



THE RELIGION AND DIVERSITY PROJECT/RELIGION ET DIVERSITÉ



Biography

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Biography

Prema A. Kurien is Professor of Sociology, and founding Director of the Asian/Asian American Studies program at Syracuse University. In 2014-2015, she was the Dr. Thomas Tam Visiting Professor at the CUNY Graduate Center in New York City. She received her Ph.D. in Sociology from Brown University and taught at the University of Southern California before moving to Syracuse University.

Professor Kurien received the inaugural Contribution to the Field Award from the Asia and Asian America section of the American Sociological Association in 2014 as well as four other national awards for her articles and books. She has been involved in committees in the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Association for the Sociology of Religion, the Religion and she is the Chair-Elect of the Asian and Asian American sections of the American Sociological Association. She has been on the editorial board of the American Sociological Review and is currently on the editorial board of the Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion and Qualitative Sociology. She has also been a panelist for the Woodrow Wilson International Center Fellowship competition and the National Science Foundation Sociology Panel. She has received post-doctoral fellowships and grants from the National Science Foundation, the Woodrow Wilson International Center, the Carnegie Corporation, the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Center for the

Study of Religion at Princeton University, the American Institute of Indian Studies, the Louisville Institute, and the New Ethnic and Immigrant Congregations Project.

Some of her publications related to the topic of religion and diversity are:

Books:

Forthcoming Ethnic Church Meets Mega Church: Indian American Christianity in Motion.
June 2017 New York University Press.

2007 A Place at the Table: Multiculturalism and the Development of an American Hinduism. Rutgers University Press.

2009 *Honorable Mention from the Sociology of Religion section, American Sociological Association.*

2002 Kaleidoscopic Ethnicity: International Migration and the Reconstruction of Community Identities in India. Rutgers University Press.

2003 *Book award from the Asia and Asian American section of the American Sociological Association.*

Peer Reviewed Journal Articles and Book Chapters:

Forthcoming “Majority versus Minority Religious Status and Diasporic Nationalism: Indian American Advocacy Organizations.” Nations and Nationalism.

2016 “Race, Religion, and the Political Incorporation of Indian Americans.” Journal of Religious and Political Practice. Vol 2 (3). October

2016 “Contemporary Ethno-Religious Groups and Political Activism in the United States.” Pp. 428-441 in Barbara McGraw (ed.), Politics and Religion in America. Wiley-Blackwell (Companion Series).

2015 “Hinduism in North America.” Pp. 143-157 in Brian Hatcher (ed.), Hinduism in the Modern World. Routledge.

2014 “Immigration, Community Formation, Political Incorporation, and Why Religion Matters: Migration and Settlement Patterns of the Indian Diaspora.” Invited article, Sociology of Religion Vol 75(4): 524-536.

2014 “The Impact of International Migration on Home Churches: The Mar Thoma Syrian Christian Church in India.” Journal for the Scientific Study of

Religion, Vol 53(1):109-129.

- 2013 “Religion, Social Incorporation, and Civic Engagement: Second-Generation Indian American Christians. Review of Religious Research, Vol 55(1):81-104.
- 2013 “Religious Life in the Malayali Diaspora: Hindus and Christians in the United States.” Pp. 149-160 in Sam George and T.V. Thomas (eds.), Malayali Diaspora: From Kerala to the Ends of the Earth. Serials Publications, New Delhi.
- 2013 “Decoupling Religion and Ethnicity: Second-Generation Indian American Christians.” Qualitative Sociology, Vol 35(4): 447-468.
- 2013 *Research Paper Award from Asia and Asian American section, American Sociological Association.*
- 2013 “Religious Life in the Malayali Diaspora: Hindus and Christians in the United States.” In Sam George and T.V. Thomas (eds.), Malayali Diaspora: From Kerala to the Ends of the Earth.
- 2012 “What is American about American Hinduism? Hindu Umbrella Organizations in the U.S. in Comparative Perspective.” Pp. 90-111 in John Zavos, Pralay Kanungo, Deepa Reddy, Maya Warriar, and Raymond Brady Williams (eds.) Public Hinduisms. Sage Publications.
- 2009 “White Protestant Normativity and Asian American Religions.” Invited Contribution, Forum on Religion and Whiteness in American Society, Religion and American Culture, Vol 19 (1):19-27.
- 2009 “A Socio-cultural Perspective on Migration and Development: Middle Eastern Migration from Kerala, India.” Pp. 189-218 in Josh DeWind and Jennifer Holdaway (eds.) Migration and Development Within and Across Borders: Research and Policy Perspectives on Internal and International Migration. International Organization for Migration (IOM), and Social Science Research Council.
- 2007 “Who Speaks for Indian Americans? Religion, Ethnicity, and Political Formation.” American Quarterly, Vol 59 (3): 759-783.
- 2007 “Redefining Americanness by Reformulating Hinduism: Indian

