Conclusion

A Prehistory of Hindu Pluralism

Who invented Smārta-Śaivism? Was the tradition created *ex nihilo* through the abstract discourses of an intellectual elite, or did it emerge organically through the unfolding of social dynamics over the course of the early modern centuries? As with the purported "invention" of Hinduism, to identify the moment and circumstances of birth of a particular sectarian tradition raises a number of vexing theoretical questions about historical causation—the process by which a genuinely new cultural edifice comes into being. My aim in this work has been to sketch the unmistakable impressions of public theology on the embodied, socially embedded boundaries of Smārta religious life, its role in shaping emerging modes of religious identity—a process that cannot be reduced either to hegemonic domination or to elitist fancy. Indeed, the impact of Smārta-Śaivism on contemporary religious culture in Tamil Nadu extends far beyond the boundaries of *maṭha* or *sampradāya,* "monastery" or "lineage." Much in the way that the "Sacred Games of Śiva," the distinctive legend of place of Madurai, has historicizable discursive origins in the public theology of the seventeenth century, the same can be said for the wider public Smārta culture of the Tamil region. The subsequent inauguration of a public regional culture, from the Śrīvidyā inflection of Carnatic music (Shulman 2014) to the public esotericism of contemporary Chennai (Kachroo 2015), bears the distinct impressions of the actors and events of early modernity.

The Smārta-Śaiva community—with its perduring alliance between Śaṅkarācārya renunciant lineages, the monastic institutions they maintain, associated temple complexes such as the Kāmākṣī Temple of Kanchipuram, and a

laity comprised largely of south Indian Smārta Brahmins—an integral feature of Tamil Smārta culture today, began to emerge under specific and eminently observable social circumstances in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As I have documented throughout this book, the intellectuals who found themselves in the midst of this rapidly emerging network were by no means passive observers; rather, they actively contributed to the constitution of the network itself and the continual rethinking of its dimensions and boundaries. Precisely by doing so, in fact, Nīlakaṇṭha and his colleagues forged systems of religious meaning that opened new avenues for public religious participation in the Smārta community and, concomitantly, new models for lived religious identity. Although seemingly confined to palm leaves and paper through the medium of written text, the intellectual work of these scholars played a foundational role in the conceptual constitution of the emergent Smārta system, articulating new boundaries for the orthodoxy and orthopraxy of participant devotees, stabilizing the social structure of the system by delimiting it from competing sectarian systems, such as the more transgressive Śākta esoteric lineages or the vibrant Vaiṣṇava traditions of the region.[1] Niklas Luhmann (1995), indeed, insightfully observes that systems, composed of socially embedded institutions, cohere not on the basis of institutions alone but, rather, through the shades of meaning they acquire through the communicative endeavors of social agents. Such meaning supplies the very rationale for preserving religious institutions—and the religious publics they cultivate—in the face of constant competition from neighboring communities and perpetual fluctuations in the fabric of society. It is no surprise, then, that court-sponsored intellectuals of the seventeenth century should have exerted their most formative influence on extratextual life through their work as public theologians.

Indeed, the public memory of their influence in shaping the boundaries of a new religious community is palpable throughout the writings of their descendants, from the eighteenth century down to the present day. Take, for instance, the following excerpt from the decidedly southern Purāṇa, the Śivarahasya: As the text-critical acumen of our early modern theologians has taught us, some Purāṇic extracts offer representations of seemingly modern phenomena and so warrant suspicion of interpolation. Some passages, however, occasion no room for doubt. The following vignette allays our fears that the practice of scriptural forgery may have somehow diminished under early colonial rule:

> All twice-borns will be devoted to barbarous conduct, poor,
> And of meager intellect. In such a world, a sage will be born.
> O Śivā, Śaṅkara, born from a portion of me, the greatest of the
>   devotees of Śiva,
> Will take incarnation in the Kali Yuga, along with four students.
> He will bring about the destruction of the groves of heretics on
>   earth.

To him I have given the wisdom of the Upaniṣads, O Maheśvarī.

In the same Kali Yuga, O Great Goddess, the twice-born named
    Haradatta[2]

Will be born on the surface of the earth to chastise the non-Śaivas.

There will also be a certain [Appayya] Dīkṣita, a god on earth, a por-
    tion of me, O Ambikā,

Ceaselessly engaged in radiant practices, born in a Śaiva Sāmaveda
    lineage.

