RESEARCH   **Open Access**

CrossMark

"*Dharm* is technology": the theologizing of technology in the experimental Hinduism of renouncers in contemporary North India

Antoinette Elizabeth DeNapoli

Correspondence:
a.denapoli@tcu.edu
Religion Department, Texas
Christian University, Fort Worth
76129, TX, USA

Abstract

This article advances a conceptual shift in the ways that scholars think and teach about the established categories of religion, renunciation, and the modern in religious studies, anthropology, and Asian studies through the use of the concept of "experimental Hinduism." Drawing on an analytical model of "experimental religion" developed by the anthropologist John Nelson, a contributor to this volume, and based on fifteen years of ethnographic fieldwork with Hindu renouncers (*sādhus*) in North India, the article examines the *sādhus*' views, experiences, and practices of the modern technological as an empirical –and underrepresented– context for reconfiguring Hinduism in the 21st century. It shows that they revision the dominant definitional boundaries of Hinduism by theologizing what is called "the forms of the modern," like communication technologies, in the context of their public teaching events (*dharm-kathās*). Thus, this article calls attention to the creative—and experimental—thinking taking place in vernacular asceticism (*sannyās*) among *sādhus* from different renunciant traditions, and who want to make sense of the vast technological changes shaping their lives and those of the communities whom they serve. The theologizing of technology is seen in their drawing on a synthesis of Hindu ideological frameworks through which the *sādhus* emphasize by means of storytelling three narrative motifs that articulate the divinity of technology. These are: *Sannyās* represents the "original technology" and the "original science"; technology manifests the properties of creativity and change that characterize what the *sādhus* associate with "the nature of Brahman" and "the rule of *dharm*"; and, finally, the apocalyptic Kalki *avatār* concept offers a redemptive metaphor for the evolving human-technology interface in the current global milieu.

> "Technology means no one lives in sadness. A *sādhu*'s life is one big technology. We bring people out of sadness."
>
> —Baba Balak Das, 2013
>
> "We have entered into the expanding universe that is Brahman. Brahman's technology is the best technology."
>
> –Bhuvneshwari Puri, 2014

Introduction: the experimental thinking and creativity of renouncers in India

This article explores the technology practices of renouncers (*sādhus*) as an everyday religious context for their reimagining of the conceptual parameters of Hinduism—or, as they say, "*dharm*"—and renunciation (*sannyās*) in the global 21st century. It

demonstrates that their use of technology provides the empirical foundation for theologizing it, which, in turn, authorizes their revisionings of *dharm* and *sannyās* for contemporary times.[1] The goal of this article is to show that how *sannyās* is lived by the *sādhus* with whom I worked, men and women who have taken ritual initiation into the pan-Indian Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva traditions of renunciation, depends on their receptivity to and understandings of the notion of change. Their receptivity to change is exhibited by the *sādhus'* engaging technology in order to access and stay connected to a god (Brahman; Parabrahman; Paramatma; Ishwar) who is seen to manifest in the technological, and with whom they can create divine relationship by means of interacting with it. The conventional (and world-negating) renouncer image of the universe as symbolic of an intricate "web" of dangerous entanglements has little cultural capital for the majority of the *sādhus* whose lives and practices I describe below. Rather, these *sādhus* draw on another (and world-affirming) kind of web imagery to speak about modern technology and its potential to generate cooperation among the various creatures of the natural world and to make alternative claims about the meaning of *sannyās* and the role of *sādhus* in the contemporary milieu.

In this discussion, we will focus on the *sādhus'* personal experiences of, attitudes toward, and anxieties about communication technologies, which I term "the forms of the modern," as a gateway toward understanding some of the broader experimental religious thinking taking place "on the ground" among the renouncers whom I knew with respect to the technology-religion interface and the practice of *sannyās* in India. The anthropologist Michael Jackson has observed that technology discourse mostly addresses its governmental, legal, and ethical dimensions. Consequently, "these debates," as Jackson says, "often leave unexplored the more immediately empirical issues of how we actually experience and interact with technologies, and how our attitudes toward them are linked to perennial human anxieties about the strange, the new, and the other" (2013, 191). In response to Jackson's prescient prescription for more empirical research on the relationship of modern humanity to the technological, this case study illuminates the experiential dimensions of technology and its impact on the daily lives of North Indian *sādhus*.[2] For many of these *sādhus*, connecting to, rather than disconnecting from, the local and global networks of communication technology exemplifies "modern" *sannyās* (Fig. 1).

Engaging the technology world has encouraged many of the *sādhus* to negotiate the mainstream conventional parameters of Hinduism(s) and experiment with the application of *dharm* and *sannyās* in ways that take into consideration the transnational challenges indicative of the 21st century.[3] While technology in general exemplifies an immediate social and geopolitical issue in transnational societies like India, it is important to recall the insights of the social theorist Charles Taylor (2004) and the political scientist S.N. Eisenstadt (2000) that it is a neither new phenomenon, nor a defining feature of modernity (see also Nelson this volume). And yet, the technologies emerging in an age that Taylor and others have called the "new globalization" (see Rocha 2012; McMahan 2012) have become integrated into the daily lives of the *sādhus'* and are compelling them to rework their religious symbolic and speak about modern technology's implications for world sustainability (see also the work of Jain 2011 for an analysis of the Indic communities that apply the teachings of their Dharma traditions to bring about ecological sustainability). In this respect, their reconfiguring the meanings and applications of *dharm* and *sannyās* on

Fig. 1 A female *sādhu* (pictured on the left) talks on her mobile phone during a *yajñā* (sacrificial) ceremony that honors the establishing of new deity-images (*mūrti*) in a local village temple in Rajasthan. Photo by the author

the basis of their experiences of the technology that has become pivotal to this era calls attention to a phenomenon that I have termed "experimental Hinduism."[4]

To make clear, I use "experimental Hinduism" in an analytical rather than only in a descriptive capacity (see also DeNapoli 2016a, b, and c). In doing so, I draw on the theoretical models of "experimental religion" developed by Patricia Ward (2009), a historian of religion, in her discussion of 18th-century American Protestant Christianity and, in the case of the temple Buddhism(s) practiced in contemporary Japan, by another contributor to this volume, the anthropologist John Nelson (2013).[5] He explains that experimental religion (or, in the terms he uses, "experimental Buddhism") describes the emphases that everyday religious practitioners place on processes such as personal experience (which, as Nelson suggests, includes as much the intersubjective as the subjective), experimentation (testing the validity of new ideas to see if they work), methodology (developing and applying techniques for testing the results of ideas, including their success and failure), pragmatism (cultivating a sentiment of the practicality of ideas and methods), and beneficence (that the success of any idea or method is also measured in part by its capacity to serve the universal common good). Nelson says: "An experimental approach to religious practice…is selective, pragmatic, and concerned primarily with achieving a satisfactory result that somehow improves human life …." (21). According to Nelson, through the means of religious experimentation, people make sense of the social, cultural, and economic changes taking place around them and provoke the innovation or reinvention of their religious traditions.

Besides these important aspects of the concept that Nelson teases out, I further want to bring into view the notion of *experimentation as creativity*, which plays an equally prominent role in generating the kinds of social and cultural applications illustrated by this volume's contributions on the experimental religiosities of the global Dharma traditions (Srinivas, T: The cow in the elevator: Notes on an anthropology of wonder, forthcoming; DeNapoli and Srinivas 2016). The term "experimental Hinduism" interprets the transformations occurring in the Indic theologies and practices of Hindu *dharm* today and underscores

creativity as the crucial, and yet quotidian, means by which people, renouncers, house-holders, and others, conceptualize *dharm* beyond the framework of "customs," "ethics," "lot in life," "rituals" and even "tradition" to create new or alternative Dharma visions that responsibly engage historically contextualized social change (see also McMahan 2008, 179).

In my usage of the concept, "experimental Hinduism" does not mean that the Hindu Dharma traditions analyzed in the case of renunciation here, or in the case of the other Hindu expressions featured in this volume, intentionally break away from the perceived continuities of "tradition" and struggle haplessly to anchor themselves to a "sacred canopy" (Berger 1967) which, regardless of its attitude toward the fact or significance of social change, must wrestle with the challenges of contemporary life. "Tradition" is not at all problematic to the *sādhus*. The notion of "tradition" (*dharm*), however it is imagined and enacted, carries a lot of cultural weight for them and, because of the importance ascribed to it, they want their work, and their teachings, and in some cases their religious activism, to be seen as aligned both in "spirit" and "principle" with Hindu "*dharm*," even as they reinterpret its boundaries for identity formation. At the same time, "experimental Hinduism" does not suggest that the creativity born of humanity's relationship to technology and other forms of the modern is entirely new.[6] In the case of *sannyās*, the theological experimentation illustrative of the *sādhus*' views of communication technologies has been a component of the experimental outlook of ancient yogis (Stoler Miller 1996) as well as modern holy figures like Mahatma Gandhi (see Howard 2014; see also Bakshi 1998), Vivekananda, and Aurobindo Ghose (Brown 2012; Dobe 2016). Religious experimentation, as Nelson's work similarly suggests, demonstrates the pan-historical, pan-cultural response of people precisely to the fact of change.

What this article adds to the sphere of understandings about the experimental in the Hindu Dharma traditions, at least, is that the *sādhus*' theologizing of 21st- century technological (and environmental)[7] change in India constitutes a type of religious experimentation because it is also *provisional* and not only creative (see Patton in this volume).[8] Their theologizing of technology addresses the basic human need to make sense of change by situating it within a familiar interpretive scaffolding, and is therefore necessary for responding to the problems illustrative of contemporary times. But their interpretations of technology are likely to shift as the human-technology interface evolves. As modern technologies barrage the Indian landscape, increase the human uncertainty indicative of the global phenomenon of modernity (Benevides 1998), and force people across generations, religious affiliations, and economic classes to confront the fact of technology's reality, as well as its almost totalizing influence on human life, the *sādhus*, too, are faced with interpreting this the shapeshifting global trickster, which has had both positive and negative consequences for the planet. Their theologizing of technology in/for everyday human religiousness presents new opportunities for conceptualizing change, and the modern, in ways that earlier thinkers may not have imagined possible given that human understanding is partial.

But are the *sādhus* aware of the provisional nature of their experiments? (see Patton this volume). As the rhetoric of renunciation that they perform in public teaching contexts indicates (more about this below), the *sādhus* appear to be aware that their *dharm* experiments are provisional and argue for the necessity of their theological experiments by appealing to what they say constitutes the omnipresent impulse of change that, in their views, underlies all the Dharma traditions of the world and, more

generally, the cosmos and creation. To put it in the wise words of the *sādhu* Bhuvnesh-wari Puri, a female renouncer-guru whose stories of the divine creativity of technology and its benefits for human and non-human life are presented shortly, *dharm* would be-come a "dinosaur"—extinct—if it did not change "with the times." This understanding works to remedy either popular or academic viewpoints which represent *dharm* in the stabilizing frame of a static phenomenon across time and space. The academic study of religion has repeatedly shown that woven into the imaginative fiber of religions as cultural phenomena is the potent (and enduring) impulse of change—that is, the dy-namic capacity of humans to create, build, question, and destroy their sacred worlds (Berger 1967; see also McMahan 2008; McGuire 2008; Geertz 1973). That powerful stimulus arises in part from conditional cultural visions of human life-worlds as ever-changing creations.

Against this backdrop, *dharm*-as-practiced in Asia and the diaspora by individuals and communities consisting of Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Muslims, and Sikhs captures the power of creativity and provisionary interpretations of change as the vital and underlying conditions for provoking the experimental in lived religion. Speaking about the technological innovations of the daily ritual practices of the South Indian temple priests of Bangalore (Malleswaram district) with whom she worked, the anthropologist Tulasi Srinivas says that such experimentation "makes Hinduism vibrant and dynamic… There is a lot of creativity here and we should think as scholars…about the mean-ing and nature of this creativity, especially as it relates to globalization" (2012, 37; see also DeNapoli and Srinivas 2016).[9]

For our purposes, then, "experimental Hinduism" helps draw attention to the particular kind of Hinduism that the *sādhus* create in the 21st century by locating *dharm* and *sannyās* in the modern context of the communication technologies per-meating the spectrum of contemporary Indian life worlds. Their statements that "*dharm* is technology" not only indicate a shared vision of the equivalence of these domains, but also "perform" the ethos of experimental Hinduism by questioning the artificial distinction between what are frequently seen in western-based scholar-ship as two conflicting value systems. Thus, here, we will explore the rhetorically performative ways that the *sādhus* align technology and *dharm* through an analysis of the religious stories *(kahāniyān)* they tell as part of their teaching events *(dharm-kathā)*, which are open to people from all walks of life. I suggest that the *sādhus* construct technology as a divine "web" of dharmic connectivity and widen the meaning and application of *sannyās* through the use of synthesized Hindu the-ologies, in which they emphasize three narrative motifs: *Sannyās* represents a branch of the "original science" (*vijñān*) that is consistent with the "original tech-nology" (*taknīq*) of *dharm*; technology manifests the material properties of creativity and change that characterize what they claim is the inherent nature of Brahman and *dharm*; and the apocalyptic Kalki *avatār* paradigm offers a redemp-tive metaphor for the human-technology interface in the current global milieu.

