Unitarian controversy heated up in New England.<sup>25</sup> As a result, evangelical representations of Hindu religions appeared in missionary journals within the dual context of revivalist missionary zeal and theological controversy.

The earliest images of Hindoo religions popular in the New England evangelical press came from the works of British East India Company chaplain and missionary advocate Claudius Buchanan.<sup>26</sup> Buchanan presented Hindoo religions as bloody, violent, and backwards superstitions that needed to be overcome by the bright light of the gospel. He presented this image to Americans through an example that would dominate their imaginations for the rest of the century: the Juggernaut.

"Juggernaut" was the Anglicization of the god Jagannath, seated at a temple in Puri, Orissa, on the east coast of India.<sup>27</sup> The image of Juggernaut in America began with a letter from Buchanan written at Tanjore and originally published in the British *Christian Observer* but then reprinted throughout New England evangelical publications.<sup>28</sup> In the letter, Buchanan offered his observations from ten days spent at the Jagganath temple. He described the worship of "hundreds of thousands" of pilgrims and the great festival of the "Rutt Iatra [Ratha Yatra]," when the god is pulled outside the temple on a giant cart. More important, he described "human victims" who showed their devotion to the god "by falling under the wheels of the moving tower in which the Idol is placed."<sup>29</sup> In his description of Juggernaut, Buchanan provided a specific example of what he and other missionaries described as the "sanguinary superstitions" of Hindoo religions.

Buchanan also described Juggernaut in biblical terms for his evangelical audience. Juggernaut was "the chief seat of Moloch in the whole earth," referencing the god whose worship was forbidden in Leviticus 18:21. Buchanan saw "the place of the skulls, called Golgatha," a reference to the place of Jesus' crucifixion in the New Testament, "where the dogs and vultures are ever expecting" the corpses of the devotees.<sup>30</sup> The multitude worshiping Moloch/Juggernaut was "like that in the Revelations," but rather than Hosannas to Christ and his second coming, they yelled in "applause at the view of the horrid shape and at the actions of the high-priest of infamy, who is mounted with it on the throne."<sup>31</sup> The whole scene was "the valley of Hinnon," where children were sacrificed to the false gods in the Old Testament.<sup>32</sup> This biblical description worked by inverting traditional Protestant tropes. Rather than the Golgatha where Jesus' death atoned for sin, Juggernaut was a place of meaningless bloodshed. The worship was not the beautiful eschaton of the second coming, but "horrid." It was the valley of idolatrous blood shed to false gods, not the temple of worship to the one true God. Buchanan drove this point home by noting the difference between the scene of Juggernaut and the Indian Christians he met at Tanjore. At Tanjore "the feeble-minded Hindoo exhibits Christian virtues,



in a vigour which greatly surprises me! Here Christ is glorified."<sup>33</sup> Through his description, Buchanan constructed an image of Juggernaut as the diametric opposite of Christianity, full of meaningless worship, unredeeming death, blood that failed to atone, and horror instead of beauty.<sup>34</sup>

Buchanan's bloody Juggernaut found its fullest rendering in his most famous work in America, *Christian Researches in Asia* (1811). In *Christian Researches*, Buchanan built on the description of Juggernaut found in his earlier letter. Once again, he emphasized the blood of the rituals at Puri. Recounting the Rath Yatra, Buchanan described a man who offered himself up as a sacrifice to the god by throwing his body under the cart. "He laid himself down in the road before the tower as it was moving along, lying on his face, with his arms stretched forwards . . . and he was crushed to death by the wheels of the tower."<sup>35</sup> Buchanan declared that the god "is said to *smile* when the libation of the blood is made."<sup>36</sup> When he saw the image of the god for himself, Buchanan described "a frightful visage painted black, with his distended mouth of a bloody color."<sup>37</sup> For Buchanan, the bloody smile of Juggernaut epitomized sanguinary rites of the Hindoos.

While he had described the blood of Juggernaut in his earlier letter, in *Christian Researches* Buchanan added a new quality of licentiousness to it. He started with the outside of the temple. "As other temples are usually adorned with figures emblematical of their religion; representations (numerous and various) of that vice, which constitutes the essence of *his* worship. The walls and gates are covered with indecent emblems, in massive and durable sculpture."<sup>38</sup> During the Rath Yatra a priest pronounced "obscene stanzas" and "a boy of about twelve years was then brought forth to attempt something yet more lascivious. . . . The 'child perfected the praise' of his idol with such ardent expression and gesture, that the god was pleased . . . and the multitude emitting a sensual yell of delight, urged the car along." Next, "an aged minister of the idol then stood up, and with a long rod in his hand, which he moved with indecent action, completed the variety of this disgusting exhibition." Buchanan admitted that he "felt a consciousness of doing wrong in witnessing it."<sup>39</sup> Buchanan struggled to describe fully the horror he found in the Juggernaut. On the one hand, he struggled with the language of the devotees, which he does not know, and must rely on interpreting gesticulations. On the other hand, his English prose struggled to express the scene and maintain propriety. The sexuality Buchanan wanted to describe was always just a little outside of his words. The Juggernaut's obscenity and sexuality exceeded proper language for an evangelical readership.

Along with the blood and obscenity of Juggernaut, Buchanan paid special attention to the noise of Juggernaut's worshippers. In the quote above, he described "obscene songs" and "a sensual yell of delight." In *Christian Researches*, he described "a kind of hissing applause" from the women "who emitted a sound like that of *whistling*, with their lips circular, and the tongue vibrating: as if a serpent would speak by their organs, uttering human sounds" that he compared with the hissing of Satan's assembly in Milton's *Paradise Lost*.<sup>40</sup> Again and again, the worship of the Juggernaut, as described by Buchanan, was full of shouts, songs, hissings, "the sound of a great thunder," and acclamations. These were not sweet melodious sounds. Rather, "the voices I now heard, were not those of melody or of joyful acclamation; for there is no harmony in the praise of Moloch's worshippers."<sup>41</sup> It was a noisy and disorderly affair that shocked his senses. True religion was melodious, interior, ordered. Where he saw idolatry, Buchanan heard cacophony.

Buchanan not only described Hindoo religions in *Christian Researches*, he also surveyed Indian Catholicism and found little difference between the two. Touring through South India he wrote, "Of the Priests it may truly be said, that they are, in general better acquainted with the Veda of Brahma than with the Gospel of Christ. In some places the doctrines of both are blended . . . [I] witnessed (in October 1806) the Tower of Juggernaut employed to solemnize a Christian festival." The priest accompanying Buchanan "surveyed the idolatrous cart and its painted figures . . . seemingly unconscious himself of any impropriety in them."<sup>42</sup> The link between Hindoo practice and Catholicism engaged a larger Protestant critique of Catholics at home in Britain. As Pennington noted, Buchanan's account of Indian Catholicism "included not only clerical abuse, empty ritual, moral laxity, and papal tyranny, but even a hit of human sacrifice."<sup>43</sup> Pennington has also argued that the strong connection between South Asian "idolatry" and British anti-Catholicism "partook of a history of opposition to Roman Catholic ritual, belief, and polity" and suggested "a pervasive Protestant Christian rationalism that was suspicious of the ritual use of images and any other institutional religious forms not governed by individual reason."<sup>44</sup> Idolatry and superstition united Catholicism and Hindoo religions as forms of religion that required the bright light of rational Protestant Christianity. Indeed, "the chief object" of Buchanan's writing was "not the extermination of Hinduism, but the conquest of the idolatrous religious culture that infected both Hinduism and Christianity in India."<sup>45</sup>

Buchanan's writings in general and *Christian Researches* in particular gave American evangelicals their first images of Hindus during

the early nineteenth century. In America, *Christian Researches* went through numerous editions and was promoted in burgeoning evangelical magazines like *The Panoplist*.<sup>46</sup> Various evangelical magazines in New England published reviews and extracts of *Christian Researches* that extracted the descriptions of Juggernaut and the “sanguinary superstitions.”<sup>47</sup> Pennington has argued that “idol worship” in general became the practice that held together a pan-Indian system of Hindoo religion in the minds of nineteenth-century British evangelicals.<sup>48</sup> This observation about Buchanan’s influence in Britain holds true for America as well.

