

## Rām Banwās: Searching for Rām in World Religion Textbooks

Ramdas Lamb

This review essay is a contribution to ongoing scholarly discussion of how “Hinduism” has been represented in the textbooks assigned to students in academic courses in schools, colleges, and universities in North America. Textbook representations of Hinduism have been analyzed in earlier review essays, and among them the one by Paul E. Muller-Ortega (1988) in consultation with Gerald James Larson is particularly noteworthy. What is distinctive about the present essay is that it gives special attention to the presentation, or lack thereof, of Rām *bhakti* in chapters on Hinduism in world religion textbooks. Most of the textbooks selected for review were successful enough to have gone through multiple editions, indicating that they have been assigned to a large number of students. The challenge that faces any instructor who wishes to represent Hinduism adequately within the limited horizons of a conventional academic course was clearly stated by Muller-Ortega: “It is the daunting and often frustrating task of the teacher somehow to remain true to a vision of a tradition, yet to compress that vision into the requisite ten or sixteen week term, selecting a finite list of topics that will form perhaps the only exposure those students will ever have to the formal study of this tradition” (1988: 61). He also notes that textbooks selected for student reading can play a key role in determining the effectiveness of a course of study: “One of the crucial decisions which will determine the success of the teacher revolves around the authoritative voices added to his own to help in this presentation, primarily, though not exclusively, in the form of textbooks” (Muller-Ortega 1988: 61).

World events of the past century—as well as advances in technology, communication, and travel—have inspired a rise in interest in the cultural and religious traditions of peoples and countries far distant from the West. As a consequence, the study of the world’s major religious traditions has become a part of the

*International Journal of Hindu Studies* 7, 1–3 (2003): 177–92

© 2005 by the World Heritage Press Inc.

curriculum in schools, colleges, and universities in North America and western Europe. Dozens of textbooks have been written for that market, and most of them are considered to be generally adequate at an introductory or survey level in their scholarly treatment of the major religious traditions. From such textbooks the majority of undergraduate students receive their first impressions of the nature of Hinduism, and so they play a formative role in how the tradition is understood. However, an analysis of the way that Hinduism typically is presented in widely adopted textbooks reveals several shortcomings. First, there is a high degree of dependence on the Brāhmaṇical tradition. It is treated as if it were the definitive Hinduism of most Hindus. A revealing example is a statement in one early comparative textbook, *Religions of the World*, by Gerald L. Berry. In the chapter on Hinduism, titled “Brahmanism—The Hindu Faith,” Berry claims that all Hindus “accept the Brahmanic prescribed rituals; all venerate cows; all observe rules of caste in marriage and sharing of food; all go to the brahmins for forms concerning birth, marriage, and death; and all accept the orthodoxy of brahmanic scriptures” (1947: 42). The indigenous sources for the author’s claims almost certainly were high-caste English-speaking urban males or published writings for which they were the source. They are the ones who could be expected to promote the views expressed in the chapter. Second, there is little or no mention of the popularity among Hindus of vernacular language sacred texts and scriptures and their authors or of the significant role they have played in Hinduism over the last millennium. World religion textbooks in fact rarely provide any indication of the vast diversity of beliefs and practices found among ordinary Hindus, and in particular the ones who live in rural areas. Third, there is overemphasis in the textbooks on religious modes, movements, and individual leaders from urban nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Bengal. As a result, important aspects of the tradition from beyond the region of Bengal and from other than the Brāhmaṇical strata are generally ignored. One of the more obvious consequences is that what the textbooks assume to count as “Hinduism” at worst ignores or at best underrepresents the importance of Rām, the prevalence of Rām *bhakti*, and the influence of Tulsīdās. This essay documents these lacunae in widely adopted academic textbooks that have been used for the instruction of students in world religion courses.

It would be difficult for any scholar who studies contemporary religion “on the ground” through fieldwork-based research in northern India to overlook the popularity and pervasiveness of Rām *bhakti*. It has been among the most prevalent aspects of Hinduism during the last two centuries. In his *The Hindu Tradition*, Ainslie T. Embree includes rare recognition of the importance and role that Tulsīdās and his Hindi *Rāmcaritmānas* have played. According to him:

The story of Rāma and Sītā has become as familiar to the people of North India as the daily events of their own lives. Through [Tulsīdās'] poem, rather than through the great Sanskrit scriptures, the ideas and concepts of Hinduism have permeated the lives of the people. Westerners used to say that Tulasīdās' work was the Bible of India, but that comparison is inadequate now, for Tulasīdās' book is probably better known today in North India than the Bible is in any country of the West (Embree 1966: 249).

