

## Book Reviews

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Piotr Balcerowicz, *Early Asceticism in India: Ājīvikism and Jainism*. London: Routledge, 2016. 362 pages.

In *Early Asceticism in India: Ājīvikism and Jainism*, Piotr Balcerowicz argues for “a fresh attempt to better understand the reasons how, why and when Jainism developed its strikingly unique logic and epistemology and what historical and doctrinal factors could have prompted the ideas which later led to the formulation of the doctrine of the multiplexity of reality (*anekānta-vāda*)” (7). As the title of the monograph suggests, Balcerowicz sees an exploration of the early relationship between Jainism and Ājīvikism as fruitful territory to understand such developments. Given that there are no remnants of Ājīvika textual sources and that “neither Buddhist nor Jaina texts can be treated as reliable sources of information on Gośāla and the Ājīvika community” (41), reconstructing such a relationship is, admittedly, no easy task. Balcerowicz, though, skillfully marshals early Jaina and Buddhist textual and art-historical evidence to make compelling, if sometimes also controversial, arguments about the early development of the two Śramaṇa traditions.

Balcerowicz begins by reexamining the admittedly scanty evidence of the relationship between Mahāvīra Vardhamāna, the fifth-century BCE “founder” of Jainism, and his contemporary Gośāla Maṅkaliputra, founder of the Ājīvikas. After an introductory chapter that lays out the goals of the monograph, Chapters Two and Three argue that, contrary to the portrayal of Gośāla as a traitorous disciple of Mahāvīra, the relationship between the two men was more complicated and possibly of a quite different nature. Balcerowicz argues that Gośāla was most likely an early teacher of Mahāvīra and that the latter, after his initial initiation into Parśva’s ascetic lineage, probably adopted from Gośāla the ascetic practice of nudity as well as the custom of accepting food directly into the cupped palms of one’s hands. Chapter Three points out that early Jaina literature, including the noncanonical *Sayings of the Seers (Isibhāsiyāim)*, includes Gośāla as a leader of the early Jaina

community and that the fifteenth chapter of the canonical *Viyāhapannatti* (oftentimes called the *Bhagavatīsūtra*, or *The Venerable Sūtra*) calls Gośāla a fully enlightened *jina*. By arguing that Gośāla might have in fact been the teacher of Mahāvīra, Balcerowicz sets up examinations of how the Ājīvikas may have influenced early Jaina doctrine and practice. The examples he explores are wide ranging, but most focus on individual elements of Jaina doctrine that seem out of place within its larger framework. Chapter Twelve, for instance, entitled “Determinism, Ājīvikas and Jainism,” examines in part the concept of “emancipatable” (*bhavya*) and “nonemancipatable” (*abhavya*) souls, that is, the idea that some souls within the transmigratory world of *saṃsāra* are by default incapable of attaining final liberation (*mokṣa*). Pointing out that this bifurcation of the potentiality of souls has “baffled even Jaina commentators themselves” (153), Balcerowicz argues that it is perhaps best understood as “an old deterministic trait under the influence of the Ājīvikas” (159).

*Early Asceticism in India* covers a wide array of material, investigating subjects like pottery and its historical relationships to Śramaṇa traditions, divination practices, scriptural transmission and development, and ascetic practices, to name only a few. There are points in the book where the reader wonders how the topic at hand relates back to the stated goal of the book, that being to examine specifically the historical and doctrinal developments that contributed to the Jaina theory of *anekāntavāda*. Aside from this, the book is sure to generate both discussion and debate among scholars, opening up questions about when and how “Jainism” and “Ājīvikism” came to understand and portray themselves as distinct and separate religious traditions. As Balcerowicz points out in the concluding chapter: “The development of Jainism involved at least three different strands of religious practice, which were impossible to distinguish to a bystander” (300). It should also encourage scholars of early Indian religious development to discuss the limitations of making claims about the directionality of influence between traditions and the evidentiary expectations behind making such claims. In sum, *Early Asceticism in India* is a bold and forward thinking book, one that challenges long-accepted historical narratives and concepts of religious identity in premodern India. It is essential reading not only for scholars of Jaina history and epistemology, but for anyone interested in the contributions of Śramaṇa traditions to the wider religious landscape of early India.

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Brenda E. F. Beck and Cassandra Cornall, and art direction by Ravichandran Arumugam, *The Legend of Ponnivala*. 2 parts: Part One: *A Kingdom Constructed*; Part Two: *A Kingdom Contested*. Gore’s Landing: Ponnivala Publishing, 2012. 442 pages (Part One), 408 pages (Part Two).

*The Legend of Ponnivala* is the culmination of Brenda E. F. Beck’s intense and engaged research in Kongunadu (in the Trichy region of Tamil Nadu) spanning over

five decades. The presentation of this popular South Indian story in the form of a graphic novel is part of a larger project to “bring this ancient South Indian epic to the world,” as the project’s website states (<http://www.ponnivala.com/>). *The Legend of Ponnivala* presents the story as a connected chain of twenty-six short episodes based on the forty-four hours of audio recordings she made over eighteen consecutive nights in Kongunadu in 1965, during the research for her previous book on this subject.

This first book, *The Three Twins* (Indiana University Press, 1982), is based on her anthropological, literary, and artistic analysis of the story of Ponnivala, the oral epic of three siblings (two brothers and a sister). An analysis of the eight versions of the popular Tamil epic, *The Three Twins* represents a worthy contribution to the academic resources on the popular literary, religious, and performative traditions of Tamil South India. It remains, however, within the normative tradition of academic research, which is very rarely made accessible to the general public.

The story of Ponnivala is a remarkable Hindu regional epic of Kongunadu. It connects the everyday struggles of the farming community of the Kongu region with deeper spiritual and religious meaning connected to Hinduism and the cultural history of South India. Beck narrates the story of Ponnivala in two parts. (Each part is a separate volume.) Part One, *A Kingdom Constructed*, is a narration of the lineage of the three siblings; the main conflict to be overcome is Śiva’s curse of seven generations of barrenness directed against the twins’ parents, who were guilty of killing a herd of sacred cows. Part Two, *A Kingdom Contested*, is a narration of the life of the “three twins,” the brothers Ponnar and Shankar, and their sister Tangal. It is through the blessings of Viṣṇu, Śiva, and the goddess Celaṭṭa that the curse is lifted and the kingdom of Ponnivala (Ponnivalanadu) is attained.

With a visual presentation similar to the Amar Chitra Katha comic book series, *The Legend of Ponnivala* clearly conveys this story to a wide audience, breaking through the barriers that often result from the use of academic writing. Not only is the epic published in separate English and Tamil versions, but the Sophia Hilton Foundation of Canada—headquartered in Ontario, near the town of Gore’s Landing—serves as an important site of experiential learning for primary school students. The Foundation not only published this version of the epic; it has also produced forms of it in other popular media: an animated series that is shown on television stations in India and is made freely available to the public through online streaming; a bilingual DVD version available for sale; a website that contains a regular blog dealing with the content of the epic and the work of the Foundation; and suggested curricula for teachers, parents, and storytellers who wish to pass on the story.

Academia is only gradually warming up to the idea of sharing knowledge openly with the public through digital humanities initiatives and open source publication. For far too long it had stayed within its cloisters providing only occasional glimpses of its achievements to the general public. *The Legend of Ponnivala* is one of those rare instances in which an academic publication encourages the international community to learn about a work of global heritage. Here it is the oral epic’s form as an accessible graphic novel, accompanied by performances and electronic media, that has allowed the epic to enter the public arena, successfully engaging the next frontier of academic engagement, the digital humanities initiative, for positive

change. If the ultimate goal of the humanities is to help public learning and also to support public policy to improve human relations and ultimately life in the world, *The Legend of Ponnivala* makes an important contribution in this direction.

The development of museums and heritage sites—both brick-and-mortar and virtual, like the work in question—by enthusiastic residents and academics of each region will assist in preserving local traditions for future generations of that region, while remaining a useful tool for visitors to the district to learn about its immense cultural heritage. *The Legend of Ponnivala*, as one product of Beck's nearly sixty years of work in South India, should serve as an inspiration to both academia and the wider public. As cultural traditions are frequently lost to the ravages of time without digitalization, Beck's work in bringing to life a hitherto hidden cultural artifact does a great service to the humanities: not just preserving an ancient text, but enlivening a cultural tradition and making it accessible to the world at large.

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Diana Dimitrova, ed., *The Other in South Asian Religion, Literature and Film: Perspectives on Otherism and Otherness*. London: Routledge, 2014. 180 pages.

