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## INDIA

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Some Modern Religious Groups and Teachers

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# Indonesia

Hinduism in contemporary Indonesia often appears to resist the terms most familiar to historians of religion. The suit can be made to fit. But in practice the tradition itself is not always so readily defined with reference to important rituals, key dates, doctrines, texts, edicts, monuments, or great men. To be sure, recent years have seen all of these things, and quite a few others besides. Yet neither chronological narrative nor thematized survey will necessarily do justice to the complexities of the religious scene in present-day Indonesia. As in India itself, even the question of who counts as a Hindu is a matter of some contention. We find, for example, that the national census of 2010 reported approximately four million Hindus living in Indonesia; meanwhile the Ministry of Religion has put the number closer to ten million, and on at least one occasion the state-sponsored Indonesian Hindu Dharma Council (Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia) has claimed there to be as many as 18 million Hindus among the country's total population of some 240 million. What are the reasons for the discrepancy, and why might it matter?

To speak of Hinduism in modern Indonesia is to contemplate the outcome of a long history of transcultural interaction, emerging initially out of maritime → trade relations with the Indian subcontinent going back some two millennia (see Manguin *et al.*, 2011). The picture is complicated by ongoing contacts with China, the Middle East, and other parts of both insular and mainland Southeast Asia (see Andaya, 2008). It was against this cosmopolitan backdrop that the great imperial polities (e.g. Sriwijaya, Kediri, Majapahit) emerged during the 7th to 15th centuries CE (see Day, 2002), deploying the Indically inspired ideals of statecraft and ritual seen by many as making up the archipelago's classical culture. To this we must add the presence of Europeans, through four centuries of trade and intrigue, followed by colonial conquest and exploitation, but also local resistance and hard-fought struggles for self-determination (see Reid, 2011). Alongside such considerations of the *longue durée*, one must additionally take into account a series of more recent phenomena including the rise of new media, widespread modernization, and rapid economic growth. Arguably, our understanding

of contemporary Indonesian Hinduism depends as much on how we interpret these latter-day developments as it does on our knowledge of its historical forbears (Fox, 2011).

Here some care must be taken in distinguishing between two potentially overlapping frames of reference. From ancient monuments to television drama, much of Indonesian culture would be incomprehensible without reference to the local appropriation of broadly Indic ideals and motifs. Even the modern Islamic revival in Indonesia is shaped in part by its opposition to an Indically inspired vision of the archipelago's "heathen" past. However, it is important that we distinguish this history of sedimented practice – often seen as a sort of Hinduism *avant la lettre* – from a rather different, and equally important, history of efforts to articulate a coherent vision of Indonesian Hinduism on the part of Balinese and other Indonesian intellectuals (Picard, 2004). A certain blurring of boundaries between these two frames of reference has contributed to the difficulties in deciding who is a Hindu, and how many there are.

## Religion in Indonesia

Setting aside the question of precise numbers, we might begin by noting that Indonesia's Hindus are spread unevenly across an archipelago of some six thousand inhabited islands, spanning more than 5,000 km from east to west. Hinduism is the professed religion for the majority of those living on the island of Bali, and in certain parts of southern Sulawesi, Sumatra, and the mountainous regions of eastern Java (see contributions to Ramstedt, 2004). But Hindus generally make up a relatively small proportion of the country's total population – somewhere between 2% and 7.5%, depending on the accepted figure.

The Indonesian Constitution of 1945 (Article 29) provides for the protection of religious freedom; however, the language of this provision has been open to ongoing re-interpretation in the light of prevailing circumstance. We find, for instance, that Article 29 has recently been used to underwrite the extension of state recognition and support for Confucianism. But it has also been used

to justify a range of more repressive measures, such as the stipulation that all Indonesian citizens must register as adherents to one of the five (and now six) forms of religion that are officially recognized by the Ministry of Religion. The latter include state-sanctioned forms of Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and now Confucianism. This legislation dates to the era following the anti-Communist pogroms of 1965–1966, which ushered in 32 years of authoritarian rule under former president Suharto's New Order regime (1966–1998). As we shall see, the ensuing bureaucratization of religious adherence has had a profound effect on the formation of a modern Indonesian Hinduism.

