Introduction

In the tranquility of a small Brahmin village on the outskirts of Tirunelveli in southern Tamil Nadu, past and present collide fortuitously for the twenty-first-century observer. This village, or *agrahāra,* granted by Madurai's chieftain Tirumalai Nāyaka to the illustrious poet-intellectual Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita in the seventeenth century—or so the story goes—remains in the possession of the scholar's modern-day descendants. Still treasured as the true ancestral home of a family of Chennai businessmen and engineers, the village of Palamadai is repopulated annually for the calendrical celebrations of the life of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita: the anniversaries of his birth (*jayantī*) and death (*ārādhanā*). Although nearly four hundred years have elapsed since Nīlakaṇṭha himself graced the village's single street and worshipped the goddess Maṅgalanāyakī in its local temple, the past lives on through his descendants in more ways than one—not least of which are certain fundamental concepts about religion.

While engrossed in observing the Vedic recitation (*pārāyaṇa*) staged in honor of Nīlakaṇṭha's *ārādhanā* in January of 2011, I chanced to hear word from the family's elder, P. Subrahmanyan,[1] of a Western visitor who had received a particularly warm welcome during a previous season of festivities. This young researcher, I was told, was truly accepted as one of the family, and participated actively in all religious observances for the duration of his stay in the village—because, quite simply, this person was a Śaiva, a devotee of the Hindu god Śiva, and was wholeheartedly accepted as such by the community. Having received Śaiva *dīkṣā,* or "initiation," in his home country, he was able to recite without prompting the Lalitāsahasranāma, a hymn popular among the family, and fluently navigated the codes of conduct a

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FIGURE 1. The Śaṅkarācārya Maṭha in Palamadai, outside of Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu. This branch monastery of the Sringeri Śaṅkarācārya lineage was commissioned in the 1990s by descendants of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita. Jagadguru Bhāratī Tīrtha personally visited the village to perform the installation of the *maṭha*. The family proudly displays photos of the Jagadguru visiting the house Nīlakaṇṭha himself is believed to have inhabited in Palamadai.

Śaiva initiate would be expected to observe. Curious to learn more, I inquired of Dr. Subrahmanyan, "Then, do you believe this person has become a Hindu?" "Oh no," cautioned the elderly Brahmin. "There is no need for someone from the West to become a Hindu. Our teacher, Jagadguru Bhāratī Tīrtha, has shown that everyone must practice the religion they have learned in their home country. They can remain Christian and still follow the same path as we Hindus do."

Implicit in this seemingly self-contradictory message we can perceive a confluence of two distinct systems of categorization. Beneath the translucent veil of Hindu universalism accumulated in recent centuries, an older model of religious identity remains equally definitive of social interactions for present-day inhabitants of Palamadai. To be a Hindu, Dr. Subrahmanyan suggests, requires Indian heritage and birth in a Hindu family, an assumption as old as V. D. Savarkar's nationalist envisioning of Hindutva—a state of being that inheres in its members and cannot be extrinsically cultivated. And yet, to be a Śaiva is something altogether. A Śaiva, one may glean, is an individual who has adopted a particular set of ritual practices, beliefs, and cultural values suitable for participation in a Śaiva

religious community. Becoming a Śaiva, however, is by no means categorically dependent on one's identity as a Hindu, according to this model. Rather, the stark juxtaposition of these two terms, *Hindu* and *Śaiva,* calls attention to the categorical drift that the centuries have witnessed within the religion that we—contemporary scholars as well as practitioners—now call Hinduism.

Much has been written in recent years about the historical origins of the category of Hinduism. The Hindu religion itself has been postulated both as a construct of the colonial enterprise and as an organic whole that emerged gradually from within the Indic cultural system through systematic reflection and encounter with dialogical Others. Advocates of the first position have argued that the very idea of Hinduism was fabricated in the service of foreign interests, whether by European Orientalists or the British colonial regime.[2] On the other hand, critics of this constructionist argument have sought to locate a moment of juncture before colonial intervention at which the very idea of a unitary religion crystallized in the Indian cultural *imaginaire.*[3] The birth story of Hinduism, in other words, has been told and retold in scholarly literature of the past decades. What all accounts share, however, is the postulate that by some means or other Hinduism has been transformed into a unitary religion, in which any diversity is necessarily eclipsed by the internal cohesion of the concept itself. By attempting to narrate a genealogy of the present, however, scholarship has perhaps gone too far in erasing the variegated textures of the Indic religious landscape, layers of difference that persist unabated to this day beneath the guise of Hindu unity.

Indeed, among the definitions of Hinduism proffered by practitioners themselves, the most celebrated today are those that elevate unity over diversity— quintessentially, perhaps, and most notoriously, the definition put forth by V. D. Savarkar in his monograph *Hindutva,* first published in 1923. In Savarkar's vision, Hinduism, as a unified religion, is coterminous with the geographical boundaries of the emerging nation-state that would soon become India, the cultural unity of the concept of Hindutva thus prefiguring the anticipated political unity of the Indian nation-state. Fewer are aware, however, of a competing definition of the Hindu religion offered by Savarkar's contemporary and compatriot in the struggle for Indian independence, Balagangadhar "Lokamanya" Tilak, publicized during a speech at the 1892 Gaṇapati Festival in Pune. In the form of a memorable Sanskrit verse, Tilak defines Hinduism as follows:

> Acceptance of the ultimate validity of the Vedas, multiplicity of ways
>   of worship
> And lack of restriction on the divinity that one may worship:
> This is the definition of the [Hindu] religion.[4]

A mere three decades, it seems, made a substantive impact on the self-reflexive definition of Hinduism articulated from within the tradition. What stands out in Tilak's definition, for those who read Savarkar's Hindutva as an inevitable prologue

to the rise of an exclusivist Hindu fundamentalism, is the apparent diversity that Tilak locates in what many twentieth-century and contemporary Hindus experience as a unified religion. Our attention is drawn to the phrases "multiplicity" and "lack of restriction," as Tilak underscores the seemingly obvious fact that under the umbrella of Hinduism lies the coexistence of a diverse array of communities, each with its own chosen deity and mode of worship. What are we to make of Tilak's emphasis not on the unity but on the diversity of Hinduism? In fact, when we consult the historical archive of precolonial Indian religion, we find a great deal of precedent for Tilak's claim that the unity of Hinduism must be predicated upon its internal diversity. Over the centuries immediately preceding the rise of British colonialism, early modern south India, for instance, witnessed the crystallization of a number of discrete Hindu lineages and devotional communities. The boundaries between these communities, indeed, were deliberately circumscribed through the efforts of public theologians, each of whom was committed to defending the authenticity of his sectarian lineage as the pinnacle of an overarching Hindu orthodoxy.

With this book, I set out to complicate just what it means for us to speak of the unity of Hinduism—and, specifically, what it meant to be a Hindu on the eve of British colonialism. At whatever stage a unitary concept of Hinduism may be said to have emerged—and this subject has generated no small amount of controversy—the diverse religious communities we describe collectively as Hinduism have each preserved a fundamental independence. This independence comes to light, historically, both in the social institutions that govern their practice and in the religious identities embodied through participation in these traditions. In short, Hinduism has historically exhibited a marked tendency toward pluralism—and plurality—a trend that did *not* reverse in the centuries before colonialism but, rather, accelerated through the development of precolonial Indic early modernity. This is not to say, obviously, that diversity is absent in other world religions; nor is it to invalidate the usage of *Hinduism* by practitioners and observers, past and present, to describe genuine commonalities in doctrine and practice. And yet, to be a Śaiva or Vaiṣṇava in early modern India, to be a Mādhva, Smārta, Gauḍīya, or a member of any other such community, constituted the core of one's religious identity with a nuance that inclusivist categories such as *āstika* (orthodox) or Vaidika (Vedic) failed to capture. Even today, when a unified Hinduism is experienced as a living reality, Hindus such as the residents of Palamadai maintain a deliberate awareness of their simultaneous identity as Śaivas—and more specifically, Smārta-Śaivas affiliated with the linage of the Sringeri Śaṅkarācāryas, devotees of the current Jagadguru Bhāratī Tīrtha Svāmigaḷ.

Nevertheless, the bare fact of Hinduism's plurality before British intervention and the nationalist movement takes us only so far in understanding how Hindu identities were experienced, performed, and re-created in the religious ecosystem of early modern South Asia, a region in the midst of rapid social and economic

transformation largely unattributable to the beneficence of the European world system. In our received scholarly narrative, succinctly, Hindu difference has been read though the lens of the term *sectarianism.* In the academic study of Hinduism, *sectarianism,* by and large, signifies nothing more than "Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism"—the worship of so-called sectarian deities. And yet, to participate in Śaiva or Vaiṣṇava religiosity, in this reading, militates against the unity of a presumed Brahminical hegemony. This metanarrative resonates with the popular use of *sectarianism* to connote deviance from the mainstream, thus, in the context of Hinduism, translating devotion as dissent, and community as a potential precursor to communalism. One of my primary aims in this book, in this light, is to excavate the emic genealogy of Hindu sectarianism—a mode of religious engagement, I contend, that did not fragment a primordial whole but was the primary vehicle for the earliest expressions of Hinduism as a unified religion. One could not be a Hindu in late-medieval or early modern India without first and foremost being something else, without participating in a community governed by the religious institutions and networks that formed the backbone of a broader religious public.

