



# Indian Sisters: A History of Nursing and the State, 1907-2007 (South Asian History and Culture)

*Madelaine Healey*

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Health and medicine cannot be understood without considering the role of nurses, both as professionals and as working women. In India, unlike other countries, nurses have suffered an exceptional degree of neglect at the hands of state, a situation that has been detrimental to the quality of both rural and urban health care. Charting the history of the development of nursing in India over 100 years, *Indian Sisters* examines the reasons why nurses have so consistently been sidelined and excluded from health care governance and policymaking.

The book challenges the routine suggestion that nursing's poor status is mainly attributable to socio-cultural factors, such as caste, limitations on female mobility and social taboos. It argues instead that many of its problems are due to an under-achieved relationship between a patriarchal state on the one hand, and weak professional nursing organisations shaped by their colonial roots on the other. It also explores how the recent phenomenon of large-scale emigration of nurses to the West (leading to better pay, working conditions and career prospects) has transformed the profession, lifting its status dramatically. At the same time, it raises questions about the implications of emigration for the fate of health care system in India.

An important contribution to the growing academic genre of nursing history, the book is essential reading for scholars and students of health care, the history of medicine, gender and women's studies, sociology, and migration studies. It will also be useful to policymakers and health professionals.

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