In America, Buchanan’s accounts of Juggernaut represented Hindoo religion as a system of idolatry that stretched across India and set the pattern for later reports by American missionaries writing home. The Juggernaut Buchanan constructed also became a symbol of blood and death beyond idolatry. For example, a temperance article in *The Panoplist* used Buchanan’s account “of the sanguinary rites at Juggernaut” as a comparison to the “monstrous vice” of alcohol that “has shrines on the banks of almost every brook” and “four thousand self-devoted human victims, immolated every year upon its altars.”<sup>49</sup> Here the Juggernaut was shorthand for violent, mindless, death. American drunkenness was a form of idolatry as ignorant and destructive as Hindoo heathenism and both demanded the sacrifice of human lives. Buchanan’s Juggernaut became the dominant image of Hindoo religion in the imaginations of evangelicals for the next half-century.

When American evangelicals sent missionaries to India, new images of Hindoo idolatry were sent home in missionary reports. The founding of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions by New England Congregationalists, in 1810, provided opportunity for representations of Hindoos penned by American missionaries to enter evangelical print culture. The ABCFM had its roots in a network of New England evangelical institutions.<sup>50</sup> Its first missionaries came from Andover Seminary, and *The Panoplist*, later renamed *The Missionary Herald*, became its official periodical. In 1812, the ABCFM sent out its first batch of missionaries, headed for India: Adoniram and Nancy Judson, Samuel and Harriet Newell, Roxanna and Samuel Nott, Luther Rice, and Gordon Hall.<sup>51</sup> Hall and the Notts settled in Bombay, and Samuel Newell joined them there, in 1815, after the death of his wife and child in Ceylon.<sup>52</sup> The ABCFM mission station at Bombay produced numerous journals and letters describing Hindoos that were sent home and published in *The Panoplist*. In these missionary reports, the themes established by Buchanan emerged again and again. According to American missionaries, Hindoo religion was bloody, licentious, noisy, superstitious, and Catholic—read idolatrous—religion.

Picking up where Buchanan left off, American missionary journals continued to publish accounts of the Juggernaut. In 1813, *The Panoplist* published a letter dated June 1812 from Harriet Newell. Newell described the bathing and worship of Juggernaut at Calcutta, where the Newells awaited permission to travel south to Ceylon. After bathing the idol, devotees began bathing in the river as well, "where they said their prayers, counted their fingers, poured muddy water down their infants' throats, and performed many other superstitious ceremonies."<sup>53</sup> Newell read these actions within the Protestant framework of sin and atonement. For Newell, all of these actions reflected a desire on the part of Hindoo devotees to find atonement for their sins, atonement only available through "the blood of Jesus, which does indeed cleanse from all sin."<sup>54</sup> In 1833, the ABCFM published an engraving of Juggernaut's cart. The text accompanying the image gave a history of the festival taken from British missionary William Ward and the now infamous account of the Rath Yatra from Buchanan. Having read about Juggernaut for two decades, New Englanders had a picture of the towering cart, the mass of people, and the gesticulations of the devotees.<sup>55</sup>

Missionary reports of Hindoo religion's bloody character also included accounts of blood sacrifices and hook-swinging. Hook-swinging, or *charak puja*, involved devotees attaching hooks into the flesh of their backs and then being hung from various forms of tall poles that would swing them around in a circle.<sup>56</sup> Writing from Bombay, Samuel Newell and Gordon Hall described devotees offering the sacrifice of a rooster to the goddess of wealth, Lakshmi (or as they called her, "Luxumee"), and applying the blood of the animal to their foreheads. Newell and Hall also noted that the sacrifice of sheep was common among Hindus and that "the *life* and *blood* of the animal, are principally regarded by these idolators, in making their offerings to their gods."<sup>57</sup> In another account, Hall offered one image of the "scores of sheep" sacrificed and the details of the ritual, including the opening up of the belly and removal of the liver.<sup>58</sup> The specter of human sacrifices often haunted these accounts of animal sacrifice. As one missionary report mentioned, "there is good evidence that human sacrifices, within a few years past, and within a few miles of Bombay, have been repeatedly made on various occasions to local deities."<sup>59</sup>

While human sacrifices were never witnessed or reported, the practice of hook-swinging often appeared in these missionary accounts. One account from the Bombay missionaries described a man and woman who each took a turn being hoisted twenty-five feet in the air by two hooks in their backs. The woman "seemed to manifest greater fortitude and contempt of pain than the man did. . . . She voluntarily flung

herself about by a variety of action, which must have greatly augmented her pains."<sup>60</sup> Missionaries generally interpreted animal sacrifice and hook-swinging as "the degraded, deplorable, perishing condition of the heathen."<sup>61</sup> But the missionaries also tended to interpret these blood sacrifices as a sign that Hindoos were not wholly unredeemable. Applying their own evangelical views of Christ's atoning sacrifice, the Bombay missionaries asked the reader, "What should put it into the minds of these unenlightened heathens, that the shedding of blood could have any efficacy in appeasing of God against sin? Let the unbeliever solve this question, if he can."<sup>62</sup> As historian Carl Jackson has noted, bloody practices such as hook-swinging defined Hindoo religion and "represented the very essence of Hindu teaching" for Protestant missionaries.<sup>63</sup> Bloody rituals pointed to the darkness of Hindoo heathenism and the hope that real atonement for sin could be found when the blood of Christ replaced the blood of sheep, roosters, kids, and hook-swingers.

Along with blood, missionaries described sex and obscenity as central to Hindoo religion. In their published accounts, the Bombay missionaries condemned the obscene and sexual dancing that accompanied Hindoo festivals. Again and again missionaries railed against "those parts of the Hindoo system, which recommend and enforce impurity, licentiousness, and indecency, by annual exhibitions."<sup>64</sup> For example, one account described how during one festival "in the afternoon and evening there was, particularly among the lower sorts of people, abundance of music and dancing; males and females engaging in an indecent manner."<sup>65</sup> Another account described "*naches* (dances)" wherein "some places women were in men's clothes, and in others men were in women's clothes. . . . The females are common prostitutes but by the natives are not considered less religious on that account. . . . Their dress, and all their movements, were designed and well calculated, to excite all the passions which are for the interest of their abandoned profession."<sup>66</sup> Spectators of these dances seemed "gratified and delighted in the same proportions as the exhibitions are removed from decency."<sup>67</sup> Missionaries struggled, like Buchanan, with the proper language to describe Hindoo eroticism. The editors of *The Panoplist* prefaced the above description with a note that the scenes in the missionary report "are so scandalously obscene, as not to admit of description in a Christian country."<sup>68</sup> In another case, a missionary described the phallic shape of the lingam (an image of the god Shiva) as "a significant emblem of what decency forbids to be named; and such was the deity."<sup>69</sup> From festival worship to the forms of the gods, everywhere the missionaries looked they found obscene sexuality in Hindoo religions and struggled to put it into words.

Much like Buchanan's description of Juggernaut, the ABCFM missionaries consistently described chaotic noise accompanying the licentiousness of Hindoos. Accounts of Hindoo ritual included descriptions of musicians with "ragged-sounding instruments" that played a "hideous clang" and music "struck up with redoubled violence."<sup>70</sup> Another report noted, "The Hindoo holidays of the *Sheemgah* are just closed. For ten days past we have heard nothing but the noisy music of these people."<sup>71</sup> It was not just festivals in the streets either. Even a temple "resounded with the inharmonious notes of a band of native musicians, celebrating the praises of the cocoa-nut god."<sup>72</sup> For some missionaries, the cacophony of Hindoo worship reflected larger spiritual disease. Bombay missionary William Ramsey described how the sounds he heard on a Sunday afternoon had a profound effect on him. "The sound of the *tom-toms* and the accompanying screeching noise of the jackals on the banks of the river chilled my very soul, and threw a damp over my spirits that I cannot well describe." Ramsey wondered when the "dismal sound of idolatrous revels" would become "hymns of praise to God and to the Lamb."<sup>73</sup> The dissonant noise of Hindoo worship contrasted with the harmony of the Christian hymn just as the violent and bloody rituals differed from the single redemptive sacrifice of Jesus. Missionaries represented Hindoo religions as the cacophonous antithesis to harmonious Christian piety.

