
BOOK REVIEW

Chazan-Gillig, Suzanne and Pavitrnanand Ramhota. 2023. *Hinduism and Popular Cults in Mauritius: Sacred Religion and Plantation Economy*. Sriniket Kumar Mishra (trans.). London and New York: Routledge. ix + 233 pp. ISBN 978-1-003-29810-6 (e-book). £26.99.

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Hinduism and its goddess traditions are widespread in South and Southeast Asia (see M. Slouber, *A Garland of Forgotten Goddesses: Tales of the Divine Feminine from India and Beyond*, California: University of California Press, 2021). In *Hinduism and Popular Cults in Mauritius: Sacred Religion and Plantation Economy*, authors Chazan-Gillig and Ramhota explore the intersection between religion and economics by looking at Hinduism beyond Asia, particularly in Mauritius. Specifically, the book examines how Hinduism and popular cults have evolved in response to the island's history of slavery and indentured labour and the impact of these developments on contemporary religious practices. One of the strengths of this book is its focus on the role of fieldwork in understanding the complex relationship between religion and the economy, as the book is based on the process of “15 years of qualitative search”, where “six years were devoted to intensive fieldwork, and the remaining were dedicated to the follow-up of the work” (p. 37). The authors draw upon their extensive fieldwork in the east and north of Mauritius to provide a detailed account of various groups' religious practices and beliefs within the island's diverse Hindu population. They also closely examine how these practices intersect with economic activities, such as the sugar industry and tourism.

The first chapter introduces the book's central themes and provides an overview of the religious landscape of Mauritius. The authors argue that understanding the relationship between religion and economics requires an ethnographic approach that pays close attention to the historical and cultural context of the island. Chapter 2 provides a historical overview of Mauritius, focusing on the island's history of slavery and indentured labour. The authors argue that this history has shaped the island's religious landscape and influenced the development of Hinduism and popular cults. Chapter 3 discusses two Kalimais located near Camp de Masque, close to the small town of Bel-Air. Kalimai Verger represents three levels of social organization (work, family relations, and political emergence) corresponding to the three deities (Baram/Bramha, Hanuman, and Dhi). The second Kalimai focuses on a psychic healer's opportunistic strategies and transformation in the village of Camp de Masque.

Chapter 4 focuses on the worship of Kalimai in Beauvallon, the only one in the region with a small temple structure. The authors explore the historical and cultural roots of this

practice and examine how it has evolved in response to the changing economic conditions of the island, especially within the local society of Camp de Masque Pavé. Chapters 5 and 6 explore the relationship between the sugar industry and religious practices involved at various Kalimais of Chemin Cimetière, Petite Cabanne, Boutique Joseph, and Unité. The authors argue that both workers and plantation owners have used religion to negotiate power relations within the industry and that these negotiations have had a significant impact on the religious practices of the island. The final chapter discusses how Indian society around the sugar mills is shaped by the ideology of action Dharma, which holds that the rewards in the afterlife are proportional to one's deeds during life, creating a sense of moral obligation and reciprocity. This society has undergone a gradual social and economic differentiation, from the mills to the Kalimais and temples. Despite these changes, the educational values of the Hindu religion, specifically karma, have fostered solidarity between large and small plantations.

By examining the religious beliefs, practices and institutions of Hindus in Mauritius, the book illustrates how changes in the religious realm are closely linked to shifts in social, economic and even political realms. In particular, the authors highlight the importance of understanding how religion can reinforce and challenge economic structures. For example, they explore how the practices of popular cults, such as the worship of Kalimais, have evolved in response to the changing economic conditions of the island. They also examine how religious practices negotiate power relations within the sugar industry.

Overall, *Hinduism and Popular Cults in Mauritius* is a valuable contribution to the study of religion and economy and a helpful resource for scholars interested in the intersection of these two fields. The authors' attention to how changes in the economic foundations of society can profoundly impact religious beliefs, practices and institutions in their analysis makes this book a particularly valuable resource for those interested in conducting ethnographic research on religion and its relation to economic activity, particularly for anthropologists, and for scholars of religious studies.