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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Aspects of Religion in Indian Society by L. P. Vidyarthi

Review by: Nur Yalman

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standing of national societies. Accordingly, Geddes' unique work becomes almost indispensable for the China scholar. It will also be of special interest to all social scientists interested in problems of social change and its analysis.

Ryukyu: A Bibliographical Guide to Okinawan Studies. SHUNZO SAKAMAKI. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1963. xv, 353 pp., appendixes, indexes. \$10.00.

Reviewed by DOUGLAS G. HARING, *Syracuse University*

This is no ordinary bibliography. It represents years of devoted labor by a critical scholar who is at home in the languages of Japan, China, and Ryūkyū. Anyone who has labored with the careless citations so frequent in Japanese-language bibliographies, especially those dealing with Ryukyu, can estimate the toil and frustration involved. Nor could this work have been accomplished apart from the superb collection of Ryukyuan in the Library of the University of Hawaii, plus consultation with the numerous scholars—Japanese, Chinese, Okinawan, American—who have successively graced its faculty.

Since the none-too-adequate materials in Occidental languages have been covered by several bibliographers, Dr. Sakamaki has confined his work to publications in East Asian languages: Japanese, Ryukyuan, Chinese, and Korean. The fact that this work is in English—and worth reading by those who do not use the Asian languages—has moved the bibliographer to include brief introductions to all of the more important works, together with excellent translations of key materials; e.g., the *Sui Shu*, "the controversial 'earliest account' " recorded in the days of China's Sui dynasty (pp. 67–70). There are lucid, skilfully condensed accounts of the contents of every important work, together with information concerning individual authors, important groups of mutually influential scholars, and the dominating personnel of sundry periodicals. The title index gives ideographs for every entry; there is an author index with ideographs—invaluable when proper names are read so capriciously and unpredictably as they are in Ryukyu. Periodicals also are listed with ideographs, and a glossary of important words is similarly handled. Excellently proofread and printed, this book sets a high standard for meticulous cooperation between scholar and publisher. About 1200 books and 1800 articles and monographs are covered; the selection is exhaustive up to the time of going to press. The northern Ryukyus, however, receive less complete treatment than Okinawa and the southern islands; the political separation of the two areas justifies the differential treatment.

Professor Sakamaki has provided an essential, brilliantly scholarly foundation for the growing Occidental interest in Ryukyuan anthropology, history, economics, and general culture. The current revival of Ryukyuan studies in Japan may shortly be matched in the Occident, for these islands hold a key to numerous problems of East Asian culture history. Ryukyuan studies may be as strategic for the history of East Asian cultures as the Ryukyu Islands are strategic for military operations.

Aspects of Religion in Indian Society. L. P. VIDYARTHI (ed.) Meerut City (U.P.), India: Kedar Nath Ram Nath, n.d. [1962] x, 410 pp., bibliographies, charts, indices, 3 photographs. Rs. 18.

Reviewed by NUR YALMAN, *University of Chicago*

This is a book of essays published in memory of the late Professor D. N. Majumdar who has made many valuable contributions to our knowledge of the anthropology of

India. Twenty-three authors are represented, and their subjects, held together by the very loose thread of "religion," range far and wide over the entire mesmerizingly complex field of Hinduism. There is also one minor paper on Islam, but that deals with Afghanistan and is entirely out of place in the volume.

There are great difficulties in writing about religion in the best of circumstances. The subject comes across most effectively in social anthropology when held together by some analytic theoretical framework. The present volume has no theoretical core, and few of the authors attempt to be rigorous in their treatment of the subjects. The best papers are illuminating, and do suggest comparisons with other areas and lines of further investigation. There are others, which are only descriptive—and then only half-heartedly so—and tend to be dull and uninteresting. It is a pity that the complexities already present in Hinduism are exacerbated by a kaleidoscopic treatment of diverse and uneven papers; some regional grouping, or at least a map depicting the places of research would have greatly facilitated the tasks of the reader.

The volume is important for anthropologists with interests in India, and gives a good clue to both the strength and weaknesses of recent field work and anthropological thinking in India.

There is an introduction by the editor which is followed by a set of general papers. G. Saran neatly summarizes the work of Majumdar. McK. Marriott contributes his well known but inaccessible paper on "Changing Channels of Cultural Transmission," R. S. Srivastava writes about recent currents in Indian philosophy, and A. Aiyappan writes generally on the Hindu Way of Life.