The ABCFM missionaries in Bombay did not only observe Hindoos religions, they also took note of Indian Catholicism and often found it little different from Hindoo religions. Hall and Newell offered American readers a view of a Catholic Good Friday procession in Bombay. "Today we have witnessed among the Catholic Christians a scene not much inferior in grossness to the idolatry of the heathen: viz. a representation of the death and burial of Christ."<sup>74</sup> The blood and sacrifice of Hindoo practice appeared in the form of a crucifix processed around the Catholic church. The noise of Hindoo worship also accompanied the sacrificial savior in the form of stamping feet, rapping with canes, and clapping of hands. The whole scene was so close to Hindoo worship that "many of the heathen were present. They feel much strengthened in their image worship by observing the same practice among Christians."<sup>75</sup> In another account, the conversion of Hindoos to Catholicism was specious at best. The missionaries wrote, "But though they assumed the name of Christian, yet they have never ceased to be idolaters; for instead of their former idols, they substituted the images of saints, to which they paid a religious worship as really idolatrous as the worship paid by the Hindoos to their gods."<sup>76</sup> Indian Catholics also drew on Hindoo ideas to defend their practices. In addressing some "lapsed Catholics," Gordon Hall discovered "they

are fast learning to use the Hindoo sophistry in defence of their idolatry."<sup>77</sup> To the missionaries, Catholic practice looked and sounded like Hindoo religions in India, and they saw little difference between Catholic or Hindoo idolatry.

The bloody, lascivious, and noisy Hindoo religions of evangelical missionary reports suited the needs of missionary propagandists. The titillating scenes of unutterable eroticism offered exotic entertainment to readers, but they also reinforced New England revivalist theology. As religious historian David W. Kling has convincingly argued, the ABCFM and its missionaries were "a New Divinity creation, rooted in New Divinity theology, inspired by New Divinity revivals, and staffed by a well-established New Divinity social and institutional network."<sup>78</sup> "Disinterested benevolence," the hallmark of New Divinity theology emphasized by Samuel Hopkins, gave meaning to the ABCFM mission in India and structured missionary constructions of Hindoo religions. According to New Divinity preachers, "True Christians are given a new disposition (or 'taste' or 'relish') for God and all things he has brought into existence, and consequently they have a love of being in general"—a disinterested benevolence for God's creatures. The true Christian acted on this new benevolence "in unselfish acts of love and mercy (even in a willingness to die and be damned) in order to bring glory to God and further his kingdom."<sup>79</sup> Disinterested benevolence provided an important theological rationale for heading to the mission field. As revivalism took hold among New England evangelicals, the representations of bloody and vulgar Hindoo religions encouraged the benevolent action of giving to the missionary project. The chaotic noise of Hindoo religions described in the pages of missionary propaganda attempted to engender benevolence in Christians at home. As historian Clifton Phillips put it, "If the Calvinist image of the sinful condition of natural man made it possible to believe in the moral degradation of the heathen, the need for continuing missionary support made imperative its constant evocation."<sup>80</sup> The ABCFM used representations of Hindoo depravity to foster support for missions and increase their institutional strength.

The missionary reports also constructed a unified "Hindoo system" that could be found throughout the Indian subcontinent and even in Sri Lanka. At the heart of this pan-Indian religious system stood the idol. Pennington has described the evangelical construction of Hindoo religion qua idolatry: "stripped of all of its show and pomp, the complex and intractable mess of Hindu rite sheepishly confessed its prosaic and pitiable brute veneration of matter. . . . Hindus did not merely employ images as aids to meditation, nor did they believe them simply to house concentration of divine energy; they revered them as

gods themselves."<sup>81</sup> The moral depravity of blood and obscenity grew out of attachment to the idol. "Unlike spirit, which was rational in nature and therefore unitary, ordered, and abstract, matter displayed no one ultimate form or reason. Each idol was a law unto itself."<sup>82</sup> For evangelicals, true religion was spiritual, rational, ordered, abstract, and systematized. Hindoo religion, as constructed by New England evangelicals, was the antithesis of true Protestant religion.

### **Rammohun Roy, a Monotheistic Unitarian Hindoo**

While the missionaries were sending reports home, another movement within India worked to rid it of idolatry. Rammohun Roy rejected the idolatry of his countrymen and women. He argued that the bloody, obscene, and noisy rituals that engrossed the missionaries were anathema to true religion and to true Hindoo religion. He further believed that Hindoo religion was a monotheistic religion that called for worship of the one formless, supreme, creative deity. While the evangelical representation of Hindoo religion traveled from Bombay to Boston, Roy's representation of Hindoo religion began to make its way to New England from Calcutta. Roy's writings about Hindoo theism and Christianity embroiled him in controversy in America, Europe, and India. In India, he disputed with the English missionaries at Serampore and brahmins in Calcutta. In America, his writings became part of the larger Unitarian controversy. Americans wrote about Roy and his conflict with Calvinist missionaries as if it was the second theater of theological dispute between Calvinism and Unitarianism. Roy introduced America to Vedanta philosophy and engendered interest in Sanskrit texts and Indian philosophy among liberal Protestants. During the years of his popularity in the American press, Protestants used him as evidence in their own theological disputes.

Roy was born in either 1772 or 1774 in the Burdwan district of Bengal to a brahmin family. His father served the Muslim rulers and gave Roy an education in Persian and Arabic, preparing him for civil service. His mother began his Sanskrit education, preparing him for life as a scholar. Rejecting his parents' devotion to Vishnu at the age of sixteen, Roy was a "highly independent, precocious, troubled, but dutifully filial youth."<sup>83</sup> In 1797, Roy settled in Calcutta where he first came into contact with the British East India Company by lending money to young British civil servants. It was through money lending that Roy made the contacts that landed him a place within the world of public administration. Roy "may be seen as typical of the Bengali babu of the turn of the nineteenth century, an entrepreneur, a man of



means, whatever his caste or background."<sup>84</sup> Beginning in 1805, Roy secured work for John Digby, the Magistrate at Ramgarh. While working for Digby, he improved his Western languages "by perusing all of my [Digby's] public correspondence with diligence and attention, as well as by corresponding and conversing with European gentlemen, he acquired so correct a knowledge of the English language, as to be enabled to write and speak it with considerable accuracy."<sup>85</sup> Roy also accepted Digby's offer to read Greek and Latin literature with him. While with Digby, Roy took interest in European politics, especially revolutionary France, which he saw as a rational order for society and a land of equality.<sup>86</sup> By 1818, an Englishman touring India remarked upon meeting Roy that "his learning is most extensive, as he is not only generally conversant with the best books in English, Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Bengalee, and Hindoostanee, but has even studied rhetoric in Arabic and in English, and quotes Locke and Bacon on all occasions."<sup>87</sup> To his European admirers, Roy was a master of Western and Eastern culture, language, and philosophy.<sup>88</sup>

In New England, Roy caught the attention of Protestants on both sides of the period's theological disputes. In April of 1817, the Trinitarian *Boston Recorder* and the Unitarian *Christian Disciple* each extracted the introduction of Roy's *Translation of an Abridgement of the Vedant*, introducing Roy to each of their audiences.<sup>89</sup> These two American magazines took their extracts not from Roy's text itself but from an article in the British *Missionary Register*.<sup>90</sup> Roy addressed the introduction, "To the Believers of the only True God," which both sides assumed applied to them, and sought "to prove to my European friends, that the superstitious practices, which deform the Hindoo religion, have nothing to do with the pure spirit it dictates."<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, Roy argued, true Hindoo religion derived from the sacred texts of the Vedas. Roy then offered readers a brief explanation of the *Vedant* he had abridged and translated. The word *Vedant* came from the Sanskrit, meaning "resolution of all the Veds," and it was the book "most highly revered by all the Hindoos; and in place of the more diffuse arguments of the Veds, is always referred to as equal authority."<sup>92</sup> True Hindoo religion, for Roy, rejected idolatry and focused worship on a monotheistic supreme deity.