Hindu sectarianism, as we will see, is by no means equivalent to Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism writ large on India's historical stage. Not all of Śaivism was equally sectarian, nor was all of Śaivism's history equally Hindu. By the middle of the first millennium of the Common Era, Śaivism had crystallized as a functionally distinct religion[5]—perhaps even, as Alexis Sanderson has argued, the dominant religion of the greater Sanskrit Cosmopolis. It was only by the late-medieval period that Śaivism began to represent itself as a "sect" of a larger orthodoxy we might call Hinduism. Regarding this period, we can begin to speak, with a certain trepidation, of such a phenomenon as Hindu sectarianism, as the very phrase presumes the preexistence of a larger whole—namely, Hinduism itself. Historically speaking, emic categories such as *āstika* (believers) and Vaidika (Vedic), terms that isolate a purported orthodoxy from heterodox religious movements, achieved a newfound popularity concurrently with terms for individual sectarian communities, such as *sampradāya.* Certainly, taxonomies of "orthodox" (*āstika*) and "heterodox" (*nāstika*) sects came to occupy the theologians of medieval and early modern India, whose doxographical treatises may suggest a similar conceptual understanding of the relationship between sect and religion, as Andrew Nicholson has argued in his 2010 monograph, *Unifying Hinduism.* And yet the seeming unity that late-medieval theologians located in Hindu scripture—Vedas, Upaniṣads, Purāṇas, and the six *darśana*s, or schools of philosophy—is thoroughly permeated by difference. Purāṇas, for instance, were understood as intrinsically sectarian—Śaiva or Vaiṣṇava—and were interpreted in light of the Āgamas and sectarian Dharmaśāstras, scriptures accepted only by particular sectarian traditions.

Indeed, within the emerging *āstika,* or "orthodox," fold, not all Hindu *darśana*s were accorded equal authority. By the sixteenth century, the regnant discipline of Hindu theology was without question Vedānta, the traditional exegesis of the

Upaniṣads as modeled after the Brahmasūtras of Gauḍapāda. Formerly a philosophical tradition relegated to the margin of Indian intellectual life, Vedānta experienced a dramatic renaissance in south India during the late-medieval and early modern periods, but entered the public domain as a discourse not of consensus but of contention. In fact, sectarian theologians from disparate Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava communities differentiated themselves primarily by way of their trademarked exegetical interpretation of the Brahmasūtras, demarcating their identity on the basis of ontological doctrine, whether "dualist," "nondualist," or some variation thereof. Indeed, a novel commentary on the Brahmasūtras had become the ticket to competing in the marketplace of emerging Hindu sectarian communities. Nevertheless, there was no such thing as an unequivocally Hindu Vedānta: the discipline was fragmented at the core along sectarian lines, divisions that simultaneously correlated philosophical ontology with religious identity.

The story this book tells, then, is not only one of theology and doctrine but also one of communities and publics: the story of how a particular Hindu sectarian community—namely, the Smārta-Śaivas of the Tamil country—acquired its distinctive religious culture. More broadly speaking, however, to delineate what constitutes a sectarian community in early modern south India requires a theorization of how new religious identities come to be shared and remembered across time and space: in other words a theory of south India's early modern publics. Such publics, indeed—and religious publics no less—were invariably multiple, overlaid with one another in the urban space of thriving temple towns and connected with each other across space by networks of patronage and pilgrimage. Religious publics crystallized, by and large, around the charismatic authority of renunciant preceptors, pontiffs of monastic lineages with branch communities spanning the southern half of the subcontinent and often beyond. And yet the modes of religious identity cultivated by their devotees were promulgated, first and foremost, by a discourse we can aptly describe as public theology, circulated through the writings of major sectarian intellectuals who sought both to cultivate common bonds of devotion and to foster shared modes of public engagement that visibly demarcated the boundaries between distinct sectarian communities. As a result, fashioned through reciprocal dialogue and polemic, sectarian communities functioned as independent public spheres, cultivating, in other words, a pluralistic religious landscape that mediated conflict through independent coexistence.

HINDU SECTARIANISM: A EUROPEAN INVENTION?

Sectarianism is a term that has been firmly ingrained in Western scholarly literature on Hinduism for more than a century—and with a definition that, at best, may seem peculiarly idiosyncratic and, at worst, dangerously misleading. In contemporary parlance outside the discipline, *sectarianism* most often connotes violence and

aggression, leading many sociologists and twentieth-century historians to treat *sectarianism* as a self-evident synonym for *communalism.* Historians of religion, upon mention of the term *sect,* may gravitate toward an invocation of the work of Ernst Troeltsch, who, drawing on Max Weber, proposed the distinction between *church* and *sect* foundational to our use of the latter term in the Western context.[6] According to Troeltsch, a church, the institutional foundation of a parent religion, represents the conservative establishment of a particular religion, imbricated with deep-rooted ties to political power and an elite social constituency. A sect, on the other hand, Troeltsch defines as a breakaway fragment of a parent religion, a small-scale movement designed as a reformation or a protest of social stagnancy in the religious mainstream, often catering to the needs of socially disadvantaged or marginalized populations. Such a definition of *sect* may prove appealing to scholars of bhakti, or devotional Hinduism, who narrate bhakti unproblematically as a religious movement that fostered populist resistance against the so-called Brahminical mainstream, as saints of all social backgrounds were revered for their charismatic authority.[7] The majority of scholarship on Hinduism, however, makes use of the term *sectarianism* in a much more restricted, and indeed peculiar, vein—quite simply, as a stand-in for the compound "Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism," a form of Hinduism that grounds itself in the worship of a particular deity.

How can we account for such an omnipresence of the term *sectarianism* in this idiosyncratic usage, to which scholars adhere unfailingly despite the connotations of violence and incivility that its popular meanings may inspire? The very classification of the core divisions of Hinduism as sects, according to this definition, runs afoul of an insoluble historical problem: namely, the assumption that a unified Brahminical Hindu "church" has always existed, under the shadow of which protest movements, from early Buddhism to the anticaste protests of medieval Maharashtra,[8] strove to assert their independence. Indeed, a perusal of the archive of Orientalist scholarship on Indian religions confirms that Hindu sectarianism, as a scholarly category, was born from the well-documented alliance of European philology and the colonial state apparatus, filtered in the process through Christian theological categories. This very usage of Hindu sectarianism seems to have been first articulated by Sir Monier Monier-Williams, Oxford's Boden Professor of Sanskrit, in his monograph *Brahmanism and Hinduism* (1891), with negligible variation from its contemporary manifestation. As Monier-Williams writes, "What then is the present idea implied by Hindu Sectarianism? It is clear from what has been already stated that every Hindu creed ought to be regarded as unorthodox which exalts favorite personal deities to the position of the one eternal, self-existing Spirit (Ātman or Brahma), in contravention of the dogma that even the highest divine personalities are finite beings destined ultimately to be absorbed into that one finite Spirit. Of course it must be understood that when Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism deny this dogma they offend against orthodoxy."[9]

What, then, is the problem with the worship of Viṣṇu or Śiva as the cornerstone of a Hindu's religious identity? Hindu sectarianism, in Monier-Williams's estimation, constitutes a seditious—or even malignant—threat to a primordial unity of a religion he calls "Brāhmanism": "Hindu sectarianism is something more than the mere exclusive worship of a personal god. It implies more or less direct opposition to the orthodox philosophy of Brāhmanism." Rife with the rhetoric of a neo-Vedānta that would privilege a monistic reading of the Upaniṣads as the unchanging essence of Indian religion, Monier-Williams's model foregrounds unity over diversity, reducing in the process the rich variation in Hindu religious identity to a discordant threat to the legacy of India's golden age. Moreover, that Monier-William's usage was consonant with the Christian theology of his day, intriguingly enough, is surreptitiously revealed in the very same monograph. In Calcutta in 1883, Monier-Williams tells us, the Indian Christian convert Keshab Chandar Sen publicly disseminated a decree of the Bishop of Exeter, his 1881 New Dispensation, which included the following pointed claim: "Thus saith the Lord—Sectarianism is an abomination onto Me, and unbrotherliness I will not tolerate."

Our usage of the term *sectarianism,* it would appear, in effect not only reproduces the rationale of Orientalist polemic but also encodes a theological worldview distinctly foreign to Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism in their lived reality. It is perhaps no surprise that, at a moment when the very concept of world religions itself was just beginning to crystallize in the Western cultural imaginary,[10] Orientalist philology embarked on a quest to recover the historical unity of an unadulterated Brahmanism. Indeed, over the preceding two centuries, European missionaries and observers in south India, as William Sweetman (2003) has demonstrated, were utterly unaware of such a concept as a unified Hinduism, identifying Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism as distinct religious communities. Roberto de Nobili and Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg, in effect observing an India considerably less conditioned by European categories, arrived quite naturally at a crucial insight that escaped even the painstaking philology of Sir Monier Monier-Williams: namely, that Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism, since at least the early second millennium, had been by no means socially marginal forces, subaltern shadows of a Brahminical mainstream. Indeed, writing in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Tamil country, de Nobili, Ziegenbalg, and their contemporaries would have to have been willfully blind not to observe that public life in early modern south India had been functionally segmented along the lines of distinct religious communities.

