

Indian society, unlike Western societies, is a past-oriented society in which consciously or unconsciously attempts are made to interpret the present with the help of the golden past. Therefore it is natural to see the continuation of the traditional metaphor in every aspect of modern Indian life. *Redemptive Encounters* traces these continuities in a systematic manner in the present religious thought of India. The book should, therefore, inspire similar studies in other equally important areas of Indian culture and civilization.

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EWING, KATHERINE P., editor. *Shari'at and Ambiguity in South Asian Islam. Comparative Studies in Muslim Societies, volume 4.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. xiii+321 pages. Hardcover US\$37.50; ISBN 0-520-05575-6.

The present volume is a collection of papers which were originally prepared for a conference held at Pendle Hill Conference Center in Pennsylvania, May 22-24, 1981. It forms part of a larger effort sponsored by the Joint Committee on South Asia of the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies to understand moral values and sources of authority in South Asian Islam. This publication thus follows the first volume in the same programme, edited by Barbara D. Metcalf under the title *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam* (1984).

Both publications illustrate impressively the remarkable progress that has been made over the past three decades in the study of Islam in South Asia, especially with regard to the integration of anthropological-sociological approaches into an understanding of Muslim realities and of Islam that integrates the methodologies and questions of preponderantly textbased, normative and of largely fieldwork-based, empirical enquiry.

The volume comprises fourteen studies by fourteen different authors two of whom are based in South Asia. The others teach in North America. The contributions have been grouped in three parts. The three studies of part one deal with *shari'at*, custom and legal change and detail debates over the institutionalization of Islamic principles, the six essays of part two address changing idioms of political discourse and discuss religious legitimacy, leadership and popular mobilization whereas the five papers of part three address themselves to the negotiating of community boundaries and codes of personal behavior. The map on page four helpfully shows the wide range of locations discussed by the authors, reaching from Baluchistan in the west to the eastern borders of Bangladesh and from the Punjab in the north to Bombay in the southwest. One study, exceptionally, deals with events, earlier in this century, in Kelantan and therefore Southeast Asia. The central and southern regions of South Asia are not represented.

In the given short space we can hardly do better than restating a few selected points made by the editor in her quite brilliant introductory essay which summarizes analytically, discusses and "places," as it were, the contributions of the participants in the conference as well as of the essays published in the present volume. The focal point of the publication is the relationship between codes for behavior derived from

Islamic principles and codes derived from other sources. The central issues uniting the case studies are the uses of ambiguity, the tendency for groups of Muslims to define boundaries when placed under stress and a new role of ordinary people in defining ordinary codes of behavior.

The editor's analysis of the rich evidence and of the interpretations offered by the contributors leads to the conclusion that

there may be two basic strategies for dealing with divergent values and practices. On the one hand, ambiguity is highlighted, leading to the incorporation of diversity. On the other hand, purification and systematization are stressed, leading to debate articulations, and the exclusion of values that are felt to challenge the integrity of Islam. These essays illustrate the ways in which, when ambiguity is valued, actors use rhetorical strategies to take advantage of this ambiguity, reconciling what would otherwise be opposing values. These essays also illustrate, however, that when articulation and systematization are of concern, *shari'at* is called into play. With the urge for consistency come characteristically Islamic strategies, forums, and limits for debate, all ultimately connected to the definition and interpretation of *shari'at*. (21–22)

Among comparable collective works and published proceedings of conferences the present volume stands out as a model of careful editing and handsome as well as solid material production. It marks a worthy sequence to the volume edited by B. D. Metcalf mentioned earlier.

Notes on the contributors, including, helpfully, their chief publications, numerous illustrations and tables, a substantial glossary of selected terms and a detailed index all enhance the value of the volume which makes a substantial and stimulating contribution to the study of Islam in South Asia and of Islam in general. This edited volume demonstrates in an impressive way that the study of Islam by now has irreversibly moved to an approach that integrates the methodologies of all the disciplines relevant in this field, whether they are based on the analysis of texts, films, statistics and other related materials or on empirical observation and field work as practiced in social anthropology and the related sciences.

REFERENCE CITED:

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GOLD, ANN GRODZINS. *Fruitful Journeys. The Ways of Rajasthani Pilgrims*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988. xviii+333 pages. Photographs, maps, glossary, bibliography, index. Hardcover, no price. ISBN 0-520-05670-1.