Roy invoked reason to defend his argument. As he put it, "If correct reasoning, and the dictates of common sense, induce the belief of a wise, uncreated Being, who is the supporter and rule of the boundless universe; we should also consider him the most powerful and supreme existence, far surpassing our powers of comprehension or description."<sup>93</sup> Such a deity would be beyond the forms and rituals of idols or images. Not only reason, but Hindoo scripture itself supported

the view of a unified creative deity, and "by making them [other Hindoos] acquainted with their Scriptures" he hoped to "enable them to contemplate, with true devotion, the unity and omnipresence of Nature's God."<sup>94</sup> Human reason and Hindoo scripture pointed to a unified God, not polytheistic heathenism, and Roy wrote to convince European and Indian alike. True Hindoo religion, true religion, worshipped one Supreme Being.

At first, American Protestants were not quite sure what to make of the Bengali writer. The two magazines agreed that Roy was a "reformer." But what kind? The *Boston Recorder* must have agreed with the assessment in the *Missionary Register* article from which it borrowed. Rather than make any editorial comments, it just reprinted the entire *Missionary Register* article. The article wondered if Roy and his followers might "undermine the fabric of Hindoo superstition."<sup>95</sup> Nonetheless, the magazine reminded readers of the need for missionary work for, "reason and philosophy may not have a voice powerful enough to reach the hearts" of Hindoos and so "the Christian Missionary, who Christ sends forth, will find a mouth and a tongue, which no man shall be able to gainsay or resist."<sup>96</sup> Roy may have been a reformer, and a monotheistic reformer at that, but his reforms fell short of the missionary's gospel.

For their part, the Unitarians at the *Christian Disciple* used the Bengali reformer to take theological shots at Trinitarian orthodoxy. Noting that Roy had been opposed and even had had two attempts made on his life by brahmins who disagreed with this monotheism and interpretation of the Vedas, the *Christian Disciple* saw Roy as a compatriot in the battle of true religion over despotic orthodox power. "For they [the orthodox] will very easily prove, to their own satisfaction, that *all good men* have been *orthodox* in their opinions, and that *polytheism* is *orthodoxy*."<sup>97</sup> In this, the article's final sentence, the subject of the pronoun "they" slipped between the orthodox on two continents. The orthodox brahmins were the same "they" as the New England orthodox. Polytheism was the same as Trinitarianism, and Roy's reform was the same as Unitarian reform. Unitarians began to make Rammohun Roy one of their own.

Interest in Roy could be found on both sides of New England's Protestant divide. In March of 1818, "Theology of the Hindoos, as taught by Ram Mohun Roy," appeared in the *North American Review and Miscellaneous Journal*, a magazine that was "Bostonian, Harvardian, Unitarian."<sup>98</sup> The article, written by William Tudor, reviewed three English pamphlets Roy published in Calcutta, *Translation of the Ishaopanishad*, *Translation of the Cena Upanishad*, and *A Defence of Hindoo Theism*.<sup>99</sup> The first two were Roy's translation of parts of the Vedas, and the final

was a work of religious controversy arguing against idolatry. Once again, the emphasis was on Roy's argument for a Supreme Being as described in his interpretation of the Vedas. Tudor described how "although the Vedas taught the existence, the unity, and overruling providence of a Supreme Being, and the propriety, if not the necessity of worshipping him as being invisible and of pure intelligence; yet the Bramins carefully concealed this from the people, and insisted on the barbarous sacrifices and idols worship."<sup>100</sup> The review contained considerable extracts from the translations in order to make readers "somewhat acquainted with the present religious notions of the Hindoos, the pure doctrines of their sacred books, and the views and motives of the learned native [Roy]."<sup>101</sup> The extracts painted a picture of brahmin conniving and Hindoo ignorance conspiring together to keep Indians habitually inclined toward idols. Tudor stopped short of labeling Roy a Christian but granted that "the doctrine he inculcates differs very little from the christian [*sic*] doctrine respecting the nature and attributes of the Deity." Finally, Tudor hoped that Roy's work and "the aide of Divine Providence" might work together to change "the moral condition" of India.

The Trinitarian editors at the *Boston Recorder* agreed on that count and reprinted an article from a Calcutta newspaper that briefly reviewed the same three works and concluded that if Roy was successful "a reformation must take place—the power of the Priesthood, will be deprived of all its terror—reason will succeed to the dominion of prejudice; and the example of the higher classes will rapidly be followed by the mass of the population."<sup>102</sup> New England Protestants saw Roy as a native reformer who would pave the way for Christian progress in the country. He shared the Protestant abhorrence of idolatry and love of scripture. Whether orthodox or Unitarian, New Englanders agreed that Roy's reform work was a good thing for India and the progress of Christianity.

As missionary involvement in India increased, Roy turned his attention to Christianity and the impurities he saw in the evangelical Protestantism Britons and Americans promulgated in India. In 1820, he published *The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness*, a compilation of Jesus' moral teachings from the four gospels that left out any historical or miraculous material. Roy believed that separating out the moral teachings would "be more likely to produce the desirable effect of improving the hearts and minds of men of different persuasions and degrees of understandings" because "moral doctrines, tending evidently to the maintenance of the peace and harmony of mankind at large, are beyond the reach of metaphysical perversion, and intelligible alike to the learned and unlearned."<sup>103</sup> Roy rejected dogmatic impurities added to the pure moral monotheism of Christianity, just as he had with

Hindoo religion. The heart of Christianity for the reformer was “the law which teaches that man should do unto others as he would wish to be done by.”<sup>104</sup> For Roy, Jesus’ importance lay in his moral teaching, not his death on the cross or his place as the second person of the Trinity. The Baptist missionaries based at nearby Serampore were not happy with Roy’s text. Joshua Marshman replied to Roy in a series of articles in the evangelical *Friend of India* referring to Roy as an “enlightened heathen” at one point and arguing that Jesus’ moral teachings could not be separated from his divine place as the Son of God and his atoning work on the cross. Roy wrote a series of replies to Marshman and argued that the three persons of the Trinity were little different from the multiple gods of Hindoo religion. According to Roy, the Trinity was the real heathenism.<sup>105</sup>

As the controversy between Roy and Marshman played out in the printed pages of Calcutta, Americans on both sides of their own Unitarian debate took notice. In November of 1821, the Unitarian *Christian Register* printed an article from its British brethren at the *Monthly Repository of Theology and General Literature* describing Rammohun Roy and “the controversy which he has so ably maintained with the English Calvinistic Baptist Missionaries.” The dispute was “one of the most singular controversies which the world has ever witnessed.”<sup>106</sup> The *Register* followed up in December with a seven-column, two-page article detailing Roy’s life and the controversy with the Baptists. After outlining the debate through various selections from Roy and Marshman, the writer of the article, attributed to H. T., concluded by declaring that Roy is “plainly a firm and zealous Unitarian,” and ventured to wonder rhetorically if he could also be labeled a Christian.<sup>107</sup> In a single lengthy article Rammohun Roy, the Hindoo Vedanta philosopher, was introduced to New England Unitarians and then fought with evangelical Baptist missionaries. In the process Roy became a Unitarian and possibly a Christian. In the preface to a letter from Roy republished in the *Register*, the editor even referred to the debate as the “Indian Unitarian Controversy.”<sup>108</sup> The *Register* continued its coverage of the debate throughout the 1820s, reprinting Roy’s *Second Appeal to the Christian Public in Defence of the Precepts of Jesus*, in serial in its July 5 through August 30 issues of 1822.