And other Bhaktas, O Mistress of the Gods, in the Cēra, Cōla, and
    Pāṇḍya countries,

Supremely devoted to me, will be born in all castes:

Sundara, Jñānasambandha, and likewise, Māṇikyavācaka.[3]

Śaṅkara, Haradatta, and Appayya Dīkṣita: in this eighteenth- or nineteenth-century Purāṇic accretion, the Smārta-Śaiva legacy has rewritten the canon of saints of the Tamil country, elevating the progenitors of the Smārta tradition above the common "devotees" of Śiva, the Tamil Śaiva bhakti saints. This particular passage, in fact, was adduced as the prototypic source text for the divinity of Appayya Dīkṣita by his nineteenth-century biographer, Śivānanda Yogīndra, born Śeṣa Dīkṣita. The tradition he inspired, however, reaches far beyond the printed pages of his classic chronicle to inform the religious identity of the present-day Dīkṣita family, who pride themselves on their descent from a genuine *aṃśāvatāra,* or partial incarnation,[4] of Śiva.

Intriguingly, hagiography, if not history, has never ceased to remember the formative theological influence of Appayya and Nīlakaṇṭha on the nascent Smārta-Śaiva community. From within the tradition, such hagiography blurs the line between theology and Indological scholarship. Spokesmen for the Appayya Deekshithendrar Granthavali Prakasana Samithi, for instance, advertise the intellectual legacy of their forefather in polyglot newsletters with theologically inflected taglines such as "Srimad Appayya Deekshithendrar is regarded as the aparavathara of Srimad Sankara Bhaghavathapadal and also revered in this country, as an incarnation of Iswara."[5] The divine status of these scholars is commemorated most frequently, however, by means of narrative. Short anecdotes depicting the exploits of Appayya and Nīlakaṇṭha have circulated over the course of multiple generations, preserved with the stamp of authority of their influential biographers. Swami Sivananda,[6] founder of the Divine Life Society, to name one highly visible example, includes both Appayya and Nīlakaṇṭha in his *Lives of Saints,* in the company of Jesus and the Buddha, Śaṅkara and Vidyāraṇya. His narratives, moreover, capture something of the deeply sectarianized climate in which the scholars actually moved, hinting at the highly charged community boundaries that solidified over the course of their lifetimes. Such is the case with this memorable account—forced English versification and

all—of Appayya's ostensive pilgrimage to Tirupati, stronghold of south India Vaiṣṇavism par excellence:

> Once to Tirupathi the sage
> Went on a lonely pilgrimage,
> And there the Mahant to him told:
> "Enter not the fane; it can't hold
> Within its precinct a Saivite;
> To enter here you have no right."
> Wrath was the saint and quietly he
> By occult power did o'ernight change
> The fane's image of Lord Vishnu
> To Siva. The Mahant turned blue
> When in the morn he, aghast, saw
> Vishnu's image changed to Siva.
> To the great sage he now did run
> And of him humbly beg pardon,
> And asked the image be restored
> To the shape he loved and adored.
> Such was the great saint Appayya,
> An incarnation of Siva,
> Whom men still love and have reverence
> For his wisdom and intelligence. (Sivananda 1947, 313)

Such stories abound in the public memory of Nīlakaṇṭha and Appayya's descendants: Appayya leaves his body in Cidambaram in the presence of Naṭarāja, Nīlakaṇṭha is granted the gift of sight by Mīnākṣī, Ratnakheṭa Dīkṣita garners the favor of Kāmākṣī in Kanchipuram. More often than not, these episodes have been dismissed out of hand by contemporary Indologists as an impediment to reconstructing a lost intellectual history. In this case, however, beneath hagiographical adulation lies a kernel of historical fact: these narratives serve as communal sites of memory for the socioreligious transformations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the systemic restructuring of the religious landscape that had been publicly facilitated to no small degree by Appayya, Nīlakaṇṭha, and their intellectual contemporaries. A few generations before the fact, these narratives superimpose the same Smārta-Śaiva culture that was born from their public theological interventions. These stories are replete with rivalry between Śiva and Viṣṇu, the veneration of Śaṅkarācārya ascetics, the adulation of Kāmākṣī and Mīnākṣī, and initiation into the mystery of Śrīvidyā. Like most hagiographies, the exploits of Appayya and Nīlakaṇṭha tell us less about their actual biographies than about the lives they shaped in future generations, when such motifs were no longer novel inventions but fixtures of the fabric of Smārta religiosity.