For most Hindus in northern India, this is taken for granted. They know the central place occupied by the *Mānas* (as Tulsīdās's seminal work is commonly known) in contemporary popular Hinduism. It is not only the vehicle but the genesis of Rām *bhakti* for Hindi speakers and Rām devotees in India and throughout the world. In the Hindu diaspora, the great majority of the descendants of more than a million Indians who were sent abroad by the British colonial government as indentured servants have long looked to the *Mānas* as their scripture, an important mode of connection to their religious motherland, and a source of their spiritual inspiration. However, an acknowledgment of the role of the *Mānas* that is equal to Embree's is seldom found in academic writings in the West. Tulsīdās and the entire Rām *bhakti* tradition remain unknown to far too many students of world religions. Why the neglect? To answer this question, it is necessary to look at the way that the history of India and the nature of Hinduism were formulated by and for the English-speaking world.

### **COLONIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF HINDUISM**

English-speaking Westerners have been traveling to India since at least the sixteenth century. Almost from the beginning, they were moved to write about the beliefs and practices of the peoples and cultures residing in the Indian Subcontinent. The first accounts were minimal and sporadic, but as economic and political interest grew, so did the corpus of literature about the land and its people. The development of the British East India Company led to an increased number of Western travelers to India as well as an increase in writings describing what the visitors experienced and observed. Simple reflections in the form of memoirs eventually were eclipsed by more elaborate accounts, typically written by individuals who were serving as administrators for the Company or as Christian missionaries. The agendas of the authors are indeed apparent in most of these writings.

By the latter part of the eighteenth century, the British government controlled

Bengal, and there was a calculated effort to gather information on the beliefs and practices of people in the region, especially those who had influence in the urban areas. The focus was the orthodox tradition, and this led to Charles Wilkins' translation of the *Bhagavad Gītā* in 1785, followed by an English rendering of the *Dharmaśāstras* in 1794 by William Jones. The pattern was set, and for the next hundred years, essentially the only sacred texts to be translated were those in Sanskrit, most likely because they were the only writings that Brāhmaṇ informants presented as having importance and legitimacy. In fact, it was not until 1877 that a complete English translation by Ernst Trumpp of a major non-Sanskrit sacred text, the Sikh *Guru Granth Sāhib*, was published.

In the early 1800s, an increasing number of Bengalis were exposed to British education and attitudes through English writings on India. Several prominent Indian Hindu intellectuals began to craft their own versions of Hinduism and to compete with Christian writings on Hinduism for reader attention. They wrote for the British colonizers and upper-caste urban Bengalis who comprised an English-reading public. Among the first such writers was Ram Mohan Roy, founder of the Brāhmo Samāj. Other writers who were greatly influenced by him included Debendranath Tagore, Rabindranath Tagore, and Keshub Chandra Sen. Svāmī Vivekānanda introduced the world to the teachings of his *guru*, Rāmakṣṇa Paramahansa, as well as to his own ideas. Gradually, these writers came to be viewed by subsequent English-language authors as indigenous authorities and spokesmen for the tradition. In general, the Hinduism presented in their writings as normative had Sanskrit-based Vedic tradition at the center, along with various other Sanskrit texts, such as the Itihāsas (the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*), the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and the *Manusmṛti*. No vernacular writings were given status as "sacred text." Add to this core model the popular Bengali beliefs and practices at the time—which included devotion to Śiva, Kālī, Durgā, Kṛṣṇa, and Caitanya—and they became the compendium that comprised what was presented to be "Hinduism." What got ignored were diverse strands in the tradition that can be found in the rest of the subcontinent beyond urban colonial Bengal.

Frederic Growse made available Tulsīdās's work to English-language readers through his translation of the *Mānas* in the 1880s. During the same period, Sir George Grierson also began to appreciate the preeminent position that Tulsīdās and his writings held in India. Grierson wrote several articles about the author of the *Mānas* that were published in influential journals of the day. Not only did he call Tulsīdās "the greatest of Indian authors of modern times," but he also proposed that no individual except for Gautama Buddha so profoundly influenced India as Tulsīdās (Grierson 1893: 89). Growse and Grierson were rare among writers of the time, either Indian or Western, in their acknowledgement of the

influence of Tulsīdās' work. Whenever other writers referred to the Rām story, typically they referred only to Vālmīki's Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa*. That was part of the pattern that privileged Sanskrit texts and neglected or ignored the significant role of devotional poets and sacred texts in vernacular languages. The Sanskrit texts—and especially the Vedas, Upaniṣads, and *Bhagavad Gītā*—seem to have been considered an authoritative canon by those who wrote in English about Hinduism.