Studies of the politics of culture and representation often limit themselves to a genre of production and expression or to one area of disciplinary inquiry. The essays in this collection, edited by Diana Dimitrova, are authored by scholars of South Asia from around the world and taken together present an interdisciplinary approach to the study of representation. Topics include nationalism and progressivism in modern Hindi drama and literature, gender and sexuality in commercial Indian cinema, identity formation in transnational religious life, and the politics of language and religion in North India. Together, the essays endeavor to reveal the roles that religion, literature, and film play in processes of representation, in terms of both constructing and contesting alterity. Key questions that ground the essays include: how should “otherness” be interpreted in contexts of power and authority and in terms of linguistic, ethnic, national, religious, and gendered difference? In what ways do subjected “others” engage with their marginal positions? In what ways do representations of “otherness” reflect power structures of contemporary South Asian societies?

In her Introduction, Dimitrova introduces “otherism,” a new conceptual category of analysis of South Asian cultural materials. As she explains, this term signifies a universal discourse of “otherness and othering” (7), extending Edward W. Said's description of Orientalism in several respects. Otherism examines the roles of gender and sexuality in the politics of representation, thus going beyond Said's focus on race and ethnicity. It is also a universal category that expands upon the dichotomy between West and East, indicating that the problematic of otherness is a global phenomenon. Finally, this concept demonstrates that ideological representation is not only a matter wherein dominant cultures construct and distort those whom they subjugate; the West, and dominant cultures, can also be the other (8).

Dimitrova offers otherism as an analytical category that denotes a universal discourse on otherness that marginalizes and distorts in all dimensions of being human, including gender, sexuality, class, race, ethnicity, nation, and culture.

Scholars of religion will be interested in Dimitrova's brief discussion of the other in Hindu and Buddhist thought in her Introduction (3–5). Here she identifies ways in which Hindu philosophical concepts such as *brahman*, *ātman*, and *īśvara*; *dharma* as moral and religious duty; and Hindu categories of caste relations map onto and elaborate upon definitions of otherness as theorized by postmodernist critics and phenomenologists (for example, Edward Said, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault). As Dimitrova points out, the Buddhist contention of a nonself (*anattā* or *anātman*) calls into question philosophical premises of the relationality of a self to its other (5). The point in these comparisons is to refute Derrida's contention that processes of marginalization and exclusion have a Western character and to demonstrate that constructing otherness is not exclusive to Western thought (5).

The collection of essays is organized into three sections, each focused on a particular cultural context of otherness: the South Asian diaspora, languages and literatures, and gendered representations. Two essays on sexuality and transgression in commercial Indian cinema, written by Thomas Waugh and Sunny Singh, respectively, demonstrate fluidity and ambiguity in the construction of gendered identities. Of note to scholars of Hinduism are two essays drawn from ethnographic research conducted outside of South Asia. Rashi Rohatgi reveals how Indians in the global labor diaspora (Mauritius, Suriname, and Fiji) engage Hindu notions of the self and figures from Hindu "mythology" in their composition of poetic discourse on social belonging and the struggle against indentured labor (19–33). Diana Dimitrova's essay on the South Asian diaspora in the United States focuses on the Rādhāsoāmī community in Chicago, identifying how its members employ new media and technology to build a *satsaṅg* (spiritual society of the *sants*) and hybrid identities in their newly adopted country (34–44). Dimitrova finds it remarkable that the otherness of this community in an American context does not isolate or marginalize its members; as she explains, they are "some of the most successful pursuers of the American dream" (42).

Together, these essays extend the literature on representation in the study of South Asian religions, literatures, and cinema by inviting interdisciplinary comparison and by demonstrating a global problematic in contemporary representation. It is notable that the presence of Islam, and of Muslims, is thin in the collection as a whole, and neither is the focus of any individual essay. In terms of a contemporary, global discourse on the other, Islam as a religious tradition and Muslims as a community are routinely ideologically marginalized by multiple interests and power structures. It would strengthen the claim of this work to be a "pioneering project" (9) in the field of South Asian studies if this aspect of existing social discourse had received more attention.

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Timothy S. Dobe, *Hindu Christian Faqir: Modern Monks, Global Christianity, and Indian Sainthood*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. 384 pages.

Timothy S. Dobe's *Hindu Christian Faqir* engages in a timely discussion of global Christianity and Indian sainthood that stands at the intersection of religion, culture, and history. The volume invites readers to understand "*faqīr*," or Indian holy men, in the context of comparative religion, Orientalism, and the Christian mission emphasizing the importance of understanding contextual nuances. Employing historical and comparative methodologies, the study focuses on Rama Tirtha and Sundar Singh as individuals, discussing their religious visions, experiences, and biographies, and thereby contesting views of truth, translation, and textuality.

Divided into seven chapters, the study begins with an Introduction discussing the conceptual framework of understanding Indian sainthood. Dobe introduces his readers to the complexity of the term "sainthood" and argues that sainthood simultaneously appears as a self-assertion and in the apotheosis of each figure. Through his analysis of the concept of *faqīr*, he not only challenges the notions represented by the once-prominent Anglicized term "fakir" or "fukeer," but provides readers with an interpretive tool to understand the polyvalent possibilities of the term in the Colonial-Indian-Punjabi-Islamic-Hindu-Christian context. Such polyvalent possibilities become evident in the idioms shared by South Asian holy men, a commonality that locates them in the spaces in between and beyond singular religious traditions (21). Dobe raises a pertinent question, namely, might we similarly speak of "South Asian asceticism in terms of a performative ethics of the body?" (30), and suggests that sainthood as emergent in particular places and persons can provide an answer to this question, which he argues throughout this volume shedding light on the given complexity of the processes involved in shaping sainthood in India.

The remainder of the book is basically divided into three sections, each consisting of two chapters. The second chapter contextualizes ascetic sainthood within the "shared idioms" of Punjabi and Christian Protestant perceptions of the otherness of Sufi, Hindu, Sikh, and Christian ascetics as "saints" and "fakirs." Dobe argues that even as the power of colonial legal, cultural, and religious transformations were felt, indigenous texts played a significant role in shaping the lives of the saints, Rama Tirtha and Sundar Singh (75). The third chapter argues that during the colonial period the ascetic leaders were perceived as "yogi-faqirs" as they assumed new bodies and displayed the power of sainthood, which is recognized by the emperor (108). In Chapter Four, Dobe demonstrates how Rama Tirtha remapped the dichotomy between renouncer and householder; in doing so, Tirtha transcends Orientalist binaries by challenging racism in America. More importantly, Tirtha physically and rhetorically employs his ascetic robe to "deconstruct the raced body given him and to reconstruct himself as the embodiment of the 'world's most spiritual race'" (145–46). Chapter Five illustrates how Sundar Singh's robe plays a significant role in the twentieth-century world of Protestantism. In contrast to Rama Tirtha, Sundar Singh compared himself to Christ as for him "union with Christ meant not vague mystical or psychological states but physically replicating Jesus's own divine body" (149). Sundar Singh's life and message stress the relationship of

skin and other surfaces, particularly the visual imagination of the “total personality” (180).

The final two chapters examine Rama Tirtha’s and Sundar Singh’s autohagiographies. In Chapter Six, Dobe candidly points to writing as a performative process of self-fragmentation, as a reinscription of the self in ascetic-romantic landscapes, and as a strategy of self-assertion that remained central to ascetic subjectivity (183–84). Additionally, reflection on these texts provides a distinctive sense of Rama Tirtha’s Orientalist notion of Advaita by constructing a lineage affirming local understandings and narratives of holy men and women from Sufi and Bhakti traditions in the Indian context (222). Subsequently in Chapter Seven, he illustrates the subversiveness of Sundar Singh by contrasting his notion of the self with other selves and argues that charisma is a “force generated through norms, narratives, and models, a physical blessing” present in the material and in those who have renounced society to lead new forms of life (255–56). The power of the texts written by Rama Tirtha and Sundar Singh remain relevant in the way they facilitate “local sensibilities and imaginations” (256) and highlight colonial constructions of self, religion, and culture.

Through this detailed study of Indian sainthood in the South Asian context, the author successfully presents the semiotic flexibility of the terms “sainthood/faqir” and highlights the plurality of asceticism and the complexity and diversity in the self-portrayed construction of self in a socioreligious cultural context. What becomes apparent is the significant role Hinduism has played in shaping Christian and Hindu sainthood, drawing upon contextual socioreligious elements from Hindu, Sikh, and Islamic traditions in Punjab. More importantly, the author challenges existing theoretical frameworks that can be limiting in their construction as he employs contextual, historical, and comparative lenses to comprehend various representations of religion in the South Asian context, highlighting the importance of context-based theoretical frameworks. By focusing our attention on the various representations of “sainthood,” the volume elicits further dialogue and productive debate.

