Table 5.1 Important terms (for almost all of these, videos are available on YouTube

Traditional term	*Meaning*
murti	Image
pūjā	Ritual worship
mandir/devālaya	Temple
garbhagṛha	Inner chamber
āratī	Waving of lamps
darśan	Sacred viewing
tīrtha	River ford, pilgrimage site
nād	Sound
āhat/anāhat	Stuck/unstruck
jāp	Repetition of a chant
bhajan	Devotional song
sevā	Service
dāna	Gift giving
Diwali	Festival of light
saṃskāra	Rite of passage
rasa	Nectar. aesthetic delight
sthapati	Sculptor
devadāsī	Temple dancer

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EMBRACING MODERNITY

In considering the basics of Hinduism, we have consistently kept in view how religious concepts and practices with deep historical roots change with time. Yet this book does not follow a historical model. The question then arises as to why is the modern period given a separate chapter? There are two reasons for this. First, to understand the Hindu religious life as it prevails today, looking at the developments closer to our times is helpful. And second, in many parts of the world, dramatic changes in the nature of public life during modern times have significantly influenced the religious life of people including Hindus. Hinduism has seen noticeable shifts in beliefs, practices, and sociocultural dynamics in the context of modernity. In this chapter we will consider some important ones. But what is modernity, when did it begin? Modernity is generally thought to begin in the sixteenth century during the European renaissance with the rising prominence of reason and to reach a new height in the nineteenth century with advances in technology and mass media. It has been likened to a muddle or Sphinx by leading historians because the term is seen as Eurocentric and implying a value judgment. Yet it is a broadly useful term for us since the periods covered by it – called "early modern" and "classical modern" – mark important turning points in the history of Hinduism.

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In the early modern period, under the prominence of the Mughal empire, Hinduism in India saw acute challenges at times. But it was also a period of growth and creative exchanges. The period saw creation of a composite popular culture with use of shared themes and motifs in religious poetry (in vernacular), art/architecture, and music by Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Jains. The popularity of these sacred art forms, especially performing arts, has endured through the centuries and people are still able to appreciate them across religious boundaries. The early modern period also saw a proliferation of Hindu sects focused on divinities (especially Rama and Krishna) or saints (Ravidas, Kabir) in north India around the seat of the Mughal empire. These sects were developed by diverse schools of theology. They did not arise expressly in response to external challenges. It was a period of prosperity. Europeans were just entering the Indian market. Wealthy patrons and at times royal courts patronized Hindu religious institutions and temples. Major players within this ethos like emperor Akbar who saw it as a "crowded bazaar of religious ideas" (historian André Wink's expression) were closely familiar with diverse traditions within it. In the classical modern period, Hinduism encountered modernity largely in the context of colonization by the British who were hardly familiar with the cultures and religious ethos of India. Several developments within Hinduism during this period came as Hindus' responses to their tradition's representations in European public discourses. These portrayals ranged from romanticized appreciative interpretations of Sanskrit sacred texts to devastatingly pejorative portrayals of everything Hindu or patronizing depictions of a savage society in the need of civilizing through colonization.

HINDUISM AND EUROPEAN PRESENCE IN INDIA (SEVENTEENTH TO NINETEENTH CENTURIES)

CHANGING CONTEXTS

Close encounters of Hindus with Europeans had begun in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries with the establishment of

Portuguese territories in Goa and the arrival of Jesuit missionaries like Roberto de Nobili in South India. While the experience of the former was brutal, the latter opened respectful conversations, even though with missionary goals. By the late eighteenth century, Europeans were competing for political power in Indian territories. The rivals were basically trading companies – British East India Co. (EIC), French East India Co., etc. – that first developed armies and then began developing political control over various parts of India. Of these, EIC emerged the winner with control over large territories. The trading companies did not have much interest in religious matters. With the support of the British parliament, EIC kept missionaries at bay as long as they could, even though some like Warren Hastings (the first Governor General of India under EIC) proposed study of Indian culture and religion for better governance and supported scholars like Sir William Jones who studied Sanskrit texts with local pundits.