### THE RISE OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION

The end of the nineteenth century saw the appearance of the first published writings in English that approached the concept of religion on a comparative level. One of the earliest was a compiled volume of transcribed public lectures that was published in 1889 under the title *Religious Systems of the World*. The contribution on Hinduism is by Sir Alfred Lyall. It provides a fairly balanced presentation and even suggests that Brāhmaṇical beliefs and practices represent only part of the great diversity that exists in the tradition. The book evidently was quite popular, and by 1905 it was in its eighth, enlarged edition. Just before the turn of the century, a series of lectures given by Annie Besant for the Theosophical Society was published as *Four Great Religions* (1897; later to be revised and enlarged as *Seven Great Religions*). The Hinduism chapter is primarily philosophical, and it is one of the few sources under review here that acknowledges the importance of the *guru*. Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Kṛṣṇa are presented as forms of the divine. While the relationship of Rām to his brothers and to Sītā is mentioned, there is no context given, no identification of Rām, and no indication of the widespread devotion to him.

During the early part of the twentieth century, more books on world religions began to appear. Because most of these early twentieth century texts were written by Christian authors and intended for Christian readers, they affirmed the superiority of Christianity over other belief systems. An example of the genre is the *Outline of the Religions of Mankind* by Frederick L. Fagley. The section on Hinduism is quite disparaging and includes comments such as the claim that the religion “teaches no moral standard, and shuts the door to any possible improvement in the individual's status in life” (1936: 16).

A few textbooks by Christian authors were noteworthy exceptions to that pattern. Among them was Edmund Davison Soper's *The Religions of Mankind* (1921). The author was a professor at several Methodist theological institutions, but he sought to gain an impartial understanding of Hinduism, and for two years

he lived and taught in India. The book offers an account of literary and philosophical developments, of caste, and of various forms of the divine. Brahmā, Śiva, and Viṣṇu appear, as does Rām. Nevertheless, the emphasis is on Kṛṣṇa and Kālī. The last two editions of the text (1938 and 1951) address contemporary issues, and developments in Bengal dominate. Included are all the Bengali sources named above. *The World's Living Religions* (1924) by the American Sanskritist Robert Ernest Hume is a similar sort of textbook. Even though the focus of his treatment of Hinduism is on the Sanskritic tradition, Hume seeks to achieve a balanced presentation.

Influential among early anthologies of sacred texts was Robert O. Ballou's *The Bible of the World* (1939), followed a few years later by his *The Portable World Bible* (1944). Both are comprised of extracts from various scriptures of the major religious traditions. Again one finds Bengali influence. The Hinduism section includes the Vedas, Upaniṣads, *Hitopedeśa*, and *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* (popular with devotees of Durgā). There is no reference to Tulsīdās or any form of the Rām story, yet there are several extracts from the teachings of Rāmakṛṣṇa.

#### JOHN NOSS, HUSTON SMITH, AND NINIAN SMART

By the 1940s, more academic scholars and teachers were attempting to introduce an inclusive approach to the study of religion in which Christianity was neither so central nor so dominant. At Franklin and Marshall College, John Noss developed a manuscript for his courses that was published in 1949 under the title *Man's Religions*. Noss seems to have drawn much of his information about Hinduism from the late nineteenth-century writers. Thus, not only does he present the Vedas and Vedānta, Kṛṣṇa and teachings from the *Bhagavad Gītā*, but also the Bengal-centered Brāhmo Samāj. He discusses Kabīr and his influence on Guru Nānak, but not Tulsīdās. Among the deities presented are Śiva and Durgā. Although the first edition has a nearly two-page segment on Rām and the Rām story, by the sixth edition (1980) it was reduced to less than half of that. Noss died that year, and his younger brother David took over the task of maintaining the book by preparing subsequent versions. The eighth edition (1990) was renamed *A History of the World's Religions* and exhibits a major reworking of much of the material, but the diminished segment on Rām remains the same. At last, in the tenth edition (1999), there is a single reference to Tulsīdās in which the author acknowledges that it is the *Mānas* from which “most people (in northern India) learn of Rama” (D. Noss 1999: 131).

The study of world religions began to enter the academic curriculum in British

and North American colleges and universities on a broader level in the 1950s and 1960s. This was due in large part to the initiatives of Huston Smith in the United States and Ninian Smart in England. In 1958, Smith published his *The Religions of Man*. It became one of the most widely read textbooks for the study of world religions in America for several decades, and the updated version is among the most popular of the textbooks currently in use. From the first edition of the book, Smith sought to present the major religions from an empathetic perspective. Although his book includes material similar to that of Noss, there is a greater emphasis on the *Bhagavad Gītā*. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is also presented but not the *Mānas*. There is a discussion of Rabindranath Tagore as well as Rāmakṛṣṇa and Vivekānanda. There is Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Kālī, but no Rām. Tulsīdās is introduced in a short paragraph in the context of a discussion of *bhakti*. However, the focus is not on his writings, which are not mentioned, but only on the story of his attachment to and subsequent renunciation of his wife.