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Niels Gutschow and Axel Michaels, *Getting Married: Hindu and Buddhist Marriage Rituals Among the Newars of Bhaktapur and Patan, Nepal*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012. 417 pages, with a film on DVD.

In *Getting Married*, Niels Gutschow and Axel Michaels invite their readers to metaphorically attend eight Newar weddings between 1998 and 2011 and through vivid, meticulous details, images, and discussion present the intricacies and significance of what is arguably the most important life-cycle rite observed in South Asia: marriage. *Getting Married* is the final volume in a three-part study of life-cycle rituals specific to the Hindu and Buddhist Newars of Nepal. *Handling Death* (2005) focused on Newar death and ancestor rituals, while *Growing Up* (2008) examined initiation rites among Newar children. In documenting and analyzing

Newar marriage rituals in Nepal's ancient town of Bhaktapur, Gutschow and Michaels emphasize the importance of the specificity of their ethnographic work and of the rituals themselves, while working toward a "grammar" of Newar rituals (159) that puts Newar marriage rituals into conversation with other Newar life-cycle rituals and, furthermore, facilitates a larger discussion of rituals outside of the Newar, Nepali, and even South Asian ritual context.

The book is divided into five parts. In the Introduction, Gutschow and Michaels provide a concise overview of Nepal's Newars, focusing largely on caste hierarchies, which prove to be a necessarily dominant and compelling theme throughout the book given the central role caste continues to play in Newar society. The Newar caste system has been the subject of ample scholarly discussion, but *Getting Married*, through the discussion of specific case studies of marriage, presents a new vantage point to view the ways in which caste relations determine, solidify, and potentially jeopardize a family's caste status and how caste dynamics (between families, vendors, and the community) are navigated throughout the course of a wedding event. The authors also provide an overview of key similarities and differences between Smārta (or Brāhmaṇical or Sanskritic) marriage practices among Nepal's high-caste Parbatiyā (that is, Brāhmaṇa and Kṣyātrīa) Hindus and Newar Hindus (and Buddhists). Foremost among these distinctions is the fact that in Newar marriages, the *svayamvara* (self-choice, performed by the bride placing a flower garland around the husband's neck) is deemed the "central aspect of the wedding" (37). In contrast, in Brāhmaṇical Hindu weddings the pivotal elements are the *kanyādāna* (gift of a daughter) and *saptapadī* (walking seven steps), which are not typically included in Newar marriage ceremonies because they have already been performed during Newar girls' *ihi* (mock-marriage) ceremonies as prepubescent girls. While noting that Newar marriage rituals "incorporate the Great Tradition but do not neglect local customs or ritual elements that might even come from a folk or tribal background" (10), the authors stress the importance of understanding the rituals and texts that are their object of study as "authentic" rather than "corrupt" or "deviant" (2).

Part One, "Marriage Arrangements," presents a detailed overview of the various social, cultural, and economic circumstances, negotiations, and actors involved in arranging a Newar marriage as well as issues related to first and second marriages, divorce and separation, and love marriages. The chapter's main discussion focuses on the economics of the wedding and the central role of the band that plays at the ceremony, the latter of which is considered in a section authored by Christiane Brosius and Tessa Pariyar. In both contexts, the authors document historical changes, noting both traditional practices and modern innovations, and this makes for an invaluable and illuminating archive of the social and political economy and importance surrounding, for example, dowries and wedding processions. The discussion of wedding bands is particularly interesting, as most accounts of South Asian marriage focus primarily, if not exclusively, on the bride and kinship relations. Brosius and Pariyar convincingly argue that wedding bands, constituted historically by low-caste musicians, and their music, which ranges in style from traditional Indian to Nepali and Newar to "Bollywood," have the potential to serve as "a substantial 'contact zone' for research on ritual dynamics as a source and indicator of cultural-social dynamics" (75).



In Part Two, “The Rituals,” Gutschow and Michaels present an in-depth account of three Newar weddings: a Hindu Chatharīya (that is, high-caste) wedding, a Buddhist (Śākya) wedding, and a wedding among a subcaste of butchers. The authors notably demonstrate the lack of significant differences between Hindu and Buddhist marriage rituals and conclude that Newar “marriage practices are... independent of religious belief and ideology” (132). This is further evidenced by the Newar butcher caste marriage rituals, which are performed without a priest. In addition to the numerous photographs peppered throughout the chapter that vivify the discussion, an accompanying DVD illustrates the many aspects of these carefully choreographed events in a visual and audio case study of the aforementioned high-caste Hindu wedding rituals.

In Part Three, Gutschow and Michaels unpack and elaborate upon the key elements of the marriage rituals described in the previous sections. They explain, for example, the prominent use and exchange of betel nuts and explore the emotional state of the bride as she is transferred from one family to another (which affords a discussion of Nepali marriage songs, though it does not speak specifically of Newar marriage songs). The authors also argue for the “processuality” of Newar marriages, contending that a Newar marriage must be understood as “a process rather than as an event: it is an continuation of Ihi and confinement (Bāhrā tayegu) and only lasts perhaps until the day the first child is born. Only then has the daughter-in-law effectively arrived in her new environment” (143). This is a helpful articulation of the place and status of women in Newar society that sheds further light on the status of women in South Asia more broadly as well. Part Three concludes with the authors’ positing a “‘grammar’ of Newar rituals” that enables Newar rituals to be understood in their own right and not as a “deviation from mainstream or Parbatīyā Hindu...or Buddhist orthodoxy” (159).

Parts Four and Five, the final two sections of the book, are equal in length to the first three sections combined, which underscores their importance to the overall contribution of the book. Part Four presents in Roman transliteration and English translation several Hindu and Buddhist texts that provide the ritual authority for the rites described in Parts One to Three. The authors argue that the ritual texts “offer far more freedom than has generally been accepted,” in that the rituals described are “formalised” but are “by no means strict, stereotypical, and unchangeable” (174). Part Five opens with a list of *mantras* used in the rituals and offers an annotated listing of the central elements of Newar rituals and a glossary of key terms. Taken both individually and collectively, as with so many of the details presented throughout the book, these are invaluable resources for scholars of Newar culture and literature, and ritual studies scholars more generally.

*Getting Married* is a welcome addition to studies of Newar, Nepali, and South Asian culture and practice. While the high cost of the book and its narrow ethnographic focus may be an initial deterrent for some, graduate students and scholars interested in ritual, caste, the status of women, and different corners of South Asian society will find *Getting Married* well worth the read.

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Brian A. Hatcher, ed., *Hinduism in the Modern World*. New York: Routledge, 2016. 340 pages.

The volume under review, *Hinduism in the Modern World*, is part of Routledge's "Religions in the Modern World" series. It presents—just as the other published volumes on Buddhism and Islam in this series do—a survey of religion in the modern world to undergraduate readers, “by situating its expression within a larger framework of history, ethnography, and contemporary critical theory” (back cover). Part edited volume and part textbook, *Hinduism in the Modern World* comprises eighteen essays, each written by a different author, within five thematically oriented sections; the first and introductory section (“Hinduism Today: Three Perspectives”) presents three essays: on Hinduism in South India, Hinduism in North India, and Transnational Movements (written by Leela Prasad, Brian K. Pennington, and Hanna Kim, respectively). Each essay concludes with a textbook-like apparatus, including a brief summary of the essay, a set of discussion questions, and a short annotated list of suggested reading matter. The volume concludes with a four-page glossary of South Asian terms that the authors have used, highlighted, and briefly defined throughout their respective essays.

Brian A. Hatcher's Introduction (1–11) contains two short sections that introduce the two interlocking themes that the volume's constituent essays will discuss: “Complicating ‘Hinduism’ ” and “Colonialism and Modernity.” As an assertion of the many ways that these two themes—definitional and historical—are connected throughout this book specifically and throughout scholarship generally, Hatcher writes: “One thing readers will discover in this volume is that many of the essential things said to constitute Hinduism are in some respect the legacy or residue of colonial-era categories and classifications, whether these be traced to European scholarship, Christian missionaries, Hindu reformers, or Indian nationalists” (5). Though none of the contributors to this volume takes a hard-line approach asserting that “the West” constructed Hinduism, each author deals in their own way with both the colonial legacy of Hinduism and the standard historiographical model that connects “modern Hinduism” or “Indian modernity” with the arrival of the East India Company on the shores of India. As a result, and as Hatcher alerts his readers in his Introduction, the book repeatedly refers to those categories of individuals and organizations connected with the British Orientalist project in India.