Background: *sannyās* and conventional ideals—the problem of entanglement

Popular and academic literature classifies *sādhus* as "world-renouncers."[10] There are a variety of *sādhus*—a generic term for "holy person"—in India. *Sādhus* often give vivid

expression to the recurring diversity of the ideologies, institutions, and practices constitutive of vernacular (or lived) Hinduisms in Indic contexts.[11] The most radical class of *sādhus* is known as *sannyāsīs*, a linguistically gendered masculine term, and these renouncers embody an anti-nomian, world-negating approach to existence (*sansār*). Female Hindu renouncers are characterized as *sannyāsinīs*, which denotes the linguistically feminine form of *sannyāsī*. The *sādhus* whose practices I describe and analyze in this article represent *sannyāsīs* (m) and *sannyāsinīs* (f). However, the majority of these renouncers used the term "sadhu" in their self-descriptions and distinguished between types of renouncers (e.g., Daśanāmī, Nāth-Yogī, Tyāgī, or Sītā Rām) in order to clarify the specific tradition (*sampradāya*) into which they received initiation (*dīkṣā*).[12] Following their cue, I refer to the renouncers I worked with as "sadhus," rather than as *sannyāsīs* or *sannyāsinīs*. While the term "sadhvi" represents the linguistically gendered feminine equivalent of "sadhu," the female renouncers whom I knew, and whom their constituents addressed as "*mātā-jī*," "*mātā-rām*," or "*māī-rām*," each of which translates as "holy mother," made clear that "sadhvi" describes women who become possessed by local deities in shrines throughout North India. Hence, these renouncers also called themselves *sādhus*.

Regardless of the degree of their renunciation, or the kind of renunciation created by their practices—to give some examples, devotional-oriented (*bhakti*), contemplative-oriented (*jñān*), service-oriented (*karm*), or a combination of these approaches—*sādhus*, in general, are said to renounce "the world" (Dumont 1960). In the classical Brahmanical worldview featured in renouncer texts such as the *Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣads*, "renouncing the world" accentuates the idea of physical separation from persons and places—from that which oriented an individual's social identity and structured his or her cultural habitus "in-the-world." Breaking away from the familiar, the renouncer leaves his (or her) natal village and settles in the wilderness[13] (Olivelle 1996). Therefore, living alone in the wilderness represents one classic method by which *sādhus* renounce the world in the Hindu traditions (see Olivelle 1992; 1996; Freiberger 2006; Tambiah 1977).[14] Ashrams situated in quiet forest settings symbolize the renouncer ideal of the primacy of physical separation from worldly life and provide places of respite for *sādhus* and householders who have taken temporary ascetic vows and want to devote themselves to contemplative living (Fig. 2).

Other methods of renouncing the world include leaving behind normative social-cultural institutions like marriage, family, and householding[15]—and by implication, sexual practice—caste-based community and ritual obligations, and economic expectations to work, earn a living, and support family members (but see DeNapoli 2014; Hausner 2007; Narayan 1989 for the influence of caste status on *sādhus*' self-identities and the ways that some *sādhus* continue to earn a living through their practices of singing and giving public discourses in order to support their families).[16] By doing so, *sādhus* dedicate themselves permanently to the worship of the divine in whatever manner it is conceived. The *sādhus* I collaborated with are celibate practitioners and manage ashrams with adjoining temples (in one case, a *sādhu's* disciples, a married couple with three young children, manage the ashram complex in her absence); they either live alone or in groups consisting of two or more *sādhus*. In the latter contexts, the *sādhus* relate to each other as guru and disciple (*celā*), or as spiritual "siblings" (*guru-bhāī* or *guru-bahen*) who have been initiated by the same guru (Figs. 3 and 4).

Fig. 2 The ashram of a *sādhu* located in the foothills of the Aravalli Mountains, Rajasthan. Photo by the author

The conventional ideals that signify the religious worlds of *sādhus*, generally spea-king, have to do with those of itinerant wandering (*parivrajya*), living alone (*ekānt*), practicing silence (*maun*), penance (*tapas*),[17] and detachment (*vairāg; tyāg*). Perhaps the most significant of these values concerns detachment. Classical Brahmanical texts on *sannyās*, namely the *Upaniṣads* and the *Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣads*, emphasize detachment as its premiere virtue (Olivelle 1992; 1996; Heesterman 1985, 26–44). In the dominant views of these texts, detachment denotes the unyielding ability to avoid entanglements, precisely, emotional entanglements. Not surprisingly, in these texts the world of existence (*sansār*) symbolizes a dangerous "web" (*jāl*) that mires souls (*ātmā*)

Fig. 3 Two *sādhus*, and guru-brothers, pictured in saffron-colored clothing with a disciple. Photo by the author

Fig. 4 Female *sādhus* who reside together in an ashram in Rajasthan that is managed by the elderly *sādhu* seated on the far right of the group and wearing glasses (she also serves in the guru role to the other female *sādhus*). Also pictured in the photo is a well-known male *sādhu* from the local community and a female householder (dressed in red Rajputi clothing) visiting the ashram. Photo by the author

in the cycle of rebirth (*sansār*). Hence, practicing detachment enables *sādhus* to achieve the ultimate salvific goal of liberation (*mokṣ*) from *sansār* and union with the divine.[18]

Ideals, though, are not always indicative of the ways in which *sādhus* live their *sannyās* "on the ground." [19]As I have discussed elsewhere (DeNapoli 2016b and c; 2014; 2013), *sannyās*-as-practiced, or "vernacular asceticism," as I have characterized this phenomenon in the cultural context of North India, foregrounds understandings about *sannyās* that complement *as well as* conflict with its dominant—and frequently text-based—ideals. But whether it is imagined as an ideal or practiced every day by *sādhus*, detachment, according to much of the ethnographic literature on *sannyās*, continues to be that signal value which *sādhus* across traditions, regions, generations, gendered embodiments, classes, castes, and educational levels press on in their descriptions of what *sannyās* is all about.

So, what does it mean when *sādhus* use technology? Does it suggest the decay of an ancient way of life and cultural institution? Does it epitomize *sādhus*' entanglement in *sansār*? Or, does it reveal a new way of conceiving *sannyās* for the 21st century? How may scholars and students of religion understand the relationship between technology and *sannyās* in India today in respect to the *sādhus*' experiences and practices of the technological? To reiterate Srinivas's astute insights on the creative and provisional nature of everyday Hindu religiosities discussed earlier, the focus on experimentation *as* creativity provides a more accurate and lived view of *how* "Hinduism is changing in India in the global age" (2012, 39). From this angle, the *sādhus*' use of technology offers scholars and students the opportunity, as Srinivas says about temple priests in Bangalore, "to think beyond the boundaries of conventional thinking about religion" and to see the "innovative and experimental" (39) possibilities of technology to reshape ideas about *sannyās* and about the *dharm*-technology interface as fashioned in contemporary times. Let me first give some ethnographic context to what provoked the questioning of my own scholarly assumptions about the lack of connections I had thought existed between *dharm* and technology in *sannyās* (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5 A *sādhu* whose use of modern technologies epitomizes modern *sannyās*. Photo by author

Sixteen years ago, when I began conducting ethnographic fieldwork for a research project on Hindu *sannyās* as conceived and experienced by Śaiva *sādhus* in North India, modern communication technologies such as mobile phones, smart phones, personal computers, tablet computers, and iPads were non-existent in the practices of the Daśanāmī and Nāth *sādhus* with whom I worked. While a few of the ashrams, usually moderate-in-size monastic centers, in which the *sādhus* lived had landline phones,[20] the majority of them preferred to stay disconnected from the intricate and emerging web of telecommunication systems sweeping the Indian landscape. The absence of (most forms of) modern technology in *sannyās*-as-lived did not seem unusual to me. In fact, it was the norm for the *sādhus* in my field study. After all, as an ideal, *sannyās* represents radical separation from the illusory world and its purported material trappings. Being "disconnected" from communication technologies appeared to make explicit the idea of *sādhus*' detachment, the virtue of *sannyās par excellence*, from the web of *sansār*. Between 2001 and 2006, the religious stories (*kahāniyān*) they told, the sacred texts (*pāṭh*) they recited, and the religious songs (*bhajans*) they sang in devotional contexts, which I have termed as the *sādhus*' "rhetoric of renunciation" (DeNapoli 2014), "performed" this dominant view of *sannyās*. At the time, their practices suggested that technology symbolizes the impermanence of material existence connoted by the classical idea of *sansār*; that escape from *sansār* requires *sādhus* to remove themselves from the tempting world(s) of technology; and that "real" *sādhus* reach their spiritual goals of divine union only by eschewing the technological.

After completing my fieldwork in 2006, I left India with the impression that *sannyās* and technology constituted two opposing spheres of human experience and practice in the daily lives of Hindu renouncers. By the time I returned to North India in the summer of 2011,[21] however, a new narrative of technology and its relation to *sannyās* had emerged. An indication of this ideological shift became evident in the substantially increased number of *sādhus* bringing communication technologies into their renunciation. For instance, all of the *sādhus*, men and women, from my earlier field study (2001–2003;

2004–2006; 2011) had mobile phones (many of which had built-in camera and video recording), televisions, DVD and CD players. Some of these *sādhus* wrote their phone numbers on the mud-brick walls of their ashrams (see the image below). Another increasingly popular mobile (or portable) technology in these *sādhus*' practices concerned the use of a flash drive that stores music and that can be plugged into the USB port of a stereo or computer. The *sādhus* who used this device lauded its religious value. One Śaiva *sādhu* by the name of Prem Nath of Nāth-Yogī tradition said with much excitement in his voice that he could take his device to any music store and have an unlimited (*ānant*) number of *bhajans* uploaded to it. On another occasion, while traveling in the car of my field associate, Prem Nath became overjoyed when he discovered that the vehicle had a built-in port for playing music. He attached his device to the port and said, "Now I can sit anywhere and be with God" (Fig. 6).

For those *sādhus* who became field collaborators in a new research project that I began conducting in the adjoining North Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, and in the Union Territory of Silwasa, between 2013 and 2015, in which I investigated the adaptations occurring within *sannyās* on account of technology and other social transformations, they not only had televisions, DVDs, *and* mobile phones, but also tablet computers and/or personal computers. Many of these *sādhus* had also joined the social networking site of Facebook and regularly updated their status with photos of the local or regional religious events they attended (I, too, joined this networking site in the year 2013 at the behest of the *sādhus*). Two of the female *sādhus* from this field study, who lead in the guru role, in addition to using social media websites to advertise their public events, had their own professional websites.

As these examples show, technology in its various forms permeates the lives and practices of *sādhus*. Its use crosscuts the sociological categories of caste, gender, age, and education among the *sādhus* whom I knew. Their weaving technology constructively into

Fig. 6 A *sādhu*'s mobile number is written on the left side of the ashram's wall. Below the writing of the *sādhu*'s phone number is the mobile number of a devotee. Photo by the author

their lives suggests that an important conceptual shift is occurring in *sādhus'* ideas about *sannyās*, *dharm*, and technology. Employing technology not only indexes the new norm of *sannyās*-as-lived in the 21st century, but also, as I argue, destabilizes dominant views about what *sannyās* and being a *sādhu* mean in this milieu. As significantly, the *sādhus'* use of technology has provoked its theologizing to emphasize that the ever-expanding network of interactions which technology is thought to create and facilitate gives material expression to an underlying divine network—and, as we will see later on, a divine "net"—that (em)powers technology and constitutes its basis (Fig. 7).

Constructing ideas about technology through the use of Hindu frameworks makes it possible for the *sādhus* to envision new and emerging technologies in India not only as situated within a sacred cosmos, but also as the very processes in/by which divine mystery itself manifests and shapes the cosmos that it is thought to create. To see the technological changes that are redefining the current Indian socio-political, legal, and economic topographies through the scaffolding of divine intentionality helps the *sādhus* to make sense of those dramatic cultural shifts for themselves and their constituencies. It also enables them to craft worlds of meaning firmly positioned within a Hindu "sacred canopy" (Berger 1967), even as the boundaries of that canopy are negotiated in novel and distinct ways by the *sādhus'* interpretations of those shifts.

The following ethnographic analyses are drawn from fifteen months of field research that I conducted between 2013 and 2015 in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, and the Union Territory of Silwasa, with Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava *sādhus*. While I spoke with over two-hundred *sādhus*, attending public events organized by and for *sādhus* in local and regional contexts, I worked closely with forty-nine of these *sādhus*, visiting them daily at their temples, ashrams, and occasionally, at their devotees' homes. These *sādhus'* ideas about and uses of communication technologies are representative of the larger *sādhu* population that I encountered in North India.

