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**Journal Article****Author(s):**

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**Publication date:**

2020-08

**Permanent link:**

<https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000397078>

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**Originally published in:**

The Journal of Asian Studies 79(3), <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0021911819001876>

# Third-Stream Orientalism: J. N. Farquhar, the Indian YMCA's Literature Department, and the Representation of South Asian Cultures and Religions (ca. 1910–1940)

HARALD FISCHER-TINÉ 

*This article reconstructs the history of the Indian YMCA's Orientalist knowledge production in an attempt to capture a significant, if forgotten, transitional moment in the production and dissemination of scholarship on the religions and cultures of the Indian subcontinent. The YMCA's three Orientalist book series examined here flourished from the 1910s to the 1930s and represent a kind of third-stream approach to the study of South Asia. Inspired by the Christian fulfillment theory, "Y Orientalism" was at pains to differentiate itself from older polemical missionary writings. It also distanced itself from the popular "spiritual Orientalism" advocated by the Theosophical Society and from the philologically inclined "academic Orientalism" pursued in the Sanskrit departments of Western universities. The interest of the series' authors in the region's present and the multifarious facets of its "little traditions," living languages, arts, and cultures, as well as their privileging of knowledge that was generated "in the field" rather than in distant Western libraries, was unusual. Arguably, it anticipated important elements of the "area studies" approach to the Indian subcontinent that became dominant in Anglophone academia after the Second World War.*

**Keywords:** book history, Christian missionaries, colonialism, comparative religious studies, India, media history, Orientalism, South Asia, South Asian studies, YMCA

## INTRODUCTION

IN 1932, A COMMITTEE of inquiry assembled by the International Bureau of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in New York toured British India, Burma, and Ceylon. Its aim was to produce an exhaustive survey of the accomplishments of the Indian branch of the YMCA and to assess whether the money pumped into its projects, largely from American donors, was well invested. The committee's final report lauded one division of the Indian Y in particularly enthusiastic terms: the Department of Literature and Publication, established only two decades before. "Seldom," the authors rejoiced, "has the characteristic YMCA policy of giving free rein to strong men been more thoroughly justified than in the case of this department." Especially the department's initiation of several book series on Indian cultures and religions, they were convinced, would

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47 “long be remembered as an outstanding event in the religious development of India”  
48 (Holt, Kuruvilla, and Becknell 1933, 143).

49 Obviously, they were wrong. Whereas the contributions of the Indian YMCA and  
50 YWCA to various social reform and modernization projects in late colonial India have  
51 recently garnered some scholarly attention (Basu 2016; N. Chatterjee 2011; Fischer-Tiné  
52 2018, 2019; Phoenix 2014), the Association’s highly original contribution to the scholarly  
53 representation and interpretation of South Asian cultural and religious traditions, which  
54 yielded several dozen book publications during the interwar period, has fallen into oblivion.  
55 This is all the more regrettable, as it was apparently unique within the YMCA activities  
56 in Asia. Whereas the Association’s secular programs in South Asia, most prominently  
57 its sports and physical education schemes, as well as its vocational training programs and  
58 “rural reconstruction” initiatives, were fairly similar to the ones implemented in, say,  
59 China, Japan, Korea, or the Philippines (Fischer-Tiné, Huebner, and Tyrell, *forthcoming*),  
60 the systematic attempt to produce and disseminate knowledge about the religions  
61 and cultures prevailing in its “mission field” undertaken in the ambitious Orientalist  
62 book series of the Indian YMCA’s Literature Department has no match in these other  
63 countries. In China and Japan, for instance, lecture and literature departments remained  
64 for the most part concerned with imparting allegedly superior “Western knowledge”—as  
65 well as knowledge about the West—to Asians (see, e.g., Davidann 1998, 38; Heavens  
66 2014, 66–67).<sup>1</sup>

67 In what follows, I will reconstruct the history of the Indian Y’s Orientalist knowledge  
68 production in an attempt to capture a significant transitional moment in the production  
69 and dissemination of knowledge on the cultures of the Indian subcontinent. The Y’s  
70 Orientalist book production deserves a reappraisal as a distinctive and in some ways ground-  
71 breaking approach to the academic engagement with and representation of non-Western  
72 religions. I argue that the fifty-odd monographs that came out before the series were  
73 eventually discontinued in the early 1940s can be understood as a kind of third-stream  
74 approach to the study of South Asia and its religions. As the third stream, “Y Orientalism”  
75 was at pains to differentiate itself from the philologically inclined “academic Orientalism”  
76 pursued in the Sanskrit departments of Western universities, as well as from the popular  
77 second stream of “spiritual Orientalism” advocated by the Theosophical Society and com-  
78 parable esoteric bodies (Vidal 1997). On the one hand, the (mostly amateur) scholars con-  
79 tributing to the series took great pains to adhere to the quality standards set by  
80 professional Indologists and Sanskritists; on the other hand, they were dissatisfied with  
81 both the elitist bias and the thematic and disciplinary limitations of academic Orientalism  
82 and tried to push the boundaries of the discipline accordingly. They did so by focusing  
83 predominantly on various aspects of lived religion, popular culture, and the vernacular  
84 literatures of South Asia rather than basing their representation on “the finality and  
85

86  
87 <sup>1</sup>That being said, it should be mentioned that the acquisition of “Oriental” languages and familiarity  
88 with local customs and religions were of course crucial prerequisites of the Y’s work in other Asian  
89 countries as well. There are several examples of individuals who used the language skills and  
90 regional expertise acquired as Y secretaries later for an academic career. Thus, for instance,  
91 YMCA functionary Kenneth Scott Latourette (1884–1968), who had spent three years in China  
92 shortly before the First World War, later became a professor at Yale and an influential historian  
of East Asia (Kutcher 1993).

closure of antiquarian and curatorial knowledge” that Edward Said (1987, 106) identified some time ago as the hallmark of academic Orientalism (King 1999). One could even argue that, in strange ways, their interest in the region’s present and the multifarious facets of its “little traditions” (that is, its popular religious beliefs and practices, arts, and cultures), as well as their privileging of knowledge that was generated “in the field”—in South Asia itself—anticipated important elements of the “area studies” approach to the Indian subcontinent that became dominant in Anglophone academia after the Second World War. Due to space constraints, it is not possible to fully develop this argument in the present article, but there are clear indications that the questions of missionary entanglements and precursors to the area studies approach deserve more scholarly attention.

Sanskrit professors and Theosophists were not the only foils to Y Orientalism. At the same time, most authors in the series were liberal Protestants, highly critical vis-à-vis the older polemical Christian missionary literature on South Asian religions. While clearly marking their positionality as Christians, they tried concurrently to popularize a more tolerant, dialogue-oriented tone in missionary writings on non-Christian religions. Y Orientalists hence saw themselves—and were often publicly perceived—as “able and sympathetic interpreters of the spirit of India” (*Aberdeen Press and Journal* 1929). As we shall see, however, in spite of the fact that the Y’s “third-stream Orientalism” does not conform to the idea of an easy bedfellowship between Oriental studies and colonialism, the Indian YMCA’s contribution to South Asian studies remained a rather ambivalent enterprise and such acclamatory labels are problematic.

The next section of this article situates Y Orientalism in the wider history of scholarly publications on South Asian cultures and religions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. After introducing the Scottish missionary and Sanskritist John Nicol Farquhar (1861–1929), who masterminded the project, it sketches out the evolution of the three major book series launched by the Indian Y’s Literature Department in the 1910s and 1920s and scrutinizes their reception by contemporaries. The third and final part briefly discusses some of the more influential studies and points to the considerable tensions existing between the YMCA authors’ rhetoric of promoting interreligious tolerance and dialogue on the one hand and the persistence of racial and cultural prejudices and hierarchies on the other.

