The distinction between the exoteric and the esoteric, once made by philosophers, was found among the Indians as well as among Greeks, Persians, and Muslims. Basically, it was found everywhere that people believed in an order of rank and not in equality and equal rights (Nietzsche 2002, 31).

1. *The Sociology of India. Hinduism and Buddhism*

The essays that comprise Weber’s study on India, later collected in his Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssozioologie under the title of *Hinduism and Buddhism* [Hinduismus und Buddhismus], first appeared in the third instalment of Volume XLI (1915–1916) and in the second instalment of Volume XLII (1916–1917) of the Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik. They were translated into English in 1958 as *The Religion of India*. In these studies, Weber proposed a reconstruction of the complex Indian caste system, the reasons why it had become established and the ideology upon which it rested. The central aspect of the caste system seemed to Weber to be the extraordinary ability of its “prisons of class” to resist every assault of modernity, with attendant consequences affecting the wider Indian social and economic system.

Weber’s analysis of Indian history and religion aimed, like his other comparative works on world religions, to corroborate the hypothesis advanced in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Indeed, demonstrating that the type of personality shaped by the precepts of Hinduism had acted as an obstacle to the rise of the formal rationality which had arisen in the lands where ascetic Protestantism held sway would have strongly supported his initial hypothesis (Schluchter 1984).

2. *Hinduisation, Church and Sect*

In introducing his study of Indian society, Weber referred in particular to the statistics contained in the *Census of India* and to numerous studies
then available, most of which were in French or English. Based upon these accounts, Weber described India as a “country of villages”, an unchanging society characterised from time immemorial by a social architecture based upon classes determined by birth. This notwithstanding, he discovered a series of elements in Indian society which, unlike those he found in China (see Chapter Six), seemed to suggest the development of a sort of specialistic rationality and culture closer to the one which had developed in the West. Weber noted that a rational type of science had developed in India. Moreover, the dynamic that had formed the urban culture appeared to him to be in many ways similar to that which had shaped the urban culture of medieval Europe. Furthermore, Weber was struck by the “nearly absolute tolerance” of different religious and political views for long periods of time in India, and which was more widespread than in the West. Additionally, in Weber's opinion, the political unification of the country which had begun under the Mogul dynasty (1526) had contributed to the development of a certain amount of rationalisation within the administration, although, due to the effect of subsequent splintering of the territory, its full potential was never realised.

Considering the list of elements that seemed to suggest the presence of a certain amount of economic, social and political development and even brought to mind some of the elements of Western rationalism, Weber wondered what it had been that “may have prevented capitalistic development (in the occidental sense)” (Weber 1958, 4). The answer to this question lay for Weber in Indian religiosity and, in particular, in the country's process of Hinduisation.

In the course of about eight hundred years the present Hindu system has spread from a small region in Northern India to an area comprising over 200 million people. This missionary propagation was accomplished in opposition to “animistic” folk belief and in conflict with highly developed salvation religions. (...) Ordinarily the propagation occurs in approximately the following way. The ruling stratum of an “animistic” tribal territory begins to imitate specific Hindu customs in something like the following order: abstention from meat, particularly beef; the absolute refusal to butcher cows; total abstinence from intoxicating drinks. To these certain other specific purification practices of good Hindu castes may be added (Weber 1958, 9).

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1 In addition to the data contained in the *Census of India*, Weber had also employed other select sources of information, in particular the works of the Englishmen H.H. Risley, E.A.H. Blunt and E.A. Gait, and of the Frenchmen C. Bouglé.