Jack Hawley, Barnard College, Columbia University

John Stratton Hawley is Ann Whitney Olin Professor of Religion at Barnard College, Columbia University. His recent publications include a revised edition of Songs of the Saints of India *(Oxford 2004, with Mark Juergensmeyer);*
Three Bhakti Voices: Mirabai, Surdas, and Kabir in Their Time and Ours
(Oxford 2005); and
Holy Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination
(Princeton 2005, co-edited with Kimberley Patton).

In 2003 I launched a course called "Hinduism Here," which benefited from an affiliation with The Pluralism Project founded by Diana Eck at Harvard. My goal was to help students explore religious institutions established by Hindus living in the greater New York area and to document them in a Web site that would be generally accessible. The course has been offered twice now, and the students' work is visible at www.barnard.edu/religion/hinduismhere . You can also access the material through The Pluralism Project's own Web site,
 www.pluralism.org
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In a class of this kind, vivid and open interactions with members of the communities being studied are essential. Especially since students were expected to produce text that would be publicly displayed, I took it as a cardinal commandment that members of the organizations with which they were interacting should also have their say. This meant, first of all, that the Web sites of the organizations themselves, if any such existed, would also be featured on ours. Second, we invited members of these communities to read the students' papers and respond to them if they chose to do so. This usually happened informally: participants' feedback was integrated into the papers themselves. Third, we planned the course so that it would culminate in a small conference to which members of the communities were eagerly invited and at which they spoke for themselves, often presenting perspectives different from those of the students. Finally, we invited representatives of the organizations under study to post any reactions on our course Web site.

In part because of this high level of engagement outside the classroom, however, it has also been very important for students to experience the classroom as a place where they can safely articulate their own ideas. Some of these ideas — perhaps evaluative, perhaps just questions and hypotheses — might not be ones the students would regard as appropriate for sharing with members of the communities they were studying. Many students in the course are Hindus themselves, yet that hardly makes them homogeneous or uncritical. Especially the first time around, there were huge arguments — often on points that the "Hindu Right" is eager to press — but that didn't compromise the safety of the classroom as a place where such arguments were expected to occur and didn't necessarily have to be solved.

What to do, then, when one of the organizations we were studying demanded entrance into the classroom space itself? The charge was essentially that students were being brainwashed, misled, and intimidated by their instructor — me.

This accusation was made by Rajiv Malhotra, the successful information technology entrepreneur who retired from his business involvements in 1994 to establish the Infinity Foundation. The Infinity Foundation describes itself high-mindedly as "making grants in the areas of compassion and wisdom," especially as these concern India and its civilization. At the same time, however, Malhotra also uses listservs, e-mails, and online forums such as www.sulekha.com to level vitriolic attacks against scholars whose work offends him, including Wendy Doniger, Jeffrey Kripal, Paul Courtright, and myself. (For details, see Hawley 2004.)

Malhotra has accused me in his Internet columns of being anti-Hindu; of steering all of my graduate students without exception toward Persian and Urdu — languages with Islamic overtones — and away from Sanskrit; and of being, in his words "white" — a person turned on by "a sort of voyeurism or subliminal conquest of the [non-white] other." Sanskrit, Malhotra explains on www.sulekha.com , "has been the traditional language for studying Indic religions." Speaking of me, Malhotra continues as follows: "Strategy: He hopes to train and deploy an army of desi sepoys equipped in the Persian–Urdu way of thinking, so that the next generation of Hinduism Studies scholars will be of that orientation." This charge is false. All the doctorate students with whom I have worked — without exception — have studied at least some Sanskrit; some are deeply proficient. Not all of them are studying Persian and Urdu, though I certainly encourage it where appropriate.

In 2003, when "Hinduism Here" was being offered for the first time, I felt it was our responsibility

to represent something of the range of religious expression possible for Hindus living in New York. Most of the sites I had in mind were religious communities in the obvious sense — Hindu temples — but community centers and educational foundations are also important players, especially those with a presence on the Internet. So I proposed to Rajiv Malhotra and his colleagues at the Infinity Foundation (which, being headquartered in Princeton, New Jersey, is part of the orbit of greater New York) that their foundation itself should be one of the sites where our students would go to work. I was pleased when they accepted, especially since Malhotra's work had made it clear that university classrooms like ours were also places where Hinduism was being "produced" in ways that matter. The two-way mirror seemed just right.

Three students availed themselves of the chance to explore the Infinity Foundation — a master's student who has gone on to pursue a doctorate in religious studies, a doctoral student of Indian background in mechanical engineering, and an undergraduate majoring in Middle East and Asian languages and cultures at Columbia College. They began by traveling to Princeton as a group, and the first two, both men, largely accepted the foundation's idea of how its work could most appropriately be represented. The third, however, did not. This quiet, determined woman, an avid student of Foucault & Co., felt that greater independence was required if one was to understand how the power/knowledge syndrome might be at work here. As the course progressed, she gathered her thoughts in an excellent paper called "The Infinity Foundation and the Western Academy," and like others on her team, she agreed to show it to the Infinity Foundation along the way.

Not everything she said pleased Rajiv Malhotra. She began her first draft by describing what it was like to visit his home in Princeton — the foundation's office had been constructed in a separate building out back — and see what his wealth had made possible. That set off a series of alarms. How did she know how much money he made? She "never even asked us about any financials," he fumed in an April 23, 2003, e-mail communication to me. How could she say he was interested in exercising a certain form of power in the realm of knowledge? How could I allow such shoddy work? Actually, I was reading her draft at the same time the Infinity Foundation people were and had also asked her to spell out the basis of her claims. But as the Infinity Foundation's posting on the course Web site will show, they persisted in thinking that I was trying to dictate every word.