Ninian Smart taught religion for nearly five decades, both in England and the United States. He published *A Dialogue of Religions* in 1960, the first of his many comparative works. A few years later, his *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (1969) appeared. It introduces the Vedas, Upaniṣads, and *Bhagavad Gītā* and includes selections from Mohandas K. Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore. Ram Mohan Roy, Rāmakṛṣṇa, and Vivekānanda are cited as well, and Kabīr is mentioned at several points. Yet there is no Tulsīdās, no *Mānas*. The solitary acknowledgement of the *Rāmāyaṇa* refers to Vālmiki's work. There have been three subsequent editions of the book, and with the exception of the pictures and a discussion of Buddhist philosophy, the section on Indic religions remains unchanged.

The 1960s also saw the first editions of several textbooks published to meet the needs of the growing field of comparative religion in North American schools, colleges, and universities. They included *Religions of the World* by John Hardon, *Paths of Faith* by John Hutchison, *A History of Religion East and West* by Trevor Ling, and *The Religions of Mankind* by Hans Joachim Schoeps. The sections on Hinduism in each of these textbooks follow the basic pattern set by the previous works mentioned. Literary sources are exclusively from the Sanskrit tradition. Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Kṛṣṇa are the dominant deities. Kālī has a role as well. The luminaries and movements of nineteenth-century Bengal, along with Mahātmā Gandhi, represent contemporary Hinduism. Two of the authors refer to the *Mānas*, although not by name. In discussing the views of Gandhi, Hardon writes that the Mahātmā “was nourished by his devotion to a sixteenth-century version of the religious epic *Ramayana*, that for three hundred years has been the most popular scripture among the common people in North India”

(1968: 87). He adds that the philosophy of Tulsīdās “goes straight to the heart of the average Hindu” (Hardon 1968: 87). Ling quotes a single verse from Tulsīdās and reports that he “is remembered for his Hindi translation of the Ramayana” (1968: 326). Other than these brief comments, Rām *bhakti* is missing from all four, and Schoeps simply omits Rām entirely.

### TEXTBOOKS IN RECENT DECADES

There were several author-contributors to the 1971 collaborative volume edited by W. Richard Comstock and titled *Religion and Man*. Robert D. Baird wrote the section on Hinduism, and he provided a brief excerpt from the *Mānas*. The book contains a half-page discussion of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* but has three pages devoted to Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*. Other initial publications of multiedition textbooks that appeared during the decade include Roger Eastman’s *The Ways of Religion*, Robert S. Ellwood’s *Many Peoples, Many Faiths*, Ward J. Fellows’ *Religions East and West*, and Lewis M. Hopfe’s *Religions of the World*. Eastman’s is an edited work that approaches Hinduism through seven articles by various individual writers. There are translated excerpts from the *Ṛg Veda*, from several Upaniṣads, and from the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Two of the articles are by Svāmī Prabhavānanda, a Bengali disciple of Vivekānanda and founder of the Los Angeles Vedanta Center. Another is by Christopher Isherwood, a disciple of Prabhavānanda.

Other textbooks from that decade follow the typical pattern, focusing on the Brāhmaṇical Sanskrit tradition and on the Bengali “renaissance” intellectuals. Ellwood has a list of incarnations of Viṣṇu, among whom Rām and Kṛṣṇa are named. In two paragraphs on the Rām story, his divinity is mentioned but also questioned, and he is primarily referred to as the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The divinity of Kṛṣṇa, on the other hand, remains unquestioned. While Tulsīdās and the *Mānas* are absent, the author includes excerpts from the poetry of Kabīr. Hopfe’s book presents the *Gītā* and the *Mahābhārata*, but nothing of the Rām story. In a section on “Devotion to Three Major Gods,” Brahmā, Śiva, and Viṣṇu are discussed. The paragraphs on Śiva include Kālī and Durgā. Those on Viṣṇu include Kṛṣṇa and the Buddha, but not Rām. It is not until the eighth (2001) and ninth (2004) editions that three sentences devoted to Rām in the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* at last appear. Tulsīdās and the *Mānas* never appear. Fellows includes a few paragraphs on the Itihāsas, which include references to both Rām and Kṛṣṇa. In a section titled “Later Popular Devotional and Sectarian Literature,” the focus is on texts devoted to Śiva, Viṣṇu, and the



Goddess. Tulsīdās and the *Mānas* are absent. There are sixty pages on Hinduism in Eastman's edited volume. It provides lengthy selections from the Vedas, Upaniṣads, and *Bhagavad Gītā*, as well as citations from Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. There are references to Patañjali, Rāmakṛṣṇa, Vivekānanda, Prabhavānanda, eight pages on Gandhi, and another six from the writings of R. K. Narayan. However, there is no Tulsīdās and no *Mānas*. In fact, there is no mention of Rām at all.

