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Hindoos, Volume 3

William Ward

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### **A View of the History, Literature, and Religion of the Hindoos**

William Ward's account of the Hindu communities among whom he served as a Baptist missionary in Serampore in West Bengal was first published in 1811 and reprinted in this third edition in 1817. It was an extremely influential work that shaped British views of the newly defined entity of 'Hinduism' in the early nineteenth century. Ward and his fellow missionaries promoted social reforms and education, establishing the Serampore Mission Press in 1800 and Serampore College in 1818. Ward devoted twenty years to compiling his study of Hindu literature, history, mythology and religion, which was eventually published in four volumes. It provided richly detailed information, and was regarded as authoritative for the next fifty years. It is therefore still an important source for researchers in areas including Indian history, British colonialism, Orientalism and religious studies. Volume 3 focuses on the history of religion in India, the caste system, and birth rituals, but ranges widely beyond this to cover climate, landscape, agriculture and the arts. It includes a glossary of terms applicable to all four volumes.

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# A View of the History, Literature, and Religion of the Hindoos

*Including a Minute Description of their  
Manners and Customs, and Translations from  
their Principal Works*

VOLUME 3: THE HISTORY, MANNERS AND  
CUSTOMS OF THE HINDOOS

WILLIAM WARD



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IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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By WILLIAM WARD,

OF SERAMPORE.

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THE THIRD EDITION,  
CAREFULLY ABRIDGED AND GREATLY IMPROVED.

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## PRONUNCIATION OF HINDOO NAMES.

IN endeavouring to give the sounds of Sūngskritū words, the author has adopted a method, which he hopes unites correctness with simplicity, and avoids much of that confusion which has been so much complained of on this subject. If the reader will only retain in his memory, that the short ū is to be sounded as the short o in son, or the u in Burton; the French é, as a in plate, and the ēē as in sweet, he may go through the work with a pronunciation so correct, that a Hindoo would understand him. At the beginning and end of a word, the inherent (ū) has the soft sound of au. The greatest difficulty arises in giving the sound of ऽ, the kūyū-phūla; and although the English y has been used for this symbol, in the middle of a word the sound is most like that of the soft e.

*The Dēvū-Nagūree, or Sūngskritū Alphabet.*

## The Consonants.

क	kū	ख	khū	ग	gū	घ	ghū	ङ	gnoo'ū
च	chū	छ	chhū	ज	jū	झ	jhū	ञ	gnee'ū
ट	tū	ठ	t'hū	ड	dū	ढ	dkhū	ण	anū
त	tū	थ	t'hū	द	dū	ध	dhū	न	nū
प	pū	फ	phū	ब	bū	भ	bhū	म	mū
य	jū	र	rū	ल	lū	व	vū	—	
श	shū	ष	shū	स	sū	ह	hū	क्ष	kshū.

## The Vowels.

अ	ū	आ	a	इ	ee	ई	ēē
उ	oo	ऊ	ōō	ऋ	ree	ॠ	rēē
ऌ	lee	ॡ	lēē	ऎ	é	ए	oi
ओ	o	औ	ou	अं	ūng	अः	ūh.

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## ERRATA.

Page xxiv. Read the last line but three thus : " which arises from those  
pits of stagnant water and other nuisances."

Page	Line	
11,	4,	add " the" before " Kishkindhya."
69,	8,	for <i>shuts read</i> coves.
183,	15,	for council <i>read</i> counsel.
200,	22,	add, after " side," " of the cocoa-nut."
208,	In the note	<i>read</i> 80 lbs.
314,	20,	for <i>Bürigoo read</i> Bhrigoo.
—	27,	for <i>Bhoguvtee read</i> Bhūguvūtee.
316,	21,	<i>read</i> Brūmhū-Dūttū.
324,	22,	for <i>gūgūt read</i> jūgūt.
326,	27,	dele <i>h</i> in <i>Koilashū</i> .
327,	29,	for <i>Kryā read</i> Kriya.
328,	2,	for <i>Kshutryū read</i> Khshūtriyū.
—	19,	<i>read</i> Kūpālūbhrit.
330,	16,	<i>read</i> mriyoonjūyū and mriyoo.
337,	33,	dele <i>h</i> in <i>Pūrūm-Hāngshū and</i> āngshū.
342,	23,	for <i>sidhū read</i> siddhū.

