Preface

This book is the third in a projected series of four volumes dealing with different aspects of Muslim social and cultural life in India. The first two volumes were concerned with a consideration of caste and social stratification, and family, kinship and marriage among Muslims in India. This volume is devoted to a study of ritual and religion among them.

Like their co-religionists elsewhere, the Muslims in India claim to be adherents of the Islamic faith. Islam is an extremely reified religious tradition, and its doctrines, precepts and practices are supposed to be universal. Even so, the corpus of the day-to-day beliefs and practices of the Muslims have been found to vary from place to place according to the circumstances in which they were converted to Islam, their pre-conversion orientations, and their historical experiences over time. Thus, while Muslims all over the world claim adherence to the principles and practices ordained by the scriptures, there is considerable divergence between the formal and the actual religious beliefs and practices of the Muslims in different parts of the world.

The essays presented in this volume explore the nature of the actual religious beliefs of the Muslims in India. Unlike Hinduism, Islam was intrusive in India. It arrived in the midst of an established civilization and gradually won over a large indigenous population to its fold. Because of its intrusive character and the recruitment to it of a large indigenous population which brought along previous religious beliefs and orientations into the faith upon conversion, the Islamic faith in India acquired a typically indigenous flavour. The essays in this volume explore this religious system typical of the Muslim communities in India.

The focus of these essays is on religion as it is practised
among Muslim communities rather than on the theological and philosophical principles and the accompanying social system as laid down by Islamic scriptures. Each paper presented here is based on data collected by the authors themselves through direct personal observations coupled with an analysis of existing source materials. Each paper is also concerned with the realities of religion and with actual religious behaviour rather than its ideology, its beliefs and hopes. The latter are dealt with only peripherally. It is hoped that these papers will contribute towards an understanding of the structure and processes of the religious beliefs and practices of the Muslims in India.

The procedure followed in putting together this volume was the same as the one used for the previous volumes. Scholars who had worked on an aspect of religion from the viewpoint which inspires these papers were requested to contribute a paper based on their data. The choice of the aspect on which they were to write as well as the theoretical orientations were left to each contributor to decide. This flexibility with regard to the choice of theme, theoretical perspective, the methods of analysis, areas of emphasis and the nature and scope of data reported has turned out to be rewarding. It has allowed the contributors to capture the diversities that characterize ritual and religion among Muslims in India.

Five of the seven papers included in this volume were written specifically for this volume and are being published here for the first time. The papers by Professor Madan and Dr. Mines have appeared previously and are being reprinted here. Professor Madan’s paper was originally published in Contributions to Indian Sociology (New Series). Dr. Mines’ paper was presented at a workshop on Islam in Southern Asia at Heidelberg University and subsequently appeared in Man. I am grateful to Professor Madan and Dr. Mines and the editorial boards of Contributions to Indian Sociology (New Series) and Man for permission to reprint their papers in this volume.

This volume is once again an outcome of the cooperation and collaboration extended by the contributors. For their willing cooperation and sustained patience during the preparation of this volume for the press, I am deeply indebted to them.
I should add that whatever value this volume has is owed to them; at the same time, I must absolve them of any blame for its shortcomings which I reserve to myself alone.

Jawaharlal Nehru University

New Delhi

Imtiaz Ahmad