From within Hindu sectarian institutions themselves, likewise, our inscriptional record reveals that by the sixteenth century, Hindu religiosity was fundamentally mediated by the boundaries of sectarian identity. In 1533, for instance, in the course of renewing his endowments to the major religious sites of south India, Acyutadevarāya of Vijayanagara set forth an explicit proclamation that imperial grants to two of Kanchipuram's most important temple complexes ought to be

equalized. The direct intervention of the emperor of Vijayanagara, one might surmise, ought to have resolved this patronage dispute in no uncertain terms. Nevertheless, his vassal, Sāḷuva Nāyaka, taking advantage of his own administrative control over temple donations in the region, reapportioned a greater percentage of the endowment to the temple of his choice. When this misappropriation of funds was brought to light, Acyutadevarāya attempted to remove any ambiguity in his stance by inscribing his decree in stone on the temple walls as a visible reminder to all temple officiants and onlookers.[11] The conflict, as it turns out, stemmed directly from the polarized sectarian affiliations of the temples in question: dedicated to Varadarāja, in one case, and Ekāmranātha, in the other—regional strongholds of Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva devotionalism, neighbors and chief rivals in one of south India's most active and diverse temple towns.

These traces of competition for material resources and royal sanction indicate a deeper and more pervasive fault line underlying both the social and the intellectual dynamics of early modern south India—that is, sectarian competition, particularly between Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava adherents of prominent monastic lineages. During Cōḻa rule some centuries earlier, the Tamil South had already adapted to an economic structure in which the temple served as a primary node of economic distribution and a focal point for political authority. This pattern of social organization attained a new prominence under Vijayanagara and Nāyaka rule, as temples developed into megatemples, and monastic institutions began to hold a larger share of both the economic and the symbolic capital circulated by temple complexes. Monastic lineages that enjoyed heightened prestige during this period included regional "vernacular" traditions such as the Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta as well as multiregional Sanskritic traditions, such as the Mādhvas and Śrīvaiṣṇavas, whose branch outposts in Kanchipuram, Kumbakonam, and other Tamil temple towns were connected to broader networks spanning the southern half of the subcontinent. Often we find that these lineages staked their claims to authority in major temple complexes quite visibly by enshrining the spiritual and philosophical accomplishments of their most renowned adepts directly on temple walls.

At the same time, the systemwide centrality of these monastic lineages accompanied, and exacerbated, a marked increase in intersectarian debate in the intellectual sphere. Leading intellectual figures of the period began not only to define themselves explicitly by their sectarian identity but also to actively contribute to the demarcation of community boundaries, thus exerting a tangible influence on the extratextual shape of south Indian society. One of the best-known examples on the Śaiva side, for instance, is Appayya Dīkṣita (ca. 1520–1592), renowned for tireless efforts to propagate a Vedānta strictly for Śaivas—specifically, the Śaiva Advaita philosophy of Śrīkaṇṭha's commentary on the Brahmasūtras. In fact, Appayya was sufficiently motivated to promulgate his own interpretation of Śaiva Advaita philosophy that he founded an academy in his home village of

Adaiyappalam for that express purpose and composed numerous didactic *stotras* to circulate among his pupils.[12] Visitors to Adaiyappalam today will find that Appayya immortalized his own desire to propagate the Śaiva Advaita doctrine on the walls of the Kālakaṇṭheśvara Temple, a temple he commissioned as a setting for such instruction:

> Raṅgarāja Makhin, the instructor to the learned, performer of the
>   Viśvajit sacrifice,
> And son of a performer of the great Sarvatomukha sacrifice,
> Had a son renowned as Appayya Dīkṣita, devotee of the Moon-
>   crested Lord [Śiva].
>
> On account of him the fame of the illustrious king Cinnabomma,
>   breaker of the power of kings, was undefeated [*avyāhata*].
> He excavated Śrīkaṇṭha's commentary to establish the doctrine of
>   Paramaśiva.
> He, Lord Appayya Dīkṣita, son of the illustrious Raṅgarāja, has
>   created
> This most lofty and sublime abode of the Lord of Kālakaṇṭha,
>   resplendent like the white mountain.[13]

This opening pair of Sanskrit *praśasti* verses frames Appayya Dīkṣita's life and scholarship in explicitly sectarian terms. Ostensibly author of a hundred works, many of them groundbreaking treatises in Mīmāṃsā (Vedic exegesis) and poetics, including the "best-selling" textbook on rhetoric, the *Kuvalayānanda,* Appayya is remembered by his community almost exclusively for his Śaiva theology—a reputation he himself appears to have fostered through this auto-eulogistic *praśasti*. Rather than literary theorist, or even "polymath" (*sarvatantrasvatantra*), Appayya's public persona is that of reviver of the doctrine of Śrīkaṇṭha, foremost among the devotees of Śiva. This Sanskrit verse, likewise, is followed by a donative inscription in Maṇipravāḷam documenting that Cinnabomma had agreed to sponsor five hundred scholars to study Appayya's theology at the Kālakaṇṭheśvara Temple in Adaiyappalam and another five hundred in Vellore, thus financing Appayya's project of disseminating Śaiva Advaita philosophy to the extended Śaiva scholastic community:

> Hail! Beginning in the Śaka year 1504 [i.e., 1582 C.E.], in the Citrabhānu year, having composed the *Śivārkamaṇidīpikā* so that the *Śrīkaṇṭhabhāṣya* may be taught to five hundred scholars in the temple of Kālakaṇṭheśvara, and after having received an unction of gold from the hand of Cinnabomma Nāyaka, having acquired gold and *agrāhāra*s from the hand of Cinnabomma Nāyaka so that the *Śivārkamaṇidīpikā* also may be taught to five hundred scholars in Vellore—may this abode of Śiva, the creation of Appayya Dīkṣita, who composed one hundred works, beginning with the *Nyāyarakṣāmaṇi* and the *Kalpataruparimala,* be auspicious.[14]

With such an institutional setting in place for propagating his theological vision, it is no wonder that Appayya's primary epithets (*biruda*s) in academic discourse were Śrīkaṇṭhamata-sthāpanācārya[15]—"the establishing preceptor of Śrīkaṇṭha's doctrine"—and Advaita-sthāpanācārya, "the establishing preceptor of nondualism." Appayya's grandnephew Nīlakaṇṭha—whose exploits guide much of the analysis of this book—remembered his illustrious ancestor primarily for his contribution to Śaiva theology, particularly his *Śivārkamaṇidīpikā,* which some have argued represents a truly unprecedented maneuver to authenticate a Śaiva Advaita interpretation of the Brahmasūtras. That Nīlakaṇṭha considered Appayya an authority on Śaiva ritual practice as well as theology is made clear in the *Saubhāgyacandrātapa,* Nīlakaṇṭha's unpublished esoteric ritual manual, which I discuss in chapter 2, in which Nīlakaṇṭha repeatedly refers to Appayya's *Śivārcanacandrikā* as a primary authority.[16] Even within public literary circles, Nīlakaṇṭha commemorated his uncle first and foremost not for his literary theoretical advances or his poetic commentaries, but for his composition of the *Śivārkamaṇidīpikā,* a feat for which his patron, Cinnabomma, literally showered him in gold (*kanakābhiṣeka*).[17]

On the side of his antagonists, leading Vaiṣṇava theologians of the period were all too well acquainted with Appayya's theological project in the *Śivārkamaṇidīpikā,* taking special note of their own preceptors' attempts to refute his arguments and minimize his influence. For instance, the Śrīvaiṣṇava hagiographer Anantācārya recalls the particular rivalry between Appayya Dīkṣita and a scholar of his own lineage, Pañcamatabhañjana Tātācārya, so named for ostensibly "demolishing five doctrines":

> Best of those learned in Śaiva theology, the illustrious Appayya Dīkṣita
> Of great fame, who had defeated his enemies, shone at Cidambaram.
> Appayya Dīkṣita composed the text titled the *Śivārkamaṇidīpikā,*
> Always devoted to the Śaiva religion, hostile to the Lord [Viṣṇu].[18]

> Tātayācārya, having set forth the "Demolishing of Five Doctrines,"
> The *Pañcamatabhañjanam,*
> Protected the undefeated [*avyāhata*] doctrine of the illustrious
>   Rāmānuja.
> He, the great teacher, of great splendor, having made the *Caṇḍamāruta,*
> Protected that undefeated doctrine of that best of ascetics.[19]

As Anantācārya tells us, Pañcamatabhañjana Tātācārya composed the *Caṇḍamāruta* in direct response to Appayya's *Śivārkamaṇidīpikā.* And through his efforts, the Śrīvaiṣṇava doctrine of Rāmānuja remained "undefeated" (*avyāhata*), at least according to the hagiography of his lineage. On the Śaiva side, we meet with this same term, *avyāhata,* in the Adaiyappalam inscription as royal imagery for the alliance of Cinnabomma and Appayya Dīkṣita, the crest-jewel of Śaiva theologians who adorned his court. Evidently, being theologically "undefeated" was a goal that persistently preoccupied the intellectual discourse of the sixteenth

and seventeenth centuries in south India. Although the Sanskrit intellectual circles of the Nāyaka courts fostered an impressive display of erudition in all fields of *śāstric* learning, no discipline so preoccupied public discourse as did theology, whether Śaiva or Vaiṣṇava. To be undefeated, then, in such a competitive marketplace of ideas was no small matter, and yet the honor seems to have been claimed equally by all participants.