Rather than addressing all of these many and various individuals and organizations in this review, I will provide here one thread that runs throughout the volume: the many different points of contact that undergraduate readers of this book will have with Rammohan Roy and the Brāhmo Samāj, mentioned in the Introduction and in five of the essays. In Amiya P. Sen's “Debates Within Colonial Hinduism,” the Brāhmo Samāj is examined as one of the first organizations that engaged in critical discussions over fundamental issues of Hindu society, issues that were inevitably placed “in the context of increased nationalist sentiment” (77): religious debates, valid sources of knowledge, new conceptions of God and religion, moral issues, and caste. (This list represents the five subsections of this essay.) In his essay “Colonial Devotional Paths,” Jason D. Fuller introduces the figure of Rammohan Roy as a way to consider how the Hindu *bhadralok* in nineteenth-

century Bengal wrestled with “Enlightenment-driven modernity” (81). While accounting for Rammohan Roy’s opposition to the veneration of images, Fuller also introduces the late nineteenth-century Vaiṣṇava revivalism of Bhaktivinoda Thākura, who imagined “a pure, ancient, and authoritative religious tradition that both provides meaning, context, and orientation for middle-class individuals while at the same time mirroring the sociocultural interests of their particular class position” (89). In “Modern Yoga and Tantra,” Lola Williamson provides a brief history of this topic in three of the essay’s four subsections; following a short section on definitions, she details the premodern and early roots of Yoga and Tantra, their adaptation in the eighteenth through to the early twentieth century, and finally “Postmodern/Contemporary Yoga and Tantra.” Williamson introduces the Brāhmo Samāj in the second of her three historical sections as a response to the question: “How is it that something once viewed in India as potentially anti-social has come to be embraced so wholeheartedly in the present day?” (185). Part of the answer lies in the figure of Svāmī Vivekānanda (an early member of the Brāhmo Samāj who is also frequently referred to throughout this volume) who, being influenced by Western science and responding to the British myth of Indian effeminacy, called for “a return to Indian manliness” via the postural *yoga* that comprises much of its contemporary form (187).

Karline McLain’s essay, “Visual and Media Culture,” details the use and reception of images of Shirdī Sāī Bābā and mentions towards the end the opposition of early Hindu reformers such as Rammohan Roy to the worship of “idols” and their support of the veneration of the formless (*nirguṇa*) divine (239). This reference to Rammohan Roy and the Brāhmo Samāj provides readers with an implicit method for approaching this entire volume. McLain’s essay easily connects to Timothy S. Dobe’s “Modern Monks and Global Hinduism,” which describes the powerful use of the visual (*darśan*) by the early twentieth-century figures of Sundar Singh and Rama Tirtha. Dobe shows how their use of the photograph, the global lecture circuit, and the monastic robes they donned “became a part of the expansive and creative repertoire of the modern monk...[which] make[s] it clear that their own religious vision and ascetic practice inspired protest against colonial domination” (167, 172). Meena Khandelwal picks up on this theme in her essay, “Renunciation and Domesticity,” as she details how reformers such as Rammohan Roy navigated this classical South Asian conflict and agreed “that ascetic masculinity was an important cultural resource for cultivating physical and moral strength and for furthering the cause of anticolonial nationalism” (206).

The fact that this volume is not restricted to any one specific movement, organization, or theme means that it can be used in any number of ways in the classroom. One may refer to it with regard to the place of an international organization such as ISKCON in Hindu diasporic communities (essays by Hanna H. Kim, Anantanand Rambachan and Usha Shukla, Maya Warriar, and Prayala Kanungo); the role of Hindu nationalism (*hindutva*) throughout the Hindu world (essays by Brian K. Pennington, Prema Kurien, Donald R. Davis and Timothy

Lubin, and Ruth Vanita); and changing Hindu practices, sentiments, and social practices (Leela Prasad, Frederick M. Smith, Rupa Viswanath, and Eliza Kent).

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John Stratton Hawley, *A Storm of Songs: India and the Idea of the Bhakti Movement*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015. 454 pages.

Considering the amount that has been written on the topic of *bhakti* in South Asia, John Stratton Hawley's 400-plus page tome on the ontological and cultural history of *bhakti*-as-devotion and the practical role of *kīrtan* and *mantra* in relation to *bhakti* may not initially strike the reader as covering entirely new ground. In this analysis of the Bhakti tradition, however, the Herculean (t)ask behind Hawley's wide-ranging inclusion of ideas, people, and concepts is only achieved with the writer's apparent ease of thought and flow of writing style. Indeed, such a large and thoroughly researched volume is unusual in the clime of the almost-to-disappear magnum codex. The scope and erudition with which Hawley expounds upon the ontological and cultural history of *bhakti*-as-devotion and the practical role of *kīrtan* and *mantra* in relation to *bhakti* throughout his monograph should be attractive not only for scholars of Hindu Studies searching for greater depths in the interpretation of *bhakti*, but also for those seeking increased exposure to the practice of *bhakti* in the academic and intellectual realm. I would hope Hawley would wish for his work to be read and reflected on by both scholars of the mind and stalwart zealots of the heart.

I do not wish to retrace Hawley's literary mandates or reflect too much on his approach to the Bhakti tradition. However, I do wish to contextualize his vernacular and outsider's take on *bhakti* and discuss how its adherents across time and space have idealized and actualized their practice in the various temple traditions across the southern and northern reaches of the Indian subcontinent. In so doing, the basis of this review is founded less in the content of Hawley's effort and more in the conceptual and worldly realization of *bhakti*-as-*mantra* and devotion-as-sonic thought. As Hawley's narrative leads us, "this great monsoon of an idea [*bhakti*] keeps sending out squalls and downpours—a storm of songs to the last" (12).

*A Storm of Songs* is a melding of contradictions, as classical Sanskrit *mantras* and Prakrit folk song traditions as distinct indigenous modernities meet Mughal and British colonial history and *rasika* poets' hagiographies: "The bhakti archive of India—its corpus of vernacular religious songs ready to be sung at any moment—provides the country with a shared richness that has no peer.... They [*bhakti* songs] utter humor and protest, suffering and satisfaction; they bring to mind beloved realms of story; they are addressed to many gods, to one god, or none" (13). *Bhakti* poets—India's poet-saints, *kavi sant*—are political, even politician-like, in their participation in and consolidation of the linguistic- and commentary-focused history created from medieval to modern India. From Srirangam in the south through Braj to the far north of Kashmir, with excursions to Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Bengal to boot, Hawley creates and releases the pull on his subjects through a tensility of expression and story.

His narrative reveals not only the variances that represent an integral component of the *bhakti* movement, but also blatant contradictions: from colonial to colonizer, the superordinate Sanskrit posed against subordinate Prakrit, caste-focused Brāhmaṇas among the Śūdra's plight, the artist-poet challenging relationships with his ruler and lord, and original texts abutted against their translations. Despite arguments regarding how the northern *bhakti* approach attempts to ground its own institutions and practices in a southern past believed to be older and somehow staunchly authentic, Hawley propounds a political, social, and environmental historiography of an inner theoretical logic of *bhakti* drawing on a vast canon of literature coupled with a movement through the modern and even late modern emotional landscape of Indian thought. From Vaiṣṇavas to Advaitas, from Caitanya to Rabindranath Tagore, and from Hindu to Muslim, a reading (and reviewing) of Hawley's work is as much a pilgrimage of ideas as it is a "Transit of Bhakti" the title of Chapter Two.

The core of the book works its way from presenting multiple takes on *bhakti* from the "Four Sampradāys" to what Hawley eloquently dubs "the Commonwealth of Love" to what must be crucial in any developed treatise on *bhakti*, Chapter Four, "The View from Brindavan." As both a scholar and a regular visitor to the pilgrimage center, Hawley weaves a chronicling-as-*tīrtha yātrā par excellence* through Mughal times to the present. Through his expert choice of literature and productive muddying of north-south and Gauḍīya-other variances of Kṛṣṇa-*bhakti* worship, Hawley takes the reader on not only a peripatetic jaunt from Govardhan to Śrīnāthjī and back to the center, but he also summons the reader to experience a powerful sense of cerebral fervor and contradiction that hone in on Vrindavan, that heart of Vraj and that environmental crux of the geography of *bhakti*.

