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978-0-521-35156-0 - Religions of Immigrants from India and Pakistan: New Threads in the American Tapestry

Raymond Brady Williams

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Religions of immigrants from India and Pakistan

“For the originality and importance of the topic alone this book promises to be a benchmark in the field.”

Mark Juergensmeyer, University of California, Berkeley

Landmark changes in the immigration law of 1965 admitted to the United States large numbers of immigrants from India and Pakistan. The religious groups formed by these new immigrants have exerted and will continue to exert significant influence upon the fabric of American religion and culture. This book is the first comprehensive study of the religious groups formed in the United States by Asian-Indian and Pakistani immigrants and of their patterns of adaptation and organization. Professor Williams provides an overview of the variety of religions practiced by these new immigrants, examining Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Jain, Zoroastrian, and Jewish communities, and the size and character of the various groups formed. Through analysis of demographic statistics as well as information gathered in extensive interviews with religious group participants, Professor Williams examines the trajectories of adaptation charted by these groups through their involvement in a wide range of ecumenical, ethnic, sectarian, and national organizations.

Detailed descriptions of Swaminarayan Hindus and Nizari Ismaili Muslims, two diverse religious communities, illustrate the national growth of immigrant religious groups and the formative power of their adaptive strategies, while religious profiles of Asian-Indian and Pakistani religious groups in Chicago and Houston illustrate varying patterns of development on the local level. In addition to examining the historical development of these groups, Professor Williams assesses the current problems and prospects of Asian-Indian and Pakistani religious organizations and the influence of these groups on the shape of religion in America.

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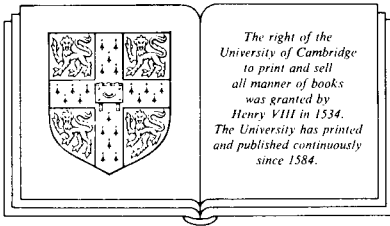
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Religions of immigrants from India and Pakistan

New threads in the American tapestry

RAYMOND BRADY WILLIAMS

Wabash College



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For friends and colleagues

Eric Dean, Hall Peebles,

David B. Greene, and William C. Placher

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Preface

Many Americans celebrated the Fourth of July 1986 by rekindling the light of the Statue of Liberty – a symbol of immigration to a land of liberty, opportunity, and religious freedom. At the same time, recent immigrants were kindling sacred fires for the dedication of a temple for Rama and Sita in Chicago. Immigrants have always brought their religions and reshaped them in the United States. The first amendment to the Constitution provides the substance of religious freedom of which the Statue of Liberty is the symbol, and temples such as the one in Chicago are the embodiment. This work is about the exercise of that freedom by recent immigrants from India and Pakistan.

Research on Swaminarayan Hinduism (Williams, 1984) introduced me to the lives of these immigrants, to their rapidly growing religious organizations, and to the importance of religion in their cultural adaptation. The data in this study are based on questionnaires received from 369 of more than 700 Asian-Indian and Pakistani religious organizations and from personal correspondence and conversations with officers of those organizations. Between 1984 and 1986 I conducted several hundred interviews, especially in Chicago and Houston, and I attended scores of ceremonies, festivals, dedications, and social gatherings. Some of these people were naturally suspicious of a person asking questions about immigration, family, occupation, and organizational infrastructure; he may be an undercover agent for a governmental agency – the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the Internal Revenue Service, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, or the Central Intelligence Agency. I am grateful to those who overcame their suspicions and were able to share detailed personal information, and I hope the result of the research is worthy of their trust.

I urged each immigrant family I spoke with to preserve a detailed record of their experiences of immigration and of their efforts to establish them-

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selves in the United States so they can pass that story on to their American children and grandchildren. The present work is, in part, an attempt by an outsider to preserve a record of early institutional development and the role of religion among these immigrants.

Many words from the Indian subcontinent have become regular parts of English vocabulary; others remain, at least for now, quite foreign. The result is that any decision about the use of italics and diacritical marks in the text seems arbitrary. The practice in this work is to italicize the first appearance of words about which some question may arise. Each of those words appears in the glossary with a brief definition or description. I have used the form of transliteration most often used for its words by each group in the United States.

Grants from the Rockefeller Foundation, the Eric Dean Fund, and the Faculty Development Fund of Wabash College supported this research. A McLain-McTurnan-Arnold Research Fellowship provided me with freedom from teaching and administrative responsibilities in the spring of 1986, enabling me to concentrate on writing.

My friends and colleagues, including Dr. David Maharry, Director of the Cragwall Computer Center, and Mr. Larry Frye, Head Librarian of Lilly Library, and their associates at Wabash College did everything they could to make the work of research and writing a pleasure. Dr. John Swan, Ms. Debbie Polley, and Ms. Ann Lebedeff expanded Lilly Library to research size by their skilled assistance. Professor Paul Mielke helped prepare my photographs for publication. Mr. Jim Nye and Mr. William Alspaugh of Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago also gave valuable assistance. Mr. Shams Vellani and the staff of the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London provided access to valuable resources and expertise. The Fellows of Fitzwilliam College and Westminster College, Cambridge, showed me many acts of kindness as a visiting scholar. Throughout my teaching career I have learned a great deal from Wabash College students, and Mr. Chris Coble and Mr. Keith Winton were excellent assistants during this work. No research is done in isolation, as bibliographical references make clear, and I am grateful to those whose work provided the context for this research.

Professors Eric Dean and William C. Placher commented on drafts of the entire manuscript, and other scholars, including Mr. Shams Vellani, Mr. Stephen Gelberg, Professor Mark Juergensmeyer, Professor Arif Ghayur, Dr. Ralph Strohl, Dr. Ahmad Sakr, Professor Basheer Khumawala, and leaders of several religious organizations, read relevant portions. I am grateful for their assistance because they saved me from errors of fact and interpretation.

Lois, my wife, was a regular companion on visits to homes of immi-

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grants, at religious ceremonies, and at interviews with leaders; her insights, often derived from reflection on conversations with women, added depth of understanding in this study as in all things.

No person has better colleagues than those whose companionship I enjoy in the Religion Department of Wabash College. Their friendship and excellence as teachers and scholars are sources of great pride, and this work is dedicated, with gratitude for many years of pleasant association, to Eric Dean, Hall Peebles, David B. Greene, and William C. Placher.

Raymond Williams
Wabash College