The case study presented in this article offers an explanatory model with which to think about a broader religious phenomenon as witnessed particularly in the contemporary

Fig. 7 A male *sādhu* talks about the divine properties (*guṇ*) of technology. Photo by the author

technology practices of the guru-centered, global religious movements analyzed in the works of Joseph Alter (2014), Joanne Waghorne (2014), Maya Warrier (2014), Hanna Kim (2014), Christiane Brosius (2012), and Tulasi Srinivas (2010). Although the *sādhus* I know are not transnational (or international) like the globe-trotting *sādhus*-gurus described by these scholars, the *sādhus*, too, have felt the intensity and impact of the contemporary forces and flows of transnational phenomena like modern communication technologies on their everyday lives (see also the works of Herman 2010, Helland 2010, Karapanagiotis 2010, Scheifinger 2010, and Jacobs 2007 for a discussion of the digital technologies of contemporary Hinduism). The experimental Hinduism given attention to here attests to the reality of that global impact at the local—and often underrepresented—levels of renunciant experience and practice in Indic contexts. Perhaps the experimental ways that the *sādhus* represent technology through the use of the authorizing language of *dharm* in local South Asian contexts may shed light on the imaginative possibilities that experimentation offers gurus who operate in global contexts and use technology to craft "new kind[s] of religious associations and…new…religiosit[ies]" (Waghorne 2014, 284).

Theme #1: *Sannyās, Dharm*, and techno-science—a confluence of spiritual equivalences

The *sādhus* construct the definitional boundaries of technology in a comprehensive manner and include the tripartite notions of machines, methods, and moral visions.[22] Their definitions of technology parallel their conceptions of *dharm* as holistic and, hence, as constitutive of tools, techniques, and theologies. The conceptual associations that the *sādhus* establish between technology and *dharm* have to do with their views that technology, however imagined, is "originally" (*ādi kāl men*) derived from *dharm*. What is more, the mechanisms by which technology comes into existence reflect and follow the "original" pattern for the emergence of *dharm* in the world. That is, according to the *sādhus*, both *dharm* and technology emerge from the investigative processes of observation and discovery. Both represent the "search" (*khoj*) for knowledge (*jñān*), truth (*sat*), and meaning (*arth*). Both require extensive and careful "research" (*śodh*) on a subject. And, finally, both, in theory, apply the wisdom gained through research in a manner that benefits all creation, improves the quality of life on the planet, and transforms human consciousness by awakening recognition of the beauty, creativity, and love within creation. As the *sādhu* Bhuvneshwari Puri explains in a *dharm-kathā* that she gave at her ashram on the holy day of the fall equinox (*Śarad Pūrṇimā*): "Technology makes life heavenly for human beings, for all creatures. *Dharm* has the same goal (*lakṣya*). *Dharm* benefits the entire world. It provides benefit, satisfaction, and happiness to all. *Dharm* is the highest technology."

Whereas *dharm* signifies the search for truth turned inward, technology, and by implication "science," represents this search turned outward toward the phenomenal world. While the focus of these paths may differ, the *sādhus* say that the features that identify *dharm* and technology equally as paths for discovering truth and meaning are "the same." These include personal experience as the authoritative basis for all knowledge, reasoning (or logic), and experimentation and invention. The latter two processes involve the rational processes of discerning equivalences in/throughout creation, developing methods, testing ideas, and deducing and applying ideas and/or methods that work. Some of the *sādhus* further associate these features with the concept of *tyāg*, which translates as "sacrifice." In the *Bhagavad*

Gītā, and in popular religious discourse, *tyāg* typically denotes the idea of renouncing desires and attachments to "the fruits" of action for the purpose of divine realization (Patton, trans., 2008). And yet, when the *sādhus* combine *dharm* and technology into a single conceptual framework, *tyāg* takes on a new valence to mean the releasing of biases and the practice of objectivity. Speaking about *tyāg*, Parashuram Das says,

> What is technology? It is when a person leaves behind all of his [or her] judgments, dispositions, and temperaments. Suppose we want to create a mobile phone, at that time we have to sacrifice all our judgments about phones. We have to give all our time and effort to our work, to creating a mobile. We have to apply all our attention [*dhyān*] in one place…The making of a mobile is technology. In technology we have to sacrifice everything [*tyāg*]. The scientist can only be involved in science when he leaves everything behind and concentrates on making technology. He thinks, 'I have to make this mobile. How should I make it? What should I add? How should I make the mobile so that it's effective?' The yogi, too, has to leave behind all judgments to reach God. He has to sacrifice all worldly concerns. He concentrates on only one thing. He just involves himself in *yog*. The mobile is one technology. Yog is another technology. Technology means science. The yogi and the scientist have to sacrifice all their biases and collect their attention in one place (Fig. 8).

In this narrative, engaging technology identifies a specific method of *sannyās* through which the *sādhu*, or yogi, develops detachment, a pre-requisite for religious awakening and transformation. Technology is not just a tool, or an inert and passive thing, used to interact with the world, but rather, for Parashuram Das, it is a potent technique for yogic realization. He correlates detachment with "leav[ing] behind all judgments" and "apply[ing] concentration in one place." The detachment fashioned by interacting with technology characterizes Parashuram Das's view of *tyāg* in the sense of sacrificing one's received understandings of how the world works in order that new knowledge may

Fig. 8 Parashuram Das describes technology as a technique for developing *tyāg*. Photo by the author

come to light. The new knowledge that the technology-human interface makes possible increases, at least in Parashuram Das's view, the likelihood of becoming detached because, in theory, new knowledge serves as a perennial reminder of the partiality of all received viewpoints. *Sādhus*' use of technology offers a means to cultivate the dispassion required to live the difficult yogi path. As significantly, Parashuram Das suggests that technology aids, rather than deters, *sādhus* in achieving their ultimate salvific goals.

Notice, too, that the features which Parashuram Das readily associates with *dharm* and technology help explain the *sādhus*' representations of these overlapping domains of human experience and activity in the pragmatic terms of the "practical" and the "scientific" (*vaijñāik*). Concurring on this point, Baba Balak Das says, "Science [*vijñān*] believes in 'practicals.' So do our *Śāstras*. The *mahātmās* are 'practical.' They can know what your destiny is and tell you what you will experience. Can science do that?" To the *sādhus*, *dharm* signifies the "oldest technology" and the "original science." Similarly, they say that *sādhus* in general epitomize the "original scientists" whose research brings *dharm* into the world of existence to assist and improve humanity. Parashuram Das's narrative brings out this association between the detached yogi and the objective scientist. Conceived in this way, the *sādhus* construct *sannyās* (or *yog*) in the language of spiritual techno-science. The connections established between *dharm* and technology highlight the creativity shaping their views of Hinduism and position the experimental within the parameters of *dharm*.

Their emphasis on technology, science, and rational thinking also selectively weaves the language(s) of the authorizing discourses of modernity (see Ram 2013) into the definitional boundaries of *dharm* and *sannyās*. But this is not anything new. As a number of scholars have discussed, *sādhus* (and gurus) have been drawing on the "forces and themes that have shaped the modern world" in their attempts to reinvent and legitimate their traditions in new contexts (Singleton and Goldberg 2014, 2).[23] What the *sādhus*, however, mean by "science" and "technology" appears to hinge on their views that because these empirical knowledge systems are based in experimental approaches, they always change and move in new directions. Therefore, by juxtaposing *dharm* and *sannyās* with techno-science, the *sādhus* suggest these phenomena, too, which are similarly seen to be rooted in experimental methods, change and move in new and unexpected ways. In the *dharm-kathā* that Bhuvneshwari Puri gave on the day of the fall equinox, the continuity she crafts between techno-science and *sannyās* performs this understanding. She says,

> Our *Ved-Purān* teaches that the meaning of *sannyās* is to find your self [*ātmā*]. It's less important to get God [*bhagvān*] and more important to find your *ātmā*. You should try to know your *ātmā*…*Sannyās* doesn't mean to leave your work. It means you should go in the right direction. When you live for your *ātmā*, you live for the whole world…*Sannyās* is not against technology. People think that the *sannyāsī* just sits since ancient times. That he gets up after thousands of years of sitting in the same place. He doesn't know what a mobile is, what Wi-Fi, Google, or the Internet is. People imagine all this about *sannyāsīs*. But this isn't so. *Sannyās* is always changing. It always changing with the times…
>
> [Asking the audience]: Did you know that the oldest *sannyāsī* in India is Maharshi Kannath? He developed the formula for the hydro cell…There was also the *sannyāsī* Maharshi Kapil. His topic was mathematics [continues to name a number of sages

who conducted research experiments]…These *sannyāsīs* did lots of research in their fields. Whatever we think today, our ancient *ṛiṣis* were involved in science. If they were working on atomic energy, how can we say it's not science? The *ṛiṣis* made technology. The meaning of *ṛiṣis* is to discover. That discovery covers inside and outside truths. The one who invents is a *ṛiṣis*. In the *Upaniṣads*, you find the meaning of *sannyās*. Those *ṛiṣis* researched the essence of the *ātmā*…Those *sannyāsīs* kept searching within the *ātmā* for new things and new things always came out of their research…The meaning of *sannyās* is not that you sit since ancient times. It means to live soul-wise and earth-wise.

According to Bhuvneshwari Puri, *sannyās* is as modern as techno-science, and techno-science is as ancient as *sannyās*. Its "always changing with the times" and its experimental methods distinguish the modernity of *sannyās* and its scientific approach to the processes of discovery. Her narrative indicates that the discovery of the self (*ātmā*) and the discovery of the nature of the world represent, respectively, inner and outer forms of the divine knowledge ("truths") extracted from the experiments of the *ṛiṣis* of yore. Similarly, because Bhuvneshwari Puri implies that techno-science includes the methods and the results of the discoveries (e.g., the hydro cell, mathematics, and in her later descriptions of the experiments of the sages, aerodynamics) of exemplary Vedic *ṛiṣis*, it designates a traditional practice. For *sādhus* like Bhuvneshwari Puri, techno-science reveals visions and values consonant with the perceived power of *dharm* on account of the understanding that *dharm* constitutes its vital source. To this end, she locates technology within a Hindu sacred cosmos and constructs *sannyās* in the frame of a way of life in which *dharm* and techno-science converge. *Sannyās*, then, bridges the "inner science" of *dharm* with the "outer science" of technology. Her statement that "[s]*annyās* means to live soul-wise and earth-wise" suggests this confluence. Constructing *sannyās* with respect to the combining of the knowledge systems of *dharm* and techno-science, she indicates that *sannyās* depicts the most comprehensive and sustainable way of living on the planet, because it joins the wisdom of *dharm* with the knowledge of science. Each of these systems places a premium on the pragmatic and illustrates the "modern" by virtue of the practical application of their "truths" to life. Hence, the Vedic *ṛiṣi* and expert scientist "naturally" merge in the image (and role of) the *sādhu-sannyāsī*.

Not all of the *sādhus*, however, share Bhuvneshwari Puri's positive sentiments toward technology. For some *sādhus*, the topic evokes anxiety. For example, Nityananda Puri, who manages a small ashram located deep in the jungles of LoSingh village, Udaipur district, with his guru-sister Sharda Puri, supports the conventional image of the dispassionate *sādhu* who exists in the form of a penumbra figure on the periphery of existence. While *sādhus* who refuse to engage technology like Nityananda Puri and Sharda Puri are in the minority, their views have been vocalized at regional *sādhu* feasting ceremonies (*bhaṇḍāras*), in which the *sādhus* gather together to honor a god, a guru, or a high holy day, and have cast a lingering shadow over local and regional renunciant efforts to modernize the practice (and image) of *sannyās*. Leading a strictly minimalist life, Nityananda Puri disagrees with *sādhus*' use of modern technologies. Simply my mentioning of *sādhus*' bringing technology into their everyday religious practices evoked a look of disgust on his face (he kept shaking his head during our conversation as if to suggest that

sādhus who use technology are destroying what he later called the "good name" of *sannyās*). Nityananda Puri emphasizes that the ultimate *sannyās* requires giving up the expensive and valuable electronic devices that *sādhus* use, and in his view, to which they have become attached. Sharda Puri concurs. What is more, *sannyās*, according to Nityananda Puri, in particular, requires embodying an attitude of disgust (*ghṛnā*) toward such technology. For Nityananda Puri, just as using technology signifies *sādhus*' attachment to it, and to *sansār*, their disgust toward technology illustrates their detachment from the material world.