### THE CRISIS OF PROSELYTISM AND THE “SCIENCE OF RELIGION”:

#### FARQUHAR’S FULFILLMENT THEORY AND THE YMCA’S PUBLICATION SCHEME

The political turmoil and the rise of anticolonial nationalism in the wake of the nationalist Swadeshi movement during the years 1905–8 led to severe difficulties for YMCA secretaries (and Christian missionaries more generally) who had to face the increasingly militant—and sometimes outright violent—resistance of South Asians vis-à-vis their aggressive “open air” or “bazaar” preaching (David 1992, 147). Particularly discomfiting for the YMCA’s ambition to “evangelize” (Mott 1900) India in the near future was the work of various Hindu reform organizations such as the Arya Samaj and the Brahmo Samaj, which had strategically borrowed the most effective elements from their Christian adversaries’ techniques in order to revitalize Hinduism and check the missionary influence (Fischer-Tiné 2013; Hatcher 2013; K. Jones 1989). As in

many other places around the globe where the Association was present—including countries such as China and Uruguay—the Y template was soon copied by local groups with different religious or ideological agendas. All over South Asia, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Sikh, and Jain reformers established their own Young Men’s Associations to diminish the attraction of the Christian YMCA (Farquhar 1915, 80, 125, 278, 329, 343, 444). In India, the Hindu revivalist Arya Samajis even founded a “Vedic Salvation Army” and developed *śuddhi*, a novel ritual of purification (Farquhar 1915, 127; Fischer-Tiné 2000; Ghai 1990; Vandavelde 2011) with a view to “reclaim” Hindu converts to Christianity who wanted to return to their old religion. All of this caused deep concerns in missionary circles (Thompson 1901).

It was in reaction to these multiple challenges resulting from this “tremendous uprising of the Hindu people against Christianity and all connected with it” (Farquhar 1912b) that the YMCA secretary John Nicol Farquhar, a Sanskritist and one of the leading experts on new religious movements on the subcontinent, came up with a detailed plan in 1909 for a new series of publications (Farquhar 1909; Sharpe 1979; *Times of India* 1929). Based on his long personal experience with Hindu students in Bengal, Farquhar was convinced that the circulation of scholarly yet readable monographs portraying South Asian religious traditions in a more conciliatory fashion and contrasting them with Christianity could decrease the potential for conflict and open a new, subtler avenue to reach at least the English-educated Indian elites.

To be sure, the Scottish YMCA secretary was not the first or the only one advocating a more constructive engagement with South Asian religious traditions at the time. For one, this approach echoed early modern Catholic missionary discourses that attributed a *lumen naturale* to Chinese or Indian “heathens” (Heft 2012). But there were also more recent Protestant precursors. Since the 1870s, religiously inclined Sanskrit scholars such as Monier Monier-Williams (1819–99) had been trying to promote a quasi-Darwinian view of Hindu traditions that represented the supposedly more “refined” varieties such as Vaishnavism as a lower evolutionary stage of Christianity (Dalmia 1997, 396–98). Around the turn of the twentieth century, several liberal-minded British and American missionaries were at pains to find similarities between “higher Hinduism” and Christianity (Crosthwaite 1914; J. Jones 1903; Slater 1906).

The new current soon became known as “Fulfillment Theory,” because it represented the Christian faith as the telos of the history of Hinduism and Buddhism (Hedges 2001; Satyavrata 2011). Its discursive strategy was fairly straightforward: Christian elements were “discovered” in South Asian religious traditions, which were then read as evidence for the fact that Hindus and Buddhists were on the path to Christianity and hence prepared for conversion. This new paradigm advocating “dialogue” and mutual respect first became noticeable to a broader audience at the world missionary conference held in Edinburgh in 1910 (Frykenberg 2008, 339; Stanley 2009, 205–47). Soon thereafter, Farquhar’s book *The Crown of Hinduism*, published in 1913, would become the most widely circulated and discussed contribution to this debate (Farquhar 1913; Sugirtharajah 2003, 90–107). As he was the mastermind and driving force behind the influential new discourse—the “codifier of fulfilment,” as one historian has aptly observed (Bellenoit 2007, 129)—a brief glance at Farquhar’s educational background and early career is helpful to understand the Y’s Orientalist book series, which were crucially shaped by the Scotsman’s theological views (Sharpe 1963).

185 Born in Aberdeen, Farquhar was first trained as a draper before passing grammar  
 186 school and entering the university in his hometown. His exceptional talent allowed  
 187 him to finish his studies of “Literal Humanities” in Oxford, where he developed an inter-  
 188 est in Oriental philology and things Indian. Next to the Scottish theologian Andrew Fair-  
 189 bairn (1838–1912)—an early pioneer of comparative religious studies in the United  
 190 Kingdom (Sharpe 1980, 147)—Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900), the German  
 191 *Übervater* of Indology and *Religionswissenschaft* (van den Bosch 2002), as well as his  
 192 British rival, the above-mentioned Sanskritist Monier Monier-Williams, were his favorite  
 193 teachers. There is reason to believe that Müller influenced Farquhar by conveying his  
 194 penchant for the new “science of religion” in general and especially its emphasis on phil-  
 195 ological exactness and academic rigor, while Monier-Williams prepared the ground for his  
 196 quest to reconcile a more respectful and sympathetic attitude toward Hinduism with a  
 197 sense of Christian mission (Sharpe 1965).

198 Immediately after graduation, Farquhar joined the London Missionary Society  
 199 (LMS) and volunteered for a teaching post at a Christian college run by the LMS in Bho-  
 200 wanipore near Calcutta. It was in the capital of the Raj that he eventually came in contact  
 201 with the YMCA. The young Scotsman was so impressed with the liberal atmosphere pre-  
 202 vailing in the Association and the laid-back professionalism of the American secretaries  
 203 that he decided to quit the LMS in 1902 to devote himself wholeheartedly to evangelism  
 204 and specifically to researching and writing on Asian religions under the auspices of the  
 205 Indian Y (Sharpe 1963, 61; Sugirtharajah 2003, 90).

206 Farquhar’s friend and patron, the prominent American YMCA leader John R. Mott  
 207 (1865–1955), had prepared the ground for such an endeavor two years earlier when pos-  
 208 iting a new program of “mission study” (Sharpe 1965, 234). Among other things, the  
 209 scheme that Mott presented at a workshop for leading Y secretaries (including Farquhar)  
 210 held in Yokohama in March 1907 involved a deeper engagement with other faiths, includ-  
 211 ing the production of state-of-the-art literature on non-Christian religions (Hopkins 1979,  
 212 672). When the Scotsman came up with his detailed publication plans for several series of  
 213 books on various facets of religious life in South Asia, Mott supported the project enthu-  
 214 siastically and raised the necessary seed money within a few months (Hopkins 1951, 660).  
 215 Even before being officially appointed head of the newly founded Literature Department  
 216 in late 1911, Farquhar started building a small group of academically inclined YMCA  
 217 workers around him and began to translate his vision into reality (Farquhar 1912b;  
 218 Sharpe 1965, 252, 298). The fact that, from the outset, the book series were planned  
 219 as a collaborative effort rather than the work of one individual scholar tallies with  
 220 A. Molendijk’s observation that around the turn of the twentieth century, the “big  
 221 science” model was increasingly taken up in the humanities and particularly in the  
 222 nascent discipline of comparative religion. In that respect, Y Orientalism was not an  
 223 exception, even though the financial means at its disposal were much humbler than in  
 224 the case of Müller’s Sacred Books of the East or the influential German series *Religion*  
 225 *in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Conrad 2006; Molendijk 2016a, 160–63). In other words,  
 226 in a mimetic attempt to counter the criticism leveled by academic Orientalists, the “third  
 227 stream” copied many features of its first-stream critics.

