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POLITICS AFTER TELEVISION

Religious Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Indian Public

In January 1987, the Indian state-run television began broadcasting a Hindu epic in serial form, the Ramayan, to nationwide audiences, violating a decades-old taboo on religious partisanship. What resulted was the largest political campaign in post-independence times, around the symbol of Lord Ram, led by Hindu nationalists. The complexion of Indian politics was irrevocably changed thereafter. This book examines this extraordinary series of events. While audiences may have thought they were harking back to an epic golden age, Hindu nationalist leaders were embracing the prospects of neoliberalism and globalization. Television was the device that hinged these movements together, symbolizing the new possibilities of politics, at once more inclusive and authoritarian. Simultaneously, this study examines how the larger historical context was woven into and changed the character of Hindu nationalism.

ARVIND RAJAGOPAL is Associate Professor in the Department of Culture and Communication, New York University. He was a Member of the School of Social Sciences, at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, in 1998–99.

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