Nityananda Puri's views on the incompatibility between *sannyās* and the forms of the modern have been voiced outside of renunciant contexts. From the scholarly angle, speaking about *sādhus* who lead in the guru role, the anthropologist Joseph Alter echoes Nityananda's standpoint by stating that "…gurus represent modernity, even though they do so indirectly by embodying what modernity seems to have left behind or lost touch with. Gurus are, to various degrees, self-consciously out of sync with the present, both in terms of time and place. This produces their particular authority...." (2014, 60).

Bhuvneshwari Puri, however, interrogates these perspectives. In response to my question, "Doesn't *sannyās* require abandoning technology?" she, like many of the *sādhus*, says that the ultimate *sannyās* is not about leaving behind people, family, home, village, or even technology writ large. Comparable to the spirit of Parashuram Das's teachings discussed earlier in the context of the notion that *sannyās* requires leaving behind "all judgments," for Bhuvneshwari Puri, too, it demands the relinquishing of incorrect understanding, and not "things." Along with this, she also says that cultivating an attitude of disgust toward technology is as likely to mire a person in *sansār* as is generating an attitude of passion (*kām*) for it. Below, I share an excerpt from a conversation we had on July 6, 2015 at her ashram. Here, she describes her idea of what "real" *sannyās* means:

> You asked what is the meaning of *sannyās*. It is a very deep (*gaherā*) topic. *Sannyās* means freedom (*svatantratā*). Freedom from what? Desire (*kām*). From disgust (*dveś*) and passion (*rāg*). That is real (*asli*) *sannyās*, to be free of *rāg* and *dveś* in one's heart (*man*). *Rāg* means when you say "this is mine and I want it by any means,"[24] and *dveś* means when you hate something. Hatred is *dveś*. The *sannyāsī* should not have hatred or possession in his nature. Let's say he is hating something and says, "Oh, I don't want to see this. Take it away." That is *dveś*. These are not good things. The *sannyāsī* should be 'balanced.' *Sannyāsīs* should be balanced in their heart-minds and see everything as equal (*barābar*). Now, understand that the *sannyāsī's* family is big. Not only those four family members are his, but the entire world (*duniyā*) belongs to him. Those four people didn't become erased from the *sannyāsī's* world. No. They have been added to his world. The only thing is this: The *sādhu*, the *sannyāsī*, has to treat everyone equally. Whatever he does, he should do it equally. He shouldn't say rubbish things to lift himself up.

> There was a *sannyāsī*. He was very famous. He was sitting with his devotees (*bhakts*) and talking to them. The news came over there that his wife expired. You know what he said? He said, "It's great. Now I am out of problems." It affected the people. The devotees said, "Oh, what a big *sannyāsī* he is!" The *sannyāsī* said, "She died and now I have no more problems behind me." But he should have considered this: You're a *sannyāsī*, you've been a *sannyāsī* for the last twenty years and still she's a

"problem" for you? She's still in your mind and heart as a "problem" after all these years? Normally, whenever we (*sādhus*) hear of anyone's death, we say that the soul should find peace (*śānti*) and it should leave the body in a good way (*acci tarah se*). But if all these things are coming into your mind when someone dies, it means you are still attached to that person. It means something is going on from inside. You might not be attached in one way, but definitely, you're attached. You're attached either in *rāg* or *dveś*. You are connected with these two things in some way. But when the *sannyāsī* is balanced, *rāg* and *dveś* have disappeared. His love for the world has become bigger, not smaller.

According to the teachings of Bhuvneshwari Puri, Nityananda Puri's notable disgust toward technology illustrates the concept of *dveś*, and by cultivating it, he increases his "attachment" (*kām*) to the world, and to technology, specifically, rather than decreases his attachment to it. That is, Nityananda Puri's *dveś* creates the exact opposite effect of what he intends it to accomplish. In Bhuvneshwari Puri's view, *sādhus*' use of technology, from mobile phones to motorcycles, no more indicates their worldly attachment than their hatred for it suggests their worldly detachment. From this angle, Nityananda Puri, while a staunch opponent of technology, remains as attached to technology as the *sādhus* whom he criticizes for using it. Why? In the light of Bhuvneshwari Puri's teachings, to understand the binding powers of *rāg* and *dveś*, *sādhus* must realize that they signify two ends of the same destructive continuum of human attachment. Whereas *rāg* represents what we may think of in terms of positive attachment (passion; possession; fulfillment; clinging), *dveś* connotes negative attachment (repulsion; hatred; anger; disgust). Regardless of its type, attachment is attachment, and, as Bhuvneshwari Puri emphasizes, it's "not good" for *sādhus*.

Contrary to Nityananda Puri's claim, repulsion to the technological hardly signifies a *sādhu*'s ultimate detachment from the world. Instead, it indicates that he has developed a negative attraction to technology, which continues to influence his "heart" and "mind" from "inside," burying him deeper in *sansār*. Consequently, Nityananda Puri remains as attached to technology as the *sannyāsī* who appears in Bhuvneshwari Puri's story remains attached to the wife whom he left behind to become a *sādhu*. Both *sādhus* represent paradigmatic examples for the dark face of *dveś* and its karmic imprint on human life. Despite the wife's death, Bhuvneshwari Puri is convinced that the *sannyāsī* holds an attachment to the wife, which is shown by his callous response to the news of her passing that "It's great. Now, I'm out of problems." Rather than pronounce a blessing for the peace of her soul on its new journey in *sansār*, the *sannyāsī* expresses a mixture of joy and relief that his "problem" is now "behind" him. In Bhuvneshwari Puri's story, the *bhakts* interpret the *sannyāsī*'s reaction to mean that he has reached the highest level of dispassion, confirming his purportedly enlightened status to them. They react by saying, "Oh, what a big *sādhu* he is!"

But Bhuvneshwari Puri disagrees. She reads the *sannyāsī*'s response in another way. For her, the "problem" is not the *sannyāsī*'s wife; it's the *sannyāsī* who confuses his repugnance for the deceased woman with his realization of detachment. His ignorance of the distinction between *rāg* and *dveś* keeps the "very famous" *sannyāsī* from experiencing the detachment that he is thought to embody. The story makes clear that disgust and detachment (or dispassion) are not at all synonymous. To break free from attachment, *sādhus*

must release themselves from the gripping causal magnets of both *rāg* and *dveś*. That level of "freedom," as Bhuvneshwari Puri says, illustrates the ultimate *sannyās* and brings to her mind an image of the "real" *sādhu*. It also indicates that the *sādhu* has become "balanced" in both "heart" and "mind." Or, to put it in the language of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, which distinguishes passion (*kāma*) from hatred (*krodha*),[25] the *sādhu* has realized "equanimity," a state in which pleasure and pain are said to be "the same."[26]

Leaving technology behind no more makes a "real" *sādhu* than integrating it into one's practice establishes renunciant authenticity. The ultimate *sannyās* requires abandoning all types of attachments—including, perhaps, the idea of who a "real" *sādhu* is and what "real" *sannyās* means—and cultivating the detachment in which everything stands equally to everything else. Such detachment manifests the freedom that Bhuvneshwari Puri says is *sannyās*. By this account, the world of the *sādhu* enlarges in that family members, those whom the *sādhu* is said to abandon, join the larger "world" that signifies the *sādhu*'s "big family"; in that the *sādhu*'s natal village where he or she was born and grew up, that place from which he or she is said to separate, becomes one of the many villages that "belong" to the *sādhu* and constitutes his or her social world. We may also think about the expanding worlds of the *sādhu* in the symbolic terms of the expansion of his or her moral consciousness. As I have suggested elsewhere (DeNapoli 2016a), the trope of *sādhus*' "expanding" worlds featured in Bhuvneshwari Puri's *kathā* practices offers an alternative image of *sannyās* to the dominant symbolic of *sādhus*' contracting worlds. As significantly, it buoys her claim that the development of moral awareness is linked to an expanding ethical subjectivity that sees and treats all "life-worlds" (*prāṇī-jagat*) equally.

Thus, the worlds of *sādhus* grow in size and significance, rather than decrease. Moreover, these worlds embody the world-affirming values of connection and community, rather than the world-negating ones of rupture and isolation. If *sādhus* can add people and places to their infinitely expanding social worlds, why can they not also add technology? After all, if, as Bhuvneshwari Puri and the other *sādhus* suggest, technology has the same existential status[27] as trees, animals, insects, planets, the sun and the moon, humans, and other celestial and terrestial creatures of the seen and unseen cosmos, then there is nothing intrinsically good or bad about it. Its existence endows technology with ontological significance. *Sādhus* can, thus, form a relationship with technology as long as they remain detached from it–that is, unmoved by the competing impulses of attraction and aversion toward it. It is important to point out that, for many of the *sādhus*, detachment does not mean indifference or apathy. Recall that Bhuvneshwari Puri uses the term "love" (*prem*) to describe (and prescribe) *sādhus*' relationship to the world of material existence—they care deeply for it. Their love for the world is removed from the karmic corruptions of *rāg* and *dveś*. *Sādhus* who "love" the world, who remain "balanced" in their interactions with it, and who see its myriad forms "equally" represent her idea of the modern *sādhu*.

Unlike the common image of the *sādhu* at odds with modernity (and, by implication, the forms of the modern), Bhuvneshwari Puri brings an alternative narrative to bear on *sannyās* by highlighting its connection to technology and, therefore, to modernity. By positioning *sannyās* at the crossroads of *dharm* and technology, she rescues *sannyās* from (Indian and Western) perceptions that it is monolithic, archaic, and out-of-touch with the contemporary concerns of daily life. In this way, she experiments with the conventional parameters of the *sannyās* and *dharm* to claim that they embody the symbols, values, and "truths" of the modern. Her reconfiguring of *sannyās* and *dharm* reinforces

their historicity in time. By doing so, Bhuvneshwari Puri accentuates the idea that *sādhus* are completely in-sync with the present milieu and have an acute awareness of the unique challenges and opportunities posed by modernity. The recurrent image from my fieldwork of the *sādhus* carrying their *kamaṇḍals* (water pots) in one hand and their cellular phones in the other provides an emerging trope of *sannyās* as a religious way of life that remains entirely consonant with a rapidly changing modern world.

To a large extent, for many of the *sādhus*, renunciant identity and authority are negotiated through their use of technology. The dominant claim of the *sādhus* that engaging technology cannot at face value indicate renunciant authenticity on account that such an identity represents the difficult "fruit" of embodying freedom from aversion and attachment, in effect, affirms their largely positive valuations of technology and its dharmic significance for the practice of *sannyās*. What is more, that shared claim helps amplify the empirical value of material existence because of, and not despite, the technological dimensions of daily life. And, for most of the *sādhus*, since technology is thought to spring forth from *dharm* and extend its virtues of practicality, love, and beneficence to the physical world, they say that technology has the potential to create an experience of divine communion. Technology not only connects *sādhus* to modernity, but also to a god who is said to manifest in the machines of modernity. The *sādhu* Balak Das says, "The guru appears in many forms. [Pointing to my tape recorder] Technology is a guru. *Paramātmā* lives in technology. When you leave this place you will play the 'cassette' and remember me. The *Paramātmā* in this technology will join my *ātmā* and your *ātmā* together. Technology will cause the *ātmā* to go to the *Paramātmā*. Whether it is big or small, everything is created by the *Paramātmā*. Anything that unites *ātmā* and *Paramātmā* is *sādhanā*. With technology, you can travel anywhere. You can go to *Paramātmā*" (Fig. 9).

Invoking an Advaita Vedānta (non-dualistic; monistic) interpretation of the *Paramātmā*, or the Supreme Absolute, according to which the divine exists in and by means of creation, Balak Das also widens its semantic field to include the notion of technology. The clever association he crafts between *Paramātmā* and machines allows him to define *sādhus*' use of technology in terms of modern *sādhanā*, a perspective that Parashuram

Fig. 9 Baba Balak Das describes technology through use of a *Deus-in-Machina* metaphor. Photo by the author

Das's narrative similarly promotes in his view that technology generates *tyāg*. By recasting *sādhanā* in this way, for Balak Das, technology constitutes a powerful site for experiencing divine connection. Therefore, it signifies a new context for the practice of *sannyās* in modernity and, for the *sādhus*, a divinely empowered material marker of "modern" *sādhu* identity. For Balak Das, operating as an instrument for and agent of transformation, technology manifests the power and presence of God in the world.