The 1980s saw the publication of a number of world religion textbooks that went into multiple editions and printings, all of which take the Brāhmaṇical-Sanskritic and Bengali renaissance traditions to be the primary basis for representing Hinduism. The first of these volumes was *Ways to the Center* from the husband and wife team of John T. and Denise L. Carmody. In it are segments on famous figures in the development of Hinduism. These include Śāṅkara and Rāmānuja, Caitanya, and Tukārām. Gandhi is there as well, but not Tulsīdās. In units devoted to "Vaishnavism" and "Modern *Bhakti*," Kṛṣṇa and the Āḷvārs are subjects of focus. Although Rām is mentioned briefly, both the *Mānas* and Rām *bhakti* are absent. Kṛṣṇa is the only deity who is described in the section on "Modern Hinduism." Richard C. Bush served as general editor of *The Religious World*. It offers units on devotion to Viṣṇu and Śiva. As a part of the former, there is a description of both Rām and Kṛṣṇa. Along with Śiva is the Goddess as Kālī and as Durgā. The book provides only a single reference to Tulsīdās as the composer of "the theistic medieval version of the *Ramayana*" (Converse 1982: 89), but Vālmīki's version of the Rām story is the one emphasized. While discussion of the *Mānas* is omitted, an excerpt from poetry of Kabīr is included. Two subsequent editions rework the same material. In the same year, Ninian Smart joined with his colleague Richard D. Hecht to coedit *Sacred Texts of the World*. The volume is focused on scriptures from the various traditions, and the editors found space in the Hinduism section for excerpts from Rāmakṛṣṇa, but none for any version of the Rām story.

In 1984, John R. Hinnells edited the first edition of *A Handbook of Living Religions*. Although the pattern followed is similar to the previous textbooks, there are several references to the Rām *bhakti* tradition. Moreover, Simon Weightman who wrote the chapter on Hinduism acknowledges that devotion to Rām "found powerful expression in the *Ramacaritamanasa* of Tulsidas (sixteenth century), which is one of the most loved works in north India" (1984: 278). Another successful world religions textbook published in the decade was *The Sacred Paths* by Theodore M. Ludwig. Even though Sanskrit scriptures and Bengali contributions dominate the book's presentation of Hinduism, there are several lengthy segments dealing with devotion. Included in these are descriptions of Viṣṇu, Śiva, Kṛṣṇa, Durgā, and Kālī. Moreover, each is mentioned

numerous times throughout the Hinduism chapters. Reference to Rām comes instead in a segment on the Itihāsas, which contains a brief description of the Rām story but only alludes to the Rām *bhakti* tradition. He is listed as an incarnation of Viṣṇu and hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Caitanya, the *Gītā Govinda*, and even Svāmī Bhaktivedānta, the Bengali founder of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and his organization are discussed, as is Kabīr, but neither Tulsīdās nor the *Mānas*.

Along the lines of the volume edited by Smart and Hecht, another widely adopted anthology of sacred texts appeared in the 1990s. Robert E. Van Voorst's *Anthology of World Scriptures* has gone through five editions (1994, 1997, 2000, 2003, and 2005). Hindu texts in the first edition are limited to the Vedas, Upaniṣads, *Manusmṛti*, and the *Bhagavad Gītā*. In the second edition, the author adds a section on "Non-Sanskrit Sources" which consists of translations from Appar and from Tukārām. These remain the only non-Sanskrit offerings.

The decade of the 1990s was rich in new editions of previously published textbooks and anthologies on world religions. Among them, Richard C. Bush's second edition (1996) lists Tulsīdās along with Sūrdās and Tukārām as being among the greatest Hindu devotional poets. Yet, no further information is provided on any of the three, nor about the *Mānas*, although the author does include an excerpt from Kabīr. The second edition of Huston Smith's textbook was advertised as a "Completely Revised and Updated Edition" of his earlier work. In the Hinduism chapter, however, there are relatively few changes, and the only mention of Tulsīdās is the same brief account of his encounter with his wife that appeared in the earlier edition. There is still nothing from the *Mānas* and no Rām. Three years later, an illustrated edition was released. Although the material has been reworked, there are no changes with respect to the missing Rām tradition.

