

Editor's Preface

THE papers which constitute this volume originated from the Conference on Religion in South Asia, held on the University of California campus in Berkeley in August 1961. The idea of such a conference was suggested to me by McKim Marriott and Richard L. Park, and the generous financial support of the Committee on South Asia of the Association for Asian Studies, Inc., and the Center for South Asian Studies of the Institute of International Studies of the University of California made this five-day conference possible.

It was run informally, with the papers distributed to participants in advance. Approximately half of our working time was spent in discussing the papers, the other half in discussing general methods and problems relating to religion in South Asia. Most of the papers have subsequently been rewritten and generally reflect the authors' views at a time later than August 1961. This reworking helps to account for the eighteen-month delay between the conference and the submission of this manuscript to the Press. The conference participants included: Michael Ames, Alan R. Beals, Gerald D. Berreman, John Gumperz, Edward B. Harper, Edward J. Jay, Pauline Mahar Kolenda, William McCormack, J. Michael Mahar, David G. Mandelbaum, Gertrude Woodruff Marlowe, McKim Marriott, Vidya Ninan Misra, Karl Potter, William Rowe, J. F. Staal, Burton Stein, and Nur Yalman.

I am particularly indebted to Dorothy Spencer, Richard L. Park, McKim Marriott, Gertrude Woodruff Marlowe, and Pauline Mahar Kolenda for their substantial help, patience, and encouragement in the formulation and organization of this conference.

A comment on how the name "Conference on Religion in South Asia" was chosen should help illuminate some of the problems we encountered. Such a trivial matter as a name formed a subject of considerable moment. At an early stage of organization, the title "Conference on Hinduism" was tried out. This had the obvious disadvantage of implying a more or less exclusive concern with the theological and philosophical aspects of a religious system rather than with all possible facets. Most of the conference participants had worked as anthropologists in rural parts of South Asia and had focused at least part of their attention upon the non-philosophic traditions of its inhabitants, such as supernatural theories of disease causation, shamanism, "mother-goddess" complexes, or animal sacrifice to local deities. To include as Hinduism these aspects of religion would be to ignore the boundaries drawn around the religious system by many of its intellectual leaders, scholars who conceive of Hinduism as a philosophical tradition and an accompanying social system from which they exclude such phenomena as spirit possession and evil eye.

The term "Popular Hinduism," used in some of the older literature, had an opposite disadvantage—it implied not only that the concern of the seminar was exclusive of the "Great Tradition," but also that the Sanskritic and philosophical traditions were "unpopular." In short, using either "Hinduism" or "Popular Hinduism" alone tends to create a false dichotomy.

Even the term "Hinduism" itself posed an obstacle by obscuring similarities between Hinduism and other religious systems which form part of the complex civilization of South Asia. Not only is the religion of many tribalists similar to that of those more properly called Hindus, but the literature abounds with references to a common belief and action system participated in by Hindu and non-Hindu personnel alike within the dominant civilization. Specifically, in many local regions of South Asia there appear to be levels of a religious system common not only to Hindus of differing sects and castes, but also to non-Hindus such as Muslims, Jains, Buddhists, and Christians, not to mention "semi-Hindus" such as Sikhs and Lingayats, when two or more of these are found in geographical association with one another. For this reason, we wanted to include seminar participants who had studied the religious system and social structure of non-Hindu and non-tribal peoples on the South Asian subcontinent. Our difficulty in obtaining conference participants who had done field work among such peoples reflects a large void in our knowledge about the general subject of religion in South Asia.

The final title, "Religion in South Asia," was selected as reflecting the subject matter of the conference we envisaged and yet as being sufficiently broad to allow us to focus upon the wide range of phenomena appropriate to an exploratory seminar.

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