

1. Record Nr.	UNINA9910495962703321
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Titolo	Indian traffic : identities in question in colonial and postcolonial India / / Parama Roy
Pubbl/distr/stampa	Berkeley, CA : , : University of California Press, , [1998] ©1998
ISBN	9780520917682 0520917685 9780585069906 0585069905
Edizione	[Reprint 2019]
Descrizione fisica	1 online resource (248 p.) : 3 illustrations
Disciplina	820.9/954
Soggetti	Indic literature (English) - History and criticism - 20th century - India British Colonies in literature Group identity National characteristics, East Indian, in literature - History - India Literature and society - History and criticism - India Anglo-Indian literature - History - India Postcolonialism in literature - History - India Postcolonialism Group identity in literature Nationalism Imperialism in literature India Civilization
Lingua di pubblicazione	Inglese
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
Note generali	Bibliographic Level Mode of Issuance: Monograph
Nota di contenuto	Front matter -- CONTENTS -- ILLUSTRATIONS -- ACKNOWLEDGMENTS -- Introduction -- ONE. Oriental Exhibits -- TWO. Discovering India, Imagining Thuggee -- THREE. Anglo/ Indians and Others -- FOUR. As the Master Saw Her -- FIVE. Becoming Women -- SIX. Figuring Mother India -- Epilogue -- NOTES -- SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY -- INDEX

The continual, unpredictable, and often violent "traffic" between identities in colonial and postcolonial India is the focus of Parama Roy's stimulating and original book. Mimicry has been commonly recognized as an important colonial model of bourgeois/elite subject formation, and Roy examines its place in the exchanges between South Asian and British, Hindu and Muslim, female and male, and subaltern and elite actors. Roy draws on a variety of sources--religious texts, novels, travelogues, colonial archival documents, and films--making her book genuinely interdisciplinary. She explores the ways in which questions of originality and impersonation function, not just for "western" or "westernized" subjects, but across a range of identities. For example, Roy considers the Englishman's fascination with "going native," an Irishwoman's assumption of Hindu feminine celibacy, Gandhi's impersonation of femininity, and a Muslim actress's emulation of a Hindu/Indian mother goddess. Familiar works by Richard Burton and Kipling are given fresh treatment, as are topics such as the "muscular Hinduism" of Swami Vivekananda. Indian Traffic demonstrates that questions of originality and impersonation are in the forefront of both the colonial and the nationalist discourses of South Asia and are central to the conceptual identity of South Asian postcolonial theory itself.
