



## **Sacred Play: Ritual Levity and Humor in South Asian Religions**



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*Explores the significance of levity and humor in South Asian religious traditions.*

Frivolity isn't always frivolous—sometimes it can be sacred. Sacred Play uncovers levity and playfulness in a variety of South Asian traditions where one might least expect to find it: in the heart of ritual. While stories recounting the antics of various South Asian deities circulate widely, this enlightening book intentionally departs from divinity-centered humor to focus on the playfulness of humans and their religious practices. This grassroots levity is both serious and lighthearted; it can be highly scripted or spontaneous and cast in shades of light or dark humor. Case studies of Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and Buddhist rituals examine instances of levity that challenge social or religious norms, in which mischievous deities inspire similar behavior among their devotees, and where playful competition incites serious consequences. Sacred Play explores how piety and levity can complement and complicate one another, enriching our understanding of both.

Selva J. Raj (1952–2008) was Chair and Stanley S. Kresge Professor of Religious Studies at Albion College. His books include *Dealing with Deities: The Ritual Vow in South Asia*, also published by SUNY Press, and *South Asian Christian Diaspora: Invisible Diaspora in Europe and North America*. Corinne G. Dempsey is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point. She is author of *Kerala Christian Sainthood: Collisions of Culture and Worldview in South India* and *The Goddess Lives in Upstate New York: Breaking Convention and Making Home at a North American Hindu Temple*. Together they coedited *Popular Christianity in India: Riting between the Lines and Miracle as Modern Conundrum in South Asian Religious Traditions*, both also published by SUNY Press.

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