228 Under the generous new arrangement negotiated with Mott, Farquhar would spend  
 229 autumns and winters in India, lecturing, researching, keeping in touch with missionaries  
 230 and government officials, and consulting with individuals holding “non-Christian



opinions” (YMCA 1920, 78). Each spring, he would withdraw to Oxford for six months, where he found ideal conditions for concentrated writing and networking with British and continental scholars.

In the winter of 1912, the fledgling Literature Department was expanded through the official appointment of Kenneth J. Saunders, an expert on Buddhism, and Howard A. Walter, an American student of Islam, as deputy literary secretaries (YMCA 1920, 78). The South African-born Saunders, who had received his philological training at Cambridge, was a prolific writer and would contribute a very successful collection of Buddhist hymns to the new series (Saunders 1915). He continued to work for the Indian Y’s Literature Department for about a decade. Saunders eventually served as professor in the Pacific School of Religion at Berkeley from 1921 to 1935 and was instrumental in the establishment of the Spalding Chair of Eastern Religions and Ethics at Oxford University in 1936 (*Stanford Daily* 1921; *Times of India* 1937). Walter, a young Princeton graduate and, according to the *Times of India* (1919), “one of the ablest and most prominent writers the American Y sent to India,” specialized in South Asian Muslim traditions (Walter 1914) and acquired advanced knowledge of Urdu before his premature death during the influenza pandemic of 1918 (Walter 1918). The peculiar composition of the triumvirate leading the Literature Department (see figure 1) once more underscores the underlying claims to scientific authority. “If we are to get the ear of India,” Farquhar (1912b) held, “our work must be of the highest quality, equal to the best work done by

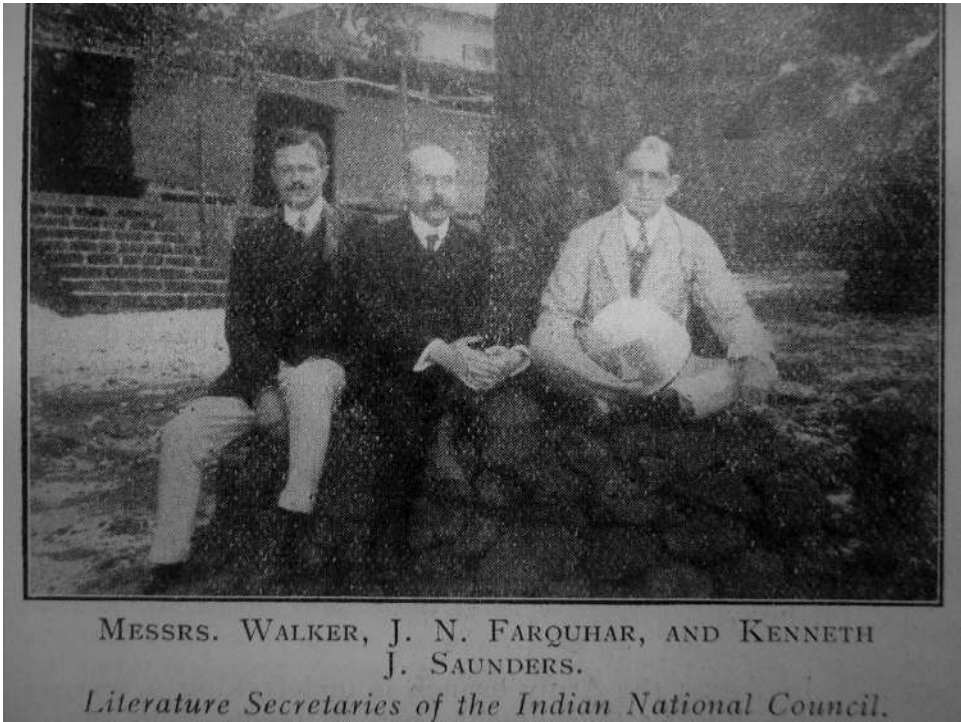


Fig. 1 - B/W online, B/W in print

**Figure 1.** Explaining South Asia to the world: members of the Indian Y’s Literature Department (The British Empire Y.M.C.A. Review 1914). Note: Walter is erroneously presented as “Walker.”

277 Oriental scholars.” It was for this reason that each of the major South Asian religious tra-  
 278 ditions was represented with an expert specifically trained in the classical and vernacular  
 279 languages relevant to his respective field of expertise.

280 When Farquhar assumed responsibility for the new department, he could already  
 281 boast of his experience as the editor of a fairly successful weekly magazine, *The Inquirer*,  
 282 published by the YMCA’s Association Press in Calcutta (Dunderdale 1962, 88). Further-  
 283 more, he had established a name for himself in the wider academic community, which  
 284 viewed him as a “man of recognized scholarship” and a competent expert on Hindu reli-  
 285 gion (Fleming 1914). He had published many articles in missionary and theological jour-  
 286 nals and produced two booklets on the Hindu epos *Bhagavadgītā* (Alexander 1903;  
 287 Farquhar 1904; 1910, 113; 1912a; Robinson 2006, 75–80). Especially his compact  
 288 *Primer of Hinduism* (Farquhar 1914a), first published in 1912, had received a very pos-  
 289 itive response. It quickly established itself as the standard handbook on Hindu traditions  
 290 for Christian missionaries arriving in India (Dunderdale 1962, 196). With more than  
 291 10,000 copies sold by 1920, it had even become a minor bestseller.

292 The second edition of the *Primer* and Farquhar’s above-mentioned magnum opus  
 293 *The Crown of Hinduism* were published by Oxford University Press (OUP). During  
 294 his first summer in Oxford, Farquhar used his contacts at OUP to establish a working  
 295 relationship between the renowned academic publishing house and the Indian Y’s  
 296 Literature Department. He cut a deal with Humphrey Milford, who was in charge of  
 297 OUP’s operations in British India (R. B. Chatterjee 2006, 66–70). Initially, Farquhar  
 298 proposed that Milford bring out three different book series. In his negotiations with  
 299 Milford, the “Literary Secretary of the National Council of the Indian Y.M.C.A.”  
 300 (as Farquhar’s official title had it) also revealed why he was so keen to cooperate with  
 301 a prestigious publishing house that was associated with the best in British science and  
 302 academia. As Milford wrote to his colleague E. V. Rieu, who had set up OUP’s  
 303 Bombay branch a couple of years before:

304  
 305 One of Farquhar’s main objects is to get the publication of ‘Christian literature’  
 306 out of the rut of provinciality and vulgarity in which it has so long been stuck, and  
 307 for this purpose he thinks that no organization would be so suitable as the Oxford  
 308 University Press.... [I]n fact, he said that one of the advantages, from his point of  
 309 view, of turning publications over to the Oxford University Press would be that  
 310 the standard would be automatically raised. (R. B. Chatterjee 2006, 197)

311  
 312  
 313 For Farquhar, the raising of standards and the acceptance by the academic establish-  
 314 ment were crucial, not least because academic Indologists such as his former teacher  
 315 Friedrich Max Müller had constantly ridiculed outsiders working in their field as  
 316 “dabblers, babblers and half-scholars” (Müller 1893, 34). One author has recently and  
 317 pertinently referred to such verbal disparagements as the typical behavior of a “new,  
 318 scientific priesthood,” attempting to protect their “sacred area” (Molendijk 2016b, 90).  
 319 To be sure, this was primarily an attack on the popular Orientalists moving in the orbit  
 320 of the Theosophical Society, but such statements implied that well-meaning missionaries  
 321 could likewise not be taken seriously as Orientalists and were damaging the reputation of  
 322 the discipline. Farquhar and his editorial team were determined to prove them wrong.



