



Kaleidoscopic Ethnicity: International Migration and the Reconstruction of Community Identities in India

Prema A. Kurien

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Based on ethnographic research in three communities (Ezhava Hindu, Mappila Muslim, and Syrian Christian) in Kerala, India, which sent large numbers of workers to the Middle East for temporary jobs, Kaleidoscopic Ethnicity explores the factors responsible for the striking differences in the groups' patterns of migration and migration-induced social change. Most broadly, Prema Kurien seeks to understand what ethnicity is and how it affects people's activities and decisions. She argues that, in each case, a community-specific nexus of religion, gender, and status shaped migration, and was, in turn, transformed by it. The religious background of the three groups determined their social location within colonial and postcolonial Kerala. This social location in turn affected their occupational profiles, family structures, and social networks, as well as their conceptions of gender and honor, and thus was fundamental in shaping migration patterns. The rapid enrichment brought about by international migration resulted in a reinterpretation of religious identity and practice which was manifested by changes in patterns of gendered behavior and status in each of the three communities. What makes this book unique is its focus on the sociocultural patterns of short-term international migration and its comparative ethnographic approach.

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