As a point of fact, neither the cultural icons of south Indian Smārtism nor the everyday religious practice of the community could be conceived of today, in their present shape, were it not for the theological innovations of Appayya's and Nīlakaṇṭha's social circles. For instance, the tradition of Carnatic music would not have been the same without the Śrīvidyā-inflected *kirtan*s of Tyāgarāja and Muttusvāmī Dīkṣitar,[7] whose compositions practically constitute the canon. Nor is it an accident that among the ranks of influential scholars in twentieth-century Tamil Nadu, many were devotees of the Kanchi and Sringeri Śaṅkarācārya lineages, initiates in Śrīvidyā ritual practice, or descendants of the Dīkṣitas themselves. Indeed, the very same P. P. S. Sastri who is responsible for orchestrating the preservation of Nīlakaṇṭha's *Saubhāgyacandrātapa* was also the chief contributor to the editing of the southern recension of the Mahābhārata. The authority of the Śrīvidyā Society of Mylapore, at one time the defining institution of Chennai's quintessential Brahmin neighborhood, rests squarely on the shoulders of Appayya and Nīlakaṇṭha; and the neighboring academic bookstore, Jayalakṣmī Indological Bookhouse, maintains itself largely through the sale of Śrīvidyā scriptures and *paddhati*s, consumed voraciously by local intelligentsia. The Sanskrit curriculum in Tamil Nadu pairs the transregional classics of Kālidāsa with the highly regional centuries of the mute poet Mūkakavi,[8] a devotee of Kāmākṣī, largely unknown to Sanskrit literature beyond the Tamil region but celebrated with reverence as an icon of Sanskrit Smārta culture.

That this particular confluence of cultural currents is prototypically Smārta in character—that is, that these features are universally definitive of Smārta-Śaiva religious culture—is captured eloquently by Sankara Rama Sastri, remembered as one of the most prolific critical editors of works of *kāvya a*nd Alaṅkāraśāstra of the period. Speaking for the twentieth-century Śrīvidyā practitioners of Chennai, Sastri writes, in his Sanskrit introduction to a handbook of Śrīvidyā ritual, the *Śrīvidyāsaparyāpaddhati*:

> This [tradition] was first taught by Paraśiva, the primordial Lord, to the auspicious goddess. Partisanship to this tantra, which independently aggregates the entirety of the aims of man, was manifested by the Blessed Feet of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, composing the *Saundaryalaharī*, which encapsulated the entirety of Mantraśāstra, and the commentary on the Lalitātriśatī. The ancient great poets, crest jewels of the Vedic tradition, such as Kālidāsa and Mūkakavi, and those of more proximate times, such as Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita, had firmly secured their affections to the pair of lotus feet of the goddess, as is celebrated repeatedly by numerous anecdotes. It has also been ascertained that Vidyāraṇya and others, although the highest of preceptors of the knowledge of Advaita, engaged in the practice of Śrīvidyā. It is well-known by word of mouth that the great treatise on Mantraśāstra, titled *The Forest of Wisdom,* was composed by the sage Vidyāraṇya, and likewise, the treatise on Mantraśāstra known as the *Parimala* was written by the illustrious Appayya Dīkṣita. These two works,

however, are no longer extant. Through an unbroken succession in sequence from the Blessed Feet of Ādi Śaṅkarācārya, the worship of the Śrīcakra, performed in various locations in the monasteries of the Śaṅkarācārya lineages, establishes beyond a doubt the Vaidika status of the tradition of the fifteen-syllable Śrīvidyā mantra.