Theme #2—change as the rule of *Dharm*: technology as divine emergence in the world

The *sādhus'* representations of technology through the frame of an instrument and agent of Brahman exemplify their theologizing of it in vernacular asceticism. In their theology, technology brings into manifestation Brahman's expanding "net" (*jāl*), or "network" (*jāl tantra*), of cosmic connectivity that holds all beings, sentient and non-sentient, of the universe together and places them in a cosmic system of interdependent relations. Use of the symbol of Brahman's net to imagine the World Wide Web of 21st-century Indian telecommunications is common in the *sādhus'* rhetoric of renunciation. Other Dharma traditions of Asia have similarly drawn on this symbol to reimagine identity and the boundaries of "tradition." Some forms of Buddhism have adopted the Vedic imagery of Indra's net and woven tapestries of teachings stitched around the virtues of empathy, compassion, and the interdependence of creation evoked by that symbol. The Mahayana Chinese Huayan school (ca. 8th century CE), established during the Tang Dynasty, has incorporated it as a metaphor to highlight the central Buddhist tenet of the interconnectedness of all life (Kinnard 2004, 374). According to Pori Park, socially engaged forms of Buddhism practiced in contemporary South Korea, like the Jungto Society and the Indra's Net Community, draw extensively on shared Buddhist understandings of Indra's net to talk about the idea of cosmic interdependency and "develop values congruent with 21st-century life" (2010, 28).

As suggested, the symbol of a divine cosmic net tying and holding the world together is ancient. Its earliest usage is featured in the *Arthārva Vedā* (Hopkins 1971; Malhotra 2016). Hymns 8.8.1-8, prayers to conquer one's enemies in battle, describe cosmos as the "great net" of Indra (Śakra). Hymns 8.8.6-8 say:

> 6. Great, forsooth, is the net of great Sakra [sic], who is rich in steeds: with it infold thou all the enemies, so that not one of them shall be released!

> 7. Great is the net of thee, great Indra, hero, that art equal to a thousand, and hast hundredfold might. With that (net) Sakra slew a hundred, thousand, ten thousand, a hundred million foes, having surrounded them with (his) army.
> 8. This great world was the net of great Sakra: with this net of Indra I infold all those (enemies) yonder in the darkness (Bloomfield, trans., 2010).

The symbol of Indra's net is creatively reimagined in the later corpus of Vedic texts. The *Upaniṣads*, for example, rework this symbol into the "warp and woof" of the cosmic Brahman. In the *Brihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, the image of Brahman as that "imperishable" power on which everything in the universe is "woven back and forth" alludes to Indra's cosmic net (Olivelle 1996, 44-46). In the debate that occurs in king Janaka's court between two renowned sages, namely Gargi Vacaknavi and Yajnavalkya, and which is featured in

Brihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 3.7-3.8.12, the identity of Brahman is rhetorically parsed out to suggest that Brahman *is* the ever-expanding net on which all creation, "moving and unmoving," in the universe is entangled (ibid). The *Upaniṣadic* image of Brahman as the divine warp and woof of the cosmos is so well-known among the *sādhus* that their theologizing of technology draws from the wellspring of received traditions of *Upaniṣadic* teachings. Their theologizing of technology also shows the creative thinking behind experimental Hinduism with respect to their drawing on ancient symbols and teachings but interpreting them in ways that speak to the immediate issues of 21st-century India.

In theologizing technology, the *sādhus* associate what they claim are the inherent properties of Brahman with those attributed to technology. The material properties ascribed to technology center mostly on the features of change (*badlāv; vikās*), the unique (*nirālā*), and the new (*nāyā*). The *sādhus* say that these properties illuminate those also possessed by Brahman. To explain the relationship that they perceive between technology and Brahman, the *sādhus* invoke a synthesis of Advaita Vedānta (non-dualistic) and Sāṃkhya (dualistic) theologies. Accordingly, they say that Brahman permeates the natural world and infuses it with Brahman's qualities of consciousness (*cid*), truth (*sat*), and bliss (*ānand*). Besides these qualities, the *sādhus* emphasize that Brahman contains the dualistic masculine and feminine powers, which they conceive in the forms of Shiva and Shakti, respectively. As with Brahman's other qualities, the *sādhus* say that the Shiva-Shakti powers, too, are inherent in all creation. To the *sādhus*, Shiva illustrates more than only the masculine power of consciousness; it also symbolizes the power of imagination. While Shakti denotes the feminine power of creativity, the *sādhus* explain that Shakti also represents the vital power force of change, movement, and emergence. Just as change demonstrates a condition of creativity, emergence constitutes a function of change. For the *sādhus*, Brahman is the power of imagination, emergence, and manifestation. This shared understanding among the *sādhus* supports the semantic undertones of the concept "Brahman," which is derived from a Sanskrit verbal root that means "to grow" and "to expand" (Klostermaier 1994, 76).

Thus, Brahman, the *sādhus* highlight, reveals itself to/in a world (*duniyā*) that Brahman is thought to create and sustain through infinite processes of change, creativity, and emergence. This is a crucial point to tease out in the context of the *sādhus*' perceptions and experiences of the relationship between *dharm* and technology, as Brahman tends to be imagined in the Sanskritic discourse and popular religious literature in the frame of the changeless and permanent divine principle that underlies the phenomenal world of change and impermanence (Radhakrishnan and Moore 1967). As an attribute, change applies only to the phenomenal world and not to Brahman. The *sādhus*, however, take issue with this mainstream view. For many of them, Brahman is change. "Change," they say, "is the rule of nature" and "the nature of *dharm*."

Emphasizing that change demonstrates "the rule of nature" and "the nature of Brahman" makes it possible for the *sādhus* to bring technology within the authoritative (and salvific) framework of *dharm*. Their associations between technology and Brahman's divine emergence suggest that their reconfiguring of the boundaries of *dharm* and, by implication, Brahman, accommodates India's shifting socio-cultural landscapes. The fact that technology changes from day-to-day is not lost on the *sādhus*. But, as I learned, they expect technology, and the world more generally, to change faster than the human mind can comprehend, because change characterizes the fundamental property of Brahman and the everyday flourishing of life (DeNapoli 2016a). In this light, *sannyās* changes for the reasons that technology

changes. Everything possesses the properties of creativity and change characteristic of Brahman. Thus, change neither scares the majority of the *sādhus*, nor represents the disintegration of Indic traditions. Rather, change as seen in old, new, and emerging technologies manifests Brahman and the combined Shiva-Shakti powers of imagination and creativity. Change enacts the power and presence of Brahman in the world. To put it another way, technology is thought to reveal the "manifest body" of the cosmic Brahman.[28] Here, Bhuvneshwari describes the creative power of Brahman that arises in/through technology:

> We can see the beauty of God everywhere. God is so very creative. God has an enormous creativity capacity. Look around this ashram. God has made the thousands of colors of the flowers and blossoms. God is very creative. God takes birth in everything, and then those things become creative. This is the rule of life. Certainly, we, and nature, too, have the 'DNA' of God. Beauty, love, and creativity are part of God's DNA. And God gave that DNA to us. The origin of God's DNA is creativity. We should create things. We should create beautiful things, lovely things…If God created this whole universe, then the technology [*taknīq*] we are having is a part of God. Technology is heavenly. But we should use it in the correct way.

The evocative dimensions that the *sādhus* attribute to technology indicate their understandings of divine intentionality at work in creation. Brahman shapes and directs the course of creation through the means of changes like technology. Balak Das's God-in-the-machine analogy discussed earlier cues this notion. Just as significantly, Brahman inspires humans to imagine and create the technology that brings about its manifestation. The *sādhus*' ideas about the divine motivation and inspiration behind human technological creation–and human creation in general–compare to the theory developed by systematic theologian Philip Hefner that humans are "co-creators" with God and assist God in fashioning a world that fulfills God's plans for life (1993). According to Hefner, "The human being is created by God to be a co-creator in the creation that God has brought into being and for which God has purposes... the freedom that marks the created co-creator and its culture is an instrumentality of God for enabling the creation (consisting of the evolutionary past of genetic and cultural inheritance as well as contemporary ecosystem) to participate in the intentional fulfillment of God's purposes" (Hefner 1993, 32)[29]. Similar to a Christian view that God's love drives the movement and the processes involved in the evolution of God's creation (Hefner 1993), the rationale that the *sādhus* give is that Brahman wants to make the conditions and the quality of human life better for everyone on the planet. Baba Balak Nath (not to be confused with Balak Das) explains,

> Whatever technology [*tantra*] we are having, it came from inside of us. For example, we make a house. We make a building. Whatever we make, we first have to make a map of the house. We draw windows and a door. We put a staircase in this part of the house. We always have to make a map first. But where does this map come from? From within our minds and our souls [*ātmā*].The map inside our soul comes from Brahman…We have mobiles, helicopters, and airplanes. But [their maps] emerge from within our *ātmā*.

Here, Balak Nath speaks about a range of human technologies, from mobile phones to airplanes. His narrative indexes not only that technology arises from the power of human

imagination and creativity (Hefner 2002), but also that those energies are stimulated by the divine Brahman.[30] His story further signals that just as technology reveals the intentionality of its human creators (we decide how to build a house, where to put the windows, the doors, etc.) humans' imaginative and creative powers make known the intentionality of the cosmic creator. Technology symbolizes, in the thought of Balak Nath, an external material "map" of human-divine intentionality. The house image used by Balak Nath suggests that Brahman wants humans to be happy, to have good lives; that Brahman empowers humans with the capacities of imagination and creativity so that they can create those happy worlds and improve the worlds they live in (Fig. 10).

Thus, imagination and creativity are essential to the well-being of a technological humanity and the natural world (*pariveś*) (Hefner 2002). In the *sādhus*' teachings, since Brahman permeates all creation, its properties of imagination and creativity are not exclusive to humans. Rather, these properties reside in every aspect of the seen and unseen; moving and non-moving natural world—in trees, forests, mountains, rocks, animals, insects, germs/bacteria, the earth, rivers/lakes/oceans, and even in the atmosphere (sky/air). By seeing technology through the meaningful lens of divine emergence and interconnectivity, the *sādhus* extend the divine properties of imagination and creativity to technology as an agent and instrument of the ever-expanding cosmic net of Brahman. The use of technology is imagined and experienced as a dynamic means for the *sādhus* to tap digitally into and access Brahman's cosmic properties of expansion and change. In this context, the *sādhus* represent technology as a beneficent force in the world. "Technology is good" or "technology improves the world," they say. They also say that human intentionality creates technology as a force for good or evil in the world (one female *sādhu* spoke about technology as an ambivalent force. She said it could go either way.).[31] Bhuvneshwari Puri explains, "Whatever technology we have, we always have to ask: will technology benefit humans or destroy them? Take nuclear energy. If it brings good things for humans, for the whole

Fig. 10 Baba Balak Nath talks about the divine intentionality at work in technology. Photo by the author

world, then technology is *dharm.* But if people make nuclear weapons from it, and if it destroys the life of the planet, then this technology has become [a force of] *adharm* [non-religious; a force of destruction and evil]."

Theme #3: Kalki as a metaphor for the human-technology interface in the 21st Century

The significance that the *sādhus* attach to human intentionality in the context of the invention, use, and implications of technology for the future of planetary flourishing amplifies its relational dimensions. They imagine technology to be a crucial part and extension of the natural world, and not as separate from it.[32] Their idea that technology represents the power of Brahman emerging in/as creation emplaces it firmly within the natural world. For this reason, the *sādhus* feel that technology is deeply connected to the human-nature worlds it is supposed to serve. They speak about the dialectic between technology and the natural world in terms of relationship. What is more, according to the *sādhus*, the natural world inspires human technology. Baba Balak Das explained this idea through the use of the example of a snake's eyes. He said that the camera was inspired by the human observation of the inherent power of snakes to record what they witness by "snapping" their eyes open and shut. Every snap of the snake's eyes records an image, which is stored in its memory "forever." (Balak Das cautioned that snakes "never forget" what their eyes witness and have an infinite memory 'chip,' which is why, in his view, they take revenge on those who hurt them). For Balak Das, the snapping of the camera lens constitutes a material technological equivalent of the "original technology" of "snake eyes." Thus, camera technology corresponds to the natural world of snake technology, helping humans to record and store their life memories, and perhaps, become more like the non-human creatures of the natural world with whom they share their existence.

Discussions about technology tend to evoke from the *sādhus* eschatological associations. Not surprisingly, they conceive of the human-technology relationship in light of the apocalyptic mythological figure of Kalki, who symbolizes the tenth and last *avatār* of Vishnu, and who, in some versions of the myth, rescues the planet (*Brahmāṇḍ*) from imminent cosmic destruction. In the rhetoric of the *sādhus*, Kalki provides a redemptive metaphor for the evolving technology-human interface in the 21st century. That is, even as Kalki represents the globalizing reach of technology in modernity and humans' increasing dependence on it as they fashion their identities and cultural habitus (Bourdieu 1980), it also signifies in its redemptive connotations technology's potential to assist humanity in creating worlds that benefit the common good. The majority of the *sādhus* say that "this is the age [yug] of technology." But what distinguishes the technology of modernity as Kalki's age has to do with the term's etymology. In their perspectives, the name "Kalki" is derived from the word "kalk," which connotes technology. Bhuvneshwari Puri says that "kalk means machines, machinery, and mechanisms…It includes all technologies. Today's world belongs to technology…People cannot spend a single day without it."