323 With such ambitious goals in mind, the Y's Literature Department eventually  
 324 launched its pioneering Religious Quest of India series in 1915. The series presented  
 325 monographs dealing with the “great traditions” of the subcontinent’s main religions  
 326 such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, and Islam. It featured such  
 327 titles as the British philologist J. H. Moulton’s account of the religion of the Parsis, *Trea-*  
 328 *sure of the Magi* (1917); the American missionary and scholar H. D. Griswold’s study *The*  
 329 *Religion of the Rigveda* (1923); and Nicol Macnicol’s critically acclaimed volume *Indian*  
 330 *Theism* (1915). Arguably, the most influential contribution to the Religious Quest of India  
 331 series was provided by Farquhar himself. His *Outline of the Religious Literature of India*  
 332 (1920) was a work of synthesis that, according to one reviewer, “recall[ed] the best type of  
 333 German *Handbücher*” (Barnett 1921, 128). It became a widely referenced work for mis-  
 334 sionaries and Indologists immediately after its first publication.

335 Of all the department’s publications, the Religious Quest of India series was doubt-  
 336 less most akin to established predecessors such as Müller’s Sacred Books of the East  
 337 series, also published by OUP (Girardot 2002; Masuzawa 2005; Molendijk 2016a,  
 338 2016b). However, that even this relatively conservative series was perceived by contem-  
 339 poraries as breaking with the conventions of academic Orientalism is suggested by a  
 340 review of Sinclair Stevenson’s (1915) volume on Jainism. The reviewer lauded the  
 341 unusual fact that the book was “not a cut-and-dried discussion of Jain dogma, but a  
 342 description of Jainism as a living religion based on long and patient study” that apparently  
 343 also involved interviews with wandering monks, merchant families, and “happy go lucky  
 344 Jaina school boys” (Clark 1916, 305). Three characteristics of these publications were  
 345 thus obviously perceived and appreciated by some contemporaneous critics: the specific  
 346 focus on contemporary aspects and lived religion characteristic of Y Orientalism; the  
 347 accessible writing style; and the authors’ innovative research methods, which partly  
 348 replaced philological meticulousness and sober hermeneutical analysis with information  
 349 gathered through oral interviews.

350 Shortly afterwards, the first tomes of the other two series began to come out. These  
 351 charted still lesser known territory in the study of South Asian cultures and religions. The  
 352 second series, entitled *The Religious Life of India*, presented a contrast to the books of  
 353 the Religious Quest of India series inasmuch as it was not concerned with the “Great  
 354 Tradition” at all, but devoted to a broad variety of folk religious phenomena. It was, as  
 355 a Y report phrased it, designed “to deal with Hindu and Muhammadan sects, the  
 356 Outcastes and the Wild Tribes” (YMCA 1920, 78). Rather inventively, it included  
 357 quasi-anthropological studies of certain conspicuous Hindu fringe groups and castes  
 358 such as Wilbur Deming’s (1928) study on the Ramdasis; Geoffrey Briggs’s (1920)  
 359 account of the low-caste Chamars; and US missionary William Allison’s (1935) mono-  
 360 graph on the Sadhs, a small sect on the margins of Hinduism. New territory was also  
 361 explored by the aforementioned Princeton graduate Howard A. Walter, who wrote one  
 362 of the first books ever on the then relatively recent but quickly expanding Islamic  
 363 reform movement of the Ahmadiyahs (Walter 1918). In sum, the great contribution of  
 364 the Religious Life of India series, with its presentist and non-elite focus, was that its  
 365 authors managed to carve out a special thematic and methodological niche for them-  
 366 selves. This gave Y Orientalism its unique profile and distinguished it from the “Great  
 367 Tradition”-oriented and historically inclined products of classical Indology that continued  
 368 to dominate academic Orientalism.

369 The third series, The Heritage of India, consisted of slim and cheap paperback  
 370 volumes (usually between 120 and 180 pages) dealing with various aspects of South  
 371 Asian literature, fine arts, architecture, philosophy, and music. Much like Stevenson's por-  
 372 trait of Jainism, Saunders's popular Heritage of India volume, *The Heart of Buddhism*,  
 373 was celebrated by contemporaries because, rather than providing the usual philologically  
 374 informed history of "master texts dominated by the scholastic categories it s[ought] to  
 375 elucidate" (Lopez 1995, 7), it presented a selection of hymns that would "pass as  
 376 current in oriental Buddhist circles today" (*Biblical World* 1917, 316).

377 This interest in the contemporary and the vernacular is even more obvious in the pio-  
 378 neering volumes devoted to living Indian languages and literatures. Edward Rice's *Kan-  
 379 narese Literature* was the "first history ever written" on literary production in one of the  
 380 major South Indian languages (YMCA 1920). Almost as innovative was F. E. Keay's  
 381 volume titled *Hindi Literature*: a British reviewer extolled it as a "most useful book,"  
 382 emphasizing that its author deserved particular praise because he "spelt Hindi names  
 383 as they are pronounced ... in conversation today," thus overcoming "a custom, much  
 384 to be condemned of using ancient Sanskrit spellings in writing of Hindi" (Bailey 1921).

385 The great significance of the Heritage of India series thus was that it challenged the  
 386 dominance of "dead" languages in the Orientalist discipline. Inspired by the very few  
 387 groundbreaking studies by academic scholars like George Grierson before them (Grier-  
 388 son 1889; Majeed 2019), the works on vernacular literatures published in the series con-  
 389 tributed to the emancipation of the philologies dealing with living Indian languages from  
 390 the overly powerful Orientalist "mother discipline" of classical Indology.<sup>2</sup> At times, this  
 391 agenda was resented by Sanskritists, some of whom seemed eager to defend their terri-  
 392 tory. The Swedish Orientalist Jarl Charpentier, for example, criticized the Heritage of  
 393 India volume *A History of Telugu Literature* (Chenchiah and Bahadur 1928) because  
 394 he regarded the authors' enthusiasm for the greatness of this vernacular literary tradition  
 395 as exaggerated. Charpentier (1929) held that India's regional languages never reached  
 396 "the standards ... set by classical Sanskrit" and the authors using these idioms only  
 397 "repeated and imitated in a parrot-like way" the "famous masters of the *kāvya* style."

398 According to a list dating from the year 1932, more than fifty volumes had been pub-  
 399 lished during the two decades after the inauguration of the Literature Department: ten in  
 400 the Religious Quest of India series, fifteen in the Religious Life of India series,  
 401 twenty-one in the Heritage of India series, and seven biographies not directly related  
 402 to one of the series (YMCA 1932; see also figure 2). However, by that time, the  
 403 project had already passed its zenith. The decline already set in slowly in the  
 404 mid-1920s, after Farquhar had withdrawn from the project and left India to take up a  
 405 position as professor of comparative religion at the University of Manchester. He  
 406 could not be replaced by a scholar of the same caliber. It was further catalyzed by the  
 407 impact of the Great Depression. Since the Indian YMCA's Publication Department—  
 408 much like other branches of the Association—depended to a considerable extent on  
 409

410 <sup>2</sup>George Abraham Grierson (1851–1941) was an especially important role model in this respect.  
 411 For his groundbreaking study on the vernacular literature of North India, he had chosen a program-  
 412 matic pro-fieldwork motto from Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan*: "Wer den Dichter will verstehen,  
 413 muss in Dichters Lande gehen" (He who wants to understand the poet, has to move to the poet's  
 414 country).