For, the great goddess Rājarājeśvarī, the supreme deity of Śrīvidyā, known by the name of Kāmākṣī as she adorns the domain of Kanchipuram, has been worshipped by many thousands of the leading traditions of *śruti* and *smṛti;* likewise with Mīnākṣī, illuminating the city of Madurai, who is renowned as the Advisor (Mantriṇī) in the Śrīvidyā tradition, and the goddess referred to as Akhilāṇḍeśvarī, lighting up the sacred site of Jambukeśvara, who indeed is known in Mantraśāstra as the Chastiser (Daṇḍinī), bearing titles such as Daṇḍanāthā, and likewise, Śrī Kanyākumārī, illumining the sacred site of Kanyakumari, who indeed in Śrīvidyā is renowned by the name of the three-syllabled goddess Bālā. Every single twice-born who is intent on the practices of the *śruti*s and *smṛti*s worships daily the mother of the Vedas, Sāvitrī. This is precisely why it is commonly said that *all twice-borns on earth are externally Śaivas, and internally Śāktas.* Therefore, the Śrīvidyā tradition itself is included within the Smārta tradition.[9]

The peculiar aphorism cited here bears repeating, as its theological import cannot be underestimated: as S. R. Sastri informs us: "All twice-borns on earth are externally Śaivas and internally Śāktas." The above passage outlines the conceptual, historical, and geographical territory of a homogenized, unified Smārta sectarian tradition. While modern Smārta religiosity is orthodox Śaiva in its public image and was founded on Śrīvidyā esotericism at its core, it is anchored on the authority of the figures who were narrativized in the seventeenth century as the progenitors of Smārta-Śaivism, such as Śaṅkarācārya and Kālidāsa, and those who set in motion those very narratives, such as Appayya and Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita. And for the Smārtas of present-day Tamil Nadu, Smārta-Śaivism is as intimately bound up with Tamil geography as with the intellectual heritage of Śaṅkara: Śrīvidyā, in its highest abstractions, abides for south Indian Smārtas in the embodied form of the newly domesticated Śākta sacred sites of the Tamil country, where scripture maps perfectly onto spatial territory.

In practice as well as in theory, the legacy of Nīlakaṇṭha's generation synecdochically invokes the characteristic Smārta-Śaiva religiosity preserved by Nīlakaṇṭha's contemporary descendants. Nearly twenty years ago, the residents of Palamadai, the ancestral *agrahāra* of Nīlakaṇṭha's lineage in southern Tamil Nadu near Tirunelveli, honored the memory of their illustrious forefather by allocating a plot of land in the village as a branch *maṭha* of the Śaṅkarācārya lineage of Sringeri. The inauguration ceremony was graced by the presence of Sringeri's Jagadguru Bhāratī Tīrtha Svāmigaḷ, whom present-day descendants of Nīlakaṇṭha have commonly accepted as family guru. In the adjoining shrine to the village's Maṅgalanāyakī Temple, presently venerated as Nīlakaṇṭha's *samādhi* shrine, rests a set of three photographs: a reproduction of a mural painting of Appayya bequeathing scriptural

manuscripts to Nīlakaṇṭha, flanked by portraits of the two most recent Jagadgurus of the Sringeri lineage, Bhāratī Tīrtha and Abhinava Vidyātīrtha. Three and a half centuries later, now that Brahmin scholars are no longer sponsored by local rulers to compose works of Sanskrit poetry and philosophy, some things have changed very little for the descendants of early modern south India's leading intellectuals. A hereditary devotional relationship with Śaṅkarācārya preceptors remains to this day a cornerstone of the religious observances of both Appayya's family, who profess allegiance to the Śaṅkarācāryas of the Kāñcī Kāmakoṭi Pīṭha, and of Nīlakaṇṭha's, devotees of the Sringeri Śaṅkarācārya lineage who continue to accept Mīnākṣī as their *kuladevatā,* many of whom recite the *Lalitāsahasranāmastotra* on a daily basis.[10]

Through this book, I have endeavored to capture the process of public theology in the making—the point of intersection between discourse and social system. I have chosen to highlight three instances of theological trajectories—genuinely revolutionary in the scope of their agenda—that exerted a fundamental influence on the future shape of Smārta-Śaiva sectarianism. I chronicle the birth of the formative features of Smārta-Śaiva religiosity from within the sectarian community itself. On one hand an epoch-making development in the history of Indian religion and intellectual life, the birth of the Smārta sectarian tradition also provides an optimal illustration of the widespread acceleration of Hindu sectarianism throughout the centuries of the early modern era, in south India and beyond. When placed in the context of a wider sectarian community in the process of coming into existence, these works begin to speak with a cohesive voice, telling the story of the earliest articulations of the religious values that came to structure the experience of an enduring religious tradition. It is not merely the historical facticity of the Smārta tradition—and the circumstances of its origin—that I have aimed to elucidate in this book; it is also, more crucially, the process of its emergence. Public theology, I contend, provides us with a powerful model for accounting for both the diverse, multivalent texture of Hindu religious experience and the historically contingent phenomena—the genuine theological efforts—that allowed these traditions to assume the shape we observe today.

