

Andrea Marion Pinkney and John Whalen-Bridge, eds., *Religious Journeys in India: Pilgrims, Tourists, and Travelers*

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India's pilgrimages continue to captivate ethnographers. From the pioneering study of Irawati Karve (1962) to later interventions by Diana Eck (1981, 2012), David Haberman (1994), and Anne Feldhaus (2003), to name but a handful of past works, scholars have innovatively conceptualized the shared religious experiences of pilgrims from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. But times have changed and religious journeys have acquired new meanings in twenty-first-century India. The eleven essays in this edited volume, therefore, set out to investigate "new motivations" for religious journeys in India, "from exile and mission, to heritage and Hindutva" (3).

The purpose of the project, according to the editors, is to explore religious travel in India "at the margins of scholarship on religion and travel" (7). The case studies, therefore, not only investigate little-studied sites across India (a welcome departure from conventional *tirthas* like Banaras and Braj) but also represent numerous religious communities: of the eleven essays, four are on Hindus; two each are on Buddhists, Muslims, and Christians; and one is on Sikhs. The spatial and religious variety contained in the volume makes it an unusually rich portrait of India's diverse traditions.

Theoretically, the volume aims to look at the intersection of pilgrimage and tourism, evidently responding to a dominant scholarly paradigm, set by Victor and Edith Turner (1978), that sees pilgrimage as fundamentally anti-structural, outside the everyday material world. Hence the essays explore the convergences, to quote one of the editors, between "mercantile materialism and mystical quest" (173). To that end, the papers are organized in three thematic sections: "Constructing Community Spaces," showing how groups interact with sites to generate communitarian identities; "Pilgrimage as Paradox," investigating situations when the purposes of religious journeys are at odds with the form of the event; and "Reversals and Revisions," exploring how obstacles to pilgrimages are incorporated within journeys. These elegant thematic assemblages are interesting and invite comparative analysis.

Comparing the scales of the different journeys in this book gives new insights into the varying social landscapes of religions in contemporary India. The Buddhist pilgrimages, like the Thai pilgrimage to Buddhist sites in Bihar (chapter 2) and the "proxy pilgrimage" to Dharamsala (chapter 7), are parts of a multi-million-dollar international tourism industry. Christian missionaries (chapters 5 and 11) too belong to global networks of institutions and personnel. Interestingly, the Hindu sites and organizations seem to be receiving increasing investments to be promoted within and beyond India: Ayodhya as a site for Hindu nationalist theatrics (chapter 4), Anand Sagar in Maharashtra as a theme park (chapter 3), Rishikesh as a magnet for Western spiritual tourists (chapter 6), and the Ranganiketana Troupe as an international ambassador for the culture of Manipur (chapter 10).

In contrast, the Muslim and Sikh pilgrimages are less globally commodified and more embedded in their regional and local contexts. Afsar Mohammed's remarkable essay (chapter 8) on the "Little Hajj" in Andhra Pradesh shows how religious boundaries are negotiated in everyday practice. Pilgrims at Gugudu, for instance, describe

their ritual as “*ziyāratu darśanam*,” combining the Persian word for pilgrimage with the Sanskrit word for auspicious sighting (203). Carla Bellamy’s compelling reading of the competing myths of Hussain Tikri in Jaora (chapter 1) shows the complex processes linking religious space and communitarian identity. Similarly, Andrea Marion Pinkney (chapter 10) provides a revealing account of the role of dust in Sikh theology and ritual practice (231). These essays are distinguished by their insightful analysis of actors’ categories to describe their religious journeys.

The emphasis on emic concepts is a key contribution of the volume. The authors and editors regularly ground their analysis on the phenomenology of words and phrases used by travelers to narrate their experiences. The richness of this collection of case studies, however, has potential for broader comparative questions. Comparing the patronage, audience, and social bases of Hindu and Buddhist journeys with Muslim and Sikh ones, for instance, can reveal social affinities and fissures in contemporary India.

In fact, the project would have been much stronger had the essays taken a more critical view of the political-economic context of religious journeys. With the exceptions of Bellamy’s analysis of the politics of memory and Dibyesh Anand’s account of Hindutva in Ayodhya, the essays are curiously silent regarding the politics of religious travel and space-making. The silence is especially baffling in the two essays on Christian missionaries (chapters 5 and 11), which do not engage with the growing critical literature on colonialism and the politics of conversion. Attention to political history would have also avoided factual errors: the missionary hub Serampore was a Danish colony and not a Dutch protectorate (128).

In the other essays too, discussions of key analytical issues, like the economics of tourism (81–83) and the commercialization of heritage (265–70) are, at best, desultory. This conceptual confusion is prominent in Alex Norman’s essay, which describes Rishikesh as a “spiritual marketplace” only to mean, alas, a “marketplace of ideas,” while the ethnographic evidence unmistakably points also toward the blatant commodification of spirituality for a global market (149). For a volume that foregrounds the materialist aspects of pilgrimage, the lack of a critical understanding of key questions of political economy is a conspicuous omission.

Both tourism and pilgrimage are, after all, far from being apolitical. The packaging of pilgrimages as international tourist destinations, funding of certain sites (and defunding of others), and the consumption of tourist sites by the middle and upper classes have all been fundamentally shaped by recent political-economic developments in India. This is not to say that pilgrimage is determined by economy, but to emphasize that motivations for religious journeys cannot be adequately understood without due attention to the broader material contexts of societies. While the book’s rich array of ethnographic case studies will be of great interest to specialists as well as casual readers, a more critical analysis of the political economy of religious travel would have given the project its due analytical depth.

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Aniket De
Harvard University