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**The God Market- How
Globalization Is Making India
More Hindu
By Meera Nanda**

**Book Summary By CSPs
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Introduction:

“The God Market: How Globalization Is Making India More Hindu”. Beginning with post-independence India, Nanda walks us forward in time, pausing at influential points in the story to build a bullet-proof case for her central assertion that- in her words- “Globalization has been good to the Gods in India”. While it is a fast and thoroughly engaging read with all references relegated to the back pages, the sheer quantity of facts is still overwhelming at times.

The book has five parts, each part a self-contained thesis from start to finish.

Part 1: Privatization Promoting Hindutva Ideology

After a brief description of neo-liberalism, Nanda breaks down the history of post-independence India into three time periods and takes us through the political and religious events that transpired during these periods. The story begins with the creation of the modern welfare state, the foundation of the democratic process, and the emergence of new nationalistic and ideological movements after independence in 1947. After going through a badly bungled experimental phase, neo-liberalism arose as the dominant economic model in India towards the end of the century. To end the chapter, Nanda writes about the privatization of society under the guise of ‘swatantra’. She provides evidence to show that **“...privatization is not just turning higher education into a business; it is opening it up to the business of God and god-men as well.”** The ideology of the ‘neo-Swatantrites’, according to Nanda, is that “the state has to have a minimal role in economic affairs, but a maximum role in propagation of Hinduism”.



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Part 2: The Rush Hour of gods

In the second section of the book, Nanda explores the alarming increase in religiosity among the middle classes. This is unintuitive, to say the least, but the evidence presented is solid again. Despite the growing affluence and numbers among the middle classes, religion has increased its grip on society in India. Particularly noteworthy is Nanda's assertion that this increased religiosity is more fervent and reactionary than ever before. Nanda borrows a phrase from Neill MacFarland, **'the Rush Hour of the Gods'**, to describe this growth of religiosity in India in the context of globalization and the resulting economic opportunities and **"socio-psychological needs"**.

Point by point, Nanda builds up her case to show how the new-found religiosity among young urban Indians goes hand in hand with a process of gentrification of the rituals and beliefs, adapting them to the new global economy. There is a new form of Hinduism taking root, one that is as comfortable in the boardroom as it is in the mandir. This section ends with a look at the **"new gurus"** such as **Mata Amritanandamayi, Swami Dayananda, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, and Swami Ramdev**, who has cornered the burgeoning market in techie religiosity.

Part 3: State-Temple-Corporate-Complex



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Having built up the case for how both neo-liberalism and religion have come to dominate the current social climate of India, Meera Nanda defends her central thesis in the third section of the book. To do this, she brilliantly adapts her argument from a popular way of describing the coevolution of two or more mutually dependent institutions. Nanda's term for the resulting collision between the dominant institutions in India is the **“State-Temple-Corporate Complex”**.

The subject of government involvement in religious affairs is often a cause for contention among the Hindu masses that are led to believe that the government treats Hindus unfairly by targeting them and not the other religions. Nanda's work discredits these arguments. She writes in detail how the current nexus between government and Hindu groups was initiated not by the government, but on the urging of Hindu elites. In essence, not only have Hindus managed to gain from this relationship that they forced onto the state, but they now use this nexus as propaganda claiming that the government unfairly targets Hindus!

Nanda follows the money trail, discrediting the popular arguments that attempt to portray Hindus as victims of government discrimination. The state-temple-corporate complex is in business, and business is booming. The last few pages of this chapter look at the effects of this union on culture- in particular, education and religious tourism. Nanda portrays an alarming increase in government endorsement, both financially and politically, for numerous religious and religion-related beliefs and practices. She draws examples from around the country to portray this increase in religious influence on education, both in unconventional training schools and in accredited schools, colleges, and universities.

The state-temple-corporate complex has encouraged an amalgam of nationalistic and religious emotions that the masses are drawn towards. Here is a particularly poignant quote from Nanda:

“Whereas the ‘religions of the book’, that is, Islam and Christianity, bind the faithful by demanding obedience to the letter and the spirit of their revealed dogmas, Hinduism deploys familiar rituals, festivals, myths, and observances- the kind of things children learn on their mothers’ knees- to knit a many-stranded rope that binds the faithful to the faith with so many little ties, at so many different points that one



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loses sight of the ideological indoctrination that is going on. Ordinary worshipers and the three partners described above- the state, the temples, and the corporate or business interests- perform a choreographed dance, as it were, in which each element merges into another smoothly and effortlessly. The net result is a new kind of political and nationalistic Hinduism which is invented out of old customs and traditions that people are fond of, and familiar with.”