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Fig. 2 - B/W online, B/W in print

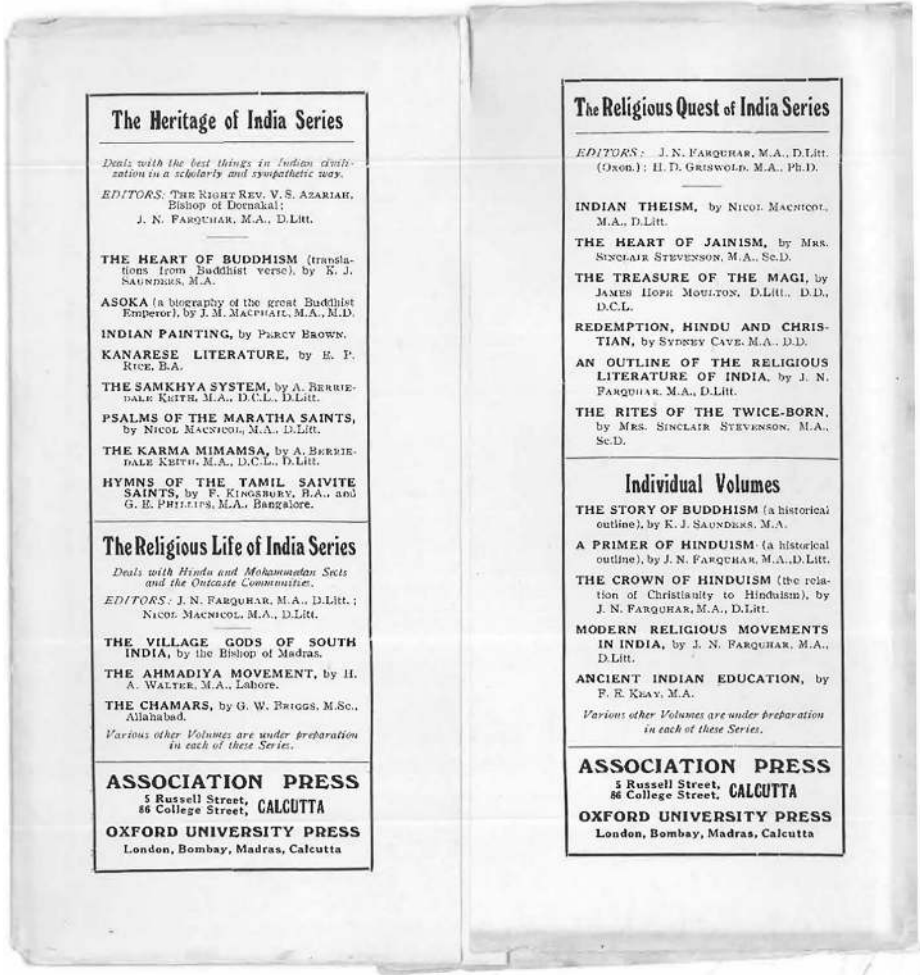


Figure 2. Advertisement for the YMCA's Oriental book series (Rice 1921, dust jacket).

donations raised in the United States, the economic recession and the subsequent drying out of funding hit the Orientalist book series particularly hard (Latourette 1957, 141–44). Only a handful of new volumes came out after 1932, and the project was finally discontinued in 1944 (R. B. Chatterjee 2006, 200).

Before analyzing some examples of Farquhar’s three original book series in greater detail, it is helpful to consider some overarching commonalities of all three varieties of Y Orientalism. The most obvious of these shared features was the somewhat problematic simultaneity of claims to scientific objectivity; a plea for an openly “sympathetic” approach to the object of study, that is, the religions and cultures of South Asia; and an emphasis on the editors’ positions as Christian missionaries. Thus, in the editorial preface of the Religious Quest of India series, the “sincere and sympathetic spirit of science” (Farquhar and Griswold 1915, iii) was juxtaposed with statements that left hardly a doubt that the proselytizing agenda ultimately overrode any sincere academic interest in Hinduism and other religions. The writers of the series, it was stated, would

461 seek to set each form of Indian religion by the side of Christianity in such a  
 462 way that the relationship may stand out clear. Jesus Christ has become to  
 463 them the light of all their seeing, and they believe Him destined to be the  
 464 light of the world. They are persuaded that, sooner or later, the age-long  
 465 quest of the Indian spirit for religious truth and power will find in Him at  
 466 once its goal and a new starting point, and they will be content if the publica-  
 467 tion of this series contributes in the smallest degree to hasten this consumma-  
 468 tion. (iii)

469  
 470 Potential critics of such an openly biased attitude were preventively reminded that “no  
 471 man approaches the study of a religion without religious convictions” and that it hence  
 472 was only a matter of transparency and fairness to the reader to make one’s own position-  
 473 ality clear from the outset (iv). The series editors admitted that, to some critical minds,  
 474 there might seem to be “a measure of incompatibility” in the twin motives of scientific  
 475 headway and proselytism, while underscoring that they themselves deemed them to be  
 476 perfectly reconcilable (Azariah and Farquhar 1921, iii).

477 The missionary zeal was somewhat less pronounced in the low-priced Religious Life  
 478 of India and Heritage of India series, both of which primarily targeted an Indian market.  
 479 Nonetheless, the editorial preface in the Religious Life of India volumes made the point  
 480 that “in each case the religion described is brought into relation with Christianity” (Far-  
 481 quhar and Griswold 1915, iii). The readers of books published in the Heritage of India  
 482 series were at least reminded that “this series of cheap books has been planned by *a*  
 483 *group of Christian men*, in order that every educated Indian ... may be able to find  
 484 his way into the treasures of India’s past” (Azariah and Farquhar 1921, iii; emphasis  
 485 added). Even though the editors attempted to calibrate the various series to the expect-  
 486 ations of the targeted South Asian audience and tried not to provoke the local sensibili-  
 487 ties by advertising their Christian agenda too aggressively, echoes of their missionary zeal  
 488 are clearly discernible. Besides, the preface to the Religious Life of India series also  
 489 emphasized an aspect quite typical of the entire venture: the fact that this knowledge  
 490 was not produced by pedantic academic philologists, preoccupied with the comparison  
 491 of root words and verb moods, but by men—and occasionally women (Stevenson  
 492 1915, 1920, 1930; Urquhart 1925)—on the spot, who knew the religious phenomena  
 493 they described from personal experience and had direct access to the South Asian reli-  
 494 gious practitioners by virtue of their language skills:

496  
 497 [We] believe they are able to shed ... fresh light drawn from the close religious  
 498 intercourse they have each had with the people who live by the faith herein  
 499 described: and their study of the relevant literature has in every instance been  
 500 largely *supplemented by persistent questioning* of those likely to be able to  
 501 give information. (Azariah and Farquhar 1921, iii; emphasis added)

502  
 503 That this was a rather uncommon approach at the time is evident from the reminiscences  
 504 of the Indian Reverend A. J. Appasamy (1891–1980), who met Farquhar in South India in  
 505 the early 1910s and later conducted research for his PhD under his guidance at Oxford.  
 506 About his academic supervisor, he states:

507 Unlike the usual scholar, his main work was not done at the desk. He spent a  
 508 considerable amount of time visiting different cities and in calling different  
 509 people.... He always went in quest of writers and established points of  
 510 contact which proved of abiding value to his work. Again, a book like *Modern*  
 511 *Religious Movements in India* could not have been written by a scholar  
 512 working in his study. The abundant facts and impressions of the book would  
 513 have been possible only to a widely-travelled man like Dr Farquhar who  
 514 gleaned information on the spot and verified it as well as he could. (Appasamy  
 515 1963, vi)  
 516

517 These unique features of Y Orientalism were typical not only of Farquhar's approach but  
 518 also of those of most other authors publishing under his aegis. Some of them can be  
 519 traced back more than a decade before the first books in the new series were actually  
 520 written. To some extent, Farquhar had already anticipated the novel features of his  
 521 book series in two programmatic articles he had penned for the missionary journal  
 522 *Harvest Field* in 1901 and 1905. In the first short piece, he had celebrated the new  
 523 "science of religion" as being of great value for the missionary cause in India, not least  
 524 because it had the potential to show "with the cold irresistible logic of facts" how "exceed-  
 525 ingly weak" Hinduism and Islam were in comparison with Christianity (Farquhar 1901).