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, translations of Sanskrit sacred texts like the Upanishads and the *Gita* were greatly admired with an element of romanticization by leading intellectuals of Europe like philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. Yet soon afterwards literal translations of Sanskrit texts like Manu's text on *dharma*, interpreted as "laws," made them into unalterable pillars of a coherent religious system. It was an oversimplified representation of the multilayered, flexible, and diverse religious ethos we have been exploring. In 1813, after heated debates in the British parliament, Christian missionaries won the right to establish missions in India. Already, missionaries were active in Serampore within the Danish colony close to the British capital Calcutta. In contrast to the earlier romanticized portrayals, many representations of "Hinduism" from these quarters were squarely negative, often describing it as the most impure and bloody system with strange multiple gods. In these, ritual worship of images of a host of deities, caste, and status of women received extensive attention. These writings also influenced media depictions of Hinduism in the West garnering greater support for the empire and the missionaries. Such representations can be seen as examples of what Edward Said famously termed "orientalism" – representation of an oriental (Asian, African,

Middle Eastern) culture based on a presumption of the superiority of the West.

From the turn of the nineteenth century, education became a major colonial and missionary enterprise. Several missionary schools opened in various parts of British India. While evangelical in orientation, many of them made education accessible for the underprivileged from diverse caste and religious backgrounds. Institutions of higher education were also established in British and other colonies including Serampore and Calcutta. Many young Hindu men in urban areas attended them. A number of them were drawn to European literature, thought and achievements in science. Some others came in close contacts with missionaries and the expanding colonial administration. Most of them agreed with the colonial/missionary critique of the social issues and many also accepted monotheism as superior to worshiping a pantheon of deities. An intense internal churning led Hindu leaders to search for ways to reform their society and revitalize their tradition. It was in this context that Hinduism's encounter with modernity took momentum.

By the mid-point of the nineteenth century, EIC had acquired control over vast territories. The Mughal emperor retained his crown; but was under British protection with little power. The unrest among rulers whose territories were annexed (often trickily) to EIC colonies and many disgruntled Indian soldiers in the company's army led a revolt against it. The revolt was effectively suppressed. Yet the loss of life of Britishers (including women) was so devastating that the British crown took over the rule of India from EIC in 1858. The rule of the crown, which lasted until 1947, proved more stable with gradual increase in the participation of the "natives" in governance. Establishment of several printing presses led to a growth in critical awareness about religious thought and practices and was demonstrated in public debates about them. There was greater confidence in British rule and wider acceptance of rationalist approach to religion with ethical concerns at the core. A few Hindu leaders even spoke of the potential of mutual exchanges between the East and the West. The spirit of reform and revitalization that had been kindled in the early nineteenth century continued in the later half

too. Yet an acute concern about conversions by missionaries also marked the public debates.

HINDU SOCIO-RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS (NINETEENTH CENTURY)

The most important development within Hinduism in the nineteenth century was the rise of socio-religious movements. Inevitably, they were immensely diverse. But most of them shared two concerns – reform of the Hindu society and regeneration of Hinduism by reviving what in the view of the movement leaders were its core teachings, lost in the course of history. In the area of reform, getting rid of caste discrimination, especially toward the Dalits, and treatment and status of women remained their main concerns. For revitalization, most movements rejected image worship and sought to retrieve from Hinduism's history elements whose reinterpretation would align with monotheism. Of the scores of leaders and movements that emerged during the period, let us look at a few important ones.

The earliest leader of a Hindu movement was Ram Mohan Roy of Bengal (1772–1833), often called the "father of modern India." Born in a Brahmin family and with early education in Sanskrit and Persian, he was drawn to monotheism. Roy later worked closely with Serampore missionaries and developed a deep affinity for the moral teachings of Jesus Christ. But refusing to accept the supremacy of Christianity, especially of the Trinitarian principle, he first allied with Unitarians and then turned to retrieving Hindu spiritual heritage from the Upanishads, interpreting them as monotheistic. Roy also collaborated with EIC officials for the legal ban of the practice of *satī* (1829) and worked extensively to gain property rights for women. In 1828, he founded Brahmo Sabha (later Brahmo Samaj) with Debendranath Tagore, a society of intellectuals who rejected ritual worship of "idols," worshipped one God, and sought inspiration from ancient Hindu scriptures (especially Upanishads' idea of Brahman) with openness to similar ideas from other traditions. They did not recognize caste. This was the first Hindu society to formally open a direction. Another Brahmin reformer from Bengal, Iswarchandra Vidyasagar (1820–1891),

individually pursued the cause of girls' education and widow remarriage. These early reformers worked closely with EIC officials but were often opposed by orthodox Hindus. Their aspirations for the end of gender and caste discrimination were well-meaning. but they came from elite men and not directly from women or lower-caste people.