Hawley's concluding Chapter Seven, "What Should the Bhakti Movement Be?" represents a short thesis about the state of live and popular performance in modern *bhakti*, the effect of Ayodhya, and the role of the Bharatiya Janata Party. While apparently at odds with more traditional Kabīr-, Tulsīdās-, and Jayadev-inspired treatments so well-known within schools of classical *bhakti*, as Hawley's book shines it might leave the more conservative reader behind, its open-mindedness possibly being both a help and a hindrance. It is here I offer another minor quibble: by infusing his writing with a passion rarely witnessed in Hindu Studies and by covering such a gamut of themes and intentions, Hawley risks positioning himself on the periphery of more orthodox research concerns and theory within the study of *bhakti*. Whether the topics of "south moves north" and statements about the complex multiple origins of the movement would appeal to some of the more traditional writers who espouse a more conservative method to scrutinize *bhakti* is unclear. For example, Hawley may have lost some such readers when he delves into the hyperpolitical nature of modern Indian politics and its connection to devotion. Still, making known the intimate and hitherto unexplored intricacies of any field of knowledge is a noble task. Bring on such wide-ranging analytical attainment and let it into the hearts and minds of any scholar and devotee who may wish upon and encounter the vastness of Hawley's opus.

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Suvira Jaiswal, *The Making of Brahmanic Hegemony: Studies in Caste, Gender and Vaiṣṇava Theology*. New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2016. 254 pages.

In this provocative and carefully documented collection of essays, some previously published, social historian Suvira Jaiswal expands on her earlier work, including *The Origin and Development of Vaiṣṇavism* (1967) and *Caste: Origin, Function and Dimensions of Change* (1998). Though the essays treat different topics, Jaiswal states at the outset that together they have a “thematic unity as they attempt to delineate the historical circumstances in which certain societal and theological structures develop, leading to a hegemony of brahmanic ideology” (ix). In particular, she aims to examine the “creation of Brahmanical hegemony through the institutions of caste, gender and religious ideology” (2). By “Brahmanical” she refers not only to learned Brāhmaṇas who composed authoritative works of *śāstra* and *kāvya*, for example, but rather to an elite community of “priests and rulers who made use of religious symbols in their class interests” (2). Throughout history, according to Jaiswal, social, political, economic and religious power are thus intertwined by design, and her aim is to reveal the “agency” (2) of the elite classes behind the social hierarchy and the production of religious literature and ritual that legitimate it. Because “hegemony implies domination” over time, Jaiswal takes a long view of history in this collection, beginning in the ancient period with the *Ṛg Veda* and considering a variety of textual, historical, and archaeological evidence through the late medieval Purāṇas. Studying the epics and Purāṇas is critical, for she contends that “myths reveal the stories of domination and resistance if we give attention to the processes of their production” (5). Taking this methodological approach, Jaiswal analyzes the development of Hinduism as a socioreligious system that benefits some and oppresses others throughout history.

The collection is divided into three parts. Part One consists of three chapters that together explore the origin and functions of the caste system, with analyses of power and ethnicity (Chapter One) and gender (Chapter Two), and including an appendix on the *Ṛg Veda*. Jaiswal argues that caste and *varṇadharmā* were tools deployed by the Brāhmaṇical elite to naturalize hierarchy, and thus ensure their perpetual power and domination. Though the early *varṇa* system was not based on race or ethnicity (12–13) and was functional and not genealogical in the *Ṛg Veda* (36), the emerging practice of endogamy allowed for the endurance of caste over time, endogamy being a “gendered device” that enabled the “upper *varṇas* to perpetuate and monopolize their class privileges on a hereditary basis” (22). *Ṛg Veda* 10.90, the Puruṣasūkta, justified this new social order (36–37), and the Upaniṣads provided further rationale with the doctrines of *karma* and rebirth in *saṃsāra*, making “birth in the higher *varṇas*...the fruit of meritorious acts performed in the previous life” (46–47). These now popular doctrines originated among the elite (47), who invented such metaphysics in order to serve their own material interests precisely by justifying inequity on the basis of birth and previous *karma*: the origin of inequity (and various forms of earthly suffering, therefore) are thus deemed personal, as philosophy masks the economic and political motivations underlying the formation of socioreligious hierarchies. For Jaiswal as a Marxist historian, moreover, elaborating in Chapter Three on the work of R. S. Sharma, the roots of socioreligious stratification are

material, grounded in production and the control of production, with the “śūdra varṇa...[coming] into existence as a class of servile labor” (73). The development of Hinduism is therefore read as a history of calculated exploitation.

Part Two consists of two chapters in which Jaiswal examines gender and the development of patriarchy in early Brāhmaṇism (Chapter Four), including the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya (Chapter Five). Here Jaiswal underscores the “linkage between the creation of patriarchy and a stratified inegalitarian society” (97), and she writes that by the seventh century BCE “patriarchy was well-established and women reduced to objects serving the interests of one lineage or the other” (99). Though in the early Vedic period women enjoyed relative autonomy, including some freedom to choose their spouses and control their sexuality (97), such freedom disappeared because the “control of female sexuality and its subordination was an essential prerequisite for restricting power and privileges to hereditary classes,” resulting finally in the practice of endogamy (116). Taking issue with Louis Dumont, she argues that the “entire edifice of caste” rests “upon the patriarchal control of gender which ensured the marking out and continuance of sharp boundaries between the exploited and exploiting classes in a hierarchical manner” (116–17). Women and girls (*kanyā*) are thus likened to objects and treated as property, exchanged between men averse to *varṇasaṃkara* (miscegenation), and thereby rendered subordinate and dependent (117–19). Indeed, Jaiswal could emphasize such *dependence* even more, as the patriarchal hegemony functions precisely by making women utterly dependent on men—in their service and unable to live without them—and this radical dependence is conceptualized as salvific in the ideologies of *pativrata* that inform the later Bhakti traditions, as Jaiswal mentions only briefly (119). While the *Arthaśāstra* portrays women in the public sphere “as a significant part of the labour force” (126–27), such women still serve men and are protected only insofar as their services are valued within the realms of hegemonic masculinity, as the women’s insecurity and poverty in old age prove (130)—demonstrating once again that even “independent” women are radically dependent on men in this economy of pleasure and power.

In Part Three Jaiswal focuses on Vaiṣṇava *avatāras*: Rāma (Chapter Six), Naraśiṃha (Chapter Seven), and Hayagrīva (Chapter Eight). She argues that the *avatāra* doctrine as formulated in *Bhagavad Gītā* 4.7–8 “provided Brahmanism with an extremely useful device for establishing its cultural hegemony” by privileging *varṇāśramadharmā* and legitimating the “destruction of evil-doers” who resist it (137). She says that the Purāṇas further advance this view and were “created as instruments of acculturation and dissemination of the Brahmanic ideology” by Brāhmaṇas who encountered aboriginal populations, assimilated them into the social hierarchy as Śūdras, and subordinated their deities by incorporating them into the Vaiṣṇava pantheon (137–40). With respect to Rāma, although the plurality of the early tradition betrays the Hindu Right’s agenda to present the *Rāmāyaṇa* story monolithically (148–52), Jaiswal reads the “cult history” of Rāma, beginning in the ninth century in South India, as a story of Brāhmaṇical ideology propagated through *bhakti*, sometimes in sharp opposition to Jainism and Buddhism (156–60). Rāma thus becomes the heroic king who protects *varṇāśramadharmā* and sanctions householder life, thus endorsing the patriarchal family and the subordination of

women and Śūdras (170–72). With respect to Narasiṃha, Jaiswal discusses two varieties of the myth—one involving a mountain cave and the other a pillar—and she argues that the “story of Narasiṃha’s emergence from a pillar reflects the supersession of an aboriginal worship of a pillar deity by Vaiṣṇavism through the cult of Narasiṃha.” She cites the Narasiṃha temple at Simhachalam, north of Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh, as evidence (186). With respect to Hayagrīva, the horse-headed hybrid, she notes that this figure has both divine and demoniacal forms in the epics and Purāṇas, and she argues that the “fierce aspect of Hayagrīva has to be traced to the absorption of an aboriginal deity of the Maṇikūṭa region in the personality of this incarnation of Viṣṇu...through the mediation of Buddhism” (198). With respect to the Vaiṣṇava *avatāras* more generally, she notes that the theriomorphic forms facilitated the assimilation of tribal cults into Brāhmaṇical Hinduism, as tribal populations in the Deccan, Orissa, and Assam were incorporated into the Brāhmaṇical social structure (200).

Although the volume lacks a separate conclusion, Jaiswal emphasizes at the end of Chapter Eight that “traces of social tensions and sectarian conflicts” are found in myths and rituals alike in various regional cults. She admits that a “frustrating lack of contextual details” obscures the “material background of such conflicts” but says the “fact of conflicts can be hardly denied” (201). Her point is not simply historiographical, but explicitly political, as she positions her work in opposition to studies of Indian history that deny social and religious conflict (201) in order to popularize the myth of a “golden age” (203), a point she also makes very strongly in her Introduction. Her work is thus an invitation for scholars of religion to explore such conflicts in order to expose the elite Brāhmaṇical agendas underlying the development of Hinduism and the social structure in India.