## The Idea of Agama Hindu

From a legal perspective, to be Hindu in contemporary Indonesia is to adhere to a form of religion known as Agama Hindu. The term “*agama*” is itself derived from Sanskrit (*āgama*) and has been used in the archipelago for several centuries in various senses, most of which center on the idea of tradition as something passed down either scripturally or otherwise. Despite its broader associations in some circles (e.g. university programs, and the translation of writings in English and Arabic), modern Indonesian usage has tended to associate the term “*agama*” with the religions officially recognized by the state – such as Agama Islam, Agama Budha, Agama Katolik, and so on.

As taught in schools and disseminated on state television, Agama Hindu is cast as a moralistic and rationalized monotheism organized around the paired ideals of personal salvation and national development (Fox, 2011). Hindu schoolchildren are taught as part of the mandated curriculum to recite the *gāyatrīmantra*, to recall the names of important Hindu holidays and rites, and to recognize depictions of the Hindu deities as manifestations of Tuhan Yang Maha Ésa (“Lord God Almighty”). A life of piety and devotion is encouraged through tales of Hindu heroes and saints, as are the virtues of family life, industriousness, and care for the environment, all expressed in a broadly Sanskritic terminology. Schematized as a tripartite system of philosophy (*tattwa*), ethics (*susila*), and ritual (*upacara*), Hindu teachings (*ajaran*) are explicated with reference to a canon of sacred scripture (*kitab suci*) that includes not only Indic sources, such as the → Vedas, → Upaniṣads, and the

→ *Bhagavadgītā*, but also local treatises composed in Old Javanese (e.g. the *Sārasamuccaya* and *Sang Hyang Kamahāyanikan*).

Both the doctrinal and institutional character of Agama Hindu owes much to the circumstances out of which it arose, for which sentiments on the island of Bali in the early years of the new republic were of particular importance (Picard, 2011a). During the early to mid-1950s, it was a sense of their minority status in a newly independent Indonesia that drove certain among the urban intellectual elite to seek state recognition for their religion. It was feared that, without formal recognition, Balinese would be seen as backward tribalists who had “not yet” embraced a world religion; and they would consequently become targets for conversion at the hands of the country's larger and institutionally established Islamic and Christian communities.

Among the criteria for state recognition, the Ministry of Religion had stipulated a belief in one God, the testimony of a prophet, a body of legal doctrine, the possession of a holy text, and, significantly, a community of adherents that extended beyond the boundaries of a single ethnic group. Following a series unsuccessful attempts to fulfill these requirements, formal recognition for Hinduism was eventually granted in 1958, and shortly thereafter the newly formed Hindu Dharma Council set to work, with the assistance of the Ministry of Religion, to codify and disseminate a form of Hindu religiosity that was meant to be at once faithful to tradition, and at the same time commensurate with the modernizing imperatives of the developmentalist state.

In practice, the aims of the Balinese Hindu reformers entailed nothing short of a wholesale reorientation of Indonesian lives – calling for the transformation of everything from habits of domestic labor and procreation to ideas about history, theology, and relations with the dead. It would be inaccurate to describe the outcome as simply a displacement of traditional way of life by modern institutions and state ideology. Much of what we might describe as “village-level” practice often appears to carry on with little, if any, reference to the pronouncements of Hindu officialdom. Yet, the government's efforts have nonetheless had a wide-reaching effect on the lives of those who would come to recognize themselves as Indonesian Hindus. These changes have played out at multiple levels, not least of which include the ways in which people set about embodying

and cultivating ideals of community, personal agency, and the collective good.