Although the classical texts and popular religious discourse often predict that Kalki will appear on the earth in a distant future (Dimmit and van Buitenen 1978), the *sādhus* emphasize that Kalki has already arrived on the planet. Kalki is here and technology serves as evidence of its all-consuming and global presence.[33] Importantly, though, *sādhus* like Bhuvneshwari Puri nuance the Kalki idea to suggest that Kalki exists specifically in the human-technology interface, and not only in machines and mechanisms. The *sādhus'*

insistence on Kalki *as* the human-technology relationship brings to mind popular (Western and Asian) cultural notions of the cyborg (Smedes 2012; Clark 2004). In this light, the Kalki conceived by the *sādhus'* represents an emerging religious paradigm in Indic Hindu traditions of a unique (and 21st-century) kind of human hybrid species ("the Kalki"), consisting of half human and half machine, that is being created through the human-technology encounter. A similar idea is found in the context of the deity Narasingh (lit., "man-lion"), the fourth *avatār* of Vishnu, whose being consists of half human and half lion. Both the Narasingh and Kalki symbols call attention to the notion that humans embody and externalize the characteristics of the species of the natural world with which they interact and form relationships (see also Smedes 2012). Thus, the Kalki metaphor, as many of the *sādhus* suggest, not only depicts a modern transhuman experience (and reality) that is fashioned by means of the 21st century human-technology interface, but also represents technology as an extension of the natural world (Smedes 2012).

Emphasizing Kalki as a redemptive transhuman metaphor for (and a symbol of) the relationships that humans, nature, and technology create together every day, the *sādhus* signal the importance of human accountability and conscientiousness (*vivek*) (or "discernment") with respect to the planet's future. In their views, responsibility (*kartavya*) constitutes an implicit condition of the human-technology relationship. The statement that Bhuvneshwari Puri makes in the context of assessing the value of technology for the continuation of life on earth pivots on the understanding that humans must use technology "in the correct way." For her and the other *sādhus*, as long as humans do not lose their "humanity" (*manuṣyatā*) because of technology, it can help them to build better worlds and safeguard the planet. Accordingly, responsible action engenders respect (*adār*), compassion (*karunā*), and love (*prem*) for other humans and nature. Prem Nath says that "[b]y respecting all life, we respect God. This is the rule of *dharm*" (Fig. 11).

Fig. 11 Women devotees recite devotional prayers during a *dharm-kathā* organized by Bhuvneshwari Puri's Silwasa devotees. While they sing, a professional videographer documents the entire event on camera. Many of the *sādhus'* dharm-kathās are filmed by devotees or by professional companies (as is shown here). For this Silwasa event, the filmed *kathā* was distributed to devotees free-of-charge. Photo by the author

The *sādhus'* theologizing of modern technology has provoked ongoing moral reflections about its use and applications in everyday life. The moral vocabulary and ethical subjectivities being constituted in response to their technology practices, in part, stem from the *sādhus'* reflections on the power of empathy (*samvedanā*) to drive beneficent technology. Applying the notion of empathy to human applications of technology, the *sādhus* say that responsible technology ("*jis taknīq se ānand-mangal bantā hai*") respects, honors, and co-operates with the world of nature. More significantly, as Prem Nath cues in his comment, responsible technology creates and spreads *dharm*—to use an idiom articulated by the *sādhus*—"in the four corners of the earth." Many of them correlate beneficent technology with *dharm* and maleficent technology with *adharm*. To that extent, responsible technology assists the world of creation—people, plants, or planets—in fulfilling its *dharm* and increases the flourishing of *dharm* (and life) on the planet. For Bhuvneshwari Puri, without feeling empathy for the world of nature (DeNapoli 2016a), the application of technology to life becomes destructive. In the *kathās* that she gives throughout India, Bhuvneshwari Puri invokes the image of the atomic bomb to heighten concerns that technology has increased humans' capacity to become what she calls "world destroyers." Feeling empathy has the real potential to create new relationships of humanity to technology and the natural world. The *sādhus'* use of the Kalki metaphor to accentuate the redemptive face of the human-technology phenomenon is helping to transform that relationship in a critical moment of the Anthropocene.

Therefore, the Kalki symbol that the *sādhus* imagine, experience, and speak about in the context of their everyday interactions with communication technology, in particular, hardly signifies an annihilistic vision of impending cosmic extinction. Rather, it evokes the redemptive possibilities of technology to inspire loving and compassionate relationships between God and humans, and between humans and nature in general. Of course, by virtue of the intentions that humans put into their technology, the potential for destruction is always there. But so is the possibility for creating a more beautiful and cooperative world.[34] Drawing on Hindu frameworks to construct what technology means and the values it holds for India, religion(s), *sannyās*, and the future of planetary life, places the *sādhus* in the advantageous position of shaping technology as a force that benefits the common good.

Conclusions: experimental Hinduism at the crossroads of tradition and change

In this article, I have suggested that, in the religious practices of the *sādhus* with whom I worked, modern technology provides a vibrant context for reimagining renunciation and Hinduism in ways that are consistent with the ever-changing conditions of 21st-century Indian life. The *sādhus* clarify that *sannyās* engages, rather than eschews, technology. For them, it is a potent instrument of divine agency and an equally powerful religious technique with which to experience Brahman-in-the machine. Using technology makes it possible for the *sādhus* to expand the dominant definitional parameters of *sannyās* and rework the world-negating meanings of the values and ideals typically associated with this way of life. As this article has shown, in many of the *sādhus'* understandings, the thoughtful (and empathetic) use of technology promotes renunciant detachment rather than inhibits it. Their revisioning of renunciation to foreground detachment in world-affirming ways is encouraging the *sādhus* to rethink the meaning and role of *dharm* for the contemporary world and include technology in that fluid

category. Since most of the *sādhus* locate their positive ideas about and experiences of the technological within a Hindu cosmos – the refusal of some of the *sādhus* to place technology within such a framework appears to provoke their anxieties about it and construct it in the adverse terms of "other"– technology and *dharm* represent compatible domains of human life. They say that "*dharm* is technology" and *vice versa*. That correlation suggests that the *sādhus* understand both of these forces to be good and necessary for the flourishing of life. In their experiences, the notion of life flourishing identifies what the *sādhus* say *dharm* is all about.

To that extent, I have examined the rhetorical ways in which the *sādhus* craft continuity between *dharm* and technology in their *dharm-kathā* (narrative) performances. I have argued that by conceiving technology in the authorizing frame of *dharm*, the *sādhus* not only claim that renunciation and renunciant identity are intimately connected to the changing Indian technological and ecological landscapes, but also question views of renunciation as static, archaic, and removed from society. *Sādhus* are often said to be the gatekeepers of a timeless and changeless Hindu tradition. Their authority, as some scholars have suggested, rests, in part, on their being perceived as "out-of-sync" with the values and symbols of modernity, sequestered within the fortress an ancient religious world impervious to the fact and reality of change. But the *sādhus* interrogate this ossified notion. They stress that renunciation "is always changing with the times." By doing so, they encourage scholars and students alike to recognize that their traditional (dharmic) way of life is situated within history, and that it shapes and is shaped by its complex histories. The modern ethos of renunciation that the *sādhus* create through their technological practices brings into focus a revised narrative of *sannyās*, and by implication *dharm*, that emphasizes the idea of "tradition-in-change" (McMahan 2008, 179).

In this respect, I have proposed that the *sādhus* shift the dominant discourse on renunciation by pressing on the point that it responds to the challenges of contemporary life and, by combining ancient and modern "wisdom," represents a "technology" specifically suited to modernity. Engaging technology and imagining it as a powerful site for transhuman experiences of spiritual and social transformation has been a crucial factor in the *sādhus*' experimenting with the more conventional definitional boundaries of renunciation and Hinduism. Thus, I have contended that experimental Hinduism as "performed" by means of their technological and rhetorical practices foregrounds the values of change, innovation, and adaptation as the enduring characteristics of *dharm* and *sannyās* across space and time. These values are similarly refracted through the *sādhus*' emphases on the overlapping narrative motifs that renunciation symbolizes the "original technology" and provides the authoritative model from which modern techno-science has emerged; that technology embodies the properties of imagination, creativity, and emergence that characterize Brahman and offers a mechanism for accessing Brahman "in-the-world"; and that the apocalyptic symbol of Kalki exists in and by means of the evolving human-technology relationship fashioned in contemporary times.

Finally, I have suggested that the *sādhus* employ the Kalki *avatar* paradigm to underscore its metaphorical signification for the redemptive potential of technology. By drawing on the Kalki symbol, they also articulate their perceptions of an emerging hybrid species, "the Kalki," which positions humans and machines in relations of interdependence and, through that interrelational coexistence, represents the compassionate and empathetic relationships that humans are capable of forming by means of the technological with the natural world.

For the *sādhus*, while the moral power of human intentionality creates technology as a force for good or evil, the moral virtue of empathy can evoke respect, compassion, and love for nature as a whole and protect the many oscillating lifeworlds of the planet as they flourish alongside of a future of potentially revolutionizing technological innovations. The repurposed applications of *sannyās* and *dharm* for contemporary times that the *sādhus* highlight, and which, as I have argued, technology helps make possible position the *sādhus* on the brink of a watershed in the role of intercultural translators of a global phenomenon whose future they have the power to imagine and direct for the common good.

Let us, then, return to a question I posed earlier in our discussion: does the *sādhus'* use of technology mean they are entangled in the world of existence? Yes. But, I clarify, not in the deprecatory sense in which *sādhus'* involvement in the world may be seen in the light of conventional understandings of renunciation's ideals. I have suggested that the *sādhus'* engaging modern communication technologies performs an alternative narrative of entanglement that is tethered to the prominent renunciant value of detachment. Their practices refute the perception that technology mires *sādhus* in *sansār*, keeps them from realizing Brahman, and enervates the moral power of the ancient way of life of *sannyās*, which embodies and transmits salvific knowledge of the divine in the world.

By contrast, for the *sādhus*, entanglement accentuates an understanding of being connected to a deity who, like the *sādhus*, is involved in the world and the change that molds it, and of being linked to an infinitely expanding network of divine connectivity that brings all life of the universe into confluences of engagement. As they see it, technology, like yoga, meditation, and singing to God, offers another complementary "technique" for humans to experience infinitely changing divinity in the world of nature and the cosmos that manifests divinity and its traits. Thinking about entanglement and its consequences from a world-affirming perspective encourages the *sādhus* to use technology, theologize it, and infuse repurposed applications for what *sannyās* and *dharm* mean in the 21st century.

Endnotes

[1]I use the Hindi (H) pronunciation, rather than the Sanskritic (S) pronunciation, for Indian language terms. Therefore, terms like *sannyāsa* (S) and *dharma* (S) are transliterated as *sannyās* and *dharm*, respectively. In this article, I will use Hindi transliteration for all Indian language terms, except when referring to the "Dharma" traditions of India featured in this volume, such as those of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. Also, I do not use diacritical marks for people's names or for the names of gods and goddesses.

[2]The new Global Religion Research Initiative sponsored by the Center for the Study of Religion and Society at the University of Notre Dame also makes explicit the dearth of empirical research on the impact of technology on modern religions and everyday religious life. This article responds to the GRRI initiative. See http://grri.nd.edu/.

[3]Apart from issues such as the use and consequences of technology for human life, other challenges which India, like other global societies, continues to deal with have to do with those of human development and human rights, women's rights, and the ecological sustainability of the Anthropocene. The challenges go beyond the specific technological issues addressed in this article. In my current book project, tentatively titled *Religion at the Crossroads: Experimental Hinduism and the Theologizing of the Modern in Contemporary India*, I discuss these and other contemporary challenges in order to bring to light the dynamic everyday contexts in which the *sādhus* with whom I conducted research variously

rework *dharm* and *sannyās* and emphasize the compatibility, and as we will see shortly, the equivalence of "religion" and the "modern" in their views of what *dharm* is all about in the contemporary world.

[4]John Nelson provides an interpretive framework for his use and development of the concept of the "experimental" in contexts of everyday human religiousness in the global world. See, in this volume, Nelson's article, "An Experimental Approach to Buddhism and Religion." See also Nelson's monograph, Nelson (2013).

[5]The model of experimental religion (or "experimental theology") developed by Patricia Ward to describe American Protestant Christianity in the 18th century makes clear that the notion of the "experimental" pertains specifically to the realm of personal spiritual experience as the ultimate source of authority. See Ward (2009).

[6]I am grateful to my colleague Pankaj Jain, whose questions about "experimental religion" inspired me to clarify my idea of experimental Hinduism as a "new" phenomenon in relation to the ways that the Dharma traditions of Asia and the diaspora already understand and apply experimental approaches to life. Our conversation took place on April 16, 2015 at the biennial meeting for the Society for the Anthropology of Religion Meeting in San Diego, CA.