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Vernon Katz and Thomas Egenes, trans., *The Upanishads: A New Translation*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2015. 203 pages.

What makes this book interesting is the way a careful reader can detect and trace, in many of the comments and translation choices of Vernon Katz and Thomas Egenes, a particular view of what the early Upaniṣads represent. For Katz that view can be traced in part to his study of the Upaniṣads at Oxford with Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, who “saw it as his mission to bring the knowledge of Indian philosophy to the outside world” (viii). Other cues on and between the covers of the book reinforce the notion that in these texts we are dealing with “philosophy,” and perhaps even “science.” Egenes introduces the work (1–28) with references to noted philosophers and physicists (4–6) and to Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who “has taken the ancient wisdom of the Upanishads and integrated it into a complete science of consciousness” (25).

Both translators place their work in an intellectual lineage that extends through their mutual teacher Maharishi Mahesh Yogi back to the ancient seers and sages.



This can be seen most clearly in the Preface by Katz (vii–ix), the aforementioned Introduction by Egenes, and the endnotes (175–94). A passage in *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 3.6 furnishes an example of how the two translators draw on aspects of this lineage. Katz and Egenes translate the passage: “This is the wisdom of Bhṛigu, son of Varuṇa. It is found in the transcendental field” (130). A more literal translation of the latter part of the text (*parame vyoman pratiṣṭhitā*) would be “established in the highest heaven,” which is the translation of both Robert Ernest Hume (London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1921, p.291) and Radhakrishnan (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953, p.557). Katz and Egenes cannot agree that the archaic and well-known phrase *parame vyoman* means “in the highest heaven”; instead the two translators see in the text a reference to the “transcendental field”—a favorite idea and locution of their teacher, the Maharishi. No less questionable is their translation “it is found” for *pratiṣṭhitā* (a well-known term often translated as “established” and taken to mean “standing firm,” and the like). Such choices suggest that Katz and Egenes are willing to sacrifice accurate translation in order to make the text more appealing, and even encouraging, to modern seekers who might also find wisdom and transcendence.

In accord with its popular flavor, the book has neither a bibliography nor an index. One has to search the endnotes for references, and in doing so one is surprised to learn that Katz and Egenes did not consult Patrick Olivelle’s landmark dual-language edition of the Upaniṣads (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), with all its notes on textually problematic passages and Sanskrit variants. Katz and Egenes would rather not deal with such thorny details, and the subject as a whole is swept under the rug with a comment meant to reassure: “Slight variations in wording are found, as they have been passed down in an oral tradition for thousands of years” (3). Nor do the two translators make clear which editions of Sanskrit texts they worked from, though this is something that ought to interest readers. Take verse 3 of the *Īśā Upaniṣad*, for example. Katz and Egenes translate the text as: “Sunless are those worlds called” (30). This reviewer is under the impression that for the first word of the verse many editions of the text employ *asuryā* (“pertaining to the anti-gods” or “demonic”) and not *asūryā* (“sunless”). How did the two translators arrive at their translation?

Katz and Egenes are talented translators who have put their skills to use in the service of a cause. They and their publisher apparently believe and would like readers to believe that in some sense their book represents philosophy, and perhaps a kind of science, but many readers will come away unconvinced. The careful reader will note how the translation choices of Katz and Egenes often downplay typically religious or cultic themes in the early Upaniṣads, but this does not make their translation philosophical or scientific. The careful reader will also note how Katz and Egenes refer to and privilege experience (viii, ix, 9, 10, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 25, 26, 28, 174, 175n1, 184n44, 191n27, 191n36), and how their book as a whole conveys the impression that the Upaniṣads are expressions of a special kind of experience (to which we can and should aspire). One does not turn to this book for a better understanding of the early Upaniṣads in their original context, but it makes a fine example of how ancient teachings can be presented in modern

English to suit the tastes, interests, or expectations of people living in the modern world.

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Jeffrey S. Lidke, *The Goddess Within and Beyond the Three Cities: Śākta Tantra and the Paradox of Power in Nepāla-Manḍala*. New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 2017, 404 pages.

This volume is an exceptional contribution to the scholarship on Hindu religious traditions, as it combines decades of intriguing ethnographic study with superb archival, manuscript, and translation work. Jeffrey S. Lidke is that rare scholar who, by virtue of his training and his choice of fieldwork, has produced truly original research on the Śākta Tantric Hindu traditions of Nepal. In this clearly written and thoroughly documented book, Lidke makes his work accessible to the nonspecialist while providing specialists with an entirely new viewpoint of how Śākta Tantra developed in Nepal. Most prior scholarship on Hindu Tantra has focused on the larger area of India, but Lidke shows us how the diverse and distinctive traditions of Tantra and Yoga were brought to Nepal and eventually developed into local variations. Over the centuries, especially under royal patronage, these esoteric mystical and ritual systems became woven into Nepali society, culture, religion, and even topography. This work serves not only as a useful introduction to Hindu Tantra in general, but also to the syncretistic religions of Nepal, which blended Hinduism, Buddhism, and the indigenous shamanistic traditions of the Himalayan region. As such, this book deserves a place in many libraries and on the shelves of historians of religions, anthropologists, students of Yoga and Tantra, and anyone interested in Asian studies.

The first portion of the book consists of four chapters and a conclusion—all deftly connected using the narrative device of Lidke walking through neighborhoods in the Kathmandu Valley in conversation with a wise Nepali *paṇḍit*. In the first chapter he deals with the primacy of the goddess Tripurasundarī (“goddess of the three cities”) and shows how she is embodied not only in figural images, but also in the key geometric design of the Śrī Yantra, in temple designs, and even in the imagined layout of the entire Kathmandu Valley. In doing this, Lidke also introduces the reader to the major scholarship on Hinduism and Nepal and to central concepts in the study of religion. Throughout the chapter, Lidke also points out the shortcomings of most prior scholarship on Nepal and presents his own original research as a means to fill this void. The second chapter takes us further into the complex and fascinating realm of Hindu Tantra, including the history of ritual sexual intercourse, the subtle physiology of the “yogic body” of the *cakras*, and important scholarly debates about theories, textuality, and ethnography. It thus provides the reader with a detailed yet concise overview of major issues in the modern study of world religion. Chapter Three explores the many dimensions of the basic concept of the sacred circular design known as a *manḍala*, which Lidke shows

to be present as a type of “cosmic blueprint” underneath the three cities of the Kathmandu Valley (Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Patan). For Nepali Hindus, this mystical circle also lies within the human body, the human mind, and even in the larger universe. By placing the goddess at the center of this cosmic circle and by the king placing himself there too as her servant, the Nepali system allows for a blending of the geographical, the sociopolitical, and the divine realms. By incorporating anecdotes and events from his many years of fieldwork and ethnography in Nepal, Lidke clarifies and illustrates such mystical practices through concrete encounters with kings, priests, shamans, musicians, and other characters. The final chapter brings us into the complexities of the “living presence” of the goddess as a *kumārī*, a premenstrual virgin who is worshiped as the goddess and who spends years involved in elaborate temple practices and royal rituals. Lidke shows the many facets of her role in the spiritual and sociopolitical dynamics of Nepal and suggests, with some sense of poignancy, how the recent ascent of Maoist rule in Nepal may well bring about the demise of this sacred tradition.

The later portions of the volume consist of Lidke’s translations of key chapters of a pivotal Sanskrit text of the goddess traditions, the *Nityāṣoḍaśikārṇava* (“Ocean of the Sixteen-fold Eternal Goddess”), dating perhaps to the eighth century CE, as well as some later commentaries on this text. The translations are clear and help to illustrate the richness and duration of the Nepali goddess traditions. Lidke also includes a trove of useful scholarly appendices, including archival lists of various ritual manuals in Nepali collections and relevant historical inscriptions from temples and other locations. All of these amply support the first portion of the volume and will prove invaluable to specialists.

In conclusion, this is truly a masterpiece of scholarship. Lidke has devoted decades of his life to learning the languages and traditions of Nepali Hinduism, has refined his scholarly methodologies, and then combined them all with skill and grace. I strongly recommend this volume for all collections dealing with the study of religion, gender, and with Hindu Studies. It is suitable for upper-division undergraduates, graduate students, and scholars of the history of religions, anthropology, and South Asian studies.

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Patrick Olivelle, trans. and ed., *A Dharma Reader: Classical Indian Law*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017. 424 pages.