The Unitarian account of the Indian controversy did not go unchallenged in New England. In March of 1823, the Baptist run *Christian Watchman* reviewed “Reply of the Baptist Missionaries at Calcutta,” *To Rammohun Roy*, which was Marshman’s side of the dispute as published in the *Friend of India*. The review extracted a portion of Marshman’s argument focused on “the accuracy of various statements made by Rammohun Roy.”<sup>109</sup> The editor at the *Watchman* desired “to present this

extract, as the author replied to has been praised by his friends in this country."<sup>110</sup> The extract from Marshman argued for the doctrines of original sin, the Trinity, and the atonement for sin through Jesus' death and resurrection. Then, in December, the *Watchman* and *Boston Recorder* reprinted a scathing article from the *New Haven Religious Intelligencer* that claimed Roy had not written his own works but that a British Unitarian in India penned them. "So that the whole amount of this wonderful matter is, than an [*sic*] Unitarian can write in India, in much the same way that an Unitarian can write in Europe." The article also smirked at "writers in this country [who] trumpet forth the praises of a man merely because he writes heresy in India."<sup>111</sup> New England Calvinists saw Roy as yet another heretic to be denounced and his ideas about Jesus little different from their Unitarian neighbors.

The question of who counted as a Christian drove the New England Unitarian controversy. Unitarianism was heresy, claimed the orthodox, and not true Christianity. Meanwhile, Unitarians believed they had found the purest, most refined, and most reformed Christianity in Western history. Yankee Protestants pulled Roy into this question regarding Christian identity. In 1824, the *Missionary Herald*, true to its roots as a defender of orthodoxy, published some remarks about Roy from the reverend William H. Mill, principal of the Bishop's College at Calcutta. The *Herald's* editor prefaced the remarks by noting how Roy "swerved first from Hindooism to Mohammedanism" and "influenced by the light, which missionaries in the first instance had been the means of introducing into Calcutta . . . became a rational Hindoo Philosopher, or in other words, a Deist."<sup>112</sup> The editor also interpreted Mill as labeling Roy at least "an infidel." Mill himself asserted that Roy claimed to be a Christian, but it was a Christianity divested of "supernatural revelation" leaving "no reason to applaud the change."<sup>113</sup> The *Christian Watchman* reprinted the comments from the *Herald* and proclaimed that Roy's "advocates may hereafter see cause to be ashamed of their prodigal encomiums."<sup>114</sup> Roy's American critics echoed the "enlightened heathen" assertion of Marshman's first reply to Roy.

The *Christian Register* did not let these critics go unchallenged. The Unitarian magazine published the remarks from Mill, noting their appearance in the *Herald*, and editor David Reed prefaced them with the words, "It was to be expected that so able an advocate for the Divine Unity, and so powerful an opposer of the leading doctrines of Calvinism, as Rammohun Roy, would excite the enmity, and be a subject of the detraction of all who are pledged to support the *trinity* and its accompaniments."<sup>115</sup> A week later, more remarks in defense of Roy appeared in the magazine in a much longer two-column article that criticized Mill for requiring Roy accept a Christianity "disfigured and deformed by its

association with the doctrines of the trinity, native depravity, &c. and with all the other human appendages" Calvinists attached to it. The article stopped short of claiming Roy was a Christian but did refer to him as a "friend and promoter of Christianity."<sup>116</sup> The *Unitarian Miscellany and Christian Monitor* showed less restraint. The magazine, edited by Francis W. P. Greenwood and published in Baltimore, but circulated among New England Unitarians, also responded to the Mill article claiming Roy "not only stands foremost in the ranks of those who oppose idolatry, but has declared himself a Christian."<sup>117</sup> Unitarians continued to defend the Christian identity of Rammohun Roy by asserting that he was a Unitarian and Unitarian theology was Christianity. As Unitarian clergyman Joseph Tuckerman put it, "This evidence may not satisfy his Trinitarian opponents, who refuse the name of Christian to their Unitarian brethren. But it will go far to solve the doubts of any who are themselves Unitarians."<sup>118</sup> Unitarians and Trinitarians continued to debate Rammohun Roy's Christian identity throughout the decade, but they agreed he was at least a Unitarian of some sort. In defending Roy's Christian identity, Unitarians also defended their own. They argued that neither they nor Roy were the heretics Trinitarians claimed them to be.

Roy's social reforms attracted Unitarian attention as much as his theological controversy. Roy had long been an opponent of sati, the practice of widow immolation, in India, arguing that the Vedic texts did not require or endorse the practice. Roy began publishing tracts opposing sati around 1819, and his 1822 tract *Brief Remarks Regarding Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females According to the Hindoo Law of Inheritance* caught the interest of an English-reading audience. Roy continued publishing against sati in both Bengali and English until it was banned in the Bengal Presidency by William Bentinck at the end of 1829 under pressure from British evangelicals and Indian reformers. For a decade, Roy argued that Hindoo sacred texts required that widows inherit their husbands property and did not endorse sati or polygamy. David Reed, editor of the *Christian Register*, took great interest in sati and published multiple accounts of the practice. But Reed also published Roy's work to combat sati. He published an extract of *Brief Remarks* in 1823, and then after the abolition of sati he credited Roy with doing much to hasten the ban and improve women's rights in India. Historian Lynn Zastoupil has noted how Reed was also an avid abolitionist and argued that "sometimes Reed's interest in sati and slavery overlapped in the same successive issues of the *Christian Register* . . . This frequent juxtaposition proved a clue to why one early American abolitionist found inspiration in Roy's example."<sup>119</sup> Other Americans found inspiration in Roy as well. An 1833 tract written anonymously called on Congress to abolish slavery and concluded: "In closing this address,

allow me to assume the name of one of the most enlightened and benevolent of the human race now living, though not a white man. RAMMOHUN ROY."<sup>120</sup> Indeed, after his death in Bristol, England, in 1833, Roy became a material symbol of social reform among New England liberals. Six envelopes containing locks of his hair were sold to raise money for the abolitionist cause in 1844, and Roy's hair was also distributed in America by those returning from the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention in London.<sup>121</sup> The "Hindoo reformer" became a symbol for liberal theology and social reform among New England elites.

Rammohun Roy was a significant figure in New England religious culture for more than twenty years. In 1833, Philadelphia artist Rembrandt Peale invited Roy to sit for a portrait while the two visited London. The Boston Athenaeum exhibited the portrait in 1834 and bought it in 1837, occasionally exhibiting it "for a community in which Rammohun Roy was well known and esteemed."<sup>122</sup> Contact between New England Unitarians and Roy prompted the Unitarians to attempt a missionary project in India. Though the project failed rather miserably, it strengthened bonds between Bengali reformers and Yankee liberals.<sup>123</sup> Though his impact was greatest in New England, word of him spread throughout the East Coast. A bibliography of references to Roy in magazines during the period numbers more than two hundred articles spread across thirty-one different publications. His name appeared in almost 50 percent of eastern religious journals.<sup>124</sup> Jackson has argued that Roy's greatest significance was his translation and explication of Sanskrit texts and Indian philosophy. Roy's writings "provided many Americans the opportunity to hear Hinduism explained by an Asian—a unique experience in the early nineteenth century."<sup>125</sup> Meanwhile, cultural historian Susan Bean has argued for Roy's influence on American literary culture: "The impact of Rammohun Roy in America paved the way for the serious consideration of Sanskrit literature and Hindu philosophy that influenced the Transcendentalists and led to the blossoming of American literature at mid-century."<sup>126</sup> But both of these evaluations miss Roy's important role in the New England Protestant controversy. He was part of the debate among liberal and evangelical Protestants about what constituted true religion.