## Hindu Community

The nature and composition of the Hindu community has been a point of enduring concern in Indonesia, as one might already have surmised from the discrepancy among official reports on population. The disagreement over numbers was arguably the product of several related factors, which include, *inter alia*, mass conversions to Hinduism among non-Balinese Indonesians, the growing influence of new religious movements from India, the regional devolution of political power following the demise of the New Order, the use of Hindu imagery in advertising cultural tourism, and local responses to the increasing prominence of Islam in Indonesian public life (see Howe, 2005).

Events in the late 1950s were crucial in setting the stage for these developments (Picard, 2011a). It may be recalled that, in order to qualify for state recognition and support from the Ministry of Religion, apologists for a nascent Agama Hindu needed to demonstrate that, among other things, their religion was not limited to a single ethnic group. For this reason it became important to be able to point to other groups, in other parts of the archipelago – such as the Tenggerese in east Java – who could also be said to be practicing a recognizably “Hindu” form of religion. This recognition of non-Balinese coreligionists was crucial to their petition for state support. But at the same time it set the precedent for widening the community, and so potentially undercutting the exclusivity of Balinese authority in administering matters Hindu.

The first significant movements in this direction came in the late 1960s, when a series of ethnic groups from other islands either converted *en masse* to Agama Hindu, or asked that their existing practices be recognized as deriving from Hindu tradition. Following the killings in 1965–1966, formal conversion among these groups helped to allay fears of being labeled atheist, and so potentially Communist. Further, given the legal requirement to register as an adherent to one of the officially recognized religions, it also helped them to avoid becoming targets for proselytization. Reflecting the growing number of Hindus living in various parts of the country, by the mid-

1980s the Hindu Dharma Council had branches in every Indonesian province (Ramstedt, 2004).

Despite their increasing numbers, the idea of a translocal “Hindu Community” (Umat Hindu) was something of a novelty for most of those it was meant to embrace. Far from embodying the ideals of a de-territorialized world religion, everyday practice among Indonesia’s growing number of Hindus had long been rooted in the specificity of place, as characterized by such things as dedicating offerings to one’s deified forebears, and to the intangible beings and forces of a given locale. The forms of solidarity embodied in these practices were less those of what B. Anderson (1983) famously called the “imagined community” of modern nationalism, and more the kind of particularist obligations described in the anthropological literature on Bali’s overlapping networks of temple congregations (*pamaksan*), ward assemblies (*banjar*), and irrigation societies (*subak*; see Hobart, 1979) – or, alternatively, the clan groups and land ties among the Karo Batak of north Sumatra (Ginting, 2004). These relations of but loosely calculated giving and receiving have been gradually transformed, if not always displaced, by the institutionalized cultivation of the Umat Hindu.

## Of Solidarity, Place and Person

The unity of this emerging community has not always come easily. Fault lines of caste and ethnicity, for example, have come to the fore in recent years following a series of events that eventually lead to a schism within the Indonesian Hindu Dharma Council itself. The central point of contention was that of leadership, and whether Balinese priests and others of high caste status would retain a privileged position within the organization’s governing bodies. Tensions had arguably been building for some time and reflected long-standing antagonisms already evident in debates among Balinese in the 1920s and 1930s (Picard, 2004). The divisions became particularly pronounced around the time of the council’s eighth national congress in Jakarta in 2001. This was to be the first national congress held in the new era of reform (*reformasi*) following the resignation of former president Suharto in May 1998 (Picard, 2011b). The demise of the New Order regime had brought hopes of widespread changes in governance, and more specifically the elimination of the

corruption and violent oppression that had stifled the lives of Indonesians for the past 32 years. In keeping with the spirit of reform, several among the regional (i.e. non-Balinese) delegations to the Hindu Dharma Council's national congress had called for a change in leadership.

