

For many centuries, Hindu temples and shrines have been of great importance to South Indian religious, social and political life. Aside from being places of worship, they are also pilgrimage destinations, centres of learning, political hotspots, and foci of economic activities. In these temples, not only the human and the divine interact, but they are also meeting places of different members of the communities, be they local or coming from afar. Hindu temples do not exist in isolation, but stand in multiple relationships to other temples and sacred sites. They relate to each other in terms of architecture, ritual, or mythology, or on a conceptual level when particular sites are grouped together. Especially in urban centres, multiple temples representing different religious traditions may coexist within a shared sacred space. The current volume pays close attention to the connections between individual Hindu temples and the affiliated communities, be it within a particular place or on a trans-local level. These connections are described as “temple networks,” a concept which instead of stable hierarchies and structures looks at nodal, multi-centred, and fluid systems, in which the connections in numerous fields of interaction are understood as dynamic processes.

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