American Protestants encountered Rammohun Roy during a period when evidential Christianity dominated the theological debates of New England clergy. Evidential Christianity relied upon the claim of natural theology that "reason, reflecting on either the visible world or the workings of the human mind, could produce evidence for the existence of a transcendent God apart from the revelation in scripture or the tradition of the church."<sup>127</sup> As E. Brooks Holifield has described, "Never had the issue of rationality assumed as much importance as it

did in the early decades of the nineteenth century."<sup>128</sup> This theological moment when reason set the rules of debate made Rammohun Roy's rational Hindoo religion accessible to New England Protestants. Insofar as Roy spoke about a quest for true religion, through reason, Americans could hear him. Evidential Christianity and natural theology allowed Unitarians to deploy Roy's writings as evidence for their position.

### The American Invention of World Religions

The representations of Hindoo religion that circulated among American Protestants from 1800 to 1830 did not mention Hinduism. Rather, in the early part of the century, evangelicals and Unitarians constructed their own representations of what the religion of the Hindoos was. On the one hand, for the evangelical missionaries, it was a system of idolatry centered around obscene, bloody, and noisy ritual. For the Unitarians, on the other hand, it was a philosophical and theological system with sacred texts and a monotheistic creator deity. But neither of these was Hinduism. Rather, these systems were early attempts to make sense of religious difference Americans encountered in India. They were representations of Hindoo religion before Americans could think or speak of Hinduism.

These two systems, and those that followed them later in the century, force scholars to reconsider the narrative of Asian religions in American culture. Most often, historians have narrated the story of Asian religions in America by beginning with the Transcendentalists and Theosophists and then quickly moving to the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions and figures like Swami Vivekananda as the dawning of the East in America.<sup>129</sup> But the story is deeper and richer than that. Rammohun Roy had a deep and lasting impact on American religious culture. He not only played a role in the New England theological controversy, but his writings and translations influenced Transcendentalists like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Similarly, the missionary image of the Juggernaut would endure in American print culture, appearing, for example, in an 1878 issue of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*.<sup>130</sup> Roy and the missionary reports provide just two examples of the multiple representations and knowledge of South Asian religions in America that predate Vivekananda and complicate the narrative of Hinduism in America.

Second, and more important, these two early representations of Hindoo religion reveal the power of Protestantism in the construction of religions. While scholars have argued for the powerful role



Protestantism played in world religions discourse, they have most often focused on Europeans.<sup>131</sup> South Asian religions entered American print culture through Protestant writers arguing about Protestant theology. Protestant missionaries constructed Hindoo idolatry as a religious system to make sense of the religious difference they encountered on the mission field and to provide an opponent for their supporters back home. Similarly, Unitarians represented Hindoo religion as essentially textual, monotheistic, and rational because it served them well in their arguments with other Protestants. Later representations of South Asian religions as “Brahmanism” and the emergence of Hinduism as a “world religion” at the World’s Parliament of Religions would likewise depend upon Protestants. Indeed, the Hinduism Vivekananda preached at the Parliament was textual, rational, and monotheistic Vedanta—Rammohun Roy’s theology for a new generation of American Protestants. ABCFM missionary reports and news of Rammohun Roy from the early nineteenth century reveal the process by which American Protestants began to imagine world religions into existence.

Scholars such as Tomoko Masuzawa and Richard King have persuasively argued for the role of Protestantism in formation of the category religion and the discourse of world religions.<sup>132</sup> However, they have tended to focus on Europeans or conflated European and American influence on religion and world religions discourse. Religious studies narrates to itself a largely European history of itself.<sup>133</sup> But, as the examples here show, Americans had their own concerns in mind when they discussed and represented religions. The history of specifically American constructions of religions and world religions must be taken into account when considering the history of religious studies as a field and the history of Protestant power in the construction of religion. American representations and constructions of religions in the nineteenth century must be reconciled with the nineteenth-century European theorists beloved by the field in order to explain the growth of religious studies as an academic field in the twentieth-century United States. Accounting for the ways American missionaries and Unitarians constructed Hindoo religions before Hinduism is the first small step in that process.

## Notes

1. Cotton Mather, *India Christiana. A Discourse, Delivered unto the Commissioners, for the Propagation of the Gospel among the American Indians Which Is Accompanied with Several Instruments Relating to the Glorious Design of Propagating Our Holy Religion, in the Eastern as Well as the Western, Indies. An Entertainment Which They That Are Waiting for the Kingdom of God Will*

*Receive as Good News from a Far Country* (Boston: Company for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England and the Parts Adjacent in America, 1721).

2. *Ibid.*, 22. Emphasis in the original.

3. Cotton Mather, *The Diary of Cotton Mather, II, 1709-1724*, vol. 8, Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society 7 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1912), 365–66. Throughout his writing about the Danish mission Mather refers to the “Malabarian mission” and the native Indians there as “Malabarian.” This is odd because the Danish mission was in Southeast India, while the Malabar coast is on the southwest side of the peninsula. It is most likely that “Malabarian” was Mather’s term for all native people living in South India.

4. *Ibid.*, 8:366. Emphasis in original.

5. Kenneth Silverman, “Cotton Mather’s Foreign Correspondence,” *Early American Literature* 3 (December 1, 1968): 172–85; Wolfgang Splitter, “The Fact and Fiction of Cotton Mather’s Correspondence with German Pietist August Hermann Francke,” *New England Quarterly* 83 (March 2010).

6. Splitter, “The Fact and Fiction of Cotton Mather’s Correspondence with German Pietist August Hermann Francke,” 107.

7. Mather, *India Christiana*, 85–86.

8. *Ibid.*, 28. Emphasis in original.

9. David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 16.

10. Mather, *India Christiana*, 29. Emphasis in original.

11. There is a great deal of debate about the origin of the terms “Hindu” and “Hinduism” in the West and in South Asia. For my purposes, I am focusing on the coinage and use of the terms within the American context. For more on the South Asian history of the terms, see Brian Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians, and the Colonial Construction of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 168–72; Arvind Sharma, “On Hindu, Hindustān, Hinduism and Hindutva,” *Numen* 49, (January 1, 2002): 1–36; David N. Lorenzen, “Who Invented Hinduism?” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41,

(October 1, 1999): 630–59; Robert Eric Frykenberg, “The Emergence of Modern ‘Hinduism’ as a Concept and Institution: A Reappraisal with Special Reference to South India,” in *Hinduism Reconsidered*, ed. Gunther-Dietz Sontheimer (New Delhi: Manohar, 1989), 29–49.

12. Heinrich von Stietencron, “Hinduism: On the Proper Use of a Deceptive Term,” in *Hinduism Reconsidered*, ed. Gunther-Dietz Sontheimer and Hermann Kulke (New Delhi: Manohar, 1989), 33.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

15. Richard King, *Orientalism and Religions: Postcolonial Theory, India and “the Mystic East”* (London: Routledge, 1999), 107.

16. Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?* 3–4.

17. *Ibid.*, 171.

18. *Ibid.*, 169.

19. I use the “Hindoo” spelling with colonial double o to emphasize the fact that Americans are constructing a representation of the South Asian other that they label “Hindoo.” There is no Hindoo or Hinduism in American culture until someone labels something as such. For more on this, see Michael J. Altman, “Hindoos, Hindus, Spelling, and Theory,” *Religion in American History*, accessed September 4, 2014, <http://usreligion.blogspot.com/2014/09/hindoos-hindus-spelling-and-theory.html>.

20. “Fragment of a Vision,” *Massachusetts Missionary Magazine* 5 (November 1807): 225.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*

23. I use the term “evangelical” to indicate Trinitarian Protestants with an actively outward focus. Such Protestants were attracted to revivalism and missionary societies. Also, many missionary societies used the word “evangelical” in the titles of their periodicals. I use the term not as a substantive definition but in order to distinguish one sort of New England Protestant from others. In this sense, some New England Protestants thought of themselves as “evangelical” in order to distance themselves from other Protestants. This difference is most pronounced in the subtitle of

Robert Baird's 1844 book, *Religion in America: or an account of the origin, relation to the state, and present condition of the evangelical churches in the United States : with notices of the unevangelical denominations*.