Voices of the marginalized were heard more clearly in public discourses a few decades later in the western Indian city of Pune where Jyotirao Phule (1827–1890), a rationalist reformer from a "low-caste," worked alongside his wife for women's education and betterment of their lives. He was an outspoken critic of caste discrimination who fought for rights of the low caste/Dalit community members. He had the foresight to see the synergy between the Dalit and women's issues. Like Roy, Phule also worked closely with British officials and missionaries whom he greatly admired. Phule's detailed profile is given in the last section of this chapter.

Two other remarkable developments of the late nineteenth century were: (a) the spread of the Arya Samaj movement founded by the ascetic Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824–1883) and (b) the visit of another ascetic, Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) to America, to attend the first Parliament of World Religions (1893). Swami Dayanand, originally from Gujarat, left home early and became a wandering ascetic. Later he developed the opinion that Hinduism had deteriorated from its Vedic origins and its contemporary social evils sprang from this decline. With a resolve to revive what he saw as Hinduism's pure golden age, he founded Arya Samaj (society of nobles) in 1875. His approach was staunchly rational, rejecting image worship, superstitions, child marriage, and hereditary caste with hierarchy (though he recognized it on the basis of mental qualities). Dayanand traveled widely in India and engaged Hindu, Muslim, and Christian clerics in sharp debates, challenging their beliefs and practices. While he shared ideals of social reform with movements like Brahmo Samaj, he was critical of them since he believed that they sought to present moral exemplars from other traditions and overlooked ancient Vedic seers. Dayanand also introduced a practice called *śuddhi* (purification) by which Hindus who had converted to other religions could be reconverted. Some scholars trace elements of the current political Hinduism to his work.

Arya Samaj became extremely successful and widespread in Punjab and north India. It is still an active religious denomination. To this day, it remains the leader in the area of education (especially of girls) outside of the government system. The other Swami, Vivekananda, was the disciple of Bengali mystic Ramakrishna. Vivekananda attended the first Parliament of World Religions in Chicago (1893) as a Hindu representative. His speech, in which he presented Hindu philosophy as based in the teachings of the Upanishads and open to all similar currents of thought, was warmly received. He quickly became popular among Americans who were open to learning from eastern philosophies. He also often spoke about what the East and the West can learn from one another. He founded the Vedanta society in 1894 in New York and in 1900 in California. He dedicated the rest of his short life to the cause of social work and education in the organization in his guru's name – the Ramakrishna Mission – and to revitalize the Hindu tradition.

As the above overview indicates, the nineteenth-century socio-religious movements strove intensely to rid the Hindu society of its problems of injustice with regard to caste and gender and to simultaneously reform the tradition with selected elements from its long history to align it with modernity. Even though the social problems they tried to eradicate still persist to an extent, collectively, leaders and movements of the nineteenth century gave a new direction to Hinduism. Because of the ways in which they responded, the scathing and often exaggerated critique of the tradition by some Europeans, which was humiliating for Hindus, proved beneficial in the end.

NATIONALISM, PARTITION, AND THEREAFTER (TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES)

EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY – PATRIOTISM AND COMMUNALISM

If the nineteenth century was a century of socio-religious reforms, in the twentieth century, religion in public life became closely intertwined with politics. Tensions between the two numerically largest religious communities in India – Hindus and Muslims –

which had started building in the late nineteenth century, began to turn into conflicts, often violent. It was not that in pre-British India, there were no skirmishes. At times, tensions did arise; but they could be more easily contained with courtly interventions under Hindu or Muslim rulers who closely knew the ethos. In the 1857 revolt, Hindu and Muslim soldiers and commanders/rulers had fought the EIC army together. But in the second half of the nineteenth century, as British rule stabilized, the cooperation turned first into rivalry and later into suspicion among some powerful groups in both communities. It remains a matter of debate whether the British purposefully employed a policy of "divide and rule" to retain their supremacy. But some British actions and policies did intensify the feelings of distrust. Inclusion of the criterion of religion in the census conducted from 1872 onwards formally highlighted the significance of religious identity as an aspect of citizenship, even as greater opportunities for natives opened in the government infrastructure. The partition of Bengal (Hindu majority West Bengal and Muslim majority East Bengal) in 1905 was purported to be for administrative purposes. But the then Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, made references to their religious makeup underscoring the differences.