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## P R E F A C E.



IT must have been to accomplish some very important moral change in the Eastern world, that so vast an empire as is comprized in British India, containing nearly One Hundred Millions of people, should have been placed under the dominion of one of the smallest portions of the civilized world, and that at the other extremity of the globe. This opinion, which is entertained unquestionably by every enlightened philanthropist, is greatly strengthened, when we consider the long-degraded state of India, and of the immense and immensely populous regions around it ; the moral enterprize of the age in which these countries have been given to us, and that Great Britain is the only country upon earth, from which the intellectual and moral improvement of India could have been expected. All these combined circumstances surely carry us to the persuasion, that Divine Providence has, at this period of the world, some great good to confer on the East, and that, after so many long and dark ages, each succeeding one becoming darker and blacker than the past, the

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day-spring from on high is destined again to visit these regions, containing the birth-place of humanity, filled with all that is magnificent and immense in creation, made sacred by the presence of patriarchs, prophets, and the Messiah Himself, as well as the theatre of the most remarkable revolutions that have ever been exhibited on earth.

To form a just conception of the state of darkness in which so many minds are involved as are comprized in the heathen population of India, a person had need become an inhabitant of the country, that he may read and see the productions of these minds, and witness the effects of the institutions they have formed, as displayed in the manners, customs, and moral circumstances of the inhabitants.

A more correct knowledge of this people appears to be necessary when we consider, that their philosophy and religion still prevails over the greater portion of the globe, and that it is Hindooism which regulates the forms of worship, and the modes of thinking, and feeling, and acting, throughout China, Japan, Tartary, Hindoost'han, the Burman empire, Siam, Ceylon, &c., that is, amongst more than 400,000,000 of the human race!

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We absolutely know nothing yet of the operations of mind among the great mass of beings which compose the Chinese empire ; though we are pretty sure that the principal deity worshipped there is the Indian Boodh, and that the popular superstition is, in substance, the same as that established in the Burman empire — In the living incarnation exhibited in the person of the Grand Lama, worshipped in Tartary, we behold another striking feature of the Hindoo system ; considered, no doubt, as an improvement upon the occasional incarnations of the Hindoos, who recognize in every extraordinary being an ūvūtar, an incarnation. As a confirmation of this idea, the reader is referred to the seventh volume of the Asiatic Researches, where we have an account of a living deity, strictly Hindoo, in the very heart of Hindoost'han, in the family of a bram-hūn. The Boodh worshipped in the Burman empire, Siam, &c., is universally known to be one of the ten Hindoo incarnations. Some persons imagine that Boodhism was the ancient religion of the Hindoos.

Here then we have the extraordinary fact, that the greater part of the human family are still Hindoos ; or, in other words, that they are under the transforming influence of the philosophy and superstition which may be denominated Hindooism ;

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and that their conceptions on these transcendently important subjects, viz. the Divine Nature, the moral government of the Almighty, the way of access to him, the nature of divine worship and of acceptable obedience, and the condition of man in the present and future states, are all regulated by systems invented by the Indian bramhūn. How exceedingly desirable then it is, how immensely important, to know the powers of an intellectual engine which moves half the globe !

What then is a *Hindoo*, as we see him on the plains of Hindoost'han ?

The opinions embraced by the more philosophical part of the Hindoo nation, are quite distinct from the popular superstition. In this philosophical system the one God is considered as pure spirit, divested of all attributes ; and every thing besides God is declared to be inert matter. This Being is contemplated either as dwelling in his own eternal solitude, in a state of infinite blessedness or repose, or as individuated in every form of life, animal or vegetable.

This connection of spirit with matter is considered as a state replete with degradation and misery, and emancipation from this state is declared to be the great business of life.

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Divine wisdom leading to perfect abstraction of mind is the only direct way of emancipation from matter, or absorption into the divine nature. The person who seeks to acquire this wisdom is directed to realise every visible object as God, and God as every thing, so that he sees God every where; and hence his mind becomes fixed exclusively on God, to the utter exclusion of all connection with matter. Such a person, by various ceremonies called yogü,\* annihilates every passion or desire in reference both to God and the creatures; every form of matter possesses the same value to him, and he becomes insensible to all want, all affection, and all desire. While in the body, he, in fact, dwells in spirit,† and he ceases to live for any bodily function. As the air contained in a vessel, when this vessel is broken, mixes with the great body of atmospheric air which had surrounded it, so at death the spirit of this yogee returns to the soul of the world, and becomes lost in spirit, as a drop of water in the ocean.

