



THE RELIGION AND DIVERSITY PROJECT/RELIGION ET DIVERSITÉ



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Research Statement

My current work is located at the intersection of the Sociology of Religion and the Sociology of Immigration. Broadly, it examines how globalization, transnationalism, and the contemporary American context affect U.S. immigrants and their children. It also addresses how immigrants are reshaping both the U.S. and their own homeland communities. My research has focused specifically on the role of religion in identity formation, immigrant incorporation, the intergenerational transmission of religion and ethnicity, and group mobilization.

Immigration to the U.S. transforms Hindu Indians from a majority to a minority and my book, *A Place at the Multicultural Table: The Development of an American Hinduism* (2007), shows how various Hindu American organizations—religious, cultural, and political—attempt to address questions about minority status and identity outside their homeland and within transnational contexts. Drawing on the experiences of both immigrant and American born Hindu Americans, I demonstrate how religious ideas and practices are being imported, exported, and reshaped through these processes. The result of this transnational movement is an American Hinduism—an organized, politicized, and standardized version of what is found in India.

I am at the writing stage of another book project, tentatively titled “Evangelicalism and Ethnic Churches,” which examines how the reverse process from that described above – being transformed from being a minority in the homeland to part of the majority in the U.S.

– affects Christian Indian Americans. Specifically, my work is based on research in different parts of the U.S. and India and focuses on the reformed Orthodox Mar Thoma Syrian denomination. The Mar Thoma denomination is located in South India but now has branches all over the world, including a North American diocese. I examine the effect of the American religious landscape on such Christian immigrants and argue that immigrant churches, particularly those from countries where Christians are an insulated minority, have to face several challenges if they are to successfully institutionalize as an “ethnic” church in a context where Christianity is the majority religion. An important issue is how to retain the allegiance of the second and later generations to an “ethnic” Christianity in the face of the intense competition from American evangelical churches. In facing this challenge, the transnational nature of Mar Thoma denomination is its greatest asset, but also its biggest liability. I have written several articles from this research that will form the basis for the book manuscript.

My interest in the way different Indian American groups have been coalescing and emerging in the public sphere and the role that religion has played in this process led me to my current project, “Globalization, Religion, and Ethnic Politics: Indian Americans in the Public Sphere.” An important goal of the project is to examine how religion influences, both directly and indirectly, patterns and types of Indian American mobilization. It focuses on the interaction between first and second generation political mobilization based on three types of identities: nation-of-origin (Indian American), religious (Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Christian), and pan-ethnic (South Asian or Asian American).