The tensions steadily accelerated. The Indian National Congress, founded as a secular political organization of Indians in 1885, was not able to win the confidence of Muslims who had felt sidelined. Politically active Muslims founded the Muslim League in 1906. In 1915, Hindu Mahasabha was established as an organization, which became a political party in 1933. With these, the chasm in political interests of the two communities kept widening. Communal riots marked by violence began to occur repeatedly. It was also a time when several nationalist movements for freedom from the British had gained momentum. Congress, under the leadership of Gandhi during the 1920s and 1930s, had garnered tremendous popular support with participation of women and men of all backgrounds in large numbers. But gradually a demand was made by the Muslim League that British India should be partitioned into two nations on religious grounds if it became independent. The partition of British India into Hindu majority India and Muslim majority Pakistan (on its east and west sides) did occur at the time of independence in 1947. Freedom from

Figure 6.1 Partition of Punjab, India 1947, migration.
Source: Wikimedia Commons.
Photographer: Unknown

the British came with the incalculable cost of human life. The massacre of people on both sides of the newly created borders remains unprecedented in human history. Mobs from Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh communities attacked one another out of frustration and anger caused by their displacement from homelands. Millions migrated from one side to the other in a state of hopelessness (Figure 6.1).

The tragic implications of the partition are still unfolding, often with violence based in religious identity politics or extremism.

AFTER PARTITION

India chose to be a secular democracy at the time of independence. A considerable percentage of its population remains committed to the ideal of secularism with respect for all religions. However, more recently, events at some contested sites for which both Hindu

and Muslim communities have attachment because of religious and/or historical reasons have led to controversies and in some cases, violent conflicts termed "communal riots." In these, both communities suffer. Yet being a minority in India, Muslims are often at the receiving end. In such conflicts, old wounds resurface at the intersections of faith, history, and identity politics. Quite apart from riots, in some circles that actually oppose violence, advocacy is still heard for a Hindu Rashtra (Hindu nation), an ideology of religious nationalism known as Hindutva. Some proponents of this ideology doubt the loyalty (to the nation state) of Muslims, for whom too India has been the dear homeland for centuries. Hindus on the other side of the border/s (former east Pakistan is now Bangladesh), who form much smaller minorities in their countries, live in analogous situations. They too live in a state of vulnerability to violence in their ancestral lands. In the former British colonies in South Asia including Sri Lanka, with the prevalence of identity politics post independence, religious minorities face a similar predicament. However, after over 70 years of independence in all these parts, the role of British rule in the rise of this situation is debatable. The situation arises out of complex issues rooted in feelings of historical injustice that await solutions through skillful and sensitive cultural as well as political engagement locally and internationally. The issues related to identity politics are not basics of Hinduism as a religious tradition. But being aware of them helps understand the news about them, which appear in the national, international, and social media rather prominently.

Two other themes that also figure prominently in public discourses and media are discrimination against the Dalits and position of women in the Hindu society. These two themes have retained media attention since the nineteenth century. In the area of caste discrimination since the time of Jyotirao Phule, several Dalit leaders have made significant contributions to the upliftment of lower-caste and former untouchable communities. The most important among them was Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (1891–1956), a prominent public figure and intellectual whose work spanned several decades of the twentieth century. Born in a Dalit family as Bhimrao Sakpal, he was given the last name Ambedkar by a Brahmin school teacher of that name. Ambedkar went on to earn a