In short, intellectual life in early modern south India—and indeed public religious life in general—had become polarized to the extreme, on both the institutional and the philosophical planes. Sectarian theology, employed strategically in debates between rival sects, became a defining structural pillar of the region's intellectual sphere in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to an even greater degree than was true in preceding centuries. In some cases, conversation became heated, judging by the titles of sectarian pamphlets, ranging from Appayya Dīkṣita's *Madhvatantramukhamardana* (Crushing the face of Madhva's doctrine) to the possibly even more graphic insults of Benares pandits in subsequent generations as tensions became still more elevated: *Durjanamukhacapeṭikā* (A slap in the face of the wicked), *Durjanamukhamahācapeṭikā* (A *great* slap in the face of the wicked), *Durjanamukhapadmapādukā* (A boot to the lotus mouth of the wicked), and so forth.[20] To better understand these rising sectarian tensions—in terms of both their theological influence and their social significance—requires a closer look at the origin and development of these debates and the textual strategies through which these debates were conducted.

While the religious networks of south India most readily point to the role of sectarianism in the Hindu religious landscape—since monasteries and megatemples visibly demarcate the terrain of rival Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava communities—Hindu sectarianism was by no means a phenomenon restricted to the South. In fact, we witness a veritable explosion of distinct Hindu communities in the domain of north India beginning around the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, demarcated in emic terms through the authority of lineage, or *sampradāya*.[21] Mirroring closely the social dynamic of the South, Vaiṣṇava devotional *sampradāya*s vied to establish themselves through Rājput and Mughal patronage, setting down institutional roots in the Vaiṣṇava heartland of Braj and its greater cultural ambit across Rajasthan. In fact, the groundbreaking work of John Stratton Hawley (2015) has situated the bhakti movement as such as the foundation of sectarian identity in Hindu north India, and as a phenomenon of the Mughal period (1526–1707) rather than of Indian antiquity. Mughal rule, some would argue, fostered in a literal sense a sectarian marketplace—as the spread of sectarian networks was heavily facilitated by the Mughal support of fiscal exchange across the northern half of the subcontinent.[22] And over the following century, much of the Vaiṣṇava heartland witnessed a thoroughgoing state-sponsored sectarianization, as Sawai Jai Singh II set out to homologize the public religious culture of eighteenth-century Jaipur—a domain in which orthodoxy was described not as *Hindu* but as *Vaiṣṇava*.[23]

Speaking constructively about sectarianism, then—in a manner that seeks to denude the term of its Orientalist overtones—requires us to resituate Hindu communities in their social and cultural context. Indeed, only a decontextualized doctrinal mélange, arguably, could have prompted Monier-Williams to read the religiosity of Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism as belligerent dissent from a unified Brahminical church—a mysterious institution, to be sure, that will be found nowhere in our inscriptional record. To be a Śaiva or a Vaiṣṇava in early modern south India, was, to the contrary, not simply to believe in the supremacy of Śiva or Viṣṇu but to belong to a socially embedded community and to mark one's religious identity as a member of a particular religious public. Sectarian communities are not Venn diagrams of people and doctrines, demarcated by drawing artificial boundaries; they are dynamic social systems composed of networks of religious actors, institutions—temples, monasteries, lineages—and the religious meanings they engender. In the words of Niklas Luhmann, for instance, by which he defines a social system, we might describe a sectarian community as a "meaning-constituting system,"[24] an operationally closed set of social institutions that maintains—and in fact reconstitutes—its own boundaries internally through the structures of meaning it generates. That is to say, Hindu sects function autonomously from one another as meaning-constituting systems, each individually reproducing the religious institutions that endow participation in that community with sectarian-inflected religious identity.

Thus, while making an appeal, on the grounds of Vedāntic exegesis, to an umbrella religion we may call Hinduism, sectarian communities maintained an internal coherence and mutual independence comparable to the discrete social systems of modern society, such as the political or legal systems, which Luhmann analogizes to the independent but permeable interactions of discrete biological systems. In south India, for instance, major sectarian communities such as the Śrīvaiṣṇava and Mādhva Vaiṣṇava lineages, and the Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta, attained virtually complete autonomy on a social as well as a doctrinal level by becoming major economic shareholders in the networks of exchange centered at major temple complexes and monasteries. This is not to say, naturally, that interactions between sectarian communities did not occur on a regular basis. In fact, it is just such interactions—whether polemical exchanges, competition for resources, or theological influence and reaction—that allow each sect to maintain its distinctive identity in the face of changing circumstances. A Hindu sectarian community, in short, mirrors closely what Luhmann describes as an autopoietic system, creating and maintaining its doctrines, ritual practices, and modes of religious expression from within its own boundaries.

A self-constituting religious tradition, in other words, generates its own meaning-creating institutions—monasteries, lineages (*paramparā*), temple complexes, sites of performance, and so on. These institutions in turn produce artifacts of religious meaning—doctrine, canon, hagiography, ritual practice,

sectarian dress, and other semiotic signals—as the intellectual property, if you will, of those sectarian institutions, effectively erecting conceptual boundaries between competing traditions. When viewed macroscopically, the aggregate of such mutually independent systems facilitates the balance of an entire ecosystem—or, in our case, a religion inflected to its core by pluralism.

RELIGION IN EARLY MODERN SOUTH INDIA

Much like Europe, India in the seventeenth century was in the midst of a transition, a substantial rethinking of religious boundaries on both the institutional and the philosophical levels. The Indic religious landscape was brimming with iconoclasts, luminaries, and reformers, each with a vision of how to navigate the complexities of an increasingly divisive and sectarian social order. And, much as in the European case, many were keen to raise awareness of their opponents' shortcomings, critiquing the excesses they perceived in the religious institutions around them.

Take, for instance, Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita, seventeenth-century poet laureate of Madurai in southern Tamil Nadu. Let's refer to Nīlakaṇṭha, for the time being, as the "Indian Voltaire"—an ironically incongruous comparison that we will have a chance to revisit shortly. Best known in academic circles for his incisive satirical wit, our poet rivals Voltaire in his willingness to publicly lambaste the moral degenerates of his day who occupied positions of clerical or political authority, and he did so to great comedic effect. In his work the *Kaliviḍambana* (A travesty of time), Nīlakaṇṭha exposes the shortcomings of the scholars and priests in his company:

> If you want to triumph in learned societies, do not be afraid, do not pay attention, do not listen to the opponent's arguments—just immediately contradict them! Unflappability, shamelessness, contempt for the adversary, derision, and praise of the king: these are the five grounds of victory. . . . If the arbitrator is not learned, one wins by shouting. If he is learned one has only to insinuate bias: "Greed" is the premise, "money" is the probandum, "the priest" is the example, "personal advance" is the result: such is the correct syllogistic procedure.[25]

Nīlakaṇṭha continues at great length to deride all manner of religious officiants and charismatic authorities, from astrologers to mantra-sorcerers and ascetics. Each of them, in Nīlakaṇṭha's satirical portrait, fails dramatically to live up to the principles of his profession, exhibiting instead a thoroughgoing deceitfulness and opportunism. In such rhetoric, it is tempting to hear the ringing echo of Voltaire's own cry "Ecrasez l'infame!"—"Crush the infamous!"—referring most likely to the clergy he found so burdensome in the Europe of his generation. Given this portrait, it may come as no surprise that scholars have located a semblance of secularism in the textual culture of early modern India, whether manifesting as

social critique or as public adjudication of religious disputes. And thus, Nīlakaṇṭha himself enters into academic literature in the West the very image of the secular public intellectual.

And yet, a closer look at Nīlakaṇṭha's writings reveals an entirely different picture. When he was not penning satirical diatribes, Nīlakaṇṭha was composing some of the most heartfelt devotional poetry ever written in the Sanskrit language—a case could even be made to include him in the canon of Indian devotional, or bhakti, poetry, a category typically reserved for vernacular lyric composition. Likewise, Nīlakaṇṭha's philosophical prose includes a commentarial essay on a popular Sanskrit hymn, the *Śivatattvarahasya* (The secret of the principle of Śiva). The introduction to this essay doubles as a theological counterpolemic, as Nīlakaṇṭha defends his own religious tradition, Śaivism, against the scathing critiques of his rivals from Vaiṣṇava communities. But perhaps the most intriguing of Nīlakaṇṭha's works, and certainly the most unexpected based on our assumptions, is a manual for esoteric ritual practice, the *Saubhāgyacandrātapa* (Moonlight of auspiciousness). Entirely unknown to Indological scholarship to date, the "Moonlight" provides us with an insider's account of the esoteric Śrīvidyā tradition of Śākta, or goddess-oriented Tantric ritual, a tradition of which Nīlakaṇṭha himself was an avid practitioner. This would be tantamount to discovering, in the European sphere, that the French Voltaire, outspoken critic of theological excess, had spent his spare hours practicing Rosicrucian ritual or angelic magic.

When we attend to the texts, Nīlakaṇṭha emerges as a man of profound religious commitments, both in his personal practice and in his public theological agenda. One may rightly wonder, in fact, whether the term *secular* could possibly do justice to the complexity of his life's work. And yet, academic literature on early modern India has scarcely noted the theological investments of scholars such as Nīlakaṇṭha; recent studies consistently depict such intellectuals purely as poets, logicians, and social theorists, implicitly secular in their public outlook. Most notably, over the course of the previous decade, Sheldon Pollock's Sanskrit Knowledge Systems Project has considerably advanced our knowledge of early modern thought in India. In doing so, this team of scholars has uncovered discursive patterns that invite direct comparison with the European Renaissance and early modernity, including a return to the classics of Sanskrit thought—an Indic neoclassicism—and a fascination with the idea of "newness," giving unprecedented sanction to intellectual innovation. Others have located a mounting historical consciousness in the writings of early modern intellectuals and literati, revealed not through historiography as a discrete textual genre but through narrative "textures" that evoke an awareness of historical change (Narayana Rao et al. 2003). It is in such features that recent scholarship has sought to locate a distinctively Indic "modernity."

