

ENGLAND'S ASCENT TO POWER  
Coincided with the rise of empirical science as an authoritative way of knowing not only the natural world, but the human one as well. In South Asia, the British scientific passion for classification, combined with the Christian impulse to differentiate people according to religion, led to the designation of Indians as either Hindu or Muslim according to rigidly defined criteria that paralleled classification in botanical and zoological taxonomies.

Through a historical and ethnographic study of the north Indian village of Chainpur, Peter Gottschalk shows that Britons' presumed categories did not necessarily reflect Indians' concepts of their own identities. While many Indians resisted these categories, others came to embrace this scientism and gradually accepted, adapted, and employed the categories the British instituted through projects like the Census of India, the Archaeological Survey of India, and the India Museum. Today's propagators of Hindu-Muslim violence often cite scientific formulations of difference that descend directly from the categories introduced by imperial Britain.

As science displaced theology as the publicly authoritative way of knowing the natural and human world, and as secular impulses threatened Christianity's place in the British social imagination, many Britons characterized Indians as definitively non-Christian yet counterproductively religious. Because South Asia's diverse population represented a vast laboratory for the study of human development, Britons and—increasingly—Indians gathered descriptive and statistical information that figured prominently in the scientific disciplines coalescing in the nineteenth century. These contributions helped instantiate assumptions

about Indians' supposed religious qualities in the globalizing disciplines of history, anthropology, demographics, archaeology, folklore studies, and finally the scientific study of religion.

Gottschalk concludes his theoretical and historical observations with an ethnographic exploration of Chainpur today, investigating how its residents remember the British Raj and how the imperial legacy continues to influence—but not decide—their understandings of their village and national communities, and their categories of social and religious belonging.

*Religion, Science, and Empire* will be a valuable resource to anyone interested in the imperial and post-imperial history of religion in India, the origins of the empirical study of religions, and the dynamics of cultural comparison.

PETER GOTTSCHALK is professor and former chair of Religion at Wesleyan University. Over the past two decades he has written widely on the dynamics of religion, identity, and representation in British and independent India, as well as on anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States. In addition to co-authoring *Islamophobia* and co-editing *Engaging South Asian Religions*, Gottschalk has published *Beyond Hindu and Muslim* about social memory and identity among Indians. He has also co-designed "A Virtual Village" ([virtualvillage.wesleyan.edu](http://virtualvillage.wesleyan.edu)), an interactive online ethnography based on the village featured in this book.