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The Realm of the Extra-Human: Agents  
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## *Introduction*

AGEHANANDA BHARATI

In a survey of the state of the anthropological study of belief and ritual systems, I found to my surprise that no "school" had usurped suzerainty in this subfield in the same way that Chomskyan generative-transformational grammars have come to rule supreme, at this time, in linguistics; no one such school in this subfield has collected enough Brownie points to be able to lay claim to sole academic respectability. Conceivably, a formalist versus a substantivist school analogous to economic anthropology might have arisen. A strong rallying of Lévi-Straussians and anti-Straussians, or a binary opposition between quantifiers and humanists, etc. could have generated this kind of pecking order. Nothing of this sort happened. Instead, we found that the writing of the last decade represents a highly eclectic and remarkably nonpolemic stratum in anthropological writing. Those papers presented at the IXth ICAES Congress and now published in two companion volumes of *World Anthropology (The realm of the extra-human: agents and audiences and The realm of the extra-human: ideas and actions)* reflect that very wide, eclectic area, and for reasons of sheer editorial verve I felt that some structured opposition, some polarity, had to be supplied, where the totality of papers seen from the viewpoint of its authors may not warrant any polarization. As the Congress convened, it became clear to me and to my co-chairman Samarendra Saraf of Saugor University, India, that a considerable number of anthropologists, especially those who had backgrounds other than British or American, saw the study of origins of microsystems (e.g. shamanism, priesthood, sacrifice, etc.) as their chief professional commitment. In British and American anthropology, origins, or rather the study of the origin of a religion, has long been legislated out of training and research, and with reason. As we realized during the first hours of the event, colleagues from other parts of the world, some of them much more erudite than I, simply refused to argue this reason, or reasons, if not on ideological grounds, then certainly on logistic ones; they had written and prepared their papers long before the Congress