Such strictly textual scholarship on Indian early modernity builds on the rich terrain of extratextual work that has excavated a pervasive transformation in the economic, political, and social dynamics of early modern Indian polities. We need not, of course, assume intellectual changes to be derivative of socioeconomic change—invoking in the process the much maligned base-superstructure dichotomy. Ample evidence exists, however, that a model of modernity characterized in part by shifts in capital flow had found a home in early modern India. The work of Sanjay Subrahmanyam (2001), for instance, complicates the traditional narrative, inherited from the economic imperialism brought on by colonial intervention, that early modern India had been stultified by a homegrown epidemic of economic stagnation. Instead, Subrahmanyam proposes a revised model for mapping modernity as a transregional phenomenon fabricated through global exchange between multiple regions of the globe, with South Asia itself playing an integral role in this multidimensional web of exchange. This "conjunctural" model of multiple modernities essentially challenges Immanuel Wallerstein's (1976) traditional explanation of early modernity's onset as a virus borne by the vector of capitalism spreading from the European center to peripheries around the globe.

In short, recent research into seventeenth-century India has ambitiously sought to reveal a distinctively Indic early modernity, one that developed in dialogue with its Western counterpart rather than being exported in toto owing to the beneficence of a European "civilizing" power. With such a project in mind, the temptation to compare looms high on the horizons, with all the promises and limitations that comparison typically invokes. As historian of religions Jonathan Z. Smith has taught us, comparison often operates through a sort of sympathetic magic, creating a semblance of similarity through a process of contact or contagion. Wary of the consequences of unduly hasty comparison, Smith further invites us in his book *Drudgery Divine* to engage in a comparison not of similarity but of difference—to compare so that the unique features of each standard of comparison appear all the more salient. It is in the spirit of Smith's dictum that I have invoked the image of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita as the Indian Voltaire. The comparison rings true at first glance; and yet the role of anticlerical iconoclast does a remarkably poor job of explaining what motivated Nīlakaṇṭha to compose his works, and an even poorer one of clarifying how his ideas influenced seventeenth-century south Indian society. Seeing the limitations of this comparison, one would scarcely believe that not a single scholar to date has remarked on the theological agenda of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita. Likewise, scholarship has barely scratched the surface of the actual theology of Nīlakaṇṭha's granduncle Appayya Dīkṣita, who has been credited with reinventing south Indian Śaivism and its accompanying philosophical discourses a century before.[26]

And yet the influence of Nīlakaṇṭha's theology is by no means marginal. Remembered by their descendants as the equivalent of living saints, both Nīlakaṇṭha

and his granduncle Appayya were instrumental in rethinking the theological boundaries between the sectarian Hindu communities of south India, Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava alike. Between the two, Appayya and Nīlakaṇṭha contributed significantly to the articulation of the fundamental pillars of Smārta-Śaivism—in matters of theology, devotion, ritual practice, and even the constitution of its religious public. Evidently, "secularism"—or the critique of religion—is the last thing we should expect to uncover in the writings of early modern south India. In fact, the evidence points in the opposite direction. In the early centuries of the Common Era, philosophers across religious boundaries—Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, and even atheist (Carvāka)—found common ground for intellectual debate through formal epistemology, or *pramāṇa* theory, a framework that, by foregrounding common means of ascertaining shared knowledge such as perception and inference, allowed partisans to engage in dialogue while bracketing religious presuppositions entirely. In contrast to the European case, then, early modern intellectuals in south India instigated a radical theologization of public discourse, such that even the very tools of their intellectual work—approaches to text criticism and the interpretation of scripture (e.g., Mīmāṃsā, Nyāya), previously founded on a shared epistemology—were claimed as the exclusive property of particular Hindu sectarian communities. In short, not until the sixteenth century did religion became the constitutive language of public intellectual exchange in south India.

In the European context, historians remain rightfully skeptical of the extent to which Enlightenment Europe had denuded its intellectual discourse of theological concerns—although exceptions do exist, and the movement to revitalize secularization as the telos of modernity is alive and well even today.[27] Nevertheless, it is difficult to underestimate the centrality occupied in the sociological study of religion by the metanarrative that modernity, as such, is necessarily heralded by a concomitant decline in religiosity. From Max Weber to Peter Berger, theorists have adamantly described secularism as an intrinsic feature of modernity itself, many presupposing that religion would inevitably die out or become obsolete in the course of time. Even in recent years, as the resurgence of fundamentalism around the globe has disabused many sociologists of religion of their faith in the teleology of secularism, theorists, such as Charles Taylor (2007), present us with claims that secularism remains intrinsic to the very experience of modernity. Within the substantial literature on secularization theory, Taylor identifies two primary subsets of definitions given for the concept of secularism. On one hand, secularism can be an attribute of belief, suggesting that individuals in modernized societies are far less likely to profess belief in a higher power or the doctrines of organized religion. On the other hand, *secularization* can refer exclusively to the removal of religious content from public space and civil society without reference to personal belief or private religious practice. Taylor, for his part, chooses to adopt elements of both approaches as constitutive of what he calls the "secular age."

Early modern India, to the contrary, exhibited neither of these tendencies that Taylor believes encapsulate the range of theories of secularization.[28] With regard to religious belief, we can locate no major thinkers of the precolonial period who personally disavow the very idea of religion—not even vociferous iconoclasts such as Kabir, whose critiques of Hindu and Muslim dogmatism are matched by enraptured descriptions of subtle-body experiences and fervent adherence to the power of the divine Name.[29] This is, to put it mildly, a striking counterexample to the European narrative and cannot be overemphasized. Even though India at the beginning of the Common Era was home to a number of flourishing atheist schools of philosophy, in the early modern centuries, atheism, or even skepticism, played virtually no role in public discourse. Perhaps it should come as no surprise, indeed, that India fails to conform to an ostensive gold standard upheld as the harbinger of modernity in western Europe. Not only has it become a matter of common sense to question the European teleology of modernity, implicating civilizations around the globe in the march of progress, but also theorists have gone so far as to locate a genuinely theological project within the Western concept of secularism, proper to the religious terrain of post-Reformation Europe. Such a theme is perhaps most interestingly theorized in the 2013 work of Giorgio Agamben undertaking an archaeology of the theological concepts that underlie such mainstays of Enlightenment rationality as sovereignty, law, and the very concept of economy.

What then, was the place of religion in early modern India, if we can even be so bold as to imply with this question the possibility of an answer in the singular? In speaking of a *theologization* of public discourse—or in speaking of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita as public theologian—care must be taken, first and foremost, to steer clear, on one hand, of the European metanarrative of secularization and, on the other hand, of its implied opposite, or the failure of India to secularize. To date, theorists of the early modern in South Asia have scrupulously avoided mentioning religion—whether its presence or decline—as an intrinsic feature of Indic early modernity. To point out the obvious—namely, that religion in precolonial India showed no signs of rational interrogation, let alone evacuation from the public sphere—would be to tread dangerously close to painting precolonial India as the irrational, mystical Other that missionaries and British Orientalists envisioned: in other words, as an India that simply failed to modernize. Rather than endorsing a theology underlying Western modernity as unproblematically universal, we are better served by returning to the archive to excavate the theology of India's early modern publics, acknowledging that India's early modernity will be permeated by a distinctive theological vision.

The alternative to adopting such metanarratives, perhaps, is to bracket the diachronic itself for some time: historiography, as Hayden White (1975) has taught us, cannot avoid implicating itself in the art of emplotment. Speaking synchronically of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita as a public theologian demands instead a delineation of

what precisely constitutes the public in the intellectual discourse of his contemporaries in post-Vijayanagara south India. To map the concept of the public—to say nothing of the omnipresent "public sphere"—directly onto Indian society, however, could result in more than a few historical anachronisms. We would be remiss not to question implications of an Indian public sphere, particularly before the overt Western influence of the colonial encounter. One has to take care, naturally, to avoid privileging Eurocentric concepts and teleologies in the study of the non-Western world. Over the past decades, however, the notion of an extra-European public, varying by degree from its presumed European model, in and of itself has ceased to be a conceptual problem. We can speak equally of a public sphere in early modern England or in Safavid Iran (Rahimi 2011) without an overt fear of unwarranted parochialism. Such a public, however, must be contextualized within its South Asian context, particularly as it relates to the place of religion in early modernity. Because the very idea of the public, in certain formulations, implicates a rationalist critique of religiosity as such, a South Asian analogue of the public sphere must above all make room for the existence of religiously inflected publics—that is, for public spaces and channels of discourse that are rooted in the lifeworlds and religious cultures of particular sectarian communities.

