I. Frykenberg – “The Politics of ‘Conversion’ in India

A. Hindutva – “Hinduness” in India

1. The BJP (Bharatia Janata Party) which has ruled India since 1999, along with other agencies are seen as Hindu fundamentalists (HVK, RSS) are part of alliance called Sangh Parivar (Fryk 108).

2. Negative reaction to the words of Ralph Winter, evangelical missionary, one month after Australian missionary Graham Staines and his sons were burned alive by Hindutva activitists (109).

3. Winter’s words came in aftermath of a year of violence against India’s Christians as a reaction against Christian conversions (viewed by some as forced conversions or reconversion).

4. Hindutva activitists believe Christian missionaries were exploiting the tribals (adivasis) and untouchables (dalits) by pressuring them to convert (109).

5. In response, the Indian prime minister announced a day of fasting, but also called for national debate on the problem of conversion.

B. What does Hindu mean?

1. Obstacles to a clear understanding of Hindu:

   a) Before modern times, Hinduism did not exist as a concept (110). Diverse religions traditions make up 1/3 of the total population, rejecting the monolithic concept of Hinduism which the west has often embraced.

   b) There aren’t adequate concepts for religion in Indian understanding:

      (1) *Dharma* – duty, law, order, or cosmic structure does not adequately describe religion.

      (2) *Karma* – causal consequences for fulfilling or not fulfilling dharma. Neither of these philosophical principles are part of religion (110).

   c) Diverse Indian understanding of mankind – 3000 castes, each with its own dharma and karma, generic identity, and birth group, prohibiting interdining and intermarriage between genetic groups.
Intermixing of any kind is viewed as a violation of the cosmic order (according to this Brahmanical view).

d) Brahmanism gained dominance over Buddhism 1000 years ago and maintained its dominance even through colonialism. Part of the reason for its success was that it allowed the elite to define Indian identity, placing the core of Indian culture in the Sanskrit, Vedic tradition, and Vedanta (III).

2. Hinduism - the great national tradition derived from Brahmanism that defined Indian identity. Other traditions were viewed as regional or local.

3. The 3 upper castes (or colors) of Hindu society make up 15% of population and view themselves as “clean” or twice born.

4. The bottom 20% of the population viewed as polluted or untouchables (dalit, or oppressed) (III)

5. Point – interaction of people in India is based on cultural & ethnic apartheid (II2).

6. Hinduism – then becomes a cultural and political environment. So Frykenberg says Indian Christians are Hindu since they are part of the Hindu world.

7. Hindu – refers to Indian nativism or national consciousness, patriotism and loyalty to India (II2). Arose in aftermath of Indian empire based on the logic of imperial policy and provided the infrastructure for national integration.

8. Institutionalized Hinduism – 2 views:

   a) The unofficial ideology of the state - emphasized pluralism, religious neutrality, secularism, syncretism, and tolerance arose in 18th c. This view called for state support of all forms of religious life (II3).

   b) Modern Hinduism – arose at same time, provoked in reaction to mass Christian conversion – nationalistic religion of Hindutva, nationalistic movement that was chauvinistic, defensive, exclusivistic in its nativism, and became militant (II3). Violent reactions by Hindutva agencies when low caste people reject their proper place, threatening status quo and attempt to be upwardly mobile (II4). Hindutva zealots assassinated Gandhi in 1948.
C. Globalization and its impact on the spread of the gospel in India:
   1. The gospel alters people’s sense of identity since it is transcultural and globalizing. Three paradigms of globalization – modernist, postmodernist, and premodernist (115).

   2. Began in India with Apostle Thomas’ arrival in India in 52AD where he later suffered martyrdom (116).

   3. Christians of Malabar were Hindu in culture, Christian in faith, Syrian in doctrine and they had high caste with emphases on ritual purity and social rank and they followed Indian ceremonial traditions including strictness with regard to interdining, intermarriage and disposal of dead bodies (116).

   4. Christian globalization began to move forward w/ work of Roberto de Nobili. Later attempts by Roman Catholics to impose their hegemony on Mar Christians failed (117).

   5. Pietist German evangelical missionaries in 1706 moved globalization forward through their emphasis on need to make everyone literate so they could read Bible based on Francke’s dictum which brought Enlightenment to India (117).

   6. Tamil Christians established schools by 1790s.

   7. William Carey’s work in Serampore quickly spread to Bengal and North India bringing about sometimes violent forms of Hinduism and cultural transformation from scholarship, translation and scientific inquiry (118).