doctoral degree in economics from Columbia University, New York, and D.Sc. from the London School of Economics. Still, he experienced humiliating discrimination recurrently on his return to India and spent the rest of his life fighting for the rights of "untouchables." Toward the end of his life, he converted to Buddhism along with his followers. Ambedkar, like Phule, worked closely with the British and held high offices in their administration. In independent India, he served as the chairman of the constitution drafting committee, which incorporated several key affirmative action measures for the Dalits. This has made a positive difference in the fields of education and government employment for them to a degree. A number of upper-caste Hindus acknowledge the historical injustice done to the Dalits and make efforts to correct it. Yet, as mentioned a few times earlier, the goal of equality remains far from achieved. The Dalits still face discrimination and at times violence. Women in all layers of the society have made tremendous strides in work forces in formal and informal sectors. They have been prominent figures in local and national politics including the Prime Minister (Indira Gandhi) and Presidents (Pratibha Patil, Draupadi Murmu) of the country. With prolonged efforts of women activists, Hindu women have gained equal rights to property as daughters and wives. They are also getting considerable respect as priests and gurus. There is gradual acceptance of gender fluidity as well. However, complete gender equality is still a dream, especially in the areas of leadership positions in business and other professional fields as well as in household chores. While issues persist, it needs to be noted that in the context of modernity, there has been incremental yet definitive progress toward retributive justice in the Hindu society through processes of negotiations and accommodations, and thanks to many actors in history including the British.

FAITH PRACTICES IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION

Because religion related topics with social and political implications generally receive more coverage in both commercial and social media in most parts of the world, developments in the area of

faith practices receive less attention. For Hinduism the topics getting most attention are caste, gender, and religious nationalism. But equally fascinating are transformations of faith practices brought about by global market economy, technological advances, and growing stress on individual choice. Global market developments propelled by technology have been influencing practices of all religious communities around the world in recent times. Like all other aspects of life, the arrival of the internet platforms, and social media have deeply influenced religion. As sociologist Peter Berger has argued, even though religion has continued to thrive as a social force disproving the earlier predictions of its gradual disappearance in the modern age, the way it is practiced today has shifted considerably from its traditional forms. This is amply demonstrated in contemporary Hinduism. While Hindu practices discussed earlier still thrive dynamically, their forms have changed and new layers have been added to them in the virtual space. Some modifications are related to economic advance while some address the contemporary global concerns for social justice, individual freedom, environment protection, and stress management. Let us look at the innovative dimensions of a few important components of Hinduism – religious philosophy and guidance for life, as well as practices such as festival rituals, pilgrimage, life cycle performances, and sacred arts. These dimensions are copiously reflected on related websites and are analogous to developments in many religious traditions.

In the area of religious teachings, locally and internationally known spiritual teachers including leaders of sects incorporate two things: (a) focus on the subjective (individual) side of devotion and personal transformation rather than simply glorification of the divine or the guru and (b) aspects of social responsibility and service. Inner transformation through devotion and practices like meditation has been a part of Hindu spiritual traditions for millennia. But its articulation now is also linked often to professional efficiency and mental well-being. Similarly, *sevā* has been an important value for Hindus for centuries as we saw earlier. But today it is stressed as a part of activities of religious organizations/fellowships. Further, in view of many individuals leaning toward the spiritual rather than the religious, some Hindu leaders define

their organizations in terms of the former and do not even mention the term "Hindu" on the front page of their sites, even though their practices such as chants, etc. mention Hindu deities and their mottos often draw from peace mantras of Vedic literature. These leaders are rearticulating Hindu spirituality for the twenty-first century. The profile of a contemporary woman guru, Amritanandamayi, is included in the last section. Links for a few websites are also given for further exploration.

In recent years, an important area in which Hindu leaders are striving to make a contribution in collaboration with other leaders is the environment. Directing attention to the components of Hinduism that present nature as sacred, suggest a continuum between human life and nature, stress human responsibility in maintaining the harmony in the cosmos, and recognize *karma* at a collective level, they advocate for environment friendly choices. In 2009, a Hindu Declaration on Climate Change was made at the Parliament of World Religions. Even though some locales and rivers in India that are considered important parts of Hindu sacred geography are facing critical environmental issues, there is gradual growth in awareness about the resources for environment protection within the tradition.

