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978-0-521-44181-0 - The Religious Culture of India: Power, Love and Wisdom

Friedhelm Hardy

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This study conducts a lively and innovative exploration of the traditional Indian religions and cultures – an area that has both fascinated and puzzled the West for centuries. Friedhelm Hardy aims at presenting the widest possible range of themes that have preoccupied traditional Indian culture. He uses a great variety of sources, in various languages, and listens not only to what the learned philosopher or theologian in the classical Sanskrit texts has to say, but also to what folk and regional cults and cultures express in stories, myths and poetry. The result is a personal and entertaining portrayal of the colourful world of India which will have great appeal to the non-specialist. By making the three universal human drives of power, love and wisdom his focal points, Hardy seeks to guide the reader through an alien world which is nevertheless recognizably human. This book will be required reading for all those interested in India and its culture.

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FRIEDHELM HARDY

Reader in Indian Religions, King's College, University of London



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**Dedicated to
P. Georg Mühlenbrock SJ**

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Preface

There are many crimes a scholar can commit. Inaccuracy and sloppiness are two of them, and the imposition of his own ideas (for the sake of originality, fame, or whatever) is another. But collectively the scholarly community knows of one unforgivable crime: to make a fascinating subject boring. Thereby it prevents future generations from deriving the delight and edification they are entitled to from it.

In the following pages I have tried to demonstrate that the study of the traditional Indian religions can be delightful and edifying. Mountains are simply there, justifying the climbing of them. But books can be justified only if they have not been there before. For many years I have found it disconcerting to be asked by friends, acquaintances and strangers what the study of Indian religions is all about, why I enjoy doing it and what possible benefits could be derived from it. I was unable to refer them to a single book that might provide them with some representative ideas about it. The opportunity to remedy the situation arose when I was invited to deliver the Wilde Lectures in Comparative Religion at the University of Oxford over the period of 1985 to 1987. These lectures are open to all members of the university and the general public. Given that I had to address specialists in my own discipline, colleagues learned in other subjects, undergraduates and a variety of interested non-academics, I had in front of me an ideal cross-section of curious humanity whom I could, once and for all, convince of the virtues of my own subject. The twenty-four hours allotted for this task provided an opportunity unmatched by two minutes at a sherry party. So it will not require many pages' reading to realize that what is offered here is not a textbook about Indian culture nor a learned monograph. What follows is unashamedly subjective and personal. But to the extent that something like a typology, illustrating the wide range

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of Indian religions, might emerge from the present venture, some objective usefulness is perhaps not altogether absent.

That the chapters of the book are essentially similar to those lectures will explain some of their idiosyncrasies. The lectures had to be delivered over a period of three years to three substantially different audiences – hence the three key themes and the relative independence of the three parts. Painful though it has been, some fortuitous chronological coincidences are not retained in the present version. As it happened, Canetti's *Auto da Fé* was originally published precisely fifty years prior to my referring to it in my first lecture; when I talked about the transcendental dimensions of love (in lecture 12), it was St Valentine's day; and when I quoted from Mr Hatterr in my seventeenth lecture 'two years this Thursday', this happened to be accurate down to the day. Similarly a persistent textual scholar might still be able to trace allusions to the political and social climate during which the lectures were produced. Those allusions have been toned down here, not because that climate itself has since then fundamentally changed, but because they will be of little interest to a future reader. Some lectures were illustrated with slides; comparable literary illustrations have been substituted for them where possible.

It is with pleasure that I express here my gratitude to a host of people who, in one way or another, have been of help and comfort to me (though they cannot be held responsible for any shortcomings.) The rather unconventional ideas about religion of Dr Henry Wilde himself are briefly discussed on pp. 426f below; I would like to thank the Electors of the Wilde Lecturer for the unique opportunity they have offered me. I am indebted to Professors M. Wiles, B. Mitchell and the late B. Motilal, to Fr N. Tanner SJ, G. Lienhard, Jacky and Peter Mackridge, P. Clarke, F. Zimmermann and A. Sanderson for their hospitality and thought-provoking discussions during my stays in Oxford. R. Norman presented me with the font used in this book. The British Academy provided me with two research grants to visit India in 1982 and 1988 and some of the materials gathered there have been incorporated here. S. Chandra, S. Collins, M. Cooper, Bonny and William Crawley, F. Gros, J. Hardy, R. King, Gyan and Gitanjali Pandey, G. Parrinder, the late A. K. Ramanujan, Narayan Rao, C. Shackle, D. Shulman, D. Smith, S. Sutherland and K. Ward provided encouragement, friendship and useful, though sometimes painful,

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criticism. But sadly G.-D. Sontheimer never saw any of this, though I would have welcomed his comments. I take the opportunity here to thank Peter Byrne for assistance that has remained unacknowledged so far. Linda Antoniw, Isobel Balakrishnan, Jo and Ian Dennis, Roger Jones, Renate Ogilvie, Rosslynne Hefferan and, above all, Janet Banks, have been involved in the process of giving shape to the book. Jenny and Mike Walker cheered me up on many occasions and so did Jartua's friendly smile. Maya and Uday Narkar, Shankar Gopal Tulpule and Sunanda Krishnamurti assisted me with difficult passages in Marathi and Bengali. For many years Gopala Chakravarthy has been a source of knowledge, a reliable travel companion and a friend. I owe special thanks to Sanjukta and Richard Gombrich who supported the present venture in quite a variety of ways, not least through their enthusiasm. Fr G. Mühlenbrock SJ, to whom I dedicate this book, created for me years ago an atmosphere in which the seeds of the present exploration were sown and allowed to grow. I hope that he would not totally disapprove of it, were he ever able to read it.

Whatever the outcome of this attempt at entertaining may be, it is with great regret that I have to apologize already at this stage for a failure. There is one friend who, perhaps more than all others, would deserve to be given the finished product for her enjoyment and edification. Instead my wife Aruna had to suffer for years the agonies of seeing me prepare and then deliver the lectures and then write the following pages. To a slightly lesser degree this also applies to my children Nikhil and Monika. As well as thanking them for their patience, I would like to ask their forgiveness for diverting so much of my time away from them.