- Americans Challenge American Academia.” Pp. 307-334 in James T. Campbell, Mathew Guterl, and Robert Lee (eds). Race, Nation, and Empire in American History. University of North Carolina Press.
- 2006 “Multiculturalism and ‘American’ Religion: The Case of Hindu Indian Americans. Social Forces, Vol 85 (2): 723-742.
- 2006 “Mr. President, Why do you Exclude us from your Prayers?: Hindus Challenge American Pluralism.” Pp. 119-138 in Stephen Prothero (ed)., A Nation of Religions: The Politics of Pluralism in Multireligious America. University of North Carolina Press.
- 2006 “Caste Mobility, and the Gilding of Rituals: The Impact of Gulf Migration on Ezhavas in South Kerala.” Pp. 21-44 in Harnam Singh Verma and Nadeem Hasnain (eds)., Stagnation, Retrograde Change, or Positive Progress? Vignettes from the Journey of the Other Backward Class Communities in the Process of Change in India. Serials Publications, New Delhi.
- 2005 “Being Young, Brown, and Hindu: The Identity Struggles of Second Generation Indian Americans.” Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, Vol 34 (4): 434-469.
- 2005 “Opposing Constructions and Agendas: The Politics of Hindu and Muslim Indian American Organizations.” Pp. 148-172 in Rey Koslowski, (ed)., International Migration and Globalization of Domestic Politics. Routledge Press.
- 2005 *Distinguished Article Award, Sociology of Religion section, American Sociological Association.*
- 2005 *Distinguished Article Award, Society for the Scientific Study of Religion.*
- 2004 “Christian by Birth or Rebirth? Generation and Difference in an Indian American Christian Church.” Pp 160-181 in Tony Carnes and Fenggang Yang (eds)., Asian American Religions: Borders and Boundaries. New York University Press.
- 2004 “Multiculturalism and Ethnic Nationalism: The Development of an American Hinduism.” Social Problems, Vol 51 (3): 362-385.
- 2003 “To Be or Not To Be South Asian: Contemporary Indian American Politics.” Journal of Asian American Studies, Vol 6 (3): 261-288.

- 2003 "Reinventions of Hinduism." Pp. 116-120 in Gary Laderman and Luis Leon (eds). Encyclopedia of Religion and American Cultures, Volume 1. ABC-CLIO.
- 2002 "'We are Better Hindus Here' - Religion and Ethnicity Among Indian Americans." Pp. 99-120 in Jung Ha Kim and Pyong Gap Min (eds), Building Faith Communities: Asian Immigrants and Religions. Altamira Press.
- 2001 "Constructing 'Indianness' in Southern California: The Role of Hindu and Muslim Indian Immigrants." Pp.289-312 in Marta Lopez-Garza and David R. Diaz (eds). Asian and Latino Immigrants in a Restructuring Economy: The Metamorphosis of Southern California. Stanford University Press.
- 2001 "Religion, Ethnicity and Politics: Hindu and Muslim Indian Immigrants in the United States." Ethnic and Racial Studies, Vol 24 (2):263-293.
- 2001 "Hinduism and Sikhism", Pp. 881-885 in James Ciment (ed). Encyclopedia of American Immigration. 2001, M.E. Sharpe.
- 1999 "Gendered Ethnicity: Creating a Hindu Indian Identity in the U.S." American Behavioral Scientist, Vol 42 (4):648-670.
- 1998 "Becoming American By Becoming Hindu: Indian Americans Take their Place at the Multi-cultural Table." Pp. 37-70 in R. Stephen Warner and Judith G. Wittner (eds). Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration. Temple University Press.
- 1997 "Constructing 'Indianness' in the United States and India: The Role of Hindu and Muslim Indian Immigrants." Southern California Studies Center Research Report.
- 1994 "Colonialism and Ethnogenesis: A Study of Kerala, India." Theory and Society, Vol 23 (3): 385-417.
- 1994 "Non-economic Bases of Economic Behavior: Consumption, Investment and Exchange Patterns among Three Emigrant Communities in Kerala, India." Development and Change, Vol 25 (4):757-783.