I believe the root issue was this student had said something about Malhotra's evident power base, in the form of his financial assets. Here was someone who needed to be a victorious warrior but at the same time a victim — a David, not a Goliath — and he didn't sound victim enough in her reporting. In response to both Malhotra's reactions and mine, she did reconsider her initial judgments as she shaped the essay into its final form, but she never gave up her critical frame, her focus on the connection between knowledge and power, not just in the case of the academy but also where the Infinity Foundation was concerned. One can see that in what

she posted on the course Web site, and she was able to be even more candid in the version she submitted for internal consumption — for my eyes only, and hers.

The Infinity Foundation's objections to this paper were only part of a larger picture. They didn't like the idea of the course at all. Interested readers can review the full range of their objections by consulting what Krishnan Ramaswamy says by way of "Challenges to the Course" on the course Web site. But that kind of formal rebuttal seemed insufficient. Rajiv Malhotra made it clear that he wanted to visit the class personally. I discussed this with the students and they agreed, some with considerable reluctance.

When certain of our PhD students, especially those from Hindu backgrounds, caught wind of this, they were appalled. Was it not wrong to lend an air of academic credibility to a person and an organization they saw as overbearing, anti-academic, and most of all Hindu chauvinist? I saw their point, but persisted in thinking the greater danger would be to seem unwilling to receive them. I agreed with Malhotra that the old anthropological model of "fieldwork" with its "informants" left a lot to be desired: the field — if ever it was a field — has to be able to talk back to the city, especially in a course so city-based.

Sure enough, there were plenty of fireworks when Malhotra showed up in class, and it was interesting to see that he didn't come alone. He brought along two surprise guests, one an academic, the other a frequent reporter on "anti-Hindu" aspects of conferences held at places like Columbia. The numbers grew for other reasons, too. A researcher who had worked with one of our students on a yoga project asked to come, and so did one of our graduate students. She ended up becoming involved in a heated e-mail correspondence with Malhotra, and that generated further ripples of its own.

Would I do it all over again? Certainly. But I have learned something along the way. There is a real tension between the course's two goals — public service (student research published on a Web site) and intellectual formation (the shaping of that research through shared readings and classroom interchange). Both deserve their due. Organizations and communities that agree to play host to our students have a right to be represented publicly in ways that are palatable to their members, especially if they do not have the resources to mount Web sites themselves. (This is hardly the case for the Infinity Foundation, of course: its Web presence is massive, especially if you add in Malhotra's regular postings on www.sulekha.com .) On the other side of the ledger, students deserve a classroom environment that allows them to think for themselves without fear of intimidation. Nor should they feel their intellectual options narrowed by the need always to protect the groups they are studying.

To keep these public and private goals distinct, I emended the course requirements the second time I taught it. I created a new rubric on the Web site called "student portraits" — shorter statements about the groups they were studying than their term papers would be — and I explicitly required that they be discussed with the groups themselves. If in addition students wanted their longer papers to be considered for Web posting, I was glad to encourage that, but not if it meant the students felt they had to pull their punches. They had to be free to think, even if it meant that they did so strictly in-house. If they wanted to produce a separate, sanitized version for the Web, that was fine, and for most students there was nothing sensitive to be deleted in the first place. But I didn't want to publish on the Web anything that might seem offensive to the communities and organizations that had extended us their hospitality — not unless the students could make a compelling case that public criticism of this sort needed to be made. In any case, I reserved the right to exercise my own editorial control (subject, of course, to the authors' approval) and the organization's right to respond remained just that.

In saying all this, I have emphasized the distinction between public and private space, but I want to close by reporting that some of the most productive exchanges occurred on the line between the two, especially in the context of our course conference. One example comes vividly to mind. It concerned caste. Rajiv Malhotra has joined many other Indian Americans — and scholars too — in trying to get their fellow countrymen to see India through some other lens than that of "the caste system." He argues that caste has no place in a discussion of Hinduism on two grounds — first, because to talk of caste is to talk sociology, not religion; and second, because there was never any such thing as caste in the first place. It's just a colonial misperception, a European invention. I don't entirely accept either point, but that's neither here nor there.

Caste came up at our conference in presentations about the Ravidas Sabha of Queens, since its members come primarily from the "lower" echelons of Indian society as ranked by caste. Responding to this, some of the young men who'd come from the Ravidas Sabha spoke movingly about their struggles against caste prejudice, sometimes in rather hesitant English. They were quickly taken to task by Infinity Foundation associates and sympathizers: "Don't you know there is no such thing as caste? You should get this out of your thinking." As for the Ravidasis, they had lived with this thing called caste, and no one was going to tell them they hadn't.

I was proud that our course made this sort of exchange possible, and made it safe for both sides. These groups, vastly different in background and perspective, were evidently encountering each other for the first time. They went at it with great energy, not just while I tried to moderate but on their own as soon as there was a break in the program. Their fundamental disagreement made it impossible to go on thinking that the great divisions fell squarely between

"the academy" and "the community," between outsiders and insiders. After all, who's inside? That's what the Ravidas is had been struggling with for centuries.

Every step we took in "Hinduism Here" revealed that things are more complex, more interesting, and more porous than we might have thought. Some of this porousness means that holes have to be plugged and dikes built. Students have to have a place to talk and communities have the right to self-representation. But for the rest, porousness is a very good thing.

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