526 The openness toward "multidisciplinarity" that would later distinguish especially the  
 527 Religious Life of India and Heritage of India series is likewise discernible in this early  
 528 article, as Farquhar highlighted the fact that he regarded the philological cum compara-  
 529 tive methodology characteristic of the "science of religion" as only one among several pos-  
 530 sible approaches. He explicitly emphasized the value of anthropological, historical, and  
 531 even "biological" currents of this new science (Farquhar 1901).<sup>3</sup>

532 In the second article, Farquhar anticipated Mott's "mission study" scheme by making  
 533 a plea for turning the study of local religions (especially Hinduism) into an integral part of  
 534 missionary training alongside the acquisition of local languages (Farquhar 1905). Only  
 535 such in-depth knowledge, he maintained, would allow missionaries to optimize their  
 536 message for the target audience. It was this considerable overlap (in terms of their  
 537 views of effective missionary work) between the business-savvy American networker  
 538 and the sober Scottish philologist that would allow Farquhar to, before long, use Y  
 539 resources and channels to disseminate the fruits of his Orientalist labor to a much  
 540 wider audience. Farquhar also used this early piece to articulate his fulfillment approach  
 541 for the first time in some detail, advocating for more tolerance toward "native" faiths:  
 542

543 All our study of Hinduism and everything we write and say on the subject should  
 544 be sympathetic. I believe incalculable harm has been done to the Christian cause  
 545 in India in times past through unsympathetic condemnations of Hinduism. Even  
 546 if the severe condemnations passed on certain aspects of the religion be quite  
 547 justifiable, it is bad policy to introduce these things into our addresses and  
 548 tracts. (Farquhar 1905, 168)  
 549

550 <sup>3</sup>Under the latter label, Farquhar subsumed "powerful writers" such as Auguste Comte, Herbert  
 551 Spencer, and Benjamin Kidd, who, according to him, had raised questions that could "not be  
 552 neglected" and would therefore significantly influence future scholars.



553 The Scotsman became increasingly outspoken on this subject as time went on. A few  
 554 years later, he observed that a considerable number of Christian books on Hinduism pub-  
 555 lished in India “contained harsh judgements, denunciatory language and ... statements  
 556 that were seriously inaccurate” (Farquhar 1913, 35). However, already in his early pro-  
 557 grammatic essay, the Scottish Y secretary had made it unmistakably clear that the new  
 558 attitude of verbal restraint and ostentatious sympathy for “native religions” was by no  
 559 means to be seen as an achievement in its own right. Rather, it had to be subservient  
 560 to the persistent, overarching goal of accomplishing “the prodigious task of defeating  
 561 the traditional religion of India” (Farquhar 1905, 177). As we shall presently see, the  
 562 tension that is noticeable here between the propensities to moral value judgements  
 563 rooted in the entrenched notion of Christian superiority and the insight that it might  
 564 be a good idea “to eschew the traditional habit of denunciation” (177) were also charac-  
 565 teristic of some of the books published under Farquhar’s scheme.

566 One last common feature of the entire literary enterprise deserves to be mentioned.  
 567 It pertains less to the contents of Y Orientalist scholarship or its underlying Christian ide-  
 568 ology than to the novel ways in which the series were marketed and distributed. It is  
 569 perhaps in those aspects that the business acumen and pragmatism typical of many activ-  
 570 ities of the American-dominated Indian YMCA become most apparent. First of all, as  
 571 Farquhar and his fellow editors were “very anxious that our fresh literature should be  
 572 widely read by the Indian educated classes” (Farquhar 1914b), the new books were com-  
 573 petitively priced in order to make them attractive to a broad South Asian audience: the  
 574 hardbound (and mostly illustrated) volumes of the Religious Life of India series cost only  
 575 twelve annas, whereas the slim paperbacks of the Heritage of India series were sold for  
 576 half that price. The low prices in the Indian market were possible not least because the  
 577 volumes sold in Europe and North America were priced significantly higher (R. B. Chatterjee  
 578 2006, 198–200). Secondly, the Y’s Literature Department deployed  
 579 innovative methods of advertising to make the series known to a nonspecialist audience.  
 580 In addition to the showrooms the Association Press had in ten major Indian cities, the  
 581 volumes of the Heritage of India and Religious Life of India series were also on  
 582 display in railway bookstalls all over the subcontinent. Moreover, sample copies were  
 583 sent to student camps and shown at various *melās* (Hindi for festival) and exhibitions,  
 584 where there apparently “was a steady run on [YMCA] books on Indian topics” (*Times*  
 585 *of India* 1921). The Publication Department, while eager to emphasize the value of its  
 586 series “to the missionary and the administrator” (YMCA 1920, 83), apparently also did  
 587 a good job bringing its products to the attention of the educational authorities of  
 588 several provincial governments in British India and of some Princely States. Some  
 589 titles were adopted as textbooks in local colleges and universities (Hogg 1928), while  
 590 others were used in colonial law courts to decide matters of religious orthodoxy  
 591 (YMCA 1920, 80). Last but not least, the Y’s Literature Department repeatedly received  
 592 the accolades of high-ranking government officials. During a public function in Novem-  
 593 ber 1921, for instance, Lord Ronaldshay, the Governor of Bengal, appreciatively  
 594 observed that the volumes of the three series launched by Farquhar were “mines of infor-  
 595 mation on the life and thought of the people of India” (*Times of India* 1920). All of this  
 596 raises more general questions about the commercial success and the impact of Y  
 597 Orientalism.  
 598

599 A YMCA report from 1920 emphasized that “our literature pays its way and we need  
 600 no subsidies,” but as there were massive differences between the various series and indi-  
 601 vidual titles, it is necessary to come to a more nuanced assessment. While relatively few  
 602 volumes of the pioneering “special interest” books on modern Indian languages and their  
 603 literatures found many buyers (YMCA 1920, 83), other Heritage of India titles proved to  
 604 be bestselling evergreens in the Association Press’s catalog. Thus, Herbert Popley’s *The*  
 605 *Music of India* ([1918] 1965) continued to be read for decades and saw several reprints.  
 606 Still more impressively, Percy Brown’s book *Indian Painting* ([1918] 1965) had reached  
 607 its eighth edition by 1965 and was reprinted as recently as 2010.

608 According to an internal memorandum published in 1928, the roughly thirty-five  
 609 titles that had been published by that date had sold 65,000 copies altogether (Hogg  
 610 1928). The reception among educated non-Christian South Asians was less enthusiastic  
 611 than Farquhar and his team had hoped, but the volumes apparently proved to be partic-  
 612 ularly popular among a Christian readership. An official report boasted that not only had  
 613 “this literary movement” persuaded many Western missionaries and Indian Christians “to  
 614 adopt the new attitude to the religions of India” but also it had “helped to convince  
 615 mission boards and secretaries in the West that it would be wise to give prospective mis-  
 616 sionaries a brief training in the religion and civilization they are to be faced with, before  
 617 they leave home” (YMCA 1920, 82). As we have seen, the most controversial and inno-  
 618 vative volumes dealing with vernacular literatures or “subaltern” religious groups gener-  
 619 ally fared worse commercially than relatively conventional ones. This notwithstanding,  
 620 when we talk about the three series as a whole, it seems safe to assume that, in terms  
 621 of both the sheer breadth of their circulation and their adoption by official institutions,  
 622 the products of Y Orientalism were outperforming their strictly academic competition.  
 623 In spite of its undeniable symbolic importance (Chaudhuri 1974; van der Veer 2001,  
 624 106–32), Müller’s much-acclaimed Sacred Books of the East series, for instance,  
 625 reached a much smaller audience on the Indian subcontinent than Farquhar’s humbler  
 626 Religious Quest of India series.