Among religious practices and sacred arts, the most observable change is construction of grand temples and retreat centers (*āśrams*) in several parts of the world. Spread on large premises, with towers or stories visible from a distance, they attract thousands of visitors (not necessarily devotees) every year. Some observers see such temples within India as markers of religious nationalism. However, the people who take pride in them, view them as indicators of the community's growing prosperity. For those who grew up in India when it was generally referenced for its poverty, it is an achievement. The trusts of several major temples upload videos of their *pūjā* on their websites and on platforms like Youtube for *darśan*. Most also have tabs for offerings (donation). As mentioned earlier, trusts at pilgrimage centers have also developed them as tourism sites with easy transportation and comfortable accommodation options, attracting large numbers of pilgrims.

Similar influence of financial growth is also seen in magnificence of *pujās* at major temples, pilgrimage sites, and enthusiastic

public festival celebrations in which people from all sectors of the society participate. Festivals are celebrated with a lot of fanfare with people spending more money on sweets, clothing, gifts, parties, and decorations. The religious meaning often recedes in the background during celebration, even though newspapers carry full stories about them. As I have discussed in my essay on Gujarat's *garbā* dance during the goddess festival Navaratri in contemporary times, paradoxically, the divinities are both present and absent in the festivities. In celebrations animated by consumerism and boosted by business ventures, the lines between the sacred and the secular are blurred. This blurring draws younger generations to festivals. But some public intellectuals find the celebrations being taken over by businesses disconcerting. They suggest that in this, the significance of family gatherings and roles of women are compromised. Yet the blurring makes possible the participation of people from diverse backgrounds (often non-Hindus) as providers of goods and services for festivals. During Navaratri, some of the most sought after singers of *garbā* songs in Gujarat are Muslims. The technological advances also allow family members far from one another to gather online and celebrate festivals together thousands of miles apart. These new layers added by global businesses and technological advances are generally welcomed by Hindus.

From their early homes in north-west India in antiquity, Hindu divinities and their devotees have indeed traveled long distances in time and space, including the virtual one. The journey has been turbulent at times and people have faltered in their steps and moral judgment. But the tradition has continued to flow in modernity and post-modernity. In this journey, some social and religious leaders have played important roles by offering spiritual guidance to people at home and internationally or by boldly pointing out the wrongs prevalent in their society. Before we end our overview of Hinduism in the modern period with a recent scene in Mumbai, let us look at brief biographical sketches of three Hindu leaders who belong to three different periods discussed above. Each one's life and work combine elements of the paths of *karma*, *bhakti*, and *jnāna* in different ways.

A NINETEENTH-CENTURY MAHATMA, JYOTIRAO PHULE (1827–1890)

For millions in the world, the term "Mahatma" (great soul) brings to mind the figure of Mohandas K. Gandhi, who was given the title in 1915 by another great personality, poet Rabindranath Tagore. But not many people globally know that the title had been given 27 years earlier to Jyotirao Phule, a social reformer from Maharashtra and an early proponent in women's education along with his wife Savitri Phule. Born in Pune in a family of gardeners, Māli, considered low in the caste hierarchy, he attended Scottish Missionary High School. As a young man, he had a chance to visit schools for girls/women (who had no access to education in that era) established by the missionaries. Impressed by the educational opportunities offered by them to the marginalized, Phule remained a lifelong admirer of Europeans and considered British rule a great advantage to India. He gradually became a successful government contractor and entrepreneur in Pune and was also appointed a commissioner on the municipal council of the city.

Phule was married at 13 to a girl from his own caste – Savitri. When Phule was 18, a humiliating experience of discrimination at a Brahmin friend's wedding led him to become sharply critical of the caste system. He developed a view that Aryans, who were ancestors of Brahmins, had invaded India and subjugated the original inhabitants of the land by placing them the lowest in the caste hierarchy or even outside of it as "untouchables." He was scathingly critical of Vedic texts and even the *Ramayana*, which he saw as sources for caste oppression. In addition to lower castes and untouchables, Phule saw women as victims of Brahminical supremacy, which he decided to resist. He first educated his wife Savitribai; and then in partnership with her, opened several institutions for women's education in Pune. The couple also opened schools for Dalit children, who were not allowed in schools. In another surprisingly liberal move, they established a shelter for widows who became mothers. This institution was open to all women, but was particularly beneficial to high-caste widows, who, as we have seen, were not allowed to remarry.