[7]See DeNapoli (2016a).

[8]Laurie Patton's deft response to this volume's articles, which theorize the experimental in light of the lived Dharma traditions of Asia and the diaspora, have helped me to develop my claim that, in the case of *sannyās*-as-lived in North India, the provisional nature of the *sādhus*' theologizing of technology not only illustrates the pragmatic spirit behind their *dharm* experiments but also heightens the processual nature of experimental Hinduism.

[9]The technological changes that Srinivas highlights in temple priests' practices have to do with their much encouraged uses of the Internet, computerized electrical sound systems to replace traditional musicians, and even chartered helicopters "to shower rose petals on the temple tower for certain ceremonies" (2012, 37).

[10]Louis Dumont's seminal essay (1960), "World Renunciation in Indian Religions," calls attention to the dominant notion that Hindu renouncers unconditionally abandon the world and all that it represents. But Dumont relied heavily on Sanskritic Brahmanical texts about *sannyās* to develop his model of Indian renunciation in the Hindu traditions. A similar representation of *sādhus* is featured in textual translation studies of *sannyās*, which present what may be described predominantly as gendered masculine models of this way of life from the radical, world-denying ideals emphasized in those texts. See Olivelle (1992) and (1996); and Heesterman (1964) and (1985). The *sādhu* as world-renouncer has been a classic trope in the academic literature on *sannyās* in India. Ethnographic studies of *sannyās*-as-lived across Indic cultural contexts suggests, though, that *sādhus* have a much more receptive and affirming relationship to the phenomenal world of existence than is typically understood. The ethnographic scholarship makes an effort to nuance the conventional thinking on the relationship between *sādhus* and "the world." If we set aside the dominant image of *sannyās* so often featured in the Brahmanical texts, we find that *sādhus* talk about the world less through use of the negative language of disgust and escape and more through use of the affirming terms of love, compassion, and connection. See Narayan (1989), McDaniel (1995; 2007), Llewellyn (1995); Gross (2001), Khandelwal (2004), Hausner (2007), DeNapoli (2014; 2016a), and Lucia (2014).

[11]For a helpful discussion of the multiplicity of expressions of *sannyās*-as-lived and the *sādhus* who embody those religiosities in a variety of ways, see DeNapoli (2013) and (2014). See also Gross (2001).

[12]To provide some context, there are two preeminent expressions of Hindu renunciation in India. These are forms are rooted in Śaiva or Vaiṣṇava manifestations of Hindu renunciation and include the Śaṅkarācārya Daśanāmī tradition and the Gorakhnāth Kānphaṭa Yogī tradition. Each tradition may been characterized as complementary branches constitutive of Śaiva renunciation. In an institutional sense, at least, both of these branches uphold the god Shiva to be their tutelary deity (which is not to say that *sādhus* who belong to these traditions worship Shiva as their primary deity). The Vaiṣṇava traditions worship Vishnu as their tutelary god and consist of the Rāmānandī, also known as Sītā Rām, Tyāgi (a subgroup of the Rāmānandī order) and the Vairāgī branches. As I discuss below, the *sādhus* I worked with have taken initiation in the Śaiva or the Vaiṣṇava renunciant traditions. I conducted research mostly with Śaiva *sādhus* who took initiation into the Daśanāmī and Nāth-Yogī orders, but also with Tyāgi and Sītā Rām Vaiṣṇava *sādhus*. For a detailed description of the history and development of these two renouncer traditions in India, see the work of Gross (2001) and Bayly (1999) and Burghart (1983a); for detailed information on the Rāmānandīs, see Lamb (2002) and Burghart (1983b).

[13]Some of the Brahmanical texts prescribe the practice of adopting a peripatetic way of life, according to which the renouncer moves from place-to-place, staying no more than two weeks in any single location. See Olivelle (1992).

[14]The author is grateful for the helpful suggestions offered by the peer-reviewers of this article concerning the point of what exactly constitutes renouncing "the world." One reviewer, in particular, encouraged me to think about the ways that both vernacular and textual views of "renouncing the world" are more similar than they are different.

[15]In DeNapoli (2014), I discuss the case of a female *sādhu* from the Khatik (butcher) community who, despite the emphasis given by renouncer traditions on physically separating from family and home in order to develop detachment, continued to live with her natal family, which consisted of three generations of kin, even though she maintained an ashram located one block from her home within her natal village. See chapter six, "Even the Black Cuckoo Sings Beautifully: Challenge and Reconfiguration in the Practices of a Khatik *Sadhu*," in *Real Sadhus Sing to God: Gender, Asceticism, and Vernacular Religion in Rajasthan* (New York: Oxford University Press).

[16]A number of scholars have discussed that *sādhus* across traditions continue to practice caste-based ritual purity prescriptions in the context of food practices and social relations and follow hierarchical customs; that *sādhus* do not automatically leave behind their caste orientations on account of ritual initiation. Apart from the scholarship already mentioned in this paragraph, see also the ethnographic works of Burghart (1983a), Hallstrom (1999); Gross (2001); Khandelwal (2004); Khandelwal, Hausner, and Gold (2006).

[17]I am using the term penance (*tapasya*) here to represent a wide range of practices in the context of *sannyās*-as-lived. These consist of meditation (*dhyān*), yoga, breathing meditation (*prāṇāyām*), scriptural recitation from memory or the printed text (*pūjā-pāṭh*), devotional singing (*bhajan*), restricting food to one meal a day, eating vegetarian food and food without spices, celibacy (*brahmacārya*), serving the guru (*guru-sevā*), and humanitarian service (*sevā*).

[18]Hindu theologies offer a variety of understandings about the notion of union with God. In the Śaiva traditions of renunciation, and more precisely in the Daśanāmī orders, the idea of union that has been developed and systematized by the founder of the movement, Ādi Śaṅkarācārya (ca 9th CE), who drew on *Advaita Vedānta* views of divinity, emphasized union in terms of the dissolving of the phenomenal self and of all existential distinctions, and the merging of the *ātmā* with the Brahman. In contrast, Vaiṣṇava theologies tend to highlight the idea of communion with God. Theologians like Rāmānujacārya (ca. 12th CE), for instance, who is acknowledged as the most important guru of Sri Vaiṣṇavism, and who expounded on *Viśiṣṭādvaita* theology, understood that liberation from the phenomenal world does not involve the dissolving of the distinctions, or the multiplicities, characteristic of the Supreme Brahman. The *sādhus* with whom I worked, Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava, articulated syncretistic Hindu theologies, as I explain below. Their theological syncretism "on the ground" provides an excellent example of the gap existing between ideals and lived practice, which includes the theologies ideally taught in renouncer traditions and the actual lived theologies of the *sādhus*. It is not surprising that the Śaiva female *sādhus* with whom I worked, despite having taken their imitations into a renouncer tradition that privileges non-dualism in its understanding of the relationship between God and world, emphasize the notion of "meeting God," which parallels Vaiṣṇava theistic interpretations of liberation as communion with the divine. For a discussion of the different Hindu theologies, see Rodrigues (2006).

[19]This applies to the historical practice of *sannyās* throughout India, not only to its contemporary expressions.

[20]Since electricity to these ashrams was functionally intermittent, the landline phones often did not work.

[21]Returning to North India after a five-year hiatus, I wanted to reexamine the state of *sannyās* in late modernity.

[22]See William Drees's (2009; 2002) analysis of the notion of technology as a multifaceted reality.

[23]There is an established and emerging body of scholarship that explores the ways in which transnational Hindu gurus, in particular, draw on the language of modernity and science with which to represent Hinduism (or Hindu spirituality) as scientific. See an excellent and recent discussion of this phenomenon in the work of Lola Williamson (2010) *Transcendent in America: Hindu-Inspired Meditation Movements as New Religion* (Albany: SUNY Press). See also the "Introduction" by Mark Singleton and Ellen Goldberg, editors of the volume (2014), *Gurus of Modern Yoga* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), and the contributions in that volume. See further Amanda Lucia's (2014), *Reflections of Amma: Devotees in a Global Embrace*, for a detailed discussion on the ways that the transnational female guru Amritanandamayi Ma has created her spiritual movement to speak to the conditions of modernity.

[24]The term *rāg* connotes a number of meanings in the Hindu traditions, including "possession," "fulfillment," and "passion." The definition of *rāg* provided by Bhuvneshwari Puri in this statement may be understood to mean "fulfillment" and "possession." Bhuvneshwari Puri's understanding of *rāg* parallels the meanings of the term featured in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. I will have more to say about this later on in this section of our discussion.

[25]I am using the Sanskritic forms of these terms (*kāma* and *krodha*) as they appear in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. For a translation of the text, see Laurie L. Patton (2008), trans.,

The Bhagavad Gītā (New York: Penguin Books). The Sanskrit text that I am consulting was published by Gita Press (date not provided). I also draw on the *Bhagavad Gītā*'s idea of equanimity (*samatva;* chapter 2, verse 48) to represent Bhuvneshwari Puri's notion of "freedom from desire," the peace of mind that one (*pumsa*) achieves in connection with becoming free from *rāg* and *dveś*. See Patton's semantic discussion of the term *pumsa* to denote "that person who can attain peace" in Patton (2008), foot note #21, p. 217. My rationale for bringing in the *Bhagavad Gītā*'s perspective on equanimity to describe an oral narrative performance of the differences between *rāg* and *dveś* is because this text's performance constitutes part of Bhuvneshwari Puri's teaching repertoire (she has studied the text with a teacher, recites it privately, and gives public discourses on it). Also, because this text deals precisely with what it means to be free—and, thus, a real "yogi." Like the text, Bhuvneshwari Puri, too, is concerned with who is a "real" yogi and what "real" or ultimate *sannyās* means.

[26]In chapter two of the *Bhagavad Gītā* the verses dealing with *kāma* and *krodha* (or *rāg* and *dveś*) are as follows. We find similar verses repeated throughout the text, but for our purposes, I will cite only those from chapter two. 14 Son of Kunti, the touches of the senses bringing pain and pleasure, heat and cold: they come and go, and they don't last for ever. You must try to endure them, son of Bharata. 15 Bull among Men, the one whom these touches do not make tremble, the one for whom pain and pleasure are alike, that one is ready for immortality…48 Abiding in yoga, engage in actions! Let go of clinging, and let fulfillment and frustration be the same; for it is said yoga is equanimity (*samatva*). (Patton trans., 2008, 20, 29). In chapter six, verse 32, the *Bhagavad Gītā* describes the equality (*samam*) generated by equanimity. Since Bhuvneshwari Puri speaks of equality in the context of cultivating the calmness of mind in which all opposite states, all beings, and all conditions and outcomes are experienced to be "the same" (*barābar*), I cite the text to give the reader a sense of the influence it has had on Bhuvneshwari Puri's teachings about and practice of renunciation: 32 Arjuna, one who everywhere sees equality, through likeness with oneself, whether pleasure or pain, is thought to be the highest practitioner of yoga (Patton 2008, trans., 78).

[27]To clarify, the existential status possessed by these phenomena is not to be confused with their moral status. For a discussion of the moral status of the world of nature in the view of the classical Sanskrit literature, see Christopher G. Framarin (2014), *Hinduism and Environmental Ethics: Law, Literature, and Philosophy* (New York: Routledge).

[28]The *sādhus*' understandings that, like everything else in the created world, technology reveals the manifest body or "form" (*rūp*) of the cosmic Brahman may be compared with similar ideas articulated in the late 19th century by Shingon Buddhist priests of the Kaji Sekai sect that "therapeutic technologies" (Josephson 2013, 138-40), such as ritual prayer and non-medical healing, reveal the "dharma body" of the Cosmic Buddha. During this revolutionary period of modernization in Japan, elite Shinto (and neo-Confucian) doctors educated in Western medical thought attempted to demarcate Buddhism (or religions) and science as two discrete spheres of knowledge and to establish Buddhist ritual practices of empowerment (*kaji*) as destructive for the body politic of the nation. However, as Jason Ananda Josephson discusses, some Kaji Sekai Buddhist priests challenged this artificial dichotomy. Citing an article written by Kobayashi Uho, which appeared in the journal *Kaji Sekai*, Josephson explains that "In Shingon doctrine, he explains that all

events in this universe result from the manifestations of the dharma body of the Cosmic Buddha…In other words…for Kobayashi, all life is empowered by the Cosmic Buddha" (139). See Jason Ananda Josephson's chapter, "Buddhist Medicine and the Potency of Prayer," pp. 117-141, in *Deus in Machina: Religion, Technology, and the Things in Between*, edited by Jeremy Stoler (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

[29]Hefner's explicates his notion of humanity as "co-creator" in this way: "Human beings are God's created co-creators whose purpose is to be the agency, acting in freedom, to birth the future that is most wholesome for the nature that has birthed us–the nature that is not only our own genetic heritage, but also the entire human community and the evolutionary and ecological reality in which and to which we belong. Exercising agency is said to be God's will for humans" (1993, 27). Later on in our discussion, we will explore the overlapping ideas of responsibility and accountability, as suggested by Hefner's theory of humanity as "created co-creator," in the *sādhus*' theologizing of technology.