The Hindoo writings contain the most marvellous accounts of these yogees dwelling in forests, and performing austerities of the most dreadful nature, in order to attain to this abstraction, and ultimate absorption.

\* Hence the name jogee, or rather yogee.

† That is, in spirit considered as remaining in eternal solitude, without attributes.

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At present, no such yogees are to be seen ; but a mimicry of this is found amongst various orders of Hindoo mendicants. Hence, to denote that he has embraced a forest residence, a mendicant is seen wearing a tyger's skin over his shoulders, and his hair is clotted with clay, and burnt brown by the sun. Others are seen without the least clothes, to denote that they are destitute of passions. Others make a vow of perpetual silence, to shew that they have renounced all human intercourse ; while others are seen bearing with infinite patience, as though insensible to pain, various austerities of the most dreadful kind, inflicted on the body. The names *voiragee*, *soonyasee*, &c. assumed by different orders of these mendicants, are intended to denote that they are destitute of passions. But the conduct of all these modern yogees proves, that they are the greatest slaves to the passions the country affords. No return, then, for the Hindoos of the present day, to the soul of the world ; and this part of the system, even in its outward forms, is completely lost.

There is another part of the Hindoo system, viz. devotion, and this is said to lead to wisdom and abstraction, and finally, to absorption ; but as no Hindoos are now found to attain abstraction, we must suppose that the merit of their

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devotion is very deficient, or that it operates very slowly on their destiny.

Amongst the great body of Hindoos are a few more remarkable than the rest for devotion: these are mostly found amongst persons tired of the bustle of the world, who sit for hours and days together repeating the name of some deity using their bead-roll. Others retire to Benares or some sacred place, and spend their time in religious ceremonies: and these are promised the heaven of the god Shivü. Many persons spend all their days in visiting holy places and in devotion there, seeking celestial happiness for a time, or the birth of a yogee. We might add several other works of merit connected with a more elevated state in the next birth, and leading towards abstraction, or the enjoyment of happiness for a time in one of the heavens: such as large offerings to the bramhüns; digging of pools; making roads to holy places or landing places to the Ganges, and consecrating orchards for shade and fruit to the public use.

Among devotees who seek the same objects must be placed the persons who drown themselves, in a state of perfect health, at Allahabad, and in other places; and the widow who ascends the funeral pile, also seeks this higher happiness, and is promised by the shastrü that, by the



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merit of this act, she shall take her deceased husband and seven generations of his family and seven generations of her family with her to the heaven of Indrū, the king of the gods, where they shall reside during 30,000,000 of years. Seduced by these promises, and having the prospect, should she not burn, of nothing but domestic slavery and perpetual widowhood, multitudes annually perish on these funeral piles.

The following facts will shew more of the nature and effects of this part of the Hindoo system : Capt. ———, now in England, but who resided in India for a very long period, while resident at Allahabad, saw, as he sat at his own window one morning, sixteen females drown themselves. He sat till a thrill of horror seized him, which nearly reduced him to a state of sickness, otherwise he might have continued longer, and seen more of these immolations. Each of these women had a large empty earthen pan slung by a cord over each shoulder ; a bramhūn supported each as she went over the side of the boat, and held her up till she, by turning the pan aside, had filled it, when he let her go, and she sunk, a few bubbles of air only rising to the surface of the water. While Dr. Robinson, late of Calcutta, resided at the same place, twelve men went in boats to drown themselves in the same spot. Each of these men had a piece of bamboo

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fastened to his body, at each end of which was suspended a large earthen pan. While these remained empty, they served as bladders to keep them upon the surface of the water, but each man, with a cup, placed now in one hand and then in the other, kept filling the pans from the river, and, as soon as full, they dragged their victim to the bottom. One of the twelve changed his resolution, and made to the shore; the bramhūns who were assisting in these immolations plied their oars with all their might, and followed their victim, resolving to compel him to fulfil his engagement, but he gained a police station, and disappointed them.

