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Craft Matters: Artisans, Development and the Indian Nation

By Soumhya Venkatesan

Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, India, 2009. Hardcover. Book Condition: New. Dust Jacket Condition: New. First Edition. Craft Matters explores the ways in which traditional Indian craft producers engage with the efforts of government and non governmental agencies to preserve, promote and develop their crafts. Based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork among the Labbai Muslim mat weavers of Pattamadai town in South India, this anthropological study explores the ways in which the famous pattu pai or high-quality silk-like mats of Pattamadai became classified as traditional craft objects, and what this classification has meant to the weavers who are now simultaneously national heroes and (paradoxically) marginalized and suspect Muslims. Handwoven by poor Muslims and bought by elite Tamil Hindus for use in marriage ceremonies and as craft objects by other affluent sections of society, the mats are made within the literature to embody liberal ideals of harmony between Hindus and Muslim, rural poor and urban elites, the past and the present, and tradition and modernity. The mats make their weavers accepted and celebrated within the wider nation, allowing them to act on the national stage. However, this is constantly constrained by the very ways in which craft is conceptualized in India. This book...

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