[30]Systematic theologian Philip Hefner discusses that the cognitive processes by which humans create technology involve the central activities of imagination and creativity. He writes, "Technology is…about being free and about imagining things and conditions that never were, things that do not exist and conditions that can be different." The *sādhus*' ideas about technology are consonant with Hefner's theory that "imagination is central to technology." And, as Hefner says, "Human nature and human freedom are brought into focus when we reflect on the central role of imagination in technology." See Hefner, "Technology and Human Becoming," in *Zygon*, vol. 37, no. 3 (September 2002): 655-665.

[31]The idea of ambivalence that this *sādhu* articulated her representation of technology reminded me of the Native American ideas of the "trickster." In this framework, the trickster, like Loki, represents neither a good nor an evil force; it is ambivalent in its intentions and actions, and yet a crucial feature of the divine and natural worlds. I will have more to say later on in the article about the *sādhus*' understandings of the moral behind technological change.

[32]The *sādhus*' views of technology as an extension of the natural world and as interconnected with nature bring to mind Taede Smedes's (2012) theory of technology. He argues that technology serves as a "natural" force in the creation and operates in cooperation with nature. Smedes's ideas about technology have helped me to think through my claims in connection with the *sādhus*' experiences of technology. See Smedes (2012).

[33]In addition to the idea that Kalki manifests in the human-technology interface, a devotional ascetic community centered around the worship and teachings of a female Śaṅkarācārya guru with whom I worked in Uttar Pradesh state, said that Kalki already exists in the form of a this guru's female *akhārā*, which promotes activism for human rights, women's equal rights, and social justice in India. See DeNapoli (2016c), "'The Time Has Come to Save Our Women': A Female Religious Leader's Feminist Politics as Experimental Hinduism in North India."

[34]When the *sādhus* talk about the various (and unpredictable) effects of technology on life, they often tell the story about the gods' churning of earth, from which three "gems" emerged: namely, immortality (or goodness), alcohol (that which excites and/or corrupts life on earth), and poison (that which destroys life on earth). Through the

performance of this tale, the *sādhus* indicate that technology can serve as a good, inebriating (passion-filled), and a destructive force for the planet. A provocative monograph written by Srivastava and Kothari (2012) similarly uses the image of the gods' churning of the ocean as a metaphor to describe the deleterious effects of globalization in India. See their, *Churning the Earth: The Making of Global India* (New Delhi: Viking Press).

Competing interests

There author declares that there are no competing interests.

Consent for publication

Verbal informed consent was obtained from the patient for the publication of this report and any accompanying images.

Publisher's Note

Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

References

Alter, J. 2014. Shri Yogendra: magic, modernity, and the burden of the middle-class yogi. In *Gurus of modern yoga*, ed. M. Singleton and E. Goldberg, 60–82. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bakshi, R. 1998. *Bapu kuti: journeys in the rediscovery of Gandi*. New York: Penguin.

Bayly, S. 1999. *Caste Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Benevides, G. 1998. Modernity. In *Critical terms for religious studies*, ed. M.C. Taylor, 186–204. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Berger, P.L. 1967. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Bloomfield, M. (trans.). 2010. reprint. Hymns of the Atharva Veda. Kessinger Publishing.

Bourdieu, P. 1980. *The logic of practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Brosius, C. 2012. The perfect world of BAPS: Media and urban dramaturgies in a globalized context. In *Public Hinduisms*, ed. J. Zavos, 440–462. London: Sage Publications.

Brown, C.M. 2012. *Hindu perspectives on evolution: Darwin, dharma, and design*. New York: Routledge.

Burghart, R. 1983a. Renunciation in the religious traditions of South Asia. *Man* 4: 635–653.

Burghart, R. 1983b. Wandering ascetics of the Ramanandi sect. *History of Religions* 22(4): 361–380.

Clark, A. 2004. *Natural-born cyborgs: minds, technologies, and the future of human intelligence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

DeNapoli, A.E. 2013. Vernacular Hinduism in Rajasthan. In *Contemporary Hinduism*, ed. P. Pratap Kumar, 97–113. Bristol, CT: Acumen Publishing.

DeNapoli, A.E. 2014. *Real Sadhus sing to God: gender, asceticism, and vernacular religion in Rajasthan*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

DeNapoli, A.E. 2016a. In search of the *Sadhu*'s stone: metals and gems as therapeutic technologies of transformation in vernacular asceticism in North India. In *Soulless matter, seats of energy: metals, minerals, and gems in South Asian religions*, ed. F. Ferrari and T. Dahnhardt, 143–173. United Kingdom: Equinox Publishers.

DeNapoli, A.E. 2016b. 'Nature is our true friend': the environmental empathy of a modern female guru in North India. Special issue on The moralizing of dharma in everyday Hinduisms. *Nidan: International Journal of Indian Studies* 1(2): 32–68.

DeNapoli, A.E. 2016c. 'The time Has come to save our women': a female religious leader's feminist politics as experimental Hinduism in North India. *The International Journal of Dharma and Hindu Studies* 2(1): 1–37.

DeNapoli, A.E., and T. Srinivas. 2016. The moralizing of dharma in everyday Hinduisms. *Nidan: The International Journal for the Study of Indian Religions* 1(2): 1–13.

Dimmit, C., and J.A.B. van Buitenen (trans.). 1978. Classical Hindu mythology: a reader in the Sanskrit Puranas. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Dobe, T. 2016. Modern monks and global Hinduism. In *Hinduism in the modern world*, ed. B.K. Hatcher, 161–179. New York, NY: Routledge.

Drees, WB. 2002. Human meaning in a technological culture: Religion in an age of technology. Zygon, 37/3 (September): 597-604.

Drees, WB. 2009, ed. Trust, technology, and religion: Roles of religions in controversies over ecology and the modification of life. AUP: Leiden University Press.

Dumont, L. 1960. World renunciation in Indian religions. In *Contributions to Indian sociology*. The Hague: Mouton and Company.

Eisenstadt, S.N. 2000. Multiple modernities. *Daedalus* 129(1): 1–29.

Framarin, C.G. 2014. *Hinduism and environmental ethics: law, literature, and philosophy*. New York: Routledge.

Freiberger, O. (ed.). 2006. *Asceticism and Its Critics: Historical Accounts and Comparative Perspectives*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Geertz, C. 1973. *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Gross, Robert L. 2001 [1992]. The Sadhus of India: A study of Hindu asceticism. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.

Hallstrom, L.L. 1999. Mother of bliss: Anandamayi Ma. Oxford: New York.

Hausner, S. 2007. *Wandering with sadhus: ascetics in the Hindu Himalayas*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Heesterman, J. 1964. Brahman, ritual, and renouncer. *WZKS* 8: 1–31.

Heesterman, J. 1985. *The inner conflict of tradition: essays in Indian ritual, kingship, and society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hefner, P. 1993. *The Human Factor: Evolution, Culture, and Religion*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress.

Hefner, P. 2002. Technology and human becoming. *Zygon* 37(3): 655–665.

Helland, C. 2010. (Virtually) been there, (virtually) done that: examining the online religious practices of the Hindu tradition. *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 4(1): 148–150.

Herman, P.K. 2010. Seeing the divine through windows: online puja and virtual religious experience. *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 4(1): 151–178.

Hopkins, T.J. 1971. *The Hindu religious tradition*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.

Howard, V. 2014. *Gandhi's ascetic action: renunciation and social action*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Jackson, M. 2013. *Lifeworlds: essays in existential anthropology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Jacobs, S. 2007. Virtually sacred: The performance of asynchronous cyber-rituals in online spaces. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communications. Special issue on religion on the internet: cross-cultural approaches to conflict, dialogue, and transformation, 12/3: 1103-1121.

Jain, P. 2011. *Dharma and ecology of Hindu communities: sustenance and sustainability*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing.

Karapanagiotis, N. 2010. Vaishnava cyber puja: problems of purity and novel ritual solutions. *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 4(1): 179–195.

Khandelwal, M. 2004. *Women in ochre robes: gendering Hindu renunciation*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Khandelwal, M., S. Hausner, and A. Gold (eds.). 2006. *Women's Renunciation in South Asia: Nuns, Yoginis, Saints, and Singers*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kim, H.H. 2014. Svaminarayana: *Bhaktiyoga* and the *Aksarabrahman* Guru. In *Gurus of modern yoga*, ed. M. Singleton and E. Goldberg, 237–260. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kinnard, J. 2004. Indra. In *the Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, ed. R.E. Buswell Jr., 374–375. New York: Macmillan.

Klostermaier, K.K. 1994. *A survey of Hinduism*, 2nd ed. New York: SUNY.

Lamb, R. 2002. *Rapt in the Name: The Ramnamis, Ramnam, and Untouchable Religion in Central India*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Llewellyn, J.E. 1995. The autobiography of a female Hindu renouncer. In *Religions of India in practice*, ed. D.S. Lopez Jr., 162–172. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Lucia, A. 2014. *Reflections of Amma: Devotees in a global embrace*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Malhotra, R. 2016. *Indra's Net: defending Hinduism's philosophical unity*. India: HarperCollins Publishers.

McDaniel, J. 1995. A holy woman of calcutta. In *Religions of India in practice*, ed. D.S. Lopez Jr., 418–425. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

McDaniel, J. 2007. Does tantric ritual empower women? renunciation and domesticity among female Bengali tantrikas. In *Women's lives, women's rituals in the Hindu tradition*, ed. T. Pintchman, 159–176. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McGuire, Meredith B. 2008. Lived Religion: Faith and practice in everyday life. New York: Oxford.

McMahan, D. 2008. *The making of Buddhist modernism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

McMahan, D. (ed.). 2012. *Buddhism in the modern world*. New York: Routledge.

Narayan, K. 1989. *Storytellers, saints, and scoundrels: folk narrative in Hindu religious teaching*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Nelson, J.K. 2013. *Experimental Buddhism: innovation and activism in contemporary Japan*. Hawaii: University of Honolulu Press.

Olivelle, P. (trans.). 1992. Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣads. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Olivelle, Patrick (trans.). 1996. The Upaniṣads. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Park, P. 2010. New visions for engaged Buddhism: the Jungto Society and the Indra's net community movement in contemporary Korea. *Contemporary Buddhism* 11(1): 27–46.

Patton, L.L. (trans.). 2008. The Bhagavad Gita. New York: Penguin Books.

Radhakrishnan, S., and C. Moore (eds.). 1967. *A sourcebook in Indian philosophy. 6th printing*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Ram, K. 2013. *Fertile disorder: spirit possession and its provocation of the modern*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Rocha, C. 2012. Buddhism and globalization. In *Buddhism in the modern world*, ed. D. McMahan, 289–304. New York: Routledge.

Rodrigues, H.P. 2006. *Introducing Hinduism*. New York and London: Routledge.

Scheifinger, H. 2010. Hindu embodiment and the internet. *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 4(1): 196–219.

Singleton, M., and E. Goldberg. 2014. Introduction. In *Gurus of modern yoga*, ed. M. Singleton and E. Goldberg, 1–16. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Smedes, T. 2012. Technology and what it means to be human. In *Technology, trust, and religion*, ed. W.B. Drees, 41–54. Leiden: University Press.

Srinivas, T. 2010. *Winged faith: rethinking globalization and religious pluralism through the Satya Sai movement*. New York Chichester: Columbia University Press.

Srinivas, T. 2012. Some pujaris in India told me American Hindus were old-fashioned. India Abroad Magazine (January 27, 2012): A37-A39. http://www.indiaabroad-digital.com/indiaabroad/20120127?pg=53#pg53.

Srivastava, A., and A. Kothari. 2012. *Churning the earth: the making of global India*. New Delhi: Viking.

Stoler Miller, B. (trans.). 1996. Yoga: discipline of freedom. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Tambiah, S. 1977. *World conqueror and world renouncer: a study of Buddhism and polity in Thailand against a historical background*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Taylor, C. 2004. *Modern social imaginaries*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Waghorne, J.P. 2014. Engineering an artful practice: on Jaggi Vasudev's isha yoga and Sri Ravi Shankar's art of living. In *Gurus of modern yoga*, ed. M. Singleton and E. Goldberg, 283–307. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ward, P.A. 2009. *Experimental theology in America: Madame Guyon, Fenelone, and their readers*. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press.

Warrier, M. 2014. Online bhakti in a modern guru organization. In *Gurus of modern yoga*, ed. M. Singleton and E. Goldberg, 308–326. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Williamson, L. 2010. *Transcendent in America: Hindu-inspired meditation movements as new religion*. New York: SUNY Press.