THE BANYAN TREE: EARLY MODERN SECTARIANISM AND MODERN PLURALISM

On September 11, 1893, Swami Vivekananda, disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and history's best-known advocate of Hindu Universalism, defined Hinduism for the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago as a religion qualified primarily by "tolerance and universal acceptance." Ironically, though obviously owing to no intention of his own, his speech prefigured by more than one hundred years a date that resonates for modern audiences with the specter not of tolerance but

terrorism. This coincidence was not lost on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who addressed a crowd in New York City on precisely the same date in 2014 in New York City. Modi proclaimed, "There are 2 images of 11th September: one of the trail of destruction in 2001 and the other the message of Swami Vivekananda in 1893. Had we followed Swami Ji's message, history would never have witnessed such dastardly acts as we saw on 11th September 2001 in [the] USA."[11] Much can be made of the politics behind Modi's invocation of this striking coincidence. For our own purposes, however, the message that Vivekananda delivered that day not only actively promotes a "neo-Hinduism" replete with European influence, as is well known, but also reflects back to the Western world a polemical critique of difference as dissent. In Vivekananda's own words: "Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilization, and sent whole nations to despair."[12]

Sectarianism, bigotry, fanaticism, violence: these synonyms, in the late-nineteenth-century Anglophone imaginaire, reveal just how much discursive space was shared between the Orientalist scholarship of Sir M. Monier-Williams just a decade earlier, in 1883, and the religious worldview of the high-caste Hindus at the height of the Bengali Renaissance. Sectarianism, as defined by Monier-Williams, the exclusive worship of Śiva or Viṣṇu, was an insidious and divisive form of religion that threatened the integrity of a primordial Brahmanical whole. Such an impetus to erase difference comes across most clearly in Vivekananda's speech through the key scriptural verses he cites in support of a Hindu Universalism that, in his view, transcended time and space: "As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to thee." By no means a coincidence, Vivekananda did not attribute a source to this scriptural citation, which in his mind speaks to a Hinduism free from sectarian division. The passage in question, however, happens to be drawn from verse seven of the *Śivamahimnaḥ Stotram,* "Hymn to the Glory of Śiva," recited for centuries by sectarian Śaivas, the quintessential text that strategically subordinates all other religious traditions to Śaiva orthodoxy. In full, the verse reads:

> The Vedas, Sāṅkhya, Yoga, the Pāśupata doctrine, and the Vaiṣṇava:
> Where authorities are divided, one says, "This is highest," another,
>   "That is beneficial,"
> Due to such variegation of the tastes of men, who enjoy straight or
>   crooked paths.
> *You alone* [Śiva] are the destination, as the ocean is the destination
>   of the waters.[13]

Implicit in the rhetoric of this verse, as we observed in chapter 1, is an inclusivism that appears to welcome with one hand while excluding with the other. Vaiṣṇavas, followers of Sāṅkhya and Yoga, Pāśupatas—not to be conflated with the author's own branch of Śaivism—and Vedic Brahmins, we learn, are all solidly established on the path to truth, a truth that happens to be known as "Śiva." A remarkably similar strategy is omnipresent in the discourse of early modern Śaivism in south India, when Śaivas routinely moved to incorporate Vaiṣṇavism under their own umbrella through the rubric of the Trimūrti, the triple form of divinity. Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Rudra, in other words, the triad of deities governing creation, sustenance, and dissolution, are simply the manifestations of an overarching divine principle known as Paramaśiva. Vivekananda, essentially, in seeking out source material to promote a homogenized Hinduism, had the ambiguous fortune to invoke a verse that in its original discursive context conveys precisely the opposite message—namely, the supremacy of the Śaiva religion. As Wilhelm Halbfass has written, encapsulating a well-worn argument advanced by Paul Hacker: "'Inclusivism' is the practice of claiming for, and thus including in, one's own religion or world-view what belongs in reality to another, foreign or competing system. It is the subordinating identification of the other, the foreign, with parts or preliminary stages of one's own sphere."[14] Such inclusivism, succinctly, may not ultimately provide the ideal metaphor for the peaceable coexistence of multiple religious traditions.