One of the important papers is by K. N. Sharma on "Hindu Sects and Food Patterns in North India." It is clearly written, closely argued, and in effect throws considerable doubt on vegetarianism as a universal value in Hindu society. He cites the evidence from particular Brahman castes such as the Kanyakubja to show that vegetarianism is "specially a value of Vishnuism, so is teetotalism. They are not values of Brahmans as such." He also argues that anthropologists have been somewhat hasty in ascribing general caste mobility to individual changes in ritual behavior. He notes cogently "... one is left wondering why and how these local variations [in caste practice] are persisting."

G. M. Carstairs, presently the holder of the Chair of Psychiatry at Edinburgh, contributes one of the major papers in the volume. It is partly a sequel to his previously published work in Rajasthan and consists of an admirable comparison of religious observances in three different communities in the same area. He deals with the villages of Sujapura and Delwara in Udaipur as well as with a settlement of Bhil. The account is essentially descriptive. The author concludes that different communities stress different aspects of Hinduism, and that the same can be said about the structural units in their social systems. This is somewhat disappointing even as a narrowly anthropological conclusion, and one hopes that Carstairs will not disregard the many problems which lie on the borderlines between anthropology and psychiatry, and will pursue his anthropological work into the confines of psychiatry.

Madan provides a paper on the Herath ritual of the Saraswat Brahmans of Kashmir. His material is certainly highly interesting and includes beautiful myths and associated rituals, but his treatment is disappointing in another sense. He refuses to distinguish between the somewhat uninteresting secular activities which take place around the rite, and the purely religious aspect of the ritual. The claim that his own informants do not make this and other special distinctions of the anthropologist leads him to concern

himself almost entirely with such matters as "spring cleaning" and "feasting" to the neglect of the myth and the ritual. The conclusion that the social activities around the ritual lead to social solidarity sounds familiar. The editor, L. P. Vidyarthi, contributes an interesting paper devoted to the sacred complex of the Maler tribe. The description is full, but the author claims that the religion of the village can be understood in terms of three analytic concepts: sacred geography, sacred performances, and sacred specialists. But are these really analytic tools, or mere descriptive devices?

Jay has a notable paper in the volume. He deals with a subject of great intrinsic importance which has been somewhat neglected by anthropologists: he writes on the "revitalization movements" among the Munda, Santal, Oraons and Bhumij tribes. He uses Wallace's paper "Revitalization Movements." (*American Anthropologist* 1956) as a theoretical base, and brings tantalizingly difficult and controversial problems to our attention.

Surajit Sinha writes on the detailed changes which have been going on in the ritual life of a Bhumij village under increasing contact with Hinduism. The author was fortunate enough to undertake field work both in 1950-53 and during 1956-57, and is able to make a convincing and detailed case for the processes of change he isolates from his material.

Apart from these papers of immediate interest, there are numerous others which specialists in India will find useful. U. R. Ehrenfels, for instance, has an erudite, though badly written paper on the sex of the Khasi deity. K. S. Mathur writes generally about religion in a Malwa village; Y. Atal on the cult of Bheru in Mewar; G. Chattopadhyaya on the Carak Festival in West Bengal; T. R. Singh on the pantheon of deities in Andhra; R. Ratan on the religion of Bhangi's, an untouchable caste, of Delhi; I. P. Singh on the religion of a Sikh village; S. S. "Sher" on the belief system of an ex-criminal caste of the Punjab; S. P. Sinha on the history of Birsa, the charismatic leader of revitalization movements among the Munda which fits in well with the paper by Jay (cf. *supra*); and K. N. Sahay on the dynamics of conversion to Christianity among the Oraon tribes of Chotanagpur.

Although the book covers many fields and areas, it is but a drop in the bucket as far as Hinduism is concerned; for instance, the peoples of South India, except for one paper, are hardly represented at all. On the other hand, the general standard of the papers in the volume exhibits the impressive quality of original field work which is now being undertaken by Indian scholars themselves. In this respect, India is one of the few countries which is able to bring such intellectual acumen to an understanding of itself. D. N. Majumdar contributed greatly to this process, and the book is a specially appropriate tribute to him for this reason.

India is great and very complex, but the real danger to Indian anthropology is a preoccupation with field material from India, and an evident lack of interest to communicate with anthropologists who have worked outside the sphere of Indian culture. Such ethnocentrism could be a serious hindrance to original Indian contributions to anthropology, and few of the papers in the volume under discussion will appeal to anthropologists not absolutely devoted to India. Fortunately, there are many devotees who will find this volume useful.

There are general and author indexes, as well as short descriptions of the academic backgrounds of the contributors. L. P. Vidyarthi has certainly done an excellent job as an editor without, however, having made much of an impact on the vagaries of Indian typography.