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Orientalism and the Modern Myth of "Hinduism"

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Is there really a single ancient religion designated by the catch-all term 'Hinduism' or is the term merely a fairly recent Western origin? This paper examines the role played by Orientalist scholars in the construction of Western notions of 'Hinduism'. It is argued that the notion of 'Hinduism' as a single world religion is a Western construction, largely dependent upon the Christian presuppositions of the early Western Orientalists. However, the exclusion of Western Orientalists constitutes a failure to acknowledge the role played by key indigenous informants (mostly Indian) in the construction of modern notions of 'the Hindu religion'. To ignore the indigenous dimension of the invention of 'Hinduism' is to subject the subject from history and perpetuate the myth of the passive Oriental. The paper concludes with a discussion of the usefulness of the term 'Hinduism'.

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