Research Statement

My recent research focuses on race and ethnic group relations, as well as the role of religion in shaping group formation and mobilization among contemporary ethnic groups. I bring the areas of race, religion, and social movements together by examining how religious institutions and organizations often provide the setting within which new ethnics confront the racialization they experience within the wider society and engage with their homelands. I also focus on the ways in which religion becomes the axis around which such groups mobilize to challenge racial discrimination and to make claims regarding their “cultural citizenship.”

My third book, Ethnic Church meets Mega Church: Indian American Christianity in Motion (NYU press) is forthcoming in June 2017. It examines how a new paradigm of ethnicity and religion is shaping contemporary immigrant religious institutions and the intergenerational transmission of religion. Classic assimilation theory was based on the assumption of individualistic adaptation, with immigrants and their children expected to shed their ethnic identities to become Americans. In the sphere of religion, however, they could maintain their communitarian traditions through American denominations. In contemporary society, multiculturalism, spiritual seeking, and postdenominationalism have reversed this paradigm. First- and second-generation immigrants integrate by remaining ethnic and group-identified, but religion is viewed as a personal quest.

Drawing on multi-sited field research in the United States and India, including interviews and participant observation in the Mar Thoma Syrian Christian denomination belonging to an ancient South Indian community, it looks at the shifts in the understandings of its members regarding their ethnic and Christian identity as a result of their U.S. migration and the coming of age of the American-born generation. The widespread prevalence of mega churches and the dominance of American evangelicalism created an environment in which the traditional practices of the Mar Thoma church seemed alien to its American-born generation. Second-generation Mar Thoma Americans were caught between their criticisms of the “ethnic” character of the Mar Thoma church and its traditions, and their appreciation for the social support its warm community and familial relationships provided them as they were growing up.

While showcasing these dynamics among the first and second generations in the United States, this book is also a case study of global religion. It examines how transnational processes shape religion in both the place of destination and the place of origin. Taking a long view, it examines how the forces of globalization, from the period of colonialism to contemporary large-scale outmigration, have brought about tremendous changes in Christian communities in the global South.

Book Manuscript in Progress

I am currently working on a book manuscript, “Race, Religion, and Citizenship: Indian American Political Advocacy.” It examines how first- and second-generation immigrants

mobilize advocacy organizations around ethnic (Indian-American), pan-ethnic (South Asian American), religious (Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian), and party-oriented identities (Democrat and Republican). My research shows how these diverse forms of mobilization can develop within one immigrant group, and how they interact with each other while advocating for their respective goals. It also reveals how race and religion interact in complex ways to shape the political integration of immigrants.

Research in Progress

My work on the political incorporation of Indian Americans showed me that the way their ethnic advocacy organizations define grievances and develop strategies are profoundly shaped by the US context. This led me to research that examines how differences in political structures, policies regarding immigrant integration and religion, as well as migration patterns, shape immigrant political activism. I am currently working on a research project funded by the National Science Foundation, “The Incorporation of Religious Minorities in Canada and the United States” examining how the social, political, and religious contexts of Canada and the United States shape the political incorporation and mobilization of religious minorities from South Asia. This research also examines how different opportunity structures (both national and regional), and differences in the characteristics of the groups shape how they frame their grievances and mobilize, and whether the mobilization takes an “ethnic,” “racial,” or “religious” form.