New textbooks published during the decade include *The Major Religions* by Patrick T. Burke, *Living Religions* by Mary Pat Fisher (two editions), *World Religions* by Warren Matthews (three editions), Michael Molloy's *Experiencing the World's Religions*, Solomon A. Nigosian's *World Faiths* (two editions), and *Patterns of Religion* edited by Roger Schmidt. All of them present the Sanskritic tradition and urban Bengali influences as if they were the central material for understanding Hinduism. Of the deities discussed in Burke's book, by far the most attention is given to Śiva, Viṣṇu, Kālī, and Kṛṣṇa while Rām is mentioned only briefly. Fisher's first edition has little more than a page on the Rām narrative, and one suggesting, "Hanuman the monkey becomes the hero of the story" (1991: 68). Her second edition adds a text box that offers a somewhat more detailed account of Hanumān and his role in the story. However, in subsequent editions the previously added text is deleted, there are no references to Tulsīdās

and the *Mānas*, and yet there is a newly added segment on the poetry of Kabīr and his influence on Sikhism. Molloy's textbook, too, follows the predictable approach. It includes the Brāhmaṇical tradition and the Bengali intellectuals, adding Aurobindo, Bhaktivedānta, and Yogānanda, but not Tulsīdās. In the section on devotional Hinduism, Śiva and Devī have the longest descriptions, followed by Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa. Rām and Brahmā are given the least amount of space. The *Rāmāyaṇa* is named in the paragraph on Rām, but not the *Mānas*.

Nigosian's second edition (1994) includes a section on Hindu deities, in which a large variety can be found, including Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa, Śiva, Varuṇa, Agni, and Mitra. Even Sūrya, Lālī, and Dhiṣaṇā (a regional fertility goddess) find a place. The text has a picture of Gaṇeśa. Yet there is no Rām. The third edition (2000) adds a paragraph on the *Rāmāyaṇa* as one of the epics. All of Matthews' editions have basically the same material. Although both Rām and Kṛṣṇa are listed as incarnations of Viṣṇu, the focus on Rām is as a prince and as the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, while Kṛṣṇa is called "Lord" and is "the Divine Child" (1991: 103). Schmidt includes a unit on "Poet-Saints in Vernacular Languages." Tulsīdās is listed along with Mirābāī, Sūrdās, and Ravidās. He is described as the author of a Hindi version of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. However, the focus of the section is on Caitanya and on Tukārām and the Marathi *bhakti* tradition. Bush, Smith, and Schmidt, then, are the only authors among those reviewed for this decade who acknowledge Tulsīdās, and none of them so much as mention the *Mānas* or the Rām *bhakti* tradition.

There have been nearly a dozen updated editions of existing works in the early years of the current decade. One of the few newly published textbooks that can be expected to attract a wide circulation is *World Religions Today* by John L. Esposito, Darrell J. Fasching, and Todd Lewis. Although much of the material is predictable, its strength is in its focus on current practices, rituals and festivals, *guru*-disciple relationships, and contemporary political issues. In the sections on deities, the longest is devoted to Śiva and the goddesses, the next longest to Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa, with Rām afforded the least attention. Nevertheless, there is occasional mention of Rām throughout the Hindu chapter, including reference to the Rām story, its television serialization in the late 1980s, and its role in the electoral politics of the Bharatiya Janata Party. Tulsīdās is named as a poet who "recomposed in Hindi" the Rām story (Lewis 2002: 290).

The world religion textbooks that seem to be generating the largest sales at present are the recent editions of textbooks written by Huston Smith, Mary Pat Fisher, Michael Molloy, and Lewis M. Hopfe. Collectively, they account for estimated sales of eighty thousand copies annually. It is reasonable to conclude that what they present has considerable influence in academia today with respect to the study of Hinduism. Two new editions (2002, 2005) of Molloy's text have

been released, both containing two added sentences in which Tulsidās and the *Mānas* make their appearance. Fisher and Hopfe both mention the Rām story, but neglect to mention Tulsidās, the *Mānas*, and the Rām *bhakti* tradition. Huston Smith, the perennially bestselling author, simply ignores the Rām tradition completely.

### CONCLUSION

Although the concern of this essay has been to document the absence of the basic features of the Rām tradition from nearly all of the most widely assigned world religion textbooks, it is important to note that a great many other significant aspects of Hinduism similarly find little or no place in the popular textbooks. For example, Kabīr's poetry and his influence on Sikhism are acknowledged in several textbooks, but the writings of Ravidās, Sūrdās, and Mīrābāī, all of which have had a great influence on devotionalism in northern India during the last several centuries, are typically left out. Except for occasional references to Tukārām, devotion to Pandharpur's Viṭṭhala and the whole range of Marathi *sant* tradition are seldom found. Central elements of religion in southern India, including devotion to Lord Vēṅkaṭēśvara, Murugaṅ, Ayyappaṅ, the Nāmasiddhānta tradition, the *Kamparāmāyaṅam*, and the poetry and writings of the Nāyaṅmārs or Tiruvaḷḷuvar, are absent. The Āḷvārs are named in only three of the textbooks. The vibrant Hindu diaspora, composed of several million Hindus living outside South Asia who honor the *Mānas*, is absent from all but two of the textbooks. The role of the *guru* and the ascetic orders in preserving and transmitting the practice of Hinduism throughout history are rarely reported.

