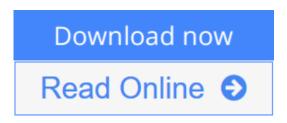# Unifying Hinduism: Philosophy and Identity in Indian Intellectual History (South Asia Across the Disciplines)

By Andrew Nicholson

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Some postcolonial theorists have argued that the idea of a single system of belief known as "Hinduism" is a creation of nineteenth-century British imperialists. Andrew J. Nicholson introduces another perspective: although the idea of a unified Hindu identity is not as ancient as many Hindus claim, it has its roots in the innovations of South Asian philosophy from the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries. Thinkers treated the philosophies of Vedanta, Samkhya, and Yoga and the deities Visnu, Siva, and Sakti as all belonging to a single system of belief and practice& mdash;rivers leading into the ocean of Brahman, the ultimate reality.

Drawing on the work of philosophers from late medieval Vedanta traditions, including Vijnanabhiksu, Madhava, and Madhusudana Sarasvati, Nicholson shows how thinkers portrayed Vedanta philosophy as the ultimate unifier of diverse belief systems. This late medieval project paved the way for later visionaries, such as Vivekenanda, Radhakrishnan, and Gandhi, whose teachings promoted the idea that all world religions belonged to a single spiritual unity. Nicholson revisits monism and dualism, theism and atheism, and orthodoxy and heterodoxy, and he critiques such formulas as "the six orthodox systems" that have worked their way into modern thinking about Indian philosophy.

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Editorial Review

Review

In this clear, analytical, well-documented, and well-argued book, Nicholson discusses the conflicts among the various systems of Hindu philosophy and the contributions of the late medieval and early modern thinkers in reconciling the systems and arriving at a unifying picture of Hinduism in Advaita Vedanta.

(*Choice*)

This path-breaking work is very helpful and a must read for scholars of Indian history, Hinduism and south Asian religious traditions.

(Vineeth Mathoor *Metapsychology*)

Nicholson has created a tour-de-force that puts India's premodern thinkers in conversation with its postmodern intellectuals.

(Christopher Key Chapple *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*)

In this marvelously clear, meticulously researched, and tightly argued book which promises to change the scholarly conversation on Hindu identity, Nicholson sets the record straight regarding the historical emergence of what is today widely known as Hinduism...

(Jeffery D. Long *Religious Studies Review*)

Given the enormous scope of its enquiry, the work is relatively concise, very accessible and therefore suitable for the advanced undergraduate or graduate classroom. More than this, it belongs on the bookshelf of anyone interested in the history, and historiography, of Indian philosophy.

(Reid Locklin *Sophia*)

Lucid and accessible, Andrew Nicholson's book offers an excellent model for South Asianists seeking to engage with the wider field of religious studies.

(*Journal of the Amer. Academy of Religion*)

Unifying Hinduism is an erudite, informative book.

(Kaif Mahmood *South Asian History and Culture*)

Review

Unifying Hinduism does much more than deal with the philosophy of Vijnanabhiksu, it questions in an intelligent and constructive manner how Indian philosophy has been studied in modern scholarship—and ways in which it has been done wrong.

(Johannes Bronkhorst, University of Lausanne, Switzerland)

Andrew J. Nicholson's courageous and challenging thesis is that processes of unification were at work in early modern India, particularly in the attempt by Vedanta philosophers to create hierarchies of philosophical schools, and these processes 'made possible the world religion later known by the name Hinduism.' *Unifying Hinduism* is a fluent, eminently readable, and absorbing study of a period in Indian intellectual history that fully deserves the attention it is now receiving.

(Jonardon Ganeri, University of Sussex)

About the Author

Andrew J. Nicholson is assistant professor of Hinduism and Indian intellectual history in the Department of Asian and Asian American Studies at Stony Brook University.

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