

The Economics of Religion in India, Iyer, Sriya.
Massachusetts: Harvard University Press: 2018, 305.

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Written by Sriya Iyer, *The Economics of Religion in India* provides a unique insight on religion from an economic perspective. Iyer has successfully attempted to bring light to the little-studied branch of economics known as the economics of religion with a specific focus on India, a country famous for its religious diversity. In this book, Iyer has intelligently used economic analysis and tools to explore how inequality, education, social trends and technology are affected by and affect the religious groups. She has used India Religion Survey to carry out the analysis at the macro as well as micro-level. Her findings are based on her ten years of research in which she surveyed 600 religious organisations of five various faiths in seven states.

This book is divided into nine chapters. In the first few chapters of the book, Iyer analyses the dependence of the Indian society on religion and historical and contemporary socio-economic differences between various religious groups and how they compete, reach out to newly converts and provide religious services. Iyer states that while it was Adam Smith who came up with an economic approach to study religion, it happened in the late 1990s when the economists started developing an approach more comprehensively. She stresses the need to look at religion from an economic lens in order to uncover the links between religion, poverty and inequality.

Chapter four discusses religious service provision and competition in a growing economy like India. In this chapter, Iyer highlights that according to data as the rich countries become secular, the world, in general, is becoming more religious due to the growth of religious fundamentalism, religious freedom and use of mass media for religious service provision.

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In chapter five, Iyer identifies various non-religious services that different faiths provide. The sheer volumes of the pilgrims that famous temples in India receive each year generate a huge amount of resources for religious institutions, which they then use to provide non-religious and welfare services such as providing education, health, food and child-care services. Her findings show that all faiths actively take part in providing non-religious services but Muslims are more focused on providing religious education while Hindu religious organisations provide food.

In chapter six, the author explores how service and religion may be related to religious competition and economic inequality. She stresses that any debate on religious fundamentalism in India needs to take in to account the economic inequality and poverty. Her findings highlight that Muslims in India have low educational and employment levels compared to Hindus. Her study shows that religious violence is common in areas where economic growth is higher as it increases inequality, which is then exploited by various political leaders and parties to encourage violence and extremist attitudes towards religious minorities. Iyer states that high fertility rates are correlated with a low level of education and income rather than any specific faith or religion. Hence, Iyer's findings help in debunking the Hindutva narrative that Muslims will eventually take over India due to their high fertility rates.

Although in chapter seven, Iyer discusses the role of Madrasas in education in India but fails to take into account the rise of Hindu nationalist schools over the years due to the rise in Hindutva movement. Another aspect that Iyer forgot to highlight in her book was the discrimination and injustice that occurs due to the caste system, present inherently in Hinduism, which then reinforces social and economic inequality. Chapter eight of this book is quite interesting as it looks at how various faiths reach out to the general masses by using modern marketing techniques, technology and mass media. It gives a perspective at how technology and various communication methods are influencing the evolution of religion in India.

Considering the current situation in India with the rise of Hindutva, *Economics of Religion in India* is a timely book and Iyer has beautifully explored the connections between economics and religion but, however, she leaves many questions unanswered and hence, gives other researchers and scholars a chance to ponder over and explore those areas in more detail. She

herself concludes that much more research needs to be done especially on economic theories of religion and the relationship that exists between religion and political economy. The book, in general, provides a detailed insight into religious dynamics in India in an economic context and identifies areas for policymakers to work on in order to reduce economic inequality and enhance social inclusion in the society.