PUBLIC THEOLOGY: OR, THE CONSTRUCTION OF INDIA'S SECTARIAN PUBLICS

The very idea of a religious public, read through the prescriptive lens of liberal political theory and the precedent of a Western model of civil society, may strike the contemporary reader as a sheer contradiction in terms. A brief thought experiment, however, may clarify why such a concept never came under fire in Indian intellectual circles. It is no surprise that, after Europe witnessed the ravaging destruction of the Wars of Religion, educated minds across the continent would seek to limit the influence of religion in the domains of politics and civil society. In India, on the contrary, history unfolded differently, and the relationship between religion, society, and violence took on another form altogether. In 1598, to name a single example, a group of Vaiṣṇava clergy in Tamil Nadu sought royal sanction to install a prominent temple image of Viṣṇu for worship at the temple of Cidambaram, one of the most staunchly Śaiva sacred centers of the Indian subcontinent. In retaliation, the Śaiva priests threatened to commit mass suicide to prevent the image of Viṣṇu from being installed, and twenty priests ended up jumping to their deaths from the temple tower. So far as our historical records can detect, this was the face of religious violence in early modern south India. Where religious violence did erupt in premodern India, it did not take the shape of large-scale militarized clashes on the scale of the European Wars of Religion,[30] which might have imprinted a memory of cultural trauma on the popular imagination—as, for instance, was undoubtedly

the case in the aftermath of independence and partition in twentieth-century South Asia. And while no culture is immune to the everyday violence of inequity and coercion, much of which is inflected with religious concerns, such everyday violence can rarely suffice to shift public opinion toward instigating a renunciation of religion as such. No one, to our knowledge, took another life specifically over a competing interpretation of the Brahmasūtras.

Quite simply, there were no Wars of Religion in India to prompt a critical response from Indian intelligentsia. Organized religion never experienced substantial backlash from intellectual circles, as social conditions never warranted a move toward limiting religion in public space. In fact, far from moving toward a secularization of public discourse, early modern thought in India became radically theologized in its outward expression. Classical knowledge systems that had previously eschewed any mention of divinity rapidly adopted the vocabulary of devotionalism and sectarian piety.[31] It is with this *theologization* of public discourse in mind that I add the second of our two terms to the word *public*—and that term is *theology.* By identifying in early modern south India the rise of a distinctively new public theology, I wish to argue that theological discourse was by no means incidental to the intellectual history of the period, nor was it a stultified relic of premodern Indic civilization. To the contrary, sectarian theology was crucial to the social and cultural constitution of south India by the sixteenth century, leaving an enduring impression on the religious landscape of the region today. Religious identity and community formation have taken the shape they have today largely because of the influence of the theologization of discourse and the discourse of theology.

The term *public theology,* as employed in the study of contemporary American religious discourse, was first coined by Martin E. Marty in an influential 1974 article on the extratextual ambitions of the renowned American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, whose eloquent words frequently influenced the deliberations of policy makers and worked their way into the speeches of presidents. Public theologians, according to Marty's model, do not merely operate in the abstract, ruminating about the nature of divinity; they also, in a particularized and concrete fashion, engage with the beliefs and conduct of the religious at large. Broadly speaking, public theologians are those "various figures who have interpreted the nation's religious experience, practice and behavior in light of some transcendent reference" (Marty 1974, 332). Seventeenth-century south India, naturally, was no nation-state in the modern sense, and we cannot speak meaningfully at this point in history of a South Asian civil society, deemed necessary by some analysts as the purview of public theology. Nevertheless, in their theologically inflected writings, Nīlakaṇṭha and his contemporaries addressed—and indeed spoke on behalf of—a religious public unconstrained by the walls of a monastery, the vows of asceticism, the hierarchies of lineage (*paramparā*), or the boundaries of any single religious institution. They spoke on behalf of a public that spanned a multiplicity of social

locations, hailing from a number of distinct caste, regional, and linguistic communities, all of which had come to participate in the networks of an overarching Śaiva public culture.

This phrase *public theology* contains two key words that I believe are fundamental to understanding both the motivations behind intellectual discourse in seventeenth-century south India and this discourse's effects on subsequent generations. The first of these is the term *public*. The most widely known theory of the public (or of publicness, Publicität) is naturally Habermas's concept of the public sphere. In its original formulation, Habermas's "public sphere" was intended to describe a unique structural transformation in European society, contemporaneous with or somewhat postdating Nīlakaṇṭha's floruit of the mid-seventeenth century. In Habermas's model, late seventeenth-century Europe witnessed the emergence of a public domain, housed in the coffee shops and salons of an educated bourgeois society, in which public opinion was crafted through the process of rational debate. This "bourgeois public sphere" coincided temporally—and indeed causally, for Habermas—with the rise of political liberalism and early capitalist social orders, forming a necessary foundation for constitutional democracy as we understand it today.

Coffee shops, one may presume, were not commonplace in the urban metropolis of early modern south India,[32] although the literary salon (*sabhā*), a South Asian institution of considerable antiquity, is another question entirely. Nevertheless, early modern India shared with Europe a flourishing network of scholars who began to gather in publicly demarcated spaces to debate issues of timely social interest. In north India, for example, the renowned scholars of Benares, one of the intellectual capitals of the subcontinent, petitioned to rebuild one of the city's legendary temples, the Viśveśvara Temple. In the temple's new incarnation, they constructed a pavilion known as the Mukti Maṇḍapa, the "Liberation Pavilion," designed as a public meeting hall in which scholars applied their scriptural expertise toward solving vexing social problems of their day.[33] In south India as well, poets and theologians traveled great distances to attend seasonal temple festivals, where performances of Sanskrit dramas served as conventions of regionwide literary society. Similarly, in written discourse, social debate flourished as representatives from rival religious sects put forth pamphlet after pamphlet defending their social and theological agendas. Our manuscript archives show a dramatic upsurge in debate through these "pamphlet wars" as sectarian tracts circulated widely across the region during the seventeenth century.

Of course, the most notable shortcoming of Habermas's model when applied to early modern India is, broadly speaking, the issue of religion. Although Habermas, at least in his early work, does not address the issue, the bourgeois liberal discourse that constituted his public sphere most certainly *was* concerned with religion. More precisely, it was concerned with the *limitation* of religion in public space and

discourse and, as a result, has often been implicated in the Western metanarrative of secularization. What, then, do we mean by the phrase *religious publics?* As numerous critics of Habermas have pointed out since the publication of his work in English in 1989, such a concept of the public sphere is by definition fundamentally antithetical to religion, founded as it is upon Enlightenment norms of rational discourse. That is, publicity, in Habermas's estimation, centers on a neo-Kantian notion of communicative rationality, mapping onto a civil society that has deliberately evacuated religious concerns from the content of public discourse. In this context Hindu public theology stands out as the precondition for a rather different sort of public, fabricated by a mode of discourse that, while by no means nonrational, was fundamentally religious in its guiding concerns. The theologization of discourse, succinctly, is the process of Hindu theology's *going public*—leaving the confines of the monastery or temple complex to cultivate the public ethos of a particular sectarian community, in the process demarcating it conceptually from its competitors.

In India, succinctly, sectarian tensions prompted an embrace rather than a rejection of religion in public space. No one religious sect was in a position to advocate universal orthodoxy for its doctrines; but rather, sectarian lineages cultivated separate and parallel public domains, each of which was suffused with the religious signifiers of that sect. Even today, visitors to India observe that religious signs and symbols permeate the landscape; and yet, no singular orthodoxy emerges from their conjunction, as each set of symbols belongs to a separate community with its own lineage, history, and devotional practice. And theologically speaking, the defense of this parallel sectarianism can be traced directly to the religious discourse of Indian early modernity. The theological debates of early modern India cultivated a heightened public awareness of sectarian identity that prompted relatively little violence or outright antagonism but greatly accelerated the formation of distinct religious communities across most of the subcontinent. It is precisely to describe the doctrinal dimensions of sectarian community formation during this period that I propose to locate a newly emerging public theology in the discourse of early modern south India. Public theology, in other words, served as the conceptual architecture for a parallel religious sectarianism that remains to this day the defining feature of the Hindu religion or, potentially, even of religious identity across the Indian subcontinent.

One of the central theoretical aims of this book, then, is to make the case for the early modern Indian public: one that, unlike its European counterpart, remained thoroughly and unapologetically inflected by religious concerns—specifically, the religiosity of distinct sectarian publics. Unlike the European case, then, we are obliged to speak not of a public sphere in the singular but of *publics*, as theologians of each sectarian community took initiative in reshaping the rules that governed public engagement of devotees and their interactions with those outside the tradition. The very idea of publics as multiple, naturally, comes as no surprise in the

wake of numerous critiques of Habermas, as Nancy Fraser (1990), Michael Warner (2002), and others have aimed to decenter the normativity of the bourgeois public sphere by documenting the fragmentation of public discourse along lines of gender, class, or sexuality. These counterpublics, as Fraser describes them, by very definition run counter to a singular, hegemonic social order, in contradistinction to which they provide a social space for the cultivation of identities that conflict with the dominant cultural order. We have already seen, however, in the context of Hinduism, that the narrative of a singular hegemonic Brahminism against which sectarian identities are defined runs afoul of numerous historical incoherencies. Sectarian publics, as a result, are not Fraser's counterpublics, nor are they spaces of resistance. Rather, sectarian publics exist parallel to one another, often colliding with networks of institutions occupying the same geographical and urban space. Sectarian publics are defined dialectically against one another rather than as subaltern shadows of a singular bourgeois Hinduism—which, when situated in the seventeenth century, is quite simply an anachronism.

