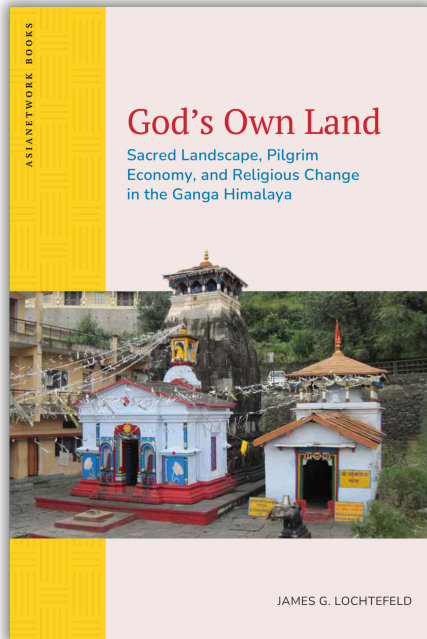




Lever Press



DOI: [10.3998/mpub.13230977](https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.13230977)

Paper | 2026 | \$27.99 U.S.
ISBN 9781643151014

Open Access
ISBN 9781643151021

James G. Lochtefeld is Professor Emeritus of Religion at Carthage College.



GOD'S OWN LAND

Sacred Landscape, Pilgrim Economy, and Religious Change in the Ganga Himalaya
By James G. Lochtefeld

God's Own Land follows the tectonic shift from traditional religious pilgrimage in the early twentieth-century to contemporary pilgrim tourism, in which ever-burgeoning visitor numbers have brought both benefits and challenges to the Garhwal region of India—the source of Hindu India's sacred river, the Ganges. Despite Hinduism's regional and sectarian variation, India's Garhwal Himalaya region is one the most sacred places to Hindus, drawing pilgrims across sectarian lines from throughout the subcontinent and the world. This sacred land—*dev bhumi* or “land of the gods”—appears in foundational Hindu stories describing the presence and activity of gods, goddesses, saints, and cultural heroes.

This study from James G. Lochtefeld draws out Hindu convictions regarding the Garhwal's eternal and continuing sanctity as a holy region, based on the premise of an “imagined landscape.” This region is strongly associated with divine activity and yet this landscape is also a real place with a real history inhabited by real people, who have historically been poor because of the challenges created by the region's geography. Juxtaposing the history of the region with its construction in the Hindu imaginary, this multidisciplinary study unpacks the nuanced image of the region, its religious significance, and the impacts of pilgrimages on the community through textual, historical, and ethnographic methods.

“

“An account such as this one of Hindu pilgrimage in an area that has emerged as central not only to Hindu imaginations, but Hindu practice in the last century exists nowhere else. It could only have been written by a scholar with many years of experience in the region and excellent training in the sacred literatures of India. It is a one-of-a-kind account of Hindu pilgrimage in Garhwal.”

—Brian Pennington, Elon University