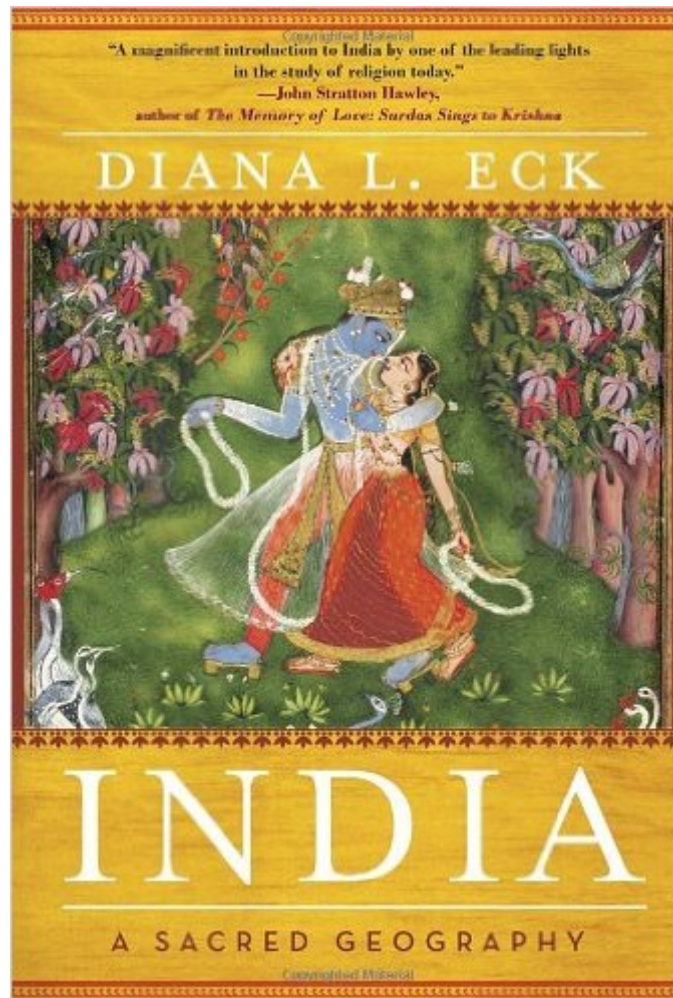


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India: A Sacred Geography



Synopsis

A spiritual history of the world's most religiously complex and diverse society, from one of Harvard's most respected scholars. *India: A Sacred Geography* is the culmination of more than a decade's work from the renowned Harvard scholar Diana L. Eck. The book explores the sacred places of India, taking the reader on an extraordinary trip through the beliefs and history of this rich and profound place, as well as providing a basic introduction to Hindu religious ideas and how those ideas influence our understanding of the modern sense of "India" as a nation.

Book Information

Paperback: 576 pages

Publisher: Harmony; Reprint edition (March 26, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0385531923

ISBN-13: 978-0385531924

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 1.1 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.3 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

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Customer Reviews

India's culture, traditions, history, lands, and religions are way too complex to ever get your arms all the way around. But if you've ever wished for something to help you at least get a bit of handle on it all, Diana Eck's wonderful tour through the sacred geography of India is a great place to turn. Actually, it is several tours. You will crisscross this land repeatedly as you visit sites and specific features of the landscape associated with the traditions and stories of: * Siva * Shakti * Vishnu * Krishna * Rama * rivers in general * the lands of India as a whole In these traditions, even the smallest details of the landscape - specific rocks, springs, trees, etcetera - can be imbued with cosmic significance. Many of these traditions/stories overlap at various points and features of the geography, which only adds to their richness. There is some kind of intuitive genius at work in how, together, these stories form a huge interconnected web, making the entire land a kind of 3-D, interactive scripture that answers the human longing for a life of larger, deeper meaning. Overall, the geographical approach to these traditions brings them - and the land they relate to - alive in a

unique way that will stay with me and that makes me more thoughtful about the ways that spiritually sensitive and open humans can relate to the land they inhabit so as to reinforce that sensitivity and openness. One of the most fascinating things brought out in Eck's presentation is that many sacred sites are repeated throughout India. As she puts it, there is a "distinctively Hindu tradition of multiplicity: Any place that is truly important is important enough to be duplicated and sited in multiple places.

In the range of its learning and in its sweep, passion, and insight, Diana Eck's new book, "India: A Sacred Geography" (2012) is a grand meditation on India and religious life. A professor of comparative literature and Indian studies at Harvard University, Eck has written widely on Indian religion and on American religious pluralism. In 1998, then President Clinton awarded Eck the National Humanities Medal for her work as director of the Pluralism Project in the investigation of America's changing religious landscape. The overriding theme of Eck's study is pilgrimage. She offers a story of pilgrimage to India's many sacred places that is at once mythical, romantic and factual. Eck herself has spent decades in India exploring the sites her book discusses in extraordinary detail. Her pilgrimage extends over millenia and to the millions of people who make pilgrimages to Indian sacred sites each year. As I read, I realized that the pilgrimage was also Eck's own, and it ultimately becomes that of the reader. Eck writes that she had the idea of writing this book of broad pilgrimages and sites upon writing an earlier book on the city of Benares. Eck came to realize that Benares was not a single sacred city in the manner of, for example, Jerusalem or Mecca, but was instead part of a vast network of Indian sacred places which she set about to explore. Eck argues that pilgrimage rather than sacrifice of the study of sacred texts is the primary expression of Hinduism and that Hinduism and religion, in turn hold the key to understanding the heart of India.

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