Religious Practice and Democracy in India

This book demonstrates the close relationship between religion and democracy in India. Religious practice creates ties among citizens that can generate positive and democratic political outcomes. In pursuing this line of inquiry the book questions a dominant strand in some contemporary social sciences – that a religious denomination (Catholic, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, etc.) is sufficient to explain the relationship between religion and politics, or that religion and democracy are antithetical to each other. The book makes a strong case for studying religious practice and placing that practice in the panoply of other social practices.

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This book demonstrates the close relationship between religion and democracy in India. Religious practice is associated with political representation because the sites and occasions of religious practice constitute one of few public spheres in which the hierarchies that normally characterize Indian society are temporarily suspended. The research reported in this book shows that religious practice in India does more than privilege the few over the many, and more than provide an avenue for political mobilization against other religions. Religious practice creates identic ties among people of strikingly different social class and status. These identic ties created through religious practice are associated with participants viewing political parties and politicians as representative.

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