Part 4: Rise of Hindutva Fascism

Nanda Further explores, the belief among Indians of our cultural superiority over others is described. Nanda writes **“Indians rank number one in the world in thinking that we are number one in the world”**. This statement is backed by evidence from internationally recognized polls. Meera Nanda presents the data on



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this subject in the context of group dynamics specific to post-colonial societies that are emerging from poverty. She extends this thought to the Hindutva explanations for the IT revolution, pointing to how Hinduism is now used to justify everything from democracy to the number of science graduates in India. She says, “A great many computer professionals, important scientists, and well-respected intellectuals have bought into this idea that Hinduism predisposes Indians to become great software engineers”. Nanda places these arrogant notions of Hindu superiority beside objective measures of India’s science and engineering accomplishments, demonstrating that the numbers tell a completely different story.

The last part of this chapter is concerned with the development of what Nanda calls the “**Theology of Hatred**”. Here she describes the “**intellectual warriors**” of the Hindutva army as resorting to “**designer fascism**”, whereby they claim tolerance of other religions while claiming that this tolerance arises due to the virtues of Hinduism alone. There is a powerful movement of Hindu intellectuals, such as those behind the Voice of India publishing house, who have made an art out of Hindu triumphalism while presenting Islam and Christianity as outsiders to be feared and challenged. Nanda closes the chapter with an appeal to celebrate the secular achievements of India as progress that was made independent of Hindu influence.

Part 5: Vanishing Point of Indian Secularism

The final section of the book is concerned with global trends in religiosity and secularism. After presenting examples to demonstrate that religious influence has increased and not decreased over the past half-century of free-markets and



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globalization, Nanda gets down to pinning down the nature of secularism as a cultural institution. There are, she points out, differences in the Indian view of secularism. She places India's struggle with religion in the context of this global trend towards increased religiosity and decreased secularization, and asks the reader to step back and try to understand how the two forces of globalization and secularization have affected each other in their evolution.

Quoting Peter Berger, whom she also quotes in other places in the book, Nanda shows that religion and the state are competitors for cultural capital. As reason begins to assert itself in a society, leading to more influence by the state over civilian activities that were once controlled by religion, the religiosity of the people also falls over time. Conversely, by the removal of the powers of the state towards influencing culture an available niche is created for religion to fill. Over and over Nanda points out, using Berger's work, how this new surge in religion is actually of the supernatural kind, not the more benign rational form commonly associated with globalization.

Nanda presents an analysis of the correlation between religiosity and economic conditions, mentioning studies that show clearly how the most religious societies are either extremely poverty-stricken or are the most unequal in terms of their wealth distribution, thus creating an underclass ripe for religious indoctrination. She writes about supply-side theory, which states that in the global market religions will compete and there will be new religious movements- a boom and bust cycle of religious beliefs. Nanda presents evidence from a larger scale model that overrides the smaller market trends and shows that a steady long-term decline of religion is feasible if the cultural need for supernatural beliefs fades away. Nanda closes by laying out the implications of the models of secularization theory on India, with an appeal towards building a secular future.

“There is no bigger challenge for India today than to create meaningful secular spaces and a secular public culture”

Conclusion



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Meera Nanda's book is an eye-opener for any Indian who values human rights, science, and secularism and wishes to advance these in India. The rationalist movement, despite the herculean efforts of a dedicated few, has been floundering in the sea of religious belief that surrounds it. Nanda's work needs to be read and discussed in rationalist settings around the country, with a view towards developing strategies that are in tune with the vastly different world in which religions operate today. With this book, Nanda joins the likes of Romila Thapar as someone who speaks the unblemished truth about our country in the face of much public resentment. **"The God Market"** is a testament to Meera Nanda's ability to cut through the noise and tell us the story, the complete story, and how it relates to what she has not yet begun to speak of.