T.N. Madan, ed. *Religion in India*

Matthew Melko
that aspect of a theory (and they always illustrate, never contra-
dict), and you are not a Weberian scholar, you don't have much to
work with. You wonder, did the editor not provide a concluding
chapter because he did not want to prevent scholars from making
their own use of the disparate articles, or because he couldn't do
it either, or because it doesn't occur to Weberians that an overar-
ching theory is desirable or possible?

If, like Donald Nielsen or Anthony Stevens-Arroyo, contrib-
utors to this volume, one is both a Weberian scholar and a civi-
lizationist, it is probably possible to make use of the information
from a volume like this. But that combination of competencies is
probably rare.

The volume may be useful for a graduate religion or social
theories class, but I don't imagine there would be too many focusing
that much on Weber's approach to religion. It would be a use-
ful library volume for some researchers, but no more so than a
journal issue devoted to this particular subject.

My sense of markets, however, is fairly weak, so there may be
something I'm missing. But since the articles are not taken from
any other publication, it looks as though they were especially solicited for this book, and that Swatos had a strong sense of a
coherence he wished to create. He wished to show the continued
applicability of Weber's theory, and indeed the 18 participating
authors agree that the theory is applicable. It may well be that for
many scholars who are free of a Spenglerian drive for universal
recurrence or significance, this is sufficient.

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This is a collection of articles edited by a sociologist at the
University of Delhi, part of a series in sociology and anthropo-
logy. It is intended primarily as a book of readings for students,
bringing together a series of articles from disparate sources, many
of them, the editor says, not readily available, most of them
recent. All the major religions of India have been covered. Presumably, then, this book ought to be useful to civilizationists not specializing in South Asian religions but also to those who are, since the most of the articles do not seem to have been written originally for students or laymen. None, however, seems excessively abstruse.

The editor begins with an introduction of some mainstream sociological theories of religion, but the organization is based around concepts of sacredness relating to knowledge, time, space, persona and reorientation. There is no return to the initial theories to evaluate the extent to which they applied, no concluding chapter attempting to pull anything together.

This organization may represent an example of a cultural difference too difficult for a lay reader to cross. At any rate, this reviewer, who is in the category of civilizationists not specializing, did not find it helpful. The connections between times or spaces in the sections seemed remote, sometimes ingenious, not so different from the creative genius of an ISCSC program chair putting seemingly unrelated papers together under a linking session title like “Explorations in Time: Heroic Women, Nasty Diseases, and the Evolution of Churlishness.”

Probably to the distress of the editor, should he ever read this, I am going to reorganize the material in a Western sort of way, according to type and probable utility.

There are a few articles that would be generally useful to students and to those of us who are a little rusty on the basics of the Koran, the difference between Dharma and Karma, the pervading principle of purity, an overview of symbols of Sikh identity.

There are two interesting local studies that provide cases of what to most laymen are probably general ideas: we meet Alyamar, a rather colorful folk deity, and learn how folks in a Gujarat village cope with the evil eye. I particularly liked David Pocock's article on “The Evil Eye.” Since the evil eye is caused by envy, instead of keeping up with the Joneses, folks tend to try to appear to keep down with the Desais.

There are some general articles explaining the significance and development of communalism, the place of the ascetic in contemporary society, the development of Christian fundamentalism since Indian independence, an assessment of the causes of reli-
igious violence and of the problem of secularization in a religious society. All of these are in the final section on reorientations, and they do address contemporary social change in terms intelligible to the student and layman.

The section on Persona was more interesting to me because it seemed more sociological in orientation, introducing some interesting religious leaders and types. There are Sathya Sai Baba, a resurrected miracle worker who is already predicting his next resurrection. He has a tremendous middle class following. Lawrence Babb, author of the article, probably an interactionist, does not question the validity of the miracles, but rather explores the reactions. Then there is the village shaman of Asora, doctor, priest, magician, repository of tradition and sacred knowledge. Finally, I.P. Vidiarthi has written a fascinating study of the social relationships of the Hindu temple priests in the sacred city of Gaya in Bihar, a microcosm of caste relationships and responses to social change.

For the specialist there are a number of articles describing ritual, but these were rather tedious for this layman and might be for students who shared his attention span. I was told much more than I wanted to know about household fire rituals taken from a manual of such rituals, the proper forms to follow when you receive a deity in Bengal, the practices involved in ushering in the monsoon in Orissa, ritual in a sacred dairy, the meaning of space in a Sri Lankan temple, the experience of a worshipper in a Jain Temple, the flower pilgrimage to the sacred Ganges city of Handwar, the Muslim pilgrimage to Ajmer and observance of the lunar month of Moharram in Maharashtra, hierarchy among priests in Madras, and astrological ritual among the Coorgs of South India. It turns out for Hindus at least, according to Diana Eck, that those not given to ritual or pilgrimages can get it all over at once in another Ganges city, Kashi, which seems to be a mall of pilgrimages, containing symbolic centers representing all the other famous centers. All of these articles may make the book worthwhile for the specialist, but probably will be as confusing, if not boring, to students and other laymen as it was for me.

In all, I would consider eleven articles essentially for specialists, 15 for laymen and students. Looked at this way, it seems to be an awkward division. Probably the book is worth having in
your university library, but the hard cover is already out of print. It is available in paperback for $15, but with only half the book usable, might not be the best choice as a supplement for a sociology of religion course, though it could be considered for an undergraduate course in South Asian religion, supplying some usable general information, a few colorful examples, and specialized articles that challenge the teacher if not the student.

Matthew Melko


We have entered a new stage in civilizational studies, if recent research and thinking by such as Frank and Gills, Chase-Dunn and Hall, and Sanderson are as eye-opening as appears to me to be the case. Apparently I am not alone in this opinion, as Albert Bergesen thinks we are experiencing a Kuhnian paradigm crisis.

The “Big Picture” is what has always held great attraction for me. I pursued graduate training in geography because it provided a comprehensive and comprehensible approach to the entire planet Earth. I looked to Marxism to provide a broad understanding of human society, but gradually became appreciative of its several serious shortcomings. I supplemented my geographic interests by tapping into sociology, anthropology, and history, while seeking a more realistic (and sufficiently broad and comprehensive) conceptual frame of reference replacing Marxism and its antiquated competitors. In this search, I was drawn to the ISCSC with its breadth of concerns, topical and temporal. Consequently recently scholarly approaches which focus on societal evolution and world systems have come to my attention. These seem to me to lay the foundation, or provide the framework, for significant progress in our understanding of the human experience all the way from Sumer and Egypt and their first cities and states to the present.

As an unabashed generalist gathering insights and information from diverse sources, I am quite dependent on the specialists