24. Oliver Wendell Elsbree, *The Rise of the Missionary Spirit in America, 1790-1815* (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1980), 104.

25. For more about these debates and their history, see Conrad Wright, *The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America*, (Boston: Starr King Press, 1995) and *The Unitarian Controversy: Essays on American Unitarian History*, (Boston: Skinner House Books, 1994).

26. For Buchanan's role in British evangelical and missionary culture, see Allan K. Davidson, *Evangelicals and Attitudes to India, 1786-1813: Missionary Publicity and Claudius Buchanan*, *Evangelicals and Society from 1750*, no. 4 (Oxfordshire: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1990); Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?* 85–93; Geoffrey A. Oddie, *Imagined Hinduism: British Protestant Missionary Constructions of Hinduism, 1793-1900* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006), 75–83.

27. I refer to "Juggernaut" throughout this discussion to highlight the difference between the representation of Juggernaut that moved through-out evangelical print culture and the Jagannath of the Puri temple. One is the construction of British and American evangelical cultures and reflects their concerns, imaginations, and desires. The other is an Indian religious culture with a long history before and after the British East India Company. For more on Jagannath, see Nancy Gardner Cassels, *Religion and Pilgrim Tax under the Company Raj*, *South Asian Studies / Heidelberg University*, New Delhi Branch, *South Asia Institute*, no. 17 (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1988); Hermann Kulke and Burkhard Schnepel, eds., *Jagannath Revisited: Studying Society, Religion, and the State in Orissa* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001).

28. Claudius Buchanan, "India," *Panoplist* 3, (August 1807): 136–39; Claudius Buchanan, "An Important Letter from the Rev. Claudius Buchanan," *Connecticut Evangelical Magazine and Religious Intelligencery* 2, (October 1809): 388–93; Claudius Buchanan, "An Important Letter from the Rev. Claudius Buchanan," *The Adviser; Or, Vermont Evangelical Magazine* 1, (November 1809): 286–87.

29. Buchanan, "India," 136.

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.*

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?* 90.

35. Claudius Buchanan, *The Works of the Reverend Claudius Buchanan, LL.D. Comprising His Eras of Light, Light of the World, and Star in the East; to Which Is Added Christian Researches in Asia. With Notices of the Translation of the Scriptures into the Oriental Languages*, 6th American ed. (Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1812), 106.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid., 105.

38. Ibid., 101.

39. Ibid., 106.

40. Ibid., 104.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., 195.

43. Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?* 91.

44. Ibid., 69.

45. Ibid., 92.

46. "Work in Press," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine* 4, (August 1811): 143.

47. Claudius Buchanan, "Two Discourses Preached before the University of Cambridge, on Commencement Sunday, July 1, 1810; and a Sermon Preached before the Society for Missions to Aftica and the East, at Their Tenth Anniversary, July 12, 1810: To Which Are Added Christian Researches in Asia," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine* 4, (September 1811): 174–78; Claudius Buchanan, "Dr. Buchanan's Christian Researches in Asia," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine* 4, (October 1811): 221–29; "The English Review of Buchanan's Researches," *Connecticut Evangelical Magazine and Religious Intelligencer* 4 (October 1811): 382–93; "The English Review of Buchanan's Researches," *Connecticut Evangelical Magazine and Religious Intelligencer* 4, (November 1811): 429–35; "The English Review of Buchanan's

Researches," *Connecticut Evangelical Magazine and Religious Intelligencer* 4, (December 1811): 458–70; "Review of Christian Researches," *The Adviser; Or, Vermont Evangelical Magazine* 4, (May 1812): 147–59; "The English Review of Buchanan's Researches," *The Adviser; Or, Vermont Evangelical Magazine* 4, (June 1812): 173–83; "The English Review of Buchanan's Researches," *The Adviser; Or, Vermont Evangelical Magazine* 4, (July 1812): 200–206.

48. *Ibid.*, 59–61.

49. "On the Ruinous Effects of Ardent Spirits," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine* 5, (February 1813): 416–17.

50. For more on the history of the ABCFM see John A. Andrew, *Rebuilding the Christian Commonwealth: New England Congregationalists and Foreign Missions, 1800-1830* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1976); Donald Phillip Corr, "'The Field Is the World': Proclaiming, Translating, and Serving by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1810-40" (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1993); Clifton Jackson Phillips, *Protestant America and the Pagan World: The First Half Century of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1810-1860* (Cambridge, Mass.: East Asian Research Center, Harvard University, 1969); Wilbert R. Shenk, ed., *North American Foreign Missions, 1810-1914: Theology, Theory, and Policy* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004); for a larger history of American missionaries in India, see Sushil Madhava Pathak, *American Missionaries and Hinduism* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1967).

51. While at sea on their way to India, the Judsons and Luther Rice had an awakening and became Baptists. Rice returned to America to organize a Baptist missionary movement, and the Judsons established a Baptist mission in Burma.

52. Elsbree, *The Rise of the Missionary Spirit in America*, 110–14.

53. Harriet Newell, "Letter from Mrs. Newell," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine* 5, (April 1813): 515.

54. *Ibid.*

55. "Juggernaut and His Worship," *Monthly Paper of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions*, no. 11 (May 1833).

56. For the history of hook-swinging and colonial attempts to suppress it, see Geoffrey A. Oddie, *Popular Religion, Elites, and*

*Reform: Hook-Swinging and Its Prohibition in Colonial India, 1800-1894* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1995).

57. Gordon Hall and Samuel Newell, "American Missionaries," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine* 13 (July 1817): 323.

58. Gordon Hall, "Journal of the Rev. Gordon Hall, Missionary at Bombay," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine* 12 (December 1816): 571.

59. Gordon Hall and Samuel Newell, "Journal of the Mission at Bombay," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Herald* 14 (February 1818): 79.

60. Gordon Hall and Samuel Newell, "Journal of the Bombay Mission," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine* 13 (December 1817): 560.

61. *Ibid.*

62. Hall and Newell, "American Missionaries," 324.

63. Carl T. Jackson, *The Oriental Religions and American Thought: Nineteenth-Century Explorations* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981), 90.

64. Horatio Bardwell, "Mission at Bombay and the Vicinity," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Herald* 16 (October 1820): 457.

65. Gordon Hall and Samuel Newell, "Journal of the Bombay Mission," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine* 13 (November 1817): 526.

66. Gordon Hall, "American Missionaries," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine* 12, (November 1816): 507.

67. *Ibid.*

68. *Ibid.*, 505.

69. Gordon Hall, "Journal of the Rev. Gordon Hall," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine* 13 (January 1817): 35.

70. Hall, "Journal of the Rev. Gordon Hall, Missionary at Bombay," 571.

71. John Nichols, "Extracts from the Journal of Mr. Nichols at Salsette," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Herald* 16 (August 1820): 374.

72. Cyrus Stone, "Extracts from Mr. Stone's Private Journal," *The Missionary Herald* 25 (September 1829): 266.

73. William Ramsey, "Journal of Mr. Ramsey: Heathen Worship–Hindoo Indolence," *Missionary Herald* 28 (May 1832): 148.

74. Gordon Hall and Samuel Newell, "Extracts from the Journal of Messrs. Hall and Newell, at Bombay," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine* 13 (August 1817): 371.

75. *Ibid.*

76. American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, "Extracts from a Joint Letter of the Missionaries, Dated January 1829," *Missionary Herald* 25 (November 1829): 340.

77. Gordon Hall, "Extracts from the Journal of Mr. Hall," *Missionary Herald* 18 (July 1822): 220.

78. David Kling, "The New Divinity and the Origins of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions," in *North American Foreign Missions, 1810-1914: Theology, Theory, and Policy*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2004), 13.

