

Andrea Marion Pinkney and John Whalen-Bridge (eds), *Religious Journeys in India: Pilgrims, Tourists and Travelers*, Albany State University of New York Press, Albany NY (2018), xiv + 323pp. \$90.00 (hardback) ISBN13: 978-1-4384-6603-3; \$26.95 (paperback) ISBN13: 978-1-4384-6602-6

Travel for religious purposes, widely considered to be one of the earliest manifestations of tourism, is nowadays a significant global phenomenon. Quite how significant is difficult to judge; accurately estimating the number of 'religious tourists' worldwide is an impossible task, not least because of a combination of definitional ambiguities and the practical challenges of measurement. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that religious journeys occur on a vast scale both within and between countries and, hence, such journeys have unsurprisingly long attracted academic attention, typically either from the perspective of a particular religion / religious institution or through the lens travel and tourism. Uniquely, this edited collection does neither. Rather, as its title indicates, it explores diverse forms of religious travel within the specific context of India. In so doing, it not only reveals, as discussed shortly, the complex cultural and political roles of religious travel within the country in particular, but also offers valuable and intriguing insights into contemporary India more generally.

Following a brief introduction which provides a short overview of the development of travel in India and a customary summary of its contents, the book comprises eleven chapters structured into three thematic sections. In the first of these, 'Constructing Community Spaces', three chapters consider how religious community identities are maintained in very different contexts, commencing with the case of pilgrimage to the sacred Islamic site of Husain Tekri. The chapter describes how South Asian Muslims identify strongly with the global Islamic community yet have retained a distinctly local sacred Islamic space in post-Partition India. This is followed by the fascinating account of the popular Thai Buddhist pilgrimage to significant sites in northern India related to the life and death of the Buddha. Whilst exploring the nature of spiritual experiences of those undertaking the journey and tensions between Buddhist space in an Indian world, however, more questions are raised than answered, not least with regards to the appropriation of these Indian sites by Thai Buddhists. The section then concludes with an equally fascinating chapter focusing on the development of a religious theme park, exploring the uneasy co-existence between the spiritual and the secular within a commodified religious-touristic space where religion competes, to an extent, with profit.

The four chapters comprising the second section are collectively themed as ‘Pilgrimage as Paradox’; that is, where the purpose of the journey appears to compete with the place or event. First, the case of the Hindu pilgrimage to Ayodhya paints an enlightening yet disturbing picture of the intersections between religion and Hindu nationalism and is of immediate relevance to the national politics of contemporary India. In contrast, the next chapter follows Christian missionaries from Kerala to Bihar, a ‘graveyard of missions’; here, the journey is conceptualised as an anti-pilgrimage to a site devoid of (Christian) spirituality yet, paradoxically, that spiritual void is what drives the pilgrimage to Bihar. The remaining two chapters in this section each focus on destinations undoubtedly familiar to Western travellers in India, both within the context contemporary understandings of spiritually-motivated travel. Since the Beatles’ visit in the late 1960s, Rishikesh has ‘famous for being famous’, a place of pilgrimage amongst Westerners seeking self-identity. And as this chapter suggests, it is this search for the self that renders their pilgrimage (in a traditional sense) paradoxical. Similarly, Dharamsala is a popular destination amongst amongst tourists wishing to visit the Dalai Lama’s de facto headquarters; it has become a spiritual pilgrimage destination but, it is argued, a proxy for a pilgrimage to Lhasa.

In the final thematic section, ‘Reversals and Revisions’, a rather eclectic collection of four chapters explores ways in which obstacles to a religious journey become part of it. The first chapter in the section presents the case of the ‘Little Hajj’, where Indian Muslims unable to make the pilgrimage to Mecca create their own sacred spaces in India though modelled by the ritual of the Hajj. This followed by a study of Sikh religious practices at gurdwaras (Sikh temples), exploring the significance of travel to these temples within the normative context of pilgrimage not being recognised within Sikhism. The penultimate chapter in the book then suggests that the international performances of the Ranganiketan Cultural Arts Troupe, bringing the culture of the north-eastern state of Manipur to international audiences, is a form of reverse pilgrimage. The ‘story’ of the troupe is illuminating; however, the links to religious travel are tenuous. And finally, the last chapter in the book presents an uplifting account of how the initially religiously motivated journeys of American women missionaries to India transformed through generations of the same family into providing education and medical care to women in India.

Overall, then, this book is intriguing, fascinating, informative and challenging. Each chapter is a worthwhile read in its own right, whilst a particular strength of the book is the collective diversity and novel focus of its content. Rather than adopting the more predictable (and ‘safe’) approach of considering more mainstream or obvious religious journeys and

gatherings, such as the Kumbh Mela, the chapters address places, experiences and themes that arguably lie more on the margins of religion and religious travel in India. Yet, both individually and as a whole, not only do they open up a window on contemporary India in all its (religious) depth and complexity, but also they serve to emphasise the inseparability of religion, politics, history and culture in India. At the same time, the book is inspiring to the extent that it suggests that diverse religious practices not only co-exist in India but also together contribute to the country's religious / spiritual essence.

This is not to say that the book is an entirely satisfying read. Some chapters raise implicit questions and themes that remain unaddressed, such as issues of exploitation, dominance or commodification. Is it appropriate, for example, that an 'annex' of Thai Buddhism should exist around Buddhist sites in northern India? Or how authentic or meaningful are the experiences of western visitors to Rishikesh? At the same time, other chapters include perhaps unnecessarily detailed and distracting historical or theological background to the journeys or events they discuss whilst, more significantly, the book would have undoubtedly benefited from the inclusion of a concluding chapter. That is, intriguing and potentially significant implications emerge from what is undoubtedly a thought-provoking collection, implications related not only to understandings of religious journeys in India in all their diversity but also to religion, society and politics in India more generally. Hence, the editors' thoughts on this broader contribution would have been a welcome addition.

Nevertheless, this book will appeal to a wide audience. It makes a valuable addition to knowledge and understanding in a number of areas, not least religious tourism and pilgrimage, in so doing demonstrating powerfully how specific fields of study, such as tourism or religion, represent a critical lens on wider social processes and phenomena. Hence, this book should also be considered essential reading for anyone with an interest in contemporary India; it not only offers insights into diverse manifestations of religious journeys and practices and the capacity of the country to embrace that diversity but also, through those insights, provides a means of understanding the complexities of India more generally.

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