

PREFACE

This volume will explore forms of internal and external religious controversy. External disputations took place between contesting individuals or movements within different religions; internal discussions occurred in a single religious community. The former were sparked often by Christian missionaries and proponents of new, aggressive religious movements in combat with other religions; the latter were generated by religious reformers who attacked orthodoxy or even by social reformers who did not see themselves as especially religious in their actions and ideology. Until the arrival of purely secular ideologies, an event that took place primarily in the twentieth century, exponents of social and cultural reform drew on religious authority for the legitimization of change even if it was limited to such doctrine as a rationalistic theism. Reformers found their efforts brought them into conflict with members of the religious establishment, which had long defined "proper" human activities as sanctioned by religion or custom.

Research for this volume is based on literature used to express differing opinions in tracts, journals, and plays that were generally issued in small numbers, but widely read as they passed from hand to hand. Even debates that used the well-established oral tradition were put into print after the event had taken place: thus their influence was magnified, because followers and opponents of a particular leader or society read them avidly. Since printing was inexpensive, anyone or any group with an ideology to expound, a position to attack, a leader to support or condemn, could publish works on their ideas. Sacred texts that supported a movement or ideology were translated and made available through inexpensive editions, as were the writings of self-proclaimed advocates of differing religious movements. As the nineteenth century progressed, polemical religious literature and those who wrote it mobilized groups to support their doctrines. These polemicists entered into religious combat as they led their followers forward through a return to what was defined as the "true" religion or attempted to defend established religion against the advocates of change. This collection of nine studies and one analytic chapter opens a window to a world expressed in South Asian languages hitherto closed to many scholars and students of the subcontinent.

The first part of this volume examines external controversy as it developed between proponents of one religious sect or community and was opposed by other religions. We open with three chapters that focus on Hindu-Christian polemics. Frank F. Conlon begins with a study of Swami Vishnubawa Brahmachari, who met Christian missionaries in debate on the beaches of Bombay and sought to condemn Christianity as well as to revive Hinduism through his writings. D. Dennis Hudson follows with the career of Arumuga Navalar, who linked both the northern peninsula of Jaffna and the Hindus of Tamilnad in his attempt to revive Shaiva Siddhanta and to defend it from Christian attacks. Both men were active in the mid-nineteenth century. Kenneth W. Jones turns to the writings of Swami Dayananda Saraswati and to the arguments that he developed to destroy all Christian credibility and at the same time to provide a basis for the one true faith, his own Vedic Hinduism.

In the second section we move on to explore two examples of Muslim-Christian polemics of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A. A. Powell begins with the decade before the Revolt of 1857, when Dr. Wazir Khan entered into controversy with Christian missionaries, particularly the acerbic Reverend C. G. Pfander. Their struggles brought a round of religious polemics to the Agra—Delhi area in the 1840s and early 1850s. Rafiuddin Ahmed takes us to Bengal with a discussion of Islamic reform and the career of Munshi Meheru'llah, who attempted to defend Islam from criticism by Christian missionaries. Here we see the writings of the Reverend Mr. Pfander once more a catalyst for religious conflict.

Not all religious controversy took the form of theological polemics, as shown by Christopher King in the final look at external polemics. He examines two polemical plays that pitted Queen Devanagari against Begum Urdu in a contest between Muslims, who struggled to maintain the dominance of Urdu, and Hindus, who sought equal or if possible superior status for Hindi. In these contexts, language was associated with script and, in turn, with religion. Urdu was written in a modified form of the Arabic script and thus symbolized the Qur'an, the core of Islam, while Devanagari was associated with Sanskrit and the Hindu scriptures.

Part 2 turns to internal religious polemics that pitted social and religious reformers against defenders of orthodoxy. Proponents of new forms of thought and social behavior attempted to redefine acceptable or unacceptable customs as they fought for change within their religious community. The chapter by John and Karen Leonard examines the career of Viresalingam, a social reformer and theistic Hindu influenced by the Brahma Samaj doctrines, who came into conflict with orthodox authority as he advocated dramatic changes in customary behavior centering around the issue of widow remarriage. Following

similar themes Gail Minault writes of Sayyid Mumtaz 'Ali's efforts to defend Islam from external criticism. These efforts became fused with the struggles of 'Ali and his wife, Muhammadi Begum, to reform the role of women in Muslim society. The third chapter of this section, by N. G. Barrier, turns to the internal struggles that developed within the Sikh community as different groups sought religious reform, redefinition of Sikh identity, and standardization of Sikh practices as well as defense of Sikhism from other religions. This is, then, a combination of both internal and external polemics, with the major thrust on internal issues. The final chapter, by Barbara Metcalf, examines the impact of these writings on concepts of religion and communal identity as polemics both internal and external acted to define the religious community.

Together these studies depict a mosaic of religious conflict, reform, and defense that expanded during the nineteenth century and were expressed in South Asian languages. The widespread use of printing provided a technique that made religious polemics all the more influential among a growing audience of literates. Overall the positions articulated in polemical literature were uncompromising, as each writer spoke of the superiority of his religion and the inferiority of his opponents' beliefs. Hindus did not talk of ethical equivalence or of all religions being true as each sought the supreme deity according to one's individual path. The goal repeatedly articulated was one of defeating all opponents and, in that process, of establishing the superiority of a particular religious doctrine—of truth as each defined it. Later religious conflict and the rise of communalism that still haunts independent India are understandable in terms of such ideological positions and polemical techniques. The techniques, organizational base, and attitudes that supported communalism were forged in the nineteenth century and led to politicized expression of religion in the twentieth century. During the years after independence new "enemies" replaced the Christian missionaries as prime targets of religious conflict.

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