Scholars of ancient India wait in eager anticipation for the release of books by Patrick Olivelle, and his latest publication, *A Dharma Reader*, does not disappoint. Indeed, in many ways this book is a capstone to Olivelle’s long career studying the foundational texts of Hindu law. It is in some ways a summary of his lifetime of scholarship, but it is also an innovative work in itself, made possible by Olivelle’s close familiarity with the texts of the Dharmasāstra tradition and introducing new

insights based on a holistic study of that tradition that few scholars other than Olivelle are able to deliver.

Like most of Olivelle's monographs, *A Dharma Reader* is mostly a translation of Sanskrit texts into English, with a short Introduction that by itself represents a significant scholarly contribution. Unlike most of Olivelle's books, however, but in keeping with the new series "Historical Sourcebooks in Classical Indian Thought" begun by Sheldon Pollock with his 2016 publication, *A Rasa Reader: Classical Indian Aesthetics*, this book is not a translation of a complete text or texts; it is, rather, an anthology of short excerpts from a variety of texts in the Dharmaśāstra tradition (as well as the *Arthaśāstra*) spanning a millennium and a half. The large number of texts involved necessitates a fairly narrow focus in what he can include from each text, and Olivelle chooses to focus, quite fruitfully, in my opinion, on two very specific topics: the epistemology of law and legal procedure. The theoretical background for this choice is taken from H. L. A. Hart's *The Concept of Law* (Oxford University Press, 2012 [1961]), which divides laws into two types (2–3). Primary laws are ordinary laws that dictate what one can or cannot do; these laws, which constitute the majority of laws in Dharmaśāstra as in any legal tradition, Olivelle excludes completely from his anthology. Secondary laws, on the other hand, are reflexive laws, laws that regulate the primary laws themselves. Olivelle divides his anthology into two parts, each corresponding to a particular type of "secondary law" as defined by Hart. The first part presents excerpts from Dharmaśāstra texts that can be considered "rules of recognition," that is, dealing with the epistemology of law; the second part consists of excerpts that can be considered "rules of adjudication," dealing with court procedure. Each part is arranged chronologically, with texts divided roughly by Olivelle into three phases: original treatises on *dharma*, beginning with the *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* and continuing into the verse Dharmaśāstras (Manu et al.); commentaries on the original treatises, which began in the second half of the first millennium CE; and finally the less innovative legal digests called *nibandhas* that were written from the twelfth century onward.

The wealth of texts translated in this collection, some of which have never been translated before, makes this book an invaluable contribution to the study of Hinduism. If there were to be any criticism of Olivelle's work, it would relate to the main title, *A Dharma Reader*, which by itself is a misnomer. The scope of this book is in no way analogous to that of Alf Hiltebeitel's most recent opus, *Dharma*, which truly grapples with the full history and semantic range of the category *dharma* in ancient India. Far more descriptive is the subtitle *Classical Indian Law*, since the operative focus in this book is not *dharma* writ large, but rather the very specific sense of "law" that it came to acquire in the Dharmaśāstra tradition. Olivelle is of course aware of the "prehistory" of the category *dharma* found in the Vedas as well as the indispensable role played by Buddhism and Aśoka in making *dharma* one of the most important categories in Indian discourse (8–13), but he does not include Vedic, Buddhist, or epigraphic texts in the anthology or really grapple in any extensive way with the broader context for the peculiar use of the category *dharma* to refer to juridical law in the Dharmaśāstra tradition. The one (very welcome) exception is the *Arthaśāstra*, which Olivelle includes in his study as representing, he

argues convincingly, an alternative and abortive tradition of law not rooted in the category *dharma* that was absorbed into the Dharmaśāstra tradition.

This segregation of the “Brāhmaṇical” tradition from corresponding and contemporaneous movements in Buddhist, Jaina, and other forms of “non-Brāhmaṇical” thought is perhaps a weakness of Olivelle’s work in general but certainly understandable given the need for specialization, and Olivelle has in any case participated in a broader scholarly discourse that has sought to contextualize the “Brāhmaṇical” and “non-Brāhmaṇical” in terms of one another in ancient India. But even in its “Brāhmaṇical” focus, this book, like Olivelle’s work in general, performs an invaluable service in *historicizing* the Brāhmaṇical tradition. With this book in hand, the reader can easily trace the way in which the Brāhmaṇical tradition changed and innovated over time, rather than falling prey to the Brāhmaṇical self-representation as a timeless and eternal tradition.

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Sanjay Palshikar, *Evil and the Philosophy of Retribution: Modern Commentaries on the Bhagavadgītā*. New Delhi: Routledge, 2014. 192 pages.

This is a suggestive and thought-provoking book on the *Bhagavad Gītā* in the context of modernity, which seeks to examine how “the pre-modern questions about spiritual praxis become, through a change in the meaning of some of the central concepts, political questions in the modern commentaries” (viii), with a special interest in “the specific question whether exceptional figures dealing with exceptional situations are absolved of ‘universal norms’ of morality” (vii). The three modern commentators taken into account by the author are Aurobindo Ghose (1872–1950), Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856–1920), and Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869–1948).

The work highlights a central point which is often overlooked, namely that despite the political, even martial, context of the *Bhagavad Gītā* the Hindu religious tradition stubbornly refused to treat the *Bhagavad Gītā* as having anything to do with politics and insisted on treating it as a spiritual text, as is evident from the colophons of its various chapters, which repeatedly refer to it as a text of *brahma-vidyā and yoga-śāstra*. It is during the latter part of the modern period, that is, after the so-called Mutiny of 1857, that it came to be invoked as a text preaching primarily Karma Yoga, which then enabled it to be harnessed to the movement to do away with foreign rule, thus providing it with a political context. This provides the new context for the old question of whether a figure can be absolved of universal norms, especially the one advocating nonviolence. Interestingly, the answers which follow from the positions of the three commentators are reasonably clear in practical terms but arguably become ambiguous when they try to justify them for the “exceptional person” in spiritual terms; for both Aurobindo and Tilak would seem to justify a departure from commitment to nonviolence in certain situations, though Gandhi would perhaps insist on it for the ordinary person at the pragmatic level.

However, the author demonstrates that once one presses this point in relation to the God-oriented person (rather than the ordinary person) in the context of the commentaries the situation becomes problematic. Aurobindo provides for overcoming resistance through violence in his spiritual vision of things, but if we further ask, “Did Aurobindo see this possibility as central to his vision? It is not easy to answer this question” (91). Similarly, the author notes that when “Tilak argues that even...God remains active, though He has nothing to gain from His actions. [And also asks] how can then human beings be exempted from the obligation to act, to perform their status-specific duties?,” then two distinct assumptions are conflated: God cannot be said to have *varṇāśrama* status; nor the liberated person, who according to Tilak, is almost like God. “So neither can be expected to perform those specific duties; their action, belonging to a different paradigm, becomes unpredictable” (128). Gandhi admits that “through diligent dedication of acts to God initially, and through a life lived ascetically, the devotee will one day become part of the Divine; or...he will get so close to God that the distance between them will become for all practical purposes negligible. Gandhi admits this possibility...[but] also refuses to admit its practical implications” (165–66).

The book teems with interesting data, ideas, questions, and proffered answers. The author’s erudition is evident throughout. The volume would make for rewarding reading for anyone interested in these individual thinkers in the *Bhagavad Gītā* or in ethics.

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Sheldon Pollock, trans. and ed., *A Rasa Reader: Classical Indian Aesthetics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016. 468 pages.

The strength of Sheldon Pollock’s *A Rasa Reader: Classical Indian Aesthetics* is how it allows the reader to enter into the vast historical landscape of *rasa* and travel through approximately 1500 years of “intense conversation about the emotional world of the story and its complex relationships to the world of the audience” (1). The true value of this reference book is how it reflects, essentially through dialogue, the development of the aesthetic idea of the *rasa* “thought-world.” This is accomplished across the six chapters by creating temporal and thematic distinctions. The volume is encyclopedic in its breadth and includes previously untranslated texts.

This chronological sequence and thematic grouping allows the reader to savor the overall themes in palatable portions. The Introduction is a treatise in and of itself on the intellectual history of *rasa* that summarizes the historical development of one of “India’s most luminous contributions to humanistic knowledge” (xi). Each chapter begins with a thorough overview of the central concerns of the particular period, how the chapter relates to the overall development of the *rasa* concept, who the main theorists were, and how their thoughts interrelate. The information about the theorists’ lives in these sections is as interesting as what they have to say about *rasa*.