   8. Rise of modern epoch in India also led to varied forms of globalization with negative reactions and the rise of the Indian empire. This then led to the Indian nation-state with rivalry between Indian National Congress (Gandhi & Nehru) competing with the Muslim League (led by Jinnah) finally giving rise to the partition of the Old Raj in 1947 into India and Pakistan. This almost led to disappearance of most Western missionaries but also competition among the various religious movements. (118).

D. Indian attitudes toward conversion (119):

   1. Seen as alien and hostile, a threat.
   2. Foreign influence destroying the Indian civilization
   4. Conversion seen by some as form of social/political protest, escape from caste domination.
   5. While conversion seen as divine intervention/redemption by some, for others it is rescue from bondage and realigning loyalties.
6. Views of conversion:
   a) logical and rational vs. erratic and irrational.
   b) Can bring about transformation of worldviews, values, and behavior.
   c) Can be seen as consequence of involuntary predetermined influences,
   d) A change of loyalties and relationships.
   e) Mass conversions in India have been most dramatic among tribals and dalits in southeast regions. No mass conversions have occurred in India that were not indigenously led (121).

7. First mass conversion in India – 16th c. among fishers of Mannar and Malabar initiated by local leaders.

8. In 1799, mass movement among Shanars, thousands of soil slaves converted to Christianity, leading to their torture by their warlords (121).

9. Further mass conversions in 19th c. also leading to persecution in Tirunelveli and other areas.

10. Many adivasi (tribal) people affected by mass conversions (122). Result has also been their advancement and education. The lack of influence on adivasi by Hindu caste structures has bothered the Indian govt, who view them as unpatriotic (123).

E. The two sides of Indian globalization:

1. Hindu face of the gospel in India – gospel expressed in indigenous forms, styles, and terms through Hindu Christian individuals, indigenous church movements, large number of churchless believers, large Indian Pentecostal movement (123).

2. Negative – seen as western cultural imperialism where Americanization of the gospel leads to its dominance over indigenous forms of Indian Christianity (129).

II. Asian Theologies (Sugirtharajah)

A. Asian theology arose in response to colonialism and nation building as well as various religious and philosophical traditions (Sug 36).

B. Heritagist theologies – seeks conceptual analogies in the textual traditions and philosophies of Asia. Trace Christian ideas in Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, Taoist, and Shinto thought worlds to explain the gospel. Delving into their
heritage helped Asians to cope with colonialism and missionary attacks on their traditions as well as develop their own identity (36).

C. Liberationist – shifts emphasis to socioeconomic realities facing the economically disadvantaged (37). Asian liberation theologies differ from Latin American liberation theology in that Asians realize liberation can’t be confined to the church and must be interreligious and address the oral and written traditions of Asian culture.

2. Filipino theology of struggle and Taiwanese homeland theologies – emerge from political oppression.

D. Subalternist – voice of those excluded from mainstream theological discourse (e.g. dalits of India who address realities of the caste structure and develop a theology based on equality; and tribal people adivasi who speak against greed and pride).

E. Postcolonialist – resists earlier orientalist paradigm of Asia as ascetic and spiritual or viewed Asia as outside modernist salvation history. Postcolonial approach requires seeing Asia from position of humility (Sug 37).

F. Accommodation – missionary adopts customs, manners, habits of culture receiving gospel message (Mateo Ricci in China, De Nobili in India) (38).

G. Indigenization (acculturation) – gospel is translated into a particular culture. Incarnation – God takes human form in a particular culture (e.g. Hindu concept of avatara).

H. Contextualization – goal to discern gospel in all aspects of life including economic and to address questions of power and powerlessness (in contrast to indigenization which address religious and cultural elements) (38).

I. Hybridization – critical integration in a two way process where text and context, gospel and culture are interactive to create something new (often seen as Hegelian dialectic, really Fichtean thesis, antithesis, synthesis) (38). Goal is to renegotiate the structures of power built on differences. Not assimilation but rather a subversive way of creating new theological interpretations (39).

J. Extratextual – indigenous sources as basis of spirituality and theological truth (39).

K. Transtextual – use of stories, visual and performative art forms in Asian cultures simultaneously unmasking ideological biases and liberative potential in them.
L. Two major issues in Asian theologies – Christology and ecclesiology (39).