This does not preclude, naturally, the possibility of such counterpublics existing elsewhere in premodern India. While publics can indeed generate a powerful setting for social critique, India's scholarship, as with that of Europe, was produced and consumed largely by a restricted class of educated elite—indeed, this is precisely the class of people who participated in Habermas's public sphere. Likewise, the sectarian religious publics of early modern south India, while constituted in part by the Sanskritic discourse of theological speculation, extended well beyond the boundaries of intellectual circles to include those of diverse social backgrounds who interface with sectarian institutions. As our historical archive bears out, the architecture of the sectarian public was indubitably founded upon a sort of rationality, couched in the language of Sanskrit *śāstra*—systematic philosophical discourse—or its equivalents in the numerous vernaculars of south India. Sectarian theologians were by and large elite social agents, whether Brahmins by class or members of groups with a significant economic power base in south India, such as the Vēḷāḷas of the Tamil country. The constituency of such a public, as a result, cannot possibly evoke the universal connotations of the twentieth-century usage—*the public* as an umbrella term for all individuals—which Habermas himself highlights as antithetical to his own vision of the public sphere. Nevertheless, *the sectarian public* is by no means an exhaustive descriptor, and by no means excludes the potential explanatory force of other overlaying public domains. Nor does the *Hindu* in "Hindu sectarian publics" imply that there were no publics composed of Muslims, Christians, Jains, or adherents of any other religious community. Rather, by the "Hindu sectarian publics of south India," what is intended is simply an empirical description of one of the most salient sources for the construction of personal identity and belonging across the Hindu religious ecology of south India's early modernity.

As in the European case, furthermore, Indian intellectual debates held wide-ranging consequences that changed the face of popular culture and society well beyond the confines of intellectual circles. For this reason, when I use the term *public* in *public theology,* I refer to the educated public of which Habermas speaks, but also to the resonances of public discourse across diverse sectors of society, what we might describe as another sort of "public" in modern parlance. This "other" sort of public—the domain of popular culture, if you will—is as fundamental an object of inquiry as the manuscripts of elite philosophical treatises. It is perhaps just this sort of public that is best captured by the work of Christian Novetzke (2016), who locates a public sphere in thirteenth-century Maharashtra that by virtue of its modes of discourse is not necessarily rational nor even necessarily literate. In India, these two publics were by no means the disparate phenomena one might imagine, and I would hazard to guess this holds true across cultures and continents. The question, methodologically speaking, is how to trace the influence that the "bourgeois public" exerted on a wider public culture, which Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge (1995), most notably, have described as "public culture." When studying preprint and premedia religious cultures, the task requires careful attention to patterns of discourse and religious practice.

Take, for example, Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita's engagement with the popular mythology of the city of Madurai, which I treat in greater detail in chapter 4. One of Nīlakaṇṭha's literary and devotional interests was a cycle of myths known as the "Sacred Games of Śiva," a set of sixty-four narratives depicting the divine interventions of the god Śiva in Madurai, where Nīlakaṇṭha himself lived in the seventeenth century. Through his religious literature and devotional hymns, Nīlakaṇṭha contributed actively to circulating and popularizing the "Sacred Games" among Śaivas of all social backgrounds, well beyond the Madurai region. As a result, the "Sacred Games" attained such heights of popularity in the city of Madurai that festival performances of several of the narratives were added to the calendrical rituals of the city's central temple, and they are still performed to this day. In short, Nīlakaṇṭha's influence reached well beyond the circles of Śaiva Brahmins to shape the popular religious culture of Śaivas across south India. The study of sectarian publics, in short, does not restrict us to the analysis of discrete, provincial worldviews—to the contrary, it is the intersection between such publics and the wider population at large that marks perhaps our most fruitful point of inquiry for understanding the shifts in religious identity and values that govern the *longue durée* of the history of Hinduism.

PLURALISM AND PUBLIC SPACE

By reframing the practice of Hinduism in light of its early modern precursors, this book aims to resituate Hindu sectarianism as a precolonial, and distinctively non-Western, form of religious pluralism. In the annals of both colonial and

contemporary historiography, as we have seen, Hindu sectarianism translates nearly uniformly as divisive dissent, virtually bordering on violent hostility. Such rhetoric, in effect, reduces the myriad of Hindu communities that deviate from the monism of neo-Hindu universalism to inconsequential noise at best and to heresy at worst. Historically speaking, however, it also dissuades us from inquiring into the socioreligious foundation of their precolonial coexistence: just how did Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava practitioners relate to each other in the public space of early modern south India? Moving beyond the impact of specific public theologians as this rhetoric was translated and transposed into a range of discursive arenas, how more generally can we understand the very relationship between religion and publicity precipitated by a religious landscape in which sectarian institutions emerged as regional power brokers, polarizing the movement of individuals in public space and the embodiment of religious identity? Our evidence, in short, allows for a reformulation of the very criteria for a non-Western pluralism, founded not on the prescriptive model of a Western civil society but on the historically descriptive account of the role of religion in public space and public discourse. In the present day as well, much of this precolonial pluralism has survived the superimposition of Hindu universalism and structures the spatial experience of religion in urban locales across the Indian subcontinent.

On a number of occasions, I have framed undergraduate seminars with the following question: "How would you feel if you walked out of this building and discovered a crowd venerating a shrine of the Virgin Mary on the first street corner, a group engaged in Islamic prayer across the street, and several individuals sitting in meditation in front of a *śivaliṅga* on the next block?" Anecdotal and counterintuitive as this statement may be, the perplexity that registers on the students' faces reveals just how poorly the Western model of civil society can account for the spatial experience of religion common in urban centers across India. The prescription, for instance, that religious dialogue be fostered in intercommunal "civic centers" makes little sense in a landscape in which street shrines are more normative than anomalous and the majority of businesses in middle-class neighborhoods bear outward signs of religious affiliation.[34] In Triplicane, Chennai, in 2017, one cannot walk down a major street without visibly encountering two distinct religious networks, with individuals dressed in either Muslim or Hindu garb, their foreheads bare or marked with ash and a *bindu* of *kuṃkum,* patronizing entirely distinct restaurants and shops that happen to be located a few feet from one another. While visibly distinguished by their embodiment of religious identity, these communities move in the same public space, and the street belongs to neither. Such urban pluralism has found a receptive audience in recent years among scholars of the global cityscape, uniting the experience of religious pluralism in contemporary India with the cultural and economic fragmentation of late capitalism. William Elison (2014), for instance, has addressed the particular phenomenon of *darśan*

as public recognition, resituating the worship of Sai Baba in Mumbai within the framework of recent theories of space and visual culture.

But is such "disjuncture and difference," in the words of Arjun Appadurai (1990), the distinctive property of global postcapitalism, a fragmentation produced by the schizophrenia of a modernist mass culture as Jean Baudrillard (1995) or Fredric Jameson (1991) would have it? A multicentric cultural landscape, at least within the Indian context, has premodern precedents; the urban pluralism of contemporary India owes as much to its early modern antecedents as to the hegemony of economic globalization. And yet, returning once again to seventeenth-century south India, we can find no better example than the invention of Madurai's Cittirai Festival, which I explore in more detail in chapter 4. The festival, celebrated annually in April/May in Madurai's Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara Temple, and which has become the city's most iconic public celebration, owes its distinctive shape to the active negotiation, some three hundred years ago, of religious diversity in public space. Before undergoing a strategic rebranding during Nīlakaṇṭha's own watch, the Cittirai Festival was a strictly Vaiṣṇava observance, commemorating Viṣṇu's journey to the Vaikai River in the center of the city to liberate the sage Maṇḍūka from the bondage of his past sins. In the early seventeenth century, the marriage of Śiva and Mīnākṣī was rescheduled to coincide with the Vaiṣṇava Cittirai Festival, essentially fusing Madurai's best-loved Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava holidays into a single citywide celebration.

Indeed, situating Viṣṇu's journey at precisely this moment must have appealed to connoisseurs of the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭal Purāṇam,* the "Sacred Games of Śiva," which by the seventeenth century had come to describe Viṣṇu himself as officiating at Śiva's marriage in the Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara Temple. And yet Viṣṇu never reaches the marriage ceremony in the city center, turning back after reaching the Vaikai to his home in the Aḻakar Temple on the outskirts of town. Over time, popular narrative tradition evolved to account for this lapse in consistency.[35] Viṣṇu, according to this anecdote, reaches the Vaikai only to learn that he is late for the wedding, and that the event has already taken place in his absence; at this point, the infuriated deity reverses his course, pausing on his journey home to make select stops for his personal enjoyment.

What this reconstruction of Madurai's Cittirai Festival illustrates is not simply the management of tensions between religious communities—an obligatory cornerstone of any model of pluralism—but the mapping of spatial geographies of religiosity that were evolving in seventeenth-century Madurai. The twin processions of the sacred couple and Viṣṇu map onto the religious networks of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava Hindus, patronized and performed throughout much of the twentieth century by entirely distinct castes and lineages that owed their allegiance to Śiva or Viṣṇu, respectively. In the seventeenth century, these communities seized the festival occasion for the exchange of honors from the Nāyaka rulers of Madurai,

allowing individuals to navigate the symbolic economy centered on the temple complex. The festival served as a venue for public performance of works of devotional literature—Parañcōti's *Tiruviḷaiyāṭal Purāṇam* being just one example—which consolidated popular religious identity around new sites of memory as the legends came to be performed as part of the temple's seasonal calendar.