And yet Hindu pluralism, in contrast to the endemic communalism of postindependence India, itself has genuine roots in the subcontinent's precolonial heritage. In his 2007 monograph *A Vision for Hinduism: Beyond Hindu Nationalism,* Jeffrey Long articulates a vision for a Hindu religious pluralism founded on just this model of inclusivism. Long prefaces his remarks cautiously with the caveat that Western pluralists have levied harsh criticism against the idea of inclusivism on the grounds that its rhetoric generally reads as paternalistic, condescending to "include" the diversity of religious Others encountered by the religious mainstream. And yet, what Long successfully clarifies is the genuine theological work done by Vivekananda and his contemporaries in constructing a viable pluralistic worldview that holds meaning for practitioners past and present. Inclusivistic pluralism, for many, is a sincerely held theological commitment and can viably be promoted as a genuinely emic Hindu pluralism. Emic as this inclusivism may be, however, in the sense of originating within the Indian subcontinent, Vivekananda's particular brand of pluralism is also historically contingent, inconceivable apart from the encounter between the British and Indian intelligentsia that precipitated the Bengali Renaissance. While it is by no means accurate to claim that Vivekananda's theology was "invented" by the British, its historical origins lent themselves to participation in a particular political trajectory. The concept of tolerance, as C. S. Adcock (2014) has demonstrated, a well-known mainstay

of Gandhian secularism, served a particular and timely political function, disaggregating questions of caste from the consolidation of an ethos of Hindu majoritarianism. It is no wonder, perhaps, that many observers associate this form of tolerant inclusivism with right-wing Hindu extremism: to be tolerant, succinctly, implies a claim to the authority to tolerate someone else. As a result, inclusivist pluralism, justly or unjustly, is often tarred with the same brush that condemns the sanctioning of communalist violence.

In contrast, etic models of secularist pluralism run afoul of a more pervasive problem—namely, the legacy of European imperialism, a parochialism that lives on in the adjudication of religious difference around the globe. In spite of the burgeoning literature on the multiplicity of global secularisms,[15] excavating the influence of non-Western models of religion as a human right or religion and governmentality,[16] Eurocentrism is alive and well in contemporary discourse on Indian pluralism. Across disciplines of scholarship, pluralism, succinctly, generally falls under the purview of a healthy civil society—a mode of sociality prescriptively modeled after the canons of liberal political theory, the heritage of the European Enlightenment. Where religion is viewed as anathema to public space, its very eruption into visibility is said to signal the dangers of incipient outbursts of violence. Such a scenario is perhaps best exemplified by the stringent standards of the French *laïcité,* in which even the public presence of a Muslim headscarf threatens the singularity of normative civil society—a uniformity literally inconceivable in the Indian subcontinent. Pluralism, in this light, is measured by the rubric of parliamentary democracy, quantified by participation in the political process and the frequency of civil unrest, or the lack thereof. One encounters this ethics of pluralism, for instance, in a compilation of essays edited by Wendy Doniger and Martha Nussbaum (2015) under the title *Pluralism and Democracy in India*—a pair which the authors cast as prescriptively intertwined in their vision for a pluralist Hinduism in the new millennium. In the introduction to the volume, the authors outline a program by which the Indian State can "foster a healthy democratic public culture" by "encouraging civil society institutions that provide a counterweight to the rabid but highly effective groups organized by the Hindu Right."[17]

This book offers no prescriptions for the practice of Hinduism, or for how India can best address the changing needs of a multireligious population. Nevertheless, the past, though it may be a foreign country, is no mere object of curiosity to be studied for personal edification. Although I have approached the origins of Hindu sectarianism in this book on strictly historical grounds, its excavation bears significant potential to speak to the formative antecedents of a distinctively Hindu pluralism through what Foucault describes as a genealogy of the present. The religious inclusivism the Hindu Right has inherited from Vivekananda and his contemporaries, while Hindu in the sense of belonging to the lifeworlds of numerous Hindus today, bears little resemblance to the practice of Hinduism before colonial

intervention. In fact, this inclusivism actively obfuscates our understanding of the precolonial diversity of Hinduism and its distinctive engagement with public space. Likewise, viewing history through the lens of a prescriptive Western-centric pluralism predisposes us to read the archive of the Indian past for its deviance from the standards of Euro-American secularism and from the canons of the Enlightenment to which it serves as invariable telos. Thus, in the words of Wendy Doniger, the Mughal emperor Akbar was a pluralist who aimed to "transcend all sectarian differences and unite his disparate subjects,"[18] one of the invariable wings of the good-Muslim, bad-Muslim binary of Akbar and Aurangzeb perpetuated by colonial historiography. And yet when read outside this entrenched metanarrative, Akbar's patronage facilitated the institutional realization of a markedly different sort of pluralism: by endowing separate temples for the Vallabha and Gauḍīya Sampradāyas of Vaiṣṇava Hindus,[19] Akbar and his successors sponsored, though perhaps unwittingly, the efforts made by these communities to establish distinct public and institutional domains. From the gaze of early modern India, sectarianism and pluralism were not opposites: they were fundamentally intertwined.

If this book offers no religious prescriptions, still less does it propose a political agenda—in contrast, perhaps, to Doniger and Nussbaum's vision for revitalizing Indian civil society. The task of advocating religious pluralism in a nation wrought with communalist violence and fundamentalism is far beyond the scope of the present work. Nevertheless, if we have learned anything from the past decades of banned books, crumbling mosques, and hurt feelings, we cannot help but reckon with the fact that the past is always political. Undoubtedly, the way in which we as scholars choose to represent the history of Hinduism has real-world consequences. As a result, it may not be unreasonable to reach for some measure of optimism in recovering a particular Hindu past—not *the* Hindu past, as no single voice can capture such an entity—that speaks to a genuinely emic religious pluralism, one that is at once neither founded upon universalism or exclusivism, nor modeled as a modular transplant of European civil society. Indeed, Hindu pluralism, in historical context, is genealogically independent of European magnanimity; it is not an Other forged in the crucible of colonial subjugation. It is a conceptual, and institutional, approach to internal diversity that cannot be reduced to a singular axis of hegemony.

We are at the point, then, when we can revisit the following questions: What is modern, and distinctively South Asian, about the pluralistic landscape that emerged in India, not in the aftermath, but before colonialism, at the dawn of modernity? How more generally can we understand this new relationship between religion and publicity, in which public space is polarized by the movement of individuals embodying their sectarian identities? To be sure, religious pluralism in south India, as in many contemporary societies, implied at the minimum a plurality of religious institutions, Hindu and otherwise: sectarian communities in south

India were underwritten by a pluralistic economic and legal landscape, as distinct sectarian institutions competed as regionwide landlords and power brokers. This sheer plurality of religions, for many theorists, was sufficient to mark India as a highly pluralistic society: Ernst Troeltsch, bringing our exploration full circle, argues that Hinduism and Buddhism were the earliest advocates of religious pluralism, granting the individual the right to choose his own personal faith. And yet, in India, religion itself is rarely a matter of belief, a propositional assent to the existence of deities or the authority of a particular temple or saint.

Pluralism, in early modern south India, like religion itself, is an embodied, spatial practice; when religious identity is not the internal affair of a private, unmarked citizen, religious pluralism itself is performed in public space. The story of Hindu pluralism is no utopia; by no means is it free of inequities and injustices. And yet, attending to Hinduism's emic legacy of religious pluralism allows us to heed the advice, proffered by Martha Nussbaum among others,[20] to refrain from labeling any one vision as India's "real" or "authentic" image. When speaking of Hinduism—a religious unity that first emerged as inherently plural, a fusion of the myriad Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, Śākta, and other religious identities—it is simply impossible to speak of an authentic Hinduism in the singular. Pluralizing Hinduism, then, is not a strategic project, designed to render audible its numerous subaltern voices—although this is undoubtedly a legitimate concern—but rather a recognition that its composite history makes it impossible to select any doctrine, practice, or identity as a Hindu "ideal type." Indeed, it is the spatial enactment of religious pluralism that formed the foundation of early modern south India's multiple religious publics, making possible a multicentric negotiation of power, identity, and truth. In essence, the sectarian religious publics of early modern south India provide us with an opportunity to rethink the very criteria for a non-Western pluralism, founded not on the prescriptive model of a Western civil society but on a historically descriptive account of the role of religion in public space.