#### 627 628 629 **STRATEGIC TOLERANCE AND THE PERSISTENCE OF THE PROSELYTIZING AGENDA**

630  
631 As has become evident in the previous sections, the initial impetus for the inaugura-  
 632 tion of the Orientalist book series was the insight that the “unsympathetic condemnation”  
 633 of South Asian religions was no longer a viable option in the political and cultural climate  
 634 of the early twentieth century, and hence a new kind of academic engagement with non-  
 635 Christian religions was required. In this last section, I want to examine Y Orientalism  
 636 more closely in order to assess to what extent it lived up to the promise of mutual under-  
 637 standing, sympathy, and cultural sensitivity propagated by Farquhar and his colleagues at  
 638 the Indian YMCA’s Publication Department. The outcomes were mixed at best since, in  
 639 spite of the editors’ lofty goals, their tolerance was largely strategic and the project  
 640 remained overdetermined by assumptions of Western and Christian superiority. The  
 641 first aspect that needs to be considered in this context pertains to the actual content of  
 642 the book series, which could at times be rather problematic in that it reinforced estab-  
 643 lished stereotypes. The second and final aspect concerns Farquhar’s recruitment of  
 644 authors and his ambivalent position toward the YMCA’s official “Indianization” strategy.

Let me begin the content analysis by using the example of Henry Whitehead's influential contribution to the Religious Life of India series, a book on the worship of *grāma devtās* (village deities) in South India (Whitehead 1921). Whitehead was fairly typical of the Y Orientalist series inasmuch as he was a Western clergyman, living and working in India. The Oxford-trained Henry Whitehead (brother of the famous philosopher Alfred N. Whitehead) had been ordained as Bishop of Madras in 1899. When he wrote *Village Gods* in 1916, he could already look back on more than thirty years of experience in India and was very familiar with several cultural and linguistic milieus in the subcontinent (*The Times* 1947). Whitehead's book was celebrated by contemporary critics as an innovative foray into the world of Indian folk religion and "an invaluable aid to the understanding of Indian village life" (W. D. S. 1917), while another reviewer predicted that "this may be one of the cases where a modest book, little noticed in the beginning, becomes the classical work on the subject" (*Times of India* 1922). Even the author himself boasted in the preface that his book deserved to be acknowledged as the "first attempt at dealing systematically" with an important but unduly neglected aspect of Indian religion (Whitehead 1921, 7). Yet, while in some sense his short monograph can certainly be considered as "field-changing," it remained at the same time pervaded by the Protestant moralism and cultural arrogance that had characterized the writings of previous generations of missionaries, which stood in stark contrast to the series' purported mission.

For one, there is a striking predilection for dealing with "barbarous cults" and "weird rites and ceremonies" (Whitehead 1921, 12, 13, 47) at the expense of less sensationalist aspects of rural religiosity. This propensity is also reflected in the choice of illustrations, which tended to focus on gory animal sacrifices (see, e.g., figure 3). While a more sober and neutral tone is prevalent in the descriptive accounts provided in the book's



BUFFALO SACRIFICED TO MOTOR BICYCLE

**Figure 3.** Typical illustration from Henry Whitehead's *Village Gods of South India* (1921, 88).

substantive chapters, perhaps not surprisingly, a rather high-handed and moralizing language is prevalent when it comes to the overall assessment of the *grāma devtā* cult. Thus, in his conclusion, Whitehead states:

Taking the system as a whole ... we can only condemn it from a moral and religious point of view as a debasing superstition, and the only attitude which the Christian Church can possibly take towards it is one of uncompromising hostility... [T]here is nothing in the vast jungle of beliefs and practices that have grown up during the ages around the worship of village deities that the Christian Church could wish to preserve. (153)

This is a perfect illustration of the kind of dismissive missionary value judgements about the “cosmological utterances” of non-Christian belief systems that Talal Asad has described as foundational for the construction of power and knowledge hierarchies in the modern world (Asad 1995, 43–44, 54). Nevertheless, the bishop stops short of condemning the cult in its entirety. For one, he sees the absence of the “priestly caste” in the village rituals as a sign of hope, as it could potentially erode “caste tyranny” by fostering the self-respect of the lower castes (154). Second, and this is his core argument, he underscores that:

while ... the conception of the deity with whom communion is sought is hopelessly inadequate and perverted, still, in the simple desire for communion with a deity of some sort. There is a germ and root of true religious feeling, which ... is to certain degree a preparation for the Gospel. (155)

The “strategic tolerance” that Farquhar had posited and that characterized his own work on India’s “Great Tradition,” as well as the notion that the scholarly erudition of Y Orientalists had to be subservient to the overarching goal of proselytization, or, at the very least, permeation of Hindu society with Christian values (Frykenberg 2008, 339), is thus also recognizable in contributions dealing with the subcontinent’s living faiths.

This kind of missionary pragmatism resurfaces in an even more straightforward manner in G. W. Briggs’s (1920) study of the Chamars. After presenting a detailed account of the social, economic, and religious life of this North Indian “Untouchable” group—with a strong focus on their allegedly “unspeakably filthy habits ..., obscenity and vulgarity” (233, 235)—Briggs, too, arrives at a rather predictable conclusion when he observes that “[w]hile the religious teachers of India do not present an adequate social programme for the Chamar, Jesus does” (240). That not only the subcontinent’s despised outcastes but also the Hindu elites were perceived as being in need of such a program becomes evident from Sanskritist A. A. Macdonnell’s foreword to the volume *The Rites of the Twice-Born* in the Religious Quest of India series. According to the Oxford professor:

A perusal of the book will show that the large mass of ritual matter it contains is permeated with innumerable superstitions and primitive usages which, inherited from a remote past, hinder the progress of Indian civilization at the present day. It will therefore appeal not only to the student of religions, but

737 to the anthropologist and the social reformer. It is a notable contribution to the  
 738 armoury of those who are fighting in the war of liberation of the human race.  
 739 (Macdonnell 1920, ix)  
 740

741 The second and final aspect that needs to be considered in this context concerns Farquhar's  
 742 ambivalent position toward the YMCA's official Indianization strategy. It is conspic-  
 743 uous that in the list of the authors of the fifty volumes published in the three series  
 744 launched and supervised by Farquhar, one finds less than a handful of Indian names.  
 745 This was certainly not because South Asian authors were not interested in the project.  
 746 Quite the reverse: he received many manuscripts by Indian scholars, and some books  
 747 were already announced as forthcoming but then withdrawn at the last minute. Even  
 748 Indian Christian admirers such as Farquhar's student—and later Bishop of Coimba-  
 749 tore—A. J. Appasamy were puzzled “to find how little he availed himself of the help of  
 750 Indian writers.” Appasamy speculated that the Scottish Orientalist must have been  
 751 obsessed with “certain rigid standards of scholarship and unconsciously came to  
 752 believe that they could only be reached by European writers” (xii). This neglect of  
 753 indigenous voices not only puzzled Indian Y members but also was in direct conflict  
 754 with the stated policy of the International Committee of the YMCA on its dedication  
 755 to “indigenous leadership, support, and control” of YMCA organizations in foreign coun-  
 756 tries (Mulready-Stone 2018, 144; for India, see Heinrichs 1923; Latourette 1957, 124).