The textbooks tend to present Brāhmaṅical-Sanskritic tradition as central and defining, despite the fact that access to it has been restricted to high castes that comprise a minority of the population. The religion of a regional elite captured the attention of scholarly studies during the colonial period and has continued to dominate the attention of those who view the tradition from outside. The cumulative error has been to take these beliefs and values to represent the values of people broadly, including members of lower castes, landless laborers and agriculturalists, and women. Even the internationally known Indian anthropologist M. N. Srinivas, a high-caste Hindu himself, admitted that his own expertise had lacunae that resulted from his position in the caste hierarchy. In a book that he wrote to sum up his finding from years of field research, he stated: "I must reiterate that what I have written...about the basic religious ideas of the villagers

is drawn from my experience of the 'touchable' Hindu castes. But I think that it is true of the Harijans also, though they are likely to regard with skepticism, if not reject, at least some parts of upper caste ideology and world-view" (Srinivas 1979: 319). His admission of a limited knowledge of the beliefs and practices of the majority of Hindus reveals the roots of the problems discussed in this review essay. Scholars from higher castes who follow the practices of their own communities too rarely associate with members of lower castes, except on a superficial level, and know little about them. Yet, high-caste scholars so often are the sources of information that ends up in textbooks.

Non-Sanskrit vernacular writings have provided the primary textual inspiration for many, if not most, Hindus over the centuries and down to today. These are texts such as the *Mānas*, the *Kamparāmāyaṇa*, the *Periyapurāṇam*, translations of Purāṇic stories, and the poetic offerings of devotional figures and their followers. Yet, they are largely ignored in world religion textbooks, and so the presentations of Hinduism contained in them are not only incomplete but misdirected and misleading also.

Along with the Brāhmaṇ-centric version of Hinduism in the textbooks is a Bengal-centric regional focus on urban intellectuals and movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although they are important, not least for their contributions to an anticolonial nationalist self-consciousness that was important for the freedom movement in India that led to independence, they are not so integral to the broader understanding of Hinduism that the world religion textbooks seek to present. If the parameters of Hinduism are delimited by the religion of the high castes and of urban Bengalis, then too many Indians get excluded without justification from counting as "Hindu." If, on the other hand, Hinduism should be thought to encompass religious practices and perspectives of the masses, then the narrow range of material that is presented in the textbooks does not adequately evoke or encompass Hinduism as actually lived by millions of people. The received frame of reference must be revised and expanded in order to avoid shortchanging both the Hindus and the Western students who seek to understand them with the assistance of world religion textbooks. Good scholarship, like good art, requires creativity and the exploration of new ground. Rām *bhakti* and the *Mānas* are crucial to an understanding of contemporary Hinduism.

Paul M. Harrison has discussed difficulties that are inherent in an attempt to rely upon a narrow selection of sacred texts while aspiring to understand a major religious tradition. His interpretive project involved Buddhism, but his insight applies to the study of Hinduism. Harrison summed up the problem in a telling image: "The study of noses, however hotly pursued, will never yield an accurate understanding of the entire face" (1978: 35). The lingering problem facing us is

that the Brāhmanical and Bengali traditions that have been presumed to be paradigmatic and are so faithfully represented in world religion textbooks by Western-educated scholars that dominate the education market may actually preclude achievement of a balanced appreciation of the wider range of inherited and contemporary religious assumptions, affirmations, and activities that characterize the religious life of millions of Hindus. Like one's nose, the received understanding of Hinduism reveals too little about what most Hindus believe, practice, and have in their hearts and souls.

### References Cited

- Ballou, Robert O., ed. 1939. *The Bible of the World*. New York: The Viking Press.
- Ballou, Robert O., ed. 1944. *The Portable World Bible*. New York: The Viking Press.
- Berry, Gerald L. 1947. *Religions of the World*. New York: Barnes & Noble.
- Besant, Annie. 1897. *Four Great Religions: Four Lectures Delivered on the Twenty-First Anniversary of the Theosophical Society at Adyar, Madras*. London: Theosophical Publication Society.
- Burke, T. Patrick. 1996. *The Major Religions: An Introduction with Texts*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Bush, Richard C., ed. 1982. *The Religious World: Communities of Faith*. New York: Macmillan.
- Carmody, John Tully and Denise Lardner Carmody. 1981. *Ways to the Center: An Introduction to World Religions*. Belmont: Wadsworth.
- Comstock, W. Richard, ed. 1971. *Religion and Man: An Introduction*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Converse, Hyla S. 1982. "Hinduism." In Richard C. Bush, ed., *The Religious World: Communities of Faith*, 53–114. New York: Macmillan.
- Eastman, Roger, ed. 1975. *The Ways of Religion*. San Francisco: Canfield Press.
- Ellwood, Robert S. 1976. *Many Peoples, Many Faiths: An Introduction to the Religious Life of Mankind*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Embree, Ainslie T. 1966. *The Hindu Tradition*. New York: Modern Library.
- Esposito, John L., Darrell J. Fasching, and Todd Lewis. 2002. *World Religions Today*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Fagley, Frederick L. 1936. *Outline of the Religions of Mankind*. Boston: The Pilgrim Press.
- Fellows, Ward J. 1979. *Religions East and West*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