This call for new leadership reflected the increasingly multi-ethnic character of the Hindu community. Since its inception in 1958, the council's governing bodies had been dominated not merely by Balinese, but more specifically by ordained Brahman priests and others of elevated caste. This was seen by many as a hindrance to the transparency and good governance sought within the broader call for national reform. A central point of contention was the status of those members of the council who were affiliated with various of the *sampradāya* (new religious movements) from South Asia (also known in Indonesia as *aliran kepercayaan*, or "streams of belief"), including Hare Krishna (→ ISKCON), → Sathya Sai Baba, and to a lesser extent the → Brahma Kumaris, and other groups of local origin. In the early 1990s, these groups had begun to attract a following in Indonesia, particularly among the growing upwardly mobile and urban middle class of Bali (see Howe, 2005). Among the attractions of these movements was an individualized style of devotion suited to the aspirations of educated and increasingly cosmopolitan Hindus. In many ways, the personal spirituality promulgated under the aegis of Agama Hindu through the 1970s and 1980s had paved the way for these developments. Moreover, with the rise of wage labor and urban living, a simplified devotional style of worship also offered the possibility of respite from the expense and burden of collective labor associated with long-established forms of ceremonial practice.

## The Good, Collective and Otherwise

Indonesian Hinduism would appear to be caught between two broad sets of ideals: on the one hand, an individualized spirituality promising happiness and salvation, and on the other, the security of tradition embodied in various forms of solidarity long fostered through collective ceremonial work. With specific reference to Bali, this may be seen at the local level on major feast days, such as *galungan* and *kuningan*, when every Hindu man, woman, and child is now called upon to

pray (*sembahyang*) at the major temples located in her or his village. This individual obligation marks a sharp disjuncture with earlier forms of ceremonial practice, in which a member of one's household would commonly be sent as a representative to deliver specified offerings, on behalf of the extended family, to a series of temples and shrines – themselves comprising the point of articulation for a corporate group of one kind or another. This act of collective donation served to maintain ongoing relationships of often hierarchical reciprocity between the household and the myriad overlapping networks in which it participated. It may be pointed out that traditional practices such as healing, sorcery, and spirit mediumship tend to center on a virtuoso performance carried out by a single adept (see H. Geertz & Togog, 2005) – so too does the priests' use of *mantra* and *mudra* to "complete" (*muput*) major rites and large temple ceremonies. However, such singular acts have traditionally been isolated – and, from the community's perspective, primarily instrumental – components of rites that are otherwise characterized by collective endeavor.

The question of who may officiate at such rites has also been a matter of some contention in recent years – and, once again, the central issue has been that of → caste (see Pitana, 1999). Both Balinese and at least some of Indonesia's other Hindu ethnic groups recognize a system of hierarchy variously patterned on the Indic ideal of the *caturvarṇa*. As in India, the model of four discrete caste groups is less a reflection of social reality than a means of judging and ordering the historical vicissitudes of power, prestige, and privilege. It is in this fashion that caste has figured in recent debates over who is qualified to complete certain key rites, such as those relating to death and the purification of the souls of the recently deceased. The latter is a precondition for the ancestral veneration practiced by many of Indonesia's Hindus, both Balinese and otherwise. Officiating at these rites is thought by some to be the exclusive privilege of the *padanda*, the consecrated high priests of Brahman descent. However, in recent years priests from other descent groups have claimed the right to complete these rites for their clients and congregations. In principle, their claim finds support in the official position of the Hindu Dharma Council, dating to 1968, according to which all members of the Hindu community are equally entitled to the requisite consecration. However, in practice, the situation has been rather more

complicated, in part due to the position of Brahman priests and others of high caste in the council's governing bodies. The competing claims ride on differing understandings of community and personal agency – one rooted in progressive ideals of equality, the other laying claim to the authority of tradition.

The prevalence of controversy might lead one to see contemporary Indonesian Hinduism as a tradition in crisis, buckling under the weight of globalization and rapid social change. In one sense this is no doubt the case. But crisis is not necessarily a sign of impending demise. The islands we now call Indonesia have a long history of engaging creatively with novel forms of language, religion, and polity. The outcome of this ongoing engagement has been variously described in terms of Indianization, Sanskritization, or Hinduization. While the adequacy of such terms may best be left an open question, what seems clear is the region's history of self-transformation through creative engagement with the outside world. There is no self-evident reason to assume that this history has come to an end.

(see also → Indonesia in vol. I.)

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