79. *Ibid.*, 24.

80. Phillips, *Protestant America and the Pagan World*, 273.

81. Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?* 96.

82. *Ibid.*

83. Bruce Carlisle Robertson, *Raja Rammohan Ray: The Father of Modern India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 12.

84. *Ibid.*, 19.

85. Rammohun Roy, *Translation of an Abridgement of the Vedant, Or, Resolution of All the Veds* (London: T. and J. Hoitt, 1817), iii–iv.

86. Iqbal Singh, *Rammohun Roy: A Biographical Inquiry into the Making of Modern India*, vol. 1 (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1958), 88.

87. Lieutenant-Colonel Fitzclarence, *Journal of a Route across India, through Egypt, to England, in the Latter End of the Year 1817, and the Beginning of 1818* (London: John Murray, 1819), 106.

88. Sophia Dobson Collet, *The Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy* (Calcutta: A. C. Sarkar, 1913), 1–23; Robertson, *Raja Rammohan Ray*,



10–24; Lynn Zastoupil, *Rammohun Roy and the Making of Victorian Britain* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 25–26.

89. “A Remarkable Hindoo Reformer,” *Christian Disciple* 5 (April 5, 1817): 123–26; “Account of Rammohun Roy,” *Boston Recorder* 2 (April 29, 1817): 69.

90. The *Missionary Register* article was itself a reprint of an article from another British magazine, *Christian Observer*.

91. “A Remarkable Hindoo Reformer,” 123; “Account of Rammohun Roy,” 69.

92. “Account of Rammohun Roy,” 69.

93. “A Remarkable Hindoo Reformer,” 124; “Account of Rammohun Roy,” 69.

94. “A Remarkable Hindoo Reformer,” 124; “Account of Rammohun Roy,” 69.

95. “Account of Rammohun Roy,” 69.

96. *Ibid.*

97. “A Remarkable Hindoo Reformer,” 126.

98. William Tudor, “Theology of the Hindoos, as Taught by Ram Mohun Roy,” *North American Review and Miscellaneous Journal* 6 (March 1818): 386–93; Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1850–1865*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938), 223.

99. Jackson identifies Tudor as the author of the anonymously published article, see his *Oriental Religions and African Thought*, 34.

100. Tudor, “Theology of the Hindoos, as Taught by Ram Mohun Roy,” 386.

101. *Ibid.*, 387.

102. “Rammohun Roy: The Celebrated Hindoo Reformer,” *Boston Recorder* 4 (September 18, 1819): 156.

103. Rammohun Roy, *The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness, Extracted From the Books of the New Testament Ascribed to the Four Evangelists. To Which Are Added the First and Second Appeal to the Christian*

*Public, in Reply to the Observations of Dr. Marshman of Serampore* (New York: B. Bates, 1825), xviii.

104. *Ibid.*, xxv.

105. Collet, *The Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy*, 55–77; Jackson, *The Oriental Religions and American Thought*, 33; Dermot Killingley, *Rammohun Roy in Hindu and Christian Tradition: The Teape Lectures 1990* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Grevatt and Grevatt, 1993), 138–43; Robertson, *Raja Rammohun Ray*, 39–42; Singh, *Rammohun Roy* 1:216–43.

106. Southwood Smith, "Rammohun Roy," *Christian Register* (November 23, 1821): 57.

107. H. T., "Rammohun Roy," *Christian Register* (December 7, 1821).

108. Rammohun Roy, "Letter: Clapton (Eng.), September 3, 1821," *Christian Register* 1 (January 4, 1822): 81.

109. "Reply of the Baptist Missionaries at Calcutta, to Rammohun Roy," *Christian Watchman* 4 (March 29, 1823): 61.

110. *Ibid.*

111. "Rammohun Roy," *Christian Watchman* (November 29, 1823): 202; "Unitarianism in India," *Boston Recorder* 8 (December 6, 1823): 193.

112. "Rammohun Roy," *Missionary Herald* (September 1824, 301): The use of "Hindooism" here is interesting. The term is uncommon in the American sources and used here by a Briton in Calcutta. Roy himself used "Hindooism" in 1816 and "Hinduism" in 1817. Lorenzen notes that despite its use here and there, the term Hinduism did not come into common British use until the second fourth of the nineteenth century. As I argue here, it did not come into common American use until much later. Lorenzen, "Who Invented Hinduism?," 631–632.

113. "Rammohun Roy," *The Missionary Herald* (September 1824): 301.

114. "Rammohun Roy," *Christian Watchman* (September 11, 1824): 159.

115. David Reed, "Rammohun Roy," *Christian Register* (September 10, 1824): 226.

116. David Reed, "Rammohun Roy," *Christian Register* (September 17, 1824): 230.

117. Francis W. P. Greenwood, "Spirit of Orthodoxy," *Unitarian Miscellany and Christian Monitor* 6 (October 1, 1824): 215.

118. Joseph Tuckerman, "Is Rammohun Roy a Christian? Or, in Other Words, Is He a Believer in the Divine Authority of Our Lord?" *Christian Examiner and Theological Review* 3 (October 1826): 361.

119. Zastoupil, *Rammohun Roy and the Making of Victorian Britain*, 94.

120. *Ibid.*

121. *Ibid.*

122. Susan S. Bean, *Yankee India: American Commercial and Cultural Encounters with India in the Age of Sail, 1784–1860* (Salem, Mass.: Peabody Essex Museum, 2001), 193.

123. Jackson, *The Oriental Religions and American Thought*, 35–36; Spencer Lavan, *Unitarians and India: A Study in Encounter and Response*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Exploration Press, 1991), 41–72.

124. Adrienne Moore, *Rammohun Roy and America* (Calcutta: Brahma Mission Press, 1942), vii, 2–3.

125. Jackson, *The Oriental Religions and American Thought*, 36.

126. Bean, *Yankee India*, 193.

127. E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005), 5.

128. *Ibid.*, 174.

129. Richard Hughes Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions: The East/West Encounter, Chicago, 1893* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Richard Hughes Seager, ed., *The Dawn of Religious Pluralism: Voices from the World's Parliament of Religions, 1893* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1993).

130. A. H. Guernsey, "Juggernaut," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 57 (July 1878): 222–29.

131. Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); see also Lee Schmidt's critique of this Eurocentrism: Leigh E. Schmidt, "Review of *The Invention of World Religions*:"

Or, *How European Universalism Was Preserved in The Language of Pluralism* by Tomoko Masuzawa," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74 (March 1, 2006): 229–32.

132. Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*; King, *Orientalism and Religion*.

133. See, for example, Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*; Daniel L. Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); J. Samuel Preus, *Explaining Religion: Criticism and Theory from Bodin to Freud* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1996); Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975); Ivan Strenski, *Thinking about Religion: An Historical Introduction to Theories of Religion* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2006).

---

**ABSTRACT** American interest in and knowledge of religion in India began before Americans imagined Hinduism as a coherent world religion. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, Americans used a variety of terms to describe, represent, and imagine the religious culture of India: Gentoos, Hindoos, religion of the Hindoos, Hindoo religion, Brahmanism, heathenism, and paganism. Each term meant different things to different writers at different times. But there was no Hinduism, a world religion originating in India and comparable to others, in America prior to the late nineteenth century. Americans read and wrote about "Hindoos" and "Hindoo religion," something altogether different from Hindus and Hinduism. This article analyzes two examples of American representations of Hindoo religion before Hinduism. First, it examines American missionary reports about "Hindoo heathenism" written by American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions missionaries and published in American missionary journals in the early nineteenth century. Second, it examines the Unitarian interest in Rammohun Roy and his growing popularity in New England during the 1820s and 1830s. Unitarian interest in Roy and ABCFM missionary reports exemplify the ways Protestant questions and interests shaped the American understanding of religions and the eventual construction of "world religions" such as Hinduism to suit American Protestant concerns.

*Keywords:* Hinduism, Rammohun Roy, Unitarians, American missionaries, India