

**TRADITIONAL
INDIA**



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A SPECTRUM BOOK

DOMINANT IDEAS IN THE FORMATION OF INDIAN CULTURE

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Franklin Edgerton

We turn now to a consideration of the religious and philosophical base of Indian culture, the essence of the civilization of the Indian subcontinent. We have before touched upon the variation in climate, daily life, language, and so on, that the subcontinent exhibits. Yet it must be emphasized that underlying this variety there is a strong unifying force that allows us to speak of Indian culture in the singular: the complex of custom and belief which shapes the lives of the vast majority of the inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent.

Nor are the ideas discussed by Professor Edgerton in this next selection exclusively "Hindu"; they are rather more truly Indian, a product of the total environment and the possession of the over-all culture rather than of a single religious group. For the principles of *Samsāra*, *karma* and *mokṣa*—Buddhist *nirvāṇa*—are at the center of all Indian religious systems. A Buddhist monk of the old Brotherhood of the Buddha's time and a Jain monk, equally with the Hindu ascetic, are following what Edgerton terms the *extraordinary* norm. Indeed, the three major religions of India (excluding Islam which is a latecomer and not within the scope of traditional India) can be said to differ more in detail than in substance.

With regard to Islam, it must be said (at the risk of offending some of my Muslim friends) that like the early Aryans, it has not escaped "Indianization." True, the Qur'ān, monolithic and unalterable, remains untouched and at the center of the religious world of some fifty million Muslims in the Republic of India (and another hundred thousand and more in Pakistan). Yet in their daily lives the Muslims of the subcontinent could not escape the influence of

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