Chapter One introduces the foundational text, namely, Bharata's *Treatise on Drama* (about 300). It then discusses the Early Theorists (650–1025) and their ideas of “manifestation.” Chapter Two focuses on the Great Synthesis of Bhoja (1025–1055) and the idea that *rasa* underlies all multiplicity. Chapter Three, titled “An Aesthetics Revolution” (900–1000), discusses the revolutionary ideas of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka regarding the location of *rasa* being found “in the reader” instead of “in the text.” In the later part of the chapter, Pollock elaborates upon the idea of *rasa* “in the reader,” highlighting relevant passages from Dhanañjaya's *Ten Dramatic Forms*, Dhanika's *Observations*, Bahurūpa Mīśra's *The Lamp*, and Bhaṭṭa Narasiṃha's *Brief Annotation*. Beginning with a critique of imitation and Bhaṭṭa Tota's *Literary Investigation*, Chapter Four highlights the contribution of Abhinavagupta and his school (1000–1200), focusing on Abhinavagupta's *The New Dramatic Art* and Mammaṭa's *Light on Poetry*. This chapter covers approximately five hundred years of theoretical insights up to Paramānanda Cakravartin, ending with Ruyyaka's *Short Explanation of Light*. Chapter Five continues the theoretical developments beyond Kashmir (1200–1400). Beginning with a discussion of the location of *rasa* and whether it is always pleasurable, including a philosophical précis of the *rasa* problematic from Viśvanātha's *Mirror of Literary Art* and Ānantadāsa's *The Eye*, the chapter concludes with a rethinking of a “Semblance of Rasa” with a brief commentary on Śiṅgabhūpāla's *The Moon on the Rasa Ocean*.

The final, sixth chapter explores the period 1200–1650. Titled “Rasa in the Early Modern World” it begins with Arjunavarmadeva's *Elixir for the Rasika*, moves through Bhānudatta's *River of Rasa* and Hemādri's *Lamp for Transcendence*, devotes a significant portion to the contributions of Jīva and Rūpa Goswāmin, and ends with the Vedānticizing of *rasa*. The book's Introduction (44) indicates that in Chapter Six there will be a comprehensive discussion regarding how the secular origins of the *rasa* concept were inverted and used by Vaiṣṇavite theologians and how *rasa* became almost the sole domain of religious poetry. However, this discussion is in fact brief, regardless of the fact that the aesthetic devotionalism of the late premodern period is a dominant part of current Hindu religious practices.

Having contextualized each time period, the latter parts of each chapter consist of a dialogue between the main scholars. This style of editing texts of different authors together into a flowing, singular dialogue is certainly one of the strengths of this publication. The following example demonstrates one such dialogue between Dhanañjaya (D), Dhanika (Dh), Bahurūpa Mīśra (BM), and Bhaṭṭa Narasiṃha (BN) on the topic of “actualization” and the location of *rasa*:

(Dh) Then why are they taken up at all? To this the author now speaks:

(BN) That is, if no attention is paid to the particularized form of Sita and the like, then why should they be “taken up” in those specific forms?

(D) (4.41cd–42ab) When children play with clay elephants, it is their own stable emotion (determination or whatever it might be) that they thereby savor. This is just what the readers do with Arjuna and the rest.

(BM) When children are playing with clay elephants, no actual elephant exists... (176).

While this dialogue creates a lucid flow and exchange of ideas, the unavoidable typesetting (including brackets and numerals) used to distinguish notes and original passages is at times confusing and distracting. However, the endnotes provide a wealth of information on the various texts and often express Pollock's justifications for reading a word or sentence in a particular way, thus providing a glimpse into his scholarship.

The thematic Sanskrit-English glossary (327–32) allows one to explore the emic categories, which aids further comprehension of the *rasa* “thought-world.” For instance, some of the categories include: the “rasas, stable emotions, aesthetic elements” (327–28), the “thirty-three transitory emotions” (328), the “eight psychophysical responses” (329), and the “ten forms of charming behavior” (329). Also, the list of works (xxi–xxii) includes the translations of the Sanskrit titles and their approximate dates.

Pollock explains on page two that this is a publication for specialists, generalists, and comparativists. The book will be of interest to anyone who would like to gain a broad overview of the historical development of *rasa*. At the same time, due to its structure it also allows the reader to explore the original thoughts of the dominant thinkers, while also continuing to compare and contextualize these ideas within a broader historical theme. While *rasa* theory is known for its density, Pollock writes with an unmatched lucidity and in a thorough and comprehensive way that greatly facilitates understanding the development of *rasa*.

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Sthaneshwar Timalisina, *Tantric Visual Culture: A Cognitive Approach*. New York: Routledge, 2015. 190 pages.

Sthaneshwar Timalisina, *Language of Images: Visualization and Meaning in Tantras*. New York: Peter Lang, 2015. 191 pages.

Sthaneshwar Timalisina offers us two recent and rich contributions that promise to shift the way we think of Tantric imagery. These two books form a complementary pair. The first *Tantric Visual Culture: A Cognitive Approach* argues for a shift in the way we read Tantric images. Particularly, Timalisina urges us away from an exclusive reliance on a sociohistorical method for reading Tantric images. The reductionist tendencies of this method, he tells us, simply omit or gloss over much of the complexity of thought that generates Tantric visual culture; if we neglect to engage an emic hermeneutic, we throw out the baby with the bathwater.

Never mind that his second offering, *Language of Images: Visualization and Meaning in Tantras*, helps us to decipher those literal baby corpses that show up visually as the earrings worn by the Goddess Guhyakālī in this deeply immersive study. Timalisina brings to bear a rich depth of learning, both textually and from a long-lived familiarity with the Tantric traditions from which he draws. I interpret these baby corpse earrings as “literal” accoutrements for this fierce and wild



goddess, yet one of Timalsina's primary points is that we should not try to read Tantric images literally. Rather, the image always functions as a metaphoric and metonymic accretion of meanings signifying a deeper philosophical worldview.

These two books comprise, in a sense, a recovery project that finds its roots in what is not explicitly addressed in either of them, namely, the still lingering effects of colonialism, as resonant ideologies that continue to shape the way we, in the West (and to some extent in India, as well, exemplifying Agehananda Bharati's proverbial pizza effect), interpret the wild, unruly images of Tantrism. While there have certainly been historical indigenous voices ridiculing Tantric practices—Jayanta Bhaṭṭa's *Āgamaḍambara* comes to mind—nevertheless, the historical effects of colonialism with its Protestant-rooted moral guideposts condemning India's vibrant Tantric practice as savage, revolting, and impure, have left a debilitating, indelible mark such that the topic of Tantra continues to elicit derision. These two books offer to show a way out of a persistent, particularly Western scholarly, miasma of misinterpretation of Tantric images. *Tantric Visual Culture* argues for a different approach than the dominant sociohistorical method, proposing to supplement what we know of India's history with two methodological additions. First, this study draws on the repository of recent cognitive scientific understandings of memory and image formation to help us understand how multiarmed and multiheaded images of gods arise in relation to cognitive processes. Secondly, Timalsina employs an emic hermeneutic drawing from his rich understanding of the role of contemplative Tantric praxis and philosophy as embedded within Tantric imagery. *Language of Images* goes further to demonstrate this hermeneutic, detailing how to go about the work of offering a culturally sensitive emic perspective for interpreting the complex, often superficially incomprehensible multiheaded manifestatins of Tantric deities. Drawing on a wide-ranging repertoire of primary textual sources, Timalsina locates the seemingly exotic, bewildering, repulsive imagery of Tantric deities within a coherent philosophical worldview, demonstrating how these images instantiate philosophical, metaphorical principles.

Thus, Timalsina urges us, his readers to rethink what we do with Tantric images. He encourages us to expand our methods for reading the wildness of Tantra beyond a reductionist sociohistoricism. Indeed, one of the most compelling, striking elements of these two books is their challenge to a reductionist model, deriving their strength from the author's deeply learned and experienced emic perspective, supplemented by his extensive and liberal use of primary Sanskrit Tantric sources. We should keep in mind here that Timalsina is not espousing an ahistorical perennialist or Eliadean universalism. On the contrary, he argues that Tantric images can only effectively be interpreted by keeping in our gaze the particular historical cultural conceptions that form the philosophical foundation for Tantra—Sāṃkhya conceptions of the three *guṇas*, the bifurcation of male and female as *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. At the same time, in a bid to turn Steven T. Katz's argument for the mediation of mystical experience on its head, he argues that it is not the case that Tantric images arise unawares from the mediated cultural conceptions of earlier, deeply embedded Sāṃkhya cosmological paradigms. If anything, the innovations of Tantra operate precisely to clear the space, to deconstruct the cultural baggage of these earlier dualist philosophies, to undo this philosophical and psychological

inheritