In what follows I wish to propose that re-imagining South Asian religions is yet a far off fantasy since understanding the religions of the continent of India is still conducted, promulgated, and vetted assuming largely western categories of ontology, rationality, relevance, and teleology. These categories not only shape the constructions we call Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, Christianity, and other religious traditions of India and its environs, but also determine the very kinds of questions scholars habitually ask concerning the religious beliefs and practices of the area. Moreover the social and epistemological location of these questions and the overt and covert pressures they manifest are often masked by social, economic, and political pressures inherent in the academic enterprise. Many of the problematic dialectics inchoate in the study of South Asian religions are revealed under the category of Orientalism and the hermeneutics of suspicion which have arisen in response to and as extensions of Said’s thesis, however in more recent work some of these issues have been of interest to philosophers working in traditional, non-comparative fields as well. The question of the epistemological status of apparently contradictory statements arising from diverse conceptual schemes is no longer the sole province of indologists and comparative religionists, but also now of social theorists such as Habermas, analytic philosophers such as Nicholas Rescher, and ethicists such as Martha Nussbaum. From among this diverse set of related discourses we might isolate the need to conduct

1 The task of re-imagining is that of representation, but representation per se has an ability to obfuscate the categories which make representation possible, that is one must be able to present before one can re-present. The original presentation and the categories of ontology and epistemology which are subsumed in this presentation must be uncovered before re-presentation, and re-imagining can occur.


the study of Indian religious traditions in ways which consciously seek to interrogate the subterranean biases at work in academic religious studies as well as to begin a strategy of counteranthropologisation of western hegemonic discourse from various south Asian perspectives. This is not merely to ‘turn the tables’ on the western history of religions, applying the same errors onto different subjects, but rather to begin to ask different kinds of questions from quite different perspectives.\(^5\) While Nussbaum and Sen, for instance, propose a revaluation of human rights which focus on those at the margins allied to a duty of care, and Billimoria argues for a mīmāṁsā notion of adhikāra-patra to effect a similar criticism, I wish to propose that the Jaina doctrine of anekāntavāda (no one view) can be used as part of just such a counteranthropologising strategy in epistemology. Along with the deployment of other ‘contra-’ social theories from Indian standpoints which together may form a more robust hermeneutics of suspicion, using such a strategy clears away the categories obfuscating our understanding of the religions of south Asia. Far from speaking ‘for the subaltern’ from western academic contexts, using destabilising concepts such as anekāntavāda helps to dissolve the categories which inhibit us from re-imagining south Asian religions in authentic or new ways. We will never escape, I suggest, our Orientalist standpoints in the absence of such acidic methods, hence my paper might be understood as a call for and possibly a first stab at a prolegomenon to future re-imaginative efforts concerning South Asian religions.

My argument will develop in two movements. Firstly I will briefly develop the notion of counteranthropology through a recapitulation of the orientalist critique and its most common rejoinders and developments. I shall show that counteranthropology is not a mere reversal of fortune on behalf of the subjugated Indian but rather a more thorough-going epistemological project equally applicable to both typically western and eastern modes of analysis. Moreover I will argue that such a strategy itself relies on the pluralistic commitments found in the anekāntavāda doctrine. The second movement will then be to develop and explicate anekāntavāda to show how it can be used as a hermeneutic of suspicion of typically western standpoints and the epistemological and political commitments with which they are imbricated. This will pave the way for the future work of re-imagining south Asian religions.

\(^5\) A similar project is enjoined by Richard King in his *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and the ‘Mystic East,’* (London: Routledge, 1999). In what follows I try, in a necessarily cursory way, to respond to King’s plea.