

MUSLIMS, HINDUS, AND SIKHS IN THE NEW RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE OF ENGLAND*

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ABSTRACT. This article examines the dramatic changes brought to English townscapes by Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhism. These “new” religions have arrived with the large-scale immigration and subsequent natural growth of the minority ethnic populations of Great Britain since the 1950s. The article traces the growth and distribution of these populations and religions, as well as the development of their places of worship from front-room prayer rooms to cathedral-scale buildings. It explores the way in which the British planning process, dedicated to preserving the traditional, has engaged with the exotic. *Keywords:* England, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, urban planning.

In 2001 Wilbur Zelinsky published a stimulating article in the *Geographical Review* extolling the exceptional nature of the American cultural landscape of religion. He argued that the United States is a land without the homogenizing effect of European state religions. New peoples have brought new religions and made a highly diversified and pluralistic impact on the American cultural landscape. Places of worship range from Episcopalian cathedrals to storefront churches, from megachurches to ethnic churches, and an almost random scatter of sites where Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and a wide variety of other religions are represented, with an equal variety of signage in the streetscape. Zelinsky described a unique pluralistic religious landscape.

On the other side of the Atlantic, dramatic changes are happening as well to the European, particularly the English, Christian cultural landscapes of religion. The homogenizing effect of state religion, to which Zelinsky referred, is being deconstructed and in some cases reconsecrated under the impact of new religious influxes. The ethnic minority populations of the United Kingdom and other Western European countries have expanded dramatically (Peach 1997). Embedded within these minority ethnic populations, especially those of South Asian origin, has come a great expansion in “new” religions—Islam (Peach 1990b), Hinduism, Sikhism—and with them the new “cathedrals” of the English cultural landscape: Muslim *masjids*, Hindu *mandirs* and Sikh *gurdwaras*. Exotic religious buildings, some of exquisite beauty, have been built on unlikely inner-city sites. The Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, handcrafted in the Gujarat in India from white Romanian marble, was shipped to

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