- Fisher, Mary Pat. 1991. *Living Religions*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Grierson, G. A. 1893. "Notes on Tulsi Das." *Indian Antiquary* 22: 89.
- Growse, Frederic Salmon. 1883. *The Rāmāyana of Tulsi Dās. Translated from the Original Hindī*. Allahabad: Ram Narain Lal Beni Prasad.
- Halhed, Nathaniel Brassey. 2000 [1776]. *A Code of Gentoo Laws, or, Ordinances of the Pundits*. London: Routledge.
- Hardon, John. 1968 [1963]. *Religions of the World*. Westminster: Newman Press.
- Harrison, Paul M. 1978. "Buddhānsmṛti in the Pratyutpanna-Buddha-Saṃmukhā-vasthita-Samādhī-Sūtra." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 6, 1: 35–57.
- Hinnells, John R., ed. 1984. *A Handbook of Living Religions*. New York: Viking.
- Hopfe, Lewis M. 1976. *Religions of the World*. Beverly Hills: Glencoe Press.
- Hume, Robert Ernest. 1924. *The World's Living Religions; an Historical Sketch with Special Reference to Their Sacred Scriptures and in Comparison with Christianity*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Hutchison, John A. 1969. *Paths of Faith*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Lewis, Todd. 2002. "Hinduism: Myriad Paths to Salvation." In John L. Esposito, Darrell J. Fasching, and Todd Lewis, *World Religions Today*, 273–351. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ling, Trevor. 1968. *A History of Religions East and West*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Ludwig, Theodore M. 1989. *The Sacred Paths: Understanding the Religions of the World*. New York: Macmillan.
- Matthews, Warren. 1991. *World Religions*. St. Paul: West Publishing Company.
- Molloy, Michael. 1998. *Experiencing the World's Religions: Tradition, Challenge, and Change*. Mountain View: Mayfield Publishing Company.
- Muller-Ortega, Paul E. 1988. "Exploring Textbooks: Introductions to Hinduism." *Critical Review of Books in Religion* 1988, 61–87.
- Nigosian, S. A. 1990. *World Faiths*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Noss, David. 1999. *A History of the World's Religions*. 10th edition. Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall.
- Noss, John. 1949. *Man's Religions*. New York: Macmillan.
- Religious Systems of the World: A Contribution to the Study of Comparative Religion. A Collection of Addresses*. 1892 [1889]. London: S. Sonnenschein.
- Schmidt, Roger, ed. 1999. *Patterns of Religion*. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Schoeps, Hans Joachim. 1966 [1961]. *The Religions of Mankind* (trans. Richard and Clara Winston). Garden City: Doubleday.
- Smart, Ninian. 1960. *A Dialogue of Religions*. London: SCM Press.

- Smart, Ninian. 1969. *The Religious Experience of Mankind*. New York: Scribner.
- Smart, Ninian and Richard D. Hecht, eds. 1982. *Sacred Texts of the World: A Universal Anthology*. New York: Crossroad.
- Smith, Huston. 1958. *The Religions of Man*. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- Soper, Edmund David. 1921. *The Religions of Mankind*. New York: The Abingdon Press.
- Srinivas, M. N. 1979 [1976]. *The Remembered Village*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Trumpp, Ernst. 1877. *The Ādi Granth, or Holy Scriptures of the Sikhs, Translated from the Original Gurmukhī, with Introductory Essays*. London: W. H. Allen.
- Van Voorst, Robert E., ed. 1994. *Anthology of World Scriptures*. Belmont: Wadsworth.
- Weightman, Simon. 1984. "Hinduism." In John R. Hinnells, ed., *A Handbook of Living Religions*, 191–236. London: Penguin Books.
- Wilkins, Charles. 1785. *The Bhagvat-Geeta; or, Dialogues of Kreeshna and Arjoon, in Eighteen Lectures; with Notes. Translated from the Original in the Sanskreet*. London: Np.

**RAMDAS LAMB** is Associate Professor of Religion at the University of Hawaii. <ramdas@hawaii.edu>