A sectarian community, in short, was not a subset of civil society, an aggregate of individuals who met privately to partake of a commonly shared religious sentiment. Sectarian communities were lived and performed in public space, with geographies that often seamlessly overlaid one another without necessitating communal conflict. Institutionally established in the religious landscape by temples and monasteries—sites that occasioned the embodiment of a shared religious identity—sectarian communities were visibly marked as public religious communities, fostering the readily legible performance of sectarian identity in public space. This is not to say, obviously, that conflicts never occurred between these parallel public domains; indeed, as we have seen, moments of tension were fundamental to the formulation of the boundaries between sectarian communities and the publics they cultivated. Pluralism, however, can be most accurately described not as the absence of conflict but as its effective resolution—a process that in Hindu early modernity was facilitated not by the removal of religion in public but by its active publicization, by the shared performance of plural religiosities.

THE MAKING OF A SECTARIAN COMMUNITY: PUBLIC THEOLOGY IN ACTION

As a case study of this larger socioreligious dynamic, this book examines the sectarianization of Hinduism in microcosm by telling the story of a particular Hindu sect in the process of coming into being. This community, the Smārta-Śaiva tradition of south India—otherwise known as Tamil Brahminism[36]—ranks among a handful of independent Hindu lineages that, when viewed in toto, palpably dominates the public religious life of south India today. And yet little scholarship to date has inquired into its contemporary religious culture, let alone the historical conditions of possibility that led to its emergence.[37] The renunciant branch of modern Smārta-Śaivism, the Śaṅkarācārya order of ascetics, has garnered significant attention as a pan-Indian monastic lineage rooted in four (or five) *maṭha*s at the corners of the Indian subcontinent and as a primary vehicle for the dissemination of Advaita Vedānta philosophy. Before the early modern centuries, however, Vedānta was the exclusive purview of such ascetic orders, as the theological canon expressly forbade its practice by all but Brahmin renunciants. Smārta-Śaivism, however, as a sectarian community, incorporated the charisma of the Śaṅkarācārya Jagadgurus into the consolidation of an extensive lay populace, many of whom began to cultivate a relationship of personal devotion with these iconic figures. Many of these

lay theologians, in turn, crafted the systems of meaning that gave birth to the religious culture of Smārta-Śaivism as such. As a result, it is in their writings—their doctrine, polemic, ritual procedures, and devotional poetry—that this project's inquiry is grounded.

The public theology of the Smārta-Śaiva community in and of itself is a discourse still in need of excavation. I draw primarily from the theologically inflected writings of major sectarian theologians—whether philosophical speculation or overt sectarian polemic. The first task at hand, then, has been both to reconstitute the discourse of public theology and to allow it to tell its story to contemporary audiences. Only when read as an active field of discourse can Śaiva public theology speak to the lived reality beyond the text, in which theology is enacted through public ritual and socioreligious institutions. I bring the pamphlets of virtual unknowns in dialogue with the polished treatises of iconic Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava theologians. As a historical archive, necessarily constrained by the happenstance of manuscript collection and preservation, this source material provides a representative sampling of the theological discourse that shaped the boundaries of the nascent sectarian communities of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century south India. As a result, the vast majority of sources cited are either unpublished manuscripts or published editions rarely accessible in readable condition.

The textual culture of early modern south India, moreover, is fundamentally polyglot in its linguistic composition. Products of a hybrid Tamil-Telugu regional culture, Smārta Brahmins, educated in the classical Sanskritic knowledge systems, rubbed shoulders with court poets and theologians writing exclusively in the Tamil and Telugu vernaculars. Indeed, the educated publics they addressed likely overlapped to a significant degree. A responsible inquiry into this discursive field, then, must necessarily take a multilingual approach to the textual archive, particularly when the object of study is not simply the text itself but simultaneously the context—the extratextual sectarian community shaped by that same multilingual discourse. Śaiva theology, to name but one example, was written in Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, and Kannada—and Sanskrit-educated theologians were by no means ignorant of their vernacular counterparts.

Chapter 1 begins by setting the scene for the emergence of an autonomous Smārta-Śaiva sectarian community. I first contextualize the salient features of early modern Smārta-Śaivism through their genealogical development from earlier pan-Indian Śaiva Tantric traditions. Śaivism, as we will see, in its earliest instantiations required no reference to an overarching religious identity that we might call Hinduism; as a result, *Śaiva* and *sectarian* are by no means synonyms but rather a dyad in need of historical disambiguation. Moving forward in history, then, I situate the earliest stages of the community's manifestation within the milieu of early sectarianization in south India. I conclude this chapter by introducing the major players in the sectarianization of Smārta-Śaivism in the sixteenth and seventeenth

centuries, particularly Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita, poet laureate of the Nāyaka kingdom of Madurai, whose theology may be viewed as representative of the generation of intellectuals who played midwife to the emergent Smārta-Śaiva community.

Chapter 2 captures the moment of crystallization of the major structural features of Smārta-Śaivism at around the turn of the seventeenth century. Specifically, this moment marks the juncture at which the south Indian Śaṅkarācārya lineages, centered institutionally at Sringeri and Kanchipuram, came to function as the doctrinal and institutional hubs of a public sectarian network that extended far beyond the walls of the monastic lineages themselves. Although certain monasteries had been incorporated as religious institutions some centuries before, particularly the Sringeri *maṭha* in western Karnataka, and had even entered into relationships of ideological exchange with ruling powers,[38] the seventeenth century witnessed a marked transformation in the religious public that came to define itself in relationship to these monastic lineages. This chapter focuses on the case of the Śaṅkarācārya networks of Tamil Nadu, which, in the process of ensconcing themselves institutionally in the vicinity of Kanchipuram, forged an alliance with the intellectual elite of Sanskritic Śaiva circles. As a result, Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita and a number of his close associates entered into devotional relationships with Śaṅkarācārya preceptors and publicly professed their allegiance to the esoteric ritual tradition associated with the Śaṅkarācārya lineages, the Śrīvidyā school of Śākta Tantrism. We witness the emergence, in the space of a generation, of a completely unprecedented socioreligious network, one that has proved foundational to the present-day constitution of south Indian Smārta-Śaivism.

In chapter 3, I examine the doctrinal constitution of "orthodox" Smārta-Śaivism from the outside in—that is, by way of polemical encounter with rival sectarian traditions, such as the Mādhva and Śrīvaiṣṇava communities, both major shareholders in the transregional south Indian networks of monasteries and temple complexes. Beginning in the mid-sixteenth century, sectarian polemic suddenly irrupts in popularity as a distinct textual genre, as major theologians launch a discoursewide, interdisciplinary inquiry into the canonical status of scriptures affiliated exclusively with particular sectarian traditions, such as the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas. Debate soon overflows the confines of strictly philosophical contention, as polemicists circulate pamphlet after pamphlet with the express aim of discrediting, on text-critical grounds, the scriptural foundations of rival lineages. We observe, as a result, a heightened philological sensitivity emerging at all levels of public discourse, which, in the process of cementing the text-critical foundations of both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava claims to orthodoxy, provides a conceptual language for differentiating sectarian communities as autonomous social systems.

In chapter 4, I explore the influence of sectarian theology on the wider public religious culture of the Tamil region by reconstructing the emergence of the Sthalapurāṇa of Madurai as a living canon of Śaiva religious experience. First

entextualized in the thirteenth century, the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭal Purāṇam*—a cycle of nar-
ratives depicting Śiva's sixty-four sacred games in the city of Madurai—emerged
out of the domain of elite literary practice and went on to transform the public
face of local Śaiva religiosity, in no small part owing to the intervention of Madu-
rai's Śaiva public theologians. The "Sacred Games" attained the status of a public
site of memory over the course of mere decades owing to the cross-pollination
of the Tamil region's diverse, multilingual literary cultures—Tamil, Telugu, and
Sanskrit—later venturing into the territories of Marathi and Kannada as well. As
a result of their dramatic upsurge in literary popularity, several of Śiva's "Sacred
Games" were woven into the texture of Śaiva temple ritual, publicly enacted to this
day as annual processional festivals. In short, by interfacing with a multilingual
domain of public culture, theologians such as Nīlakaṇṭha exerted an influence well
beyond the circles of Śaiva Brahmins and shaped the popular religiosity of Śaivas
across south India. Public theology, in the case of the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭal Purāṇam,* be-
gan with the poetry of celebrated Sanskrit and Tamil literati only to leave an indel-
ible impression on public religiosity of the region, as the "Sacred Games" are today
inextricable from the experience of being a Śaiva in the city of Madurai.

My archive is primarily textual, but always thoroughly contextualized. I analyze
religious discourse with a view of text not merely as a world unto itself but as a
medium for communication, for the production and dissemination of systems of
meaning that constitute sectarian systems as lived religious communities. In fact,
it is the very project of public theology that gives rise to the structures of mean-
ing that perpetuate religious communities such as the sectarian traditions of early
modern south India. I aim to illustrate, through the study of intellectual history
in microcosm, how public theological discourse both constructs and maintains
the cultural artifacts—from monasteries to ritual performance to soteriological
belief—that endow each religious community with its autonomous sectarian iden-
tity. I aim to document the sectarianization of Hinduism not in its aftermath, then,
but in its very process of coming into being.