Phule later founded "Satyashodhak Samaj" (society in the search of truth) with a rationalist approach. The organization had members from diverse religious and caste groups including Brahmins. They opposed image worship like other reformer groups. But their main focus was on the rights of the groups they identified as marginalized. Even though working alongside Brahmins in his organization, Phule opposed their appointments as teachers in schools. He even declined an invitation to attend the meeting of the Marathi literary society because he saw it as representing Brahmin ideology and interests. Because of Phule's uncompromising approach in efforts to reform his society, he is described as a "radical reformer" in *Sources of Indian Traditions*, Vol. 2. It is noteworthy that despite being a staunch rationalist and a harsh critic of the caste system, Phule did not convert to Christianity or Buddhism like some later leaders from lower castes, notably Ambedkar. He also saw *bhakti* saint-poets of Maharashtra like Tukaram (about whom we heard in the Introduction) as sources of inspiration. Phule's recognition of affinity among low-caste communities and women, and his fearless resistance to social injustice can be seen as his significant contributions to Hinduism. He was among the first to articulate the pain inflicted by caste discrimination from the point of view of its victims. For this, another reformer from Bombay bestowed on him the title of Mahatma in 1888. Today, Phule's legacy endures in several educational institutions for the marginalized in Maharashtra. A statue of him was unveiled in 2003 by the prime minister of the country in front of the parliament house in the capital, Delhi. The most fitting tribute to the work of the Phule couple is, however, seen in the renaming of the University of Pune as Savitribai Phule University. The institution's official song stresses combining knowledge (*jnāna*) with just *karma* and the *bhakti* qualities of the heart.

AN EARLY TEACHER OF YOGA IN AMERICA, PARAMHANSA YOGANANDA (1893–1952)

Paramhansa Yogananda, the first eminent yoga teacher to settle in the USA, was born in a Kayastha (upper caste) family in

Gorakhpur in north India as Mukund Lal Ghosh. Since childhood, Mukund was in search of a true spiritual guru, whom he found in Swami Yukteshwar Giri, an eminent guru of Kriya Yoga in the nineteenth century. Swami Yukteshwar had come in contact with missionaries in India. He was a liberal intellectual with an open mind and wrote comparatively on the Vedas and the Bible. Yukteshwar trained Mukund extensively in yoga and also allowed him to choose his spiritual name Yogananda. Young Yogananda first opened a school in West Bengal, which combined instruction of yoga with modern secular education. In 1920, 17 years after Swami Vivekananda's first tour in America, Yogananda was invited by American Unitarians for a convention in Boston. With the blessings of a great guru of his spiritual lineage, Yogananda arrived in the USA and spent the rest of his life (except one long trip) in America.

He made several lecture tours in the early 1920s and established the center of Self-realization Fellowship in Los Angeles in 1925, attracting thousands including celebrities. His guru Yukteshwar gave him the highest spiritual title for a monk, Paramhansa, during his trip to India in 1935. In 1946, he published *Autobiography of a Yogi* describing his spiritual journey. The book met with phenomenal success. It has sold over four million copies till date and is considered one of the most influential spiritual works of the twentieth century, a favorite of American business magnate Steve Jobs. His important teachings based on Kriya Yoga included (a) harmony between Jesus's teachings in Krishna's message about yoga in BG; (b) potential of every person to reach divine consciousness through disciplined following of the science of yoga; and (c) uniting science with religion for the betterment of mankind. By the time of his death in 1952, he was a greatly loved spiritual teacher in America and certainly the first to make yoga a spiritual discipline followed by thousands in the country. Today, his followers are found in close to 175 countries in the world at several Self-realization Fellowship centers. In India the fellowship is called Yogoda Satsang. Two commemorative postal stamps were issued in India to honor Yogananda (1977, 2017). His focus on the shared spirituality of mankind and

his stress on yoga as a discipline for cultivation of the human consciousness contributed significantly to gaining respect for Hinduism in the West.

MOTHER (AMMA) OF THOUSANDS, MATA AMRITANANDAMAYI (1953–)

Mata Amritanandamayi, born in Kerala in a fisherman family as Sudhamani in 1953, is a female Hindu guru of international prominence. She is known globally as "the hugging saint" because of her practice of embracing all who come for her *darśan*. For this motherly gesture, she is also called "Amma" by her disciples. Amritanandamayi's spiritual journey did not begin in school or with a guru, but with the chore of collecting scrap food she performed for her family's cattle. At an early age, this led her to come in close contact with the poor and to develop compassion for them, which she began to express through spontaneously hugging them. She also began to compose devotional songs and sing them while performing her chores. Her spiritual journey was that of self-cultivation through compassion. This is also reflected in her own practices as a spiritual mentor.