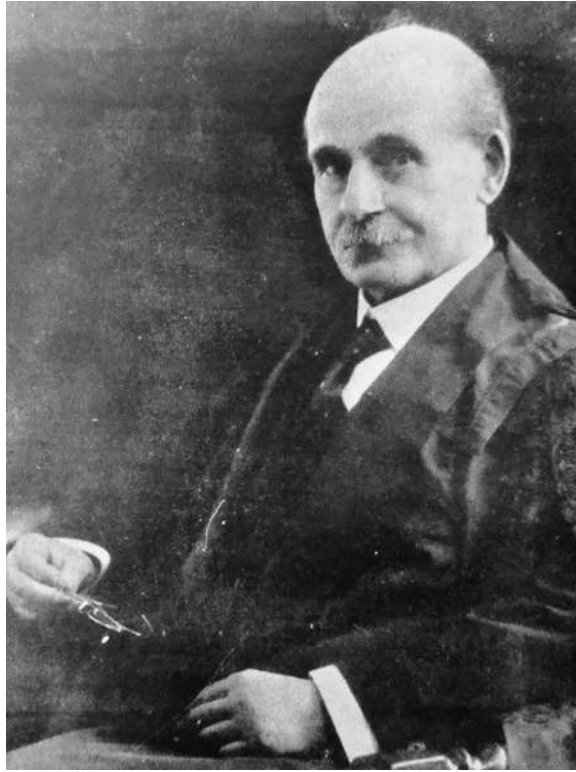
757 A close reading of Farquhar's correspondence with Mott, however, would suggest a  
 758 higher degree of consciousness in his distrust of Indian intellectuals. In a letter written in  
 759 December 1923, shortly before he left India for good (see figure 4), Farquhar complains  
 760 that the leading Indian Y secretaries had become the mere “tools” and “willing servants”  
 761 of the Indian National movement (Farquhar 1923). As a result, they had allegedly  
 762 “accepted unthinkingly the foolish arguments” of Hindu nationalists and completely  
 763 lost their Christian missionary zeal. Accordingly, he advised Mott that “for a full return  
 764 to sanity, we must depend very largely, almost altogether, I should say, upon our  
 765 British and American secretaries.”

766 Even at the height of the national movement, Farquhar remained convinced that  
 767 the “great overturning” had to come and only Christ could guarantee “national health  
 768 and strength to the Hindu people” (Farquhar 1928, 118, 121). His rigid Christian and  
 769 pro-imperial stance also led to a falling-out with Saunders. Over the years of his scholarly  
 770 engagement with the religion, Saunders had developed a profound sympathy for Bud-  
 771 dhism that let him view the teachings of the Buddha as practically equivalent to Chris-  
 772 tianity—a position that was completely unacceptable for Farquhar, who was “deeply  
 773 suspicious of anything even remotely resembling syncretism” (O'Connor 2005, 212;  
 774 Sharpe 1963, 85–88). Consequently, Farquhar rejected the manuscript of Saunders's  
 775 projected magnum opus on Buddhism for the Religious Quest of India series and per-  
 776 suaded Mott that under no circumstances should Saunders become his successor (Far-  
 777 quhar 1923). Such a harsh reaction would seem to suggest that for him, as for the  
 778 majority of the other Y Orientalists involved in the project, forms of religious tolerance  
 779 that were not strategic remained intolerable. Such a stance is typical of the transitional  
 780 character of the Y's Orientalist project. The inability to give up the belief in the unique  
 781 and superior character of Christianity once more drastically illustrates the fundamental  
 782 tension undergirding this “third-stream Orientalism”: its promise of religious tolerance



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Fig. 4 - B/W online, B/W in print



**Figure 4.** Crossing over from “third-stream Orientalism” to the academic establishment: Farquhar during the last years of his life as Professor of Comparative Religion in Manchester (ca. 1925) (Sharpe 1963, 4).

and dialogue was constantly thwarted by the persistence of cultural arrogance and Christian missionary zeal.

## CONCLUSION

I have attempted to shed light on the vast range of works on South Asian cultures and religions produced by the Indian YMCA’s Literature Department roughly between the 1910s and the 1940s. The three Orientalist book series published by the department owed their existence to two interrelated developments: First, they were an expression of the US-dominated Indian YMCA’s increasing self-positioning as a knowledge broker and social service agency on the subcontinent. Second, they were an outcome of the growing global popularity of liberal “fulfillment theology” in Anglophone missionary circles during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Indeed, literary secretary and series founder J. N. Farquhar became one of the globally most visible protagonists of the fulfillment school.

While almost completely forgotten today, the Y’s three Orientalist book series were fairly influential in their time. Quite a few of the fifty or so publications that came out in the two decades after the outbreak of the First World War were considered standard

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works by contemporaries. Perhaps most importantly, due to the novel ways of marketing and distributing the products of Y Orientalism, they contributed to a “democratization” of the debates on culture and religion, as they managed to reach an audience way beyond the academic ivory tower. Although in-depth research would be required to make this point authoritatively, there are indications that these strategies also left an imprint on the ways Hindu and Muslim scholars and reformers produced and disseminated their books and pamphlets. In slight variance to the expectations of series founder Farquhar and other protagonists of the project, however, the targeted “educated native elites” were less interested in the fruits of Y scholarship than were both Indian and Western members of the Christian minority in the subcontinent.

It is somewhat ironic that, while some contemporary critics with a professional academic background viewed the project as being situated at the fringes of scholarly respectability because of its “unscientifically” close association with a Christian missionary agenda (Clark 1916, 301–5), the body of Y Orientalist knowledge produced from the 1910s to the 1930s, in some ways, anticipated a change of direction that would thoroughly transform the nature of secular academic engagement with South Asia in the decades after World War II. From the late 1940s onward, the “area studies” model of Indology was first established in the United States and subsequently started to become popular on a global scale (Dirks 2015, 265–90). According to this new paradigm, macroregions, such as the Indian subcontinent, ought to be studied with a focus on contemporary issues, rather than with an exclusive interest in their classical past, and through a multi-perspective approach, combining expertise from various disciplines. In a striking anticipation of this methodology, as early as the 1910s, the editors of the Y’s “most popular” book series (Hogg 1928) advocated a multidisciplinary engagement with Indian cultures and religions, combined with a move away from the dominance of philology and “monumental” Sanskrit texts (van der Veer 1999). Like many South Asianists working in an area studies context during the 1950s and 1960s, most authors recruited by the Y’s Literature Department, too, showed a keen interest in popular culture, “folk religion,” and living languages. Moreover, and once again analogous to the post-World War II trend, the privileging of knowledge that was generated “in the field,” rather than being the product of armchair science, was also part of the Y Orientalist paradigm. Preliminary as these observations are, they would seem to reinforce David Hollinger’s recent argument that it was, to a considerable extent, due to the impact of “missionary-connected individuals” with their “language facility and foreign experience” that the academic study of Asian societies in the post-World War II United States was directed “away from the older ‘Orientalist’ preoccupations and toward contemporary methods in the social sciences,” in the process giving birth to the “foreign area studies” paradigm (Hollinger 2017, 215, 251).

As has become equally clear, however, most authors contributing to the project were not willing or able to fully distance themselves from the racist rhetoric and moralizing normative frameworks of older, “Orientalist” missionary and colonial discourses. In spite of their innovative stance, when it came to their choice of topics and methods and regardless of their simultaneous commitment to a “sympathetic” attitude toward non-Christian faiths and their adherents, the echoes of nineteenth-century secular and Christian varieties of Orientalism remained omnipresent in most of their works. Y Orientalism, therefore, represents an ambivalent and transitional body of knowledge that sits rather uneasily

with existing histories of the discipline. That it had a palpable impact on the broader development of academic Orientalism is apparent. In spite of occasional criticism because of the Christian bias of the book series or their authors' lack of formal academic training, the products of Y Orientalism were widely read, reviewed, and commented upon by professional Sanskritists, Indologists, anthropologists, and scholars of comparative religion. What is more, sometimes the third stream flowed directly into the mainstream, as some authors working for the Y's Literature Department—Farquhar and Saunders being the prime examples—shifted camps and later on embarked on careers in the established academe. It would hence, no doubt, be a rewarding exercise to explore the contemporaneous entanglements and ensuing legacies of Y Orientalism in both missionary and secular academic contexts in greater detail. The present article is only a first step in that direction.

### Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Michael Brunner, Carolyn Kerchof, Dominic Sachsenmaier, Bernhard Schär, Joanna Simonow, Elena Valdameri, and the three anonymous *JAS* reviewers for reading earlier versions of this article and making valuable suggestions for its improvement.

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