By a statement, containing the returns of the magistrates under the Presidency of Bengal to the Supreme Native Court at Calcutta, of the number of widows burnt or buried alive under that Presidency in the years 1815, 1816, and 1817, it appears, that in the year 1817 not less than *Seven Hundred and Six* widows were thus immolated in that part of India. The probability is, that several times that number thus perished, for these returns depended entirely on the will of the families thus immolating their widows, and on the vigilance of the native officers.\*

\* Human sacrifices and self-immolation are inculcated in the Hindoo writings.

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Such are the baneful effects of the second part of the Hindoo system: it leads the infatuated devotee to a useless life, or to a terrible death.

Still, to ascertain the effects of Hindooism on the great mass of this people, we must examine the last part of the system, which takes in nine-tenths of the Hindoo population, and refers entirely to the practice of the popular ceremonies. These consist in daily ablutions connected with the worship of a person's guardian deity, or of the stone called the shalgramă, or of the lingŭ; service paid to a person's spiritual guide, and to the bramhŭns; the worship of different deities on special occasions, monthly or annually; recitations of sacred poems; repeating the names of the gods; pilgrimages; duties to deceased ancestors; funeral rites and offerings to the manes, &c. &c. &c. This examination of the popular superstition will enable us to answer the question—What is a *Hindoo*, as we see him on the plains of Hindoost'han?

The Hindoo is unquestionably as susceptible of that improvement which is purely intellectual as the inhabitant of Europe. He may not be capable of forming plans which require great and original powers, nor fitted for bold and daring enterprizes; and yet who shall estimate the capacity of minds which have exhibited great

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powers so far as they have been called forth, but which have never been placed in circumstances of tremendous trial, which have never been kindled by the collisions of genius, the struggles of parties, which have never been called into action by the voice of their country, by the plaudits of senates, by the thunders of eloquence, and which have never been enlarged by the society of foreigners, and by voyages and travels into distant realms. The European mind, it must be recollected, has attained its present vigour and expansion by the operation of all these causes, and after the illumination of centuries ; while we find the Hindoo still walking amidst the thick darkness of a long long night, uncheered by the twinkling of a single star, a single Bacon.

Before we can be said to have become thinking beings, we have acquired so many impressions from surrounding objects, and there is in our minds before that time so much of half-formed thought, that we have become reconciled to a thousand things, which had they first met us in a state of greater maturity of mind, would have excited either our contempt or abhorrence. This is true of men in that society which may have attained the highest improvement ; how much more true where the grossest superstitions have destroyed all the energies of the mind. The Hindoo, for instance,

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becomes deeply attached to a variety of objects because they are connected with his first and most powerful impressions: had he first seen them at the age of fifteen or twenty, they would perhaps have been rejected as revolting to his reason. But it will not perhaps be an uninteresting investigation, if we endeavour to ascertain the nature of that apparatus by which the character of the Hindoo is formed:—

Almost all the first impressions of mankind are derived from the objects around them; and in this way the characteristic features of every order of human society are formed. Hence we can plainly trace the varying features of society as belonging to the town or village, to some peculiar profession, or to the scenery, or the popular manners of a country.

And it is thus that the Hindoo mind and character are formed: at home or abroad, this youth hears certain books spoken of with the highest reverence, either as being from everlasting, or as having proceeded from the lips of deity; as having descended through unknown periods to the present times; and as being so sacred that none but the priests are permitted to peruse them, or even to hear them read. These books then, having regulated the speculations of the wisest sages of

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antiquity, having excited the devotions of thousands of divine yogees, and being the source of a religion still professed by adoring millions, come to him bearing unquestionable credentials.

Reverence for the gods is produced in his mind by observing around him innumerable temples erected to their honour, where they are daily worshipped by persons next in rank to the gods ; all the towns, rivers, persons, and things, around him are named after the gods ; and thus the land which has given him birth appears to him as the very abode of the gods. Festivities and splendid services calling forth all the enthusiasm of his country, he sees consecrated to these deities ; all the books he reads are full of their praise ; in the songs and exhibitions of the country all the attributes and wonders of a divine power, and the most astonishing miracles, are ascribed to them ; and innumerable fables devoted to their fame are repeated in every circle.

He is led to adore the priests of his native land, for he is told that the sacred books have been committed to their guardian care ; that these sacred persons came forth from the head of Brūmhū ; that religion in all its offices and benefits must proceed from them ; that they are the mouths of the gods ; and that they hold the destinies of