If the work of Jyotirao Phule and Paramhansa Yogananda, the two male leaders discussed above, were rooted in selfless action and knowledge, respectively, Amritanandamayi's approach is grounded in the heart. She considers *karma*, *bhakti*, and *jnāna* as three pillars of spirituality. But at the heart of her spiritual mentorship is her emotionally reassuring embrace. At times, she sits for 20 hours at a stretch to meet her visitors in this way. Her disciples say that her embrace opens their hearts to cultivation of qualities such as compassion, patience, forgiveness, and restraint. Cultivating these qualities, Amritanandamayi stresses, prepares the mind to approach the Ultimate. With this basic philosophy, she has won thousands of followers over the world to whom she refers as her "children" and not "disciples." Her followers work in a variety of social service projects – related to food, education, disaster relief, environment, women's empowerment, etc. – in different parts of the world in a network of organizations termed "Embracing the World." She has received several honorary degrees and awards for her work from Europe, America, and India. She is the subject of some books and documentaries as well. She is recognized as one of the most influential women spiritual leaders in the world.

In modern history, there have been hundreds of guru figures like the leaders whose lives we considered above. Many have become subjects of controversies in countries where basic expectations from religion are fundamentally different from Hinduism. A few were found fraudulent too. But in general, like the three leaders profiled above, they have been able to establish constructive relationships with people around the world. They have taken advantage of the freedom of interpretation and multivocality in their tradition and brought prestige to it by building communities of people with diverse backgrounds.

A TRIP TO SIDDHIVINAYAK AND A STORY OF FLUIDITY

This short note is added to draw attention to the diverse situations that simultaneously prevail on ground in India. Because of the reports of communal tensions found daily in the media, a peaceful coexistence of diverse communities seems improbable from afar. Yet a recent trip to the famous Siddhivinayak Ganesha temple, and one to the tomb of the Muslim saint Haji Ali in the densely populated city of Mumbai highlighted for me that despite tensions and conflicts, most people find ways to live in harmony with their co-patriots. People from diverse faiths, identifiable from their attires, could be seen at both places considered powerful in fulfilling wishes. Respectful exchanges could be seen at both. Even more recently than these trips, an employee with a Hindu name at an institution I was visiting revealed that for his community in Karnataka, one of their most important festivals is the Shia Muslim festival of Muharram, which they celebrate according to the Islamic calendar. People working in far off towns return home for it. Along with gestures of mutual respect at sacred sites, this kind of fluidity in practice also helps the fabric of a diverse society to remain intact and many hope that it will continue to do so.

Table 6.1 Hinduism Since the Nineteenth Century

Early nineteenth century	• Scathing critique of the tradition in missionary tracks and European media • Ram Mohan Roy's work with early missionaries • Social reform initiatives like the legal ban of *satī* with the support of EIC officials (1829) • Rejection of image worship and rituals in favor of philosophical reflection, and disregard for caste in Brahmo Sabha/Samaj (1828)
Mid to late nineteenth century	• Rule transfer from EIC to the British crown (1858) • Proliferation of socio-religious movement with reform of society and revitalization of Hinduism as the goal • Jyotirao Phule • Arya Samaj of Dayanand Saraswati (1873) • Development of distinct religious identities as aspects of citizenship • Women's education and participation in public life, widow remarriage • Swami Vivekananda in America
Early to mid-twentieth century	• Nationalist Freedom Movements • Participation of multitudes of women and men in the movement/s led by Gandhi • Establishments of Muslim League (1906) and Hindu Mahasabha (1915, 1933) • Increasing tensions between Hindus and Muslims • Independence and the Partition of British India (1947)
Mid-twentieth century present	• India as secular democracy – provisions for the underprivileged in the constitution • Contested sites and communal riots • Hindu religious nationalism • Vulnerability of minorities in former British Colonies in South Asia • Economic growth and technological advances – transformation of religion • Hindu gurus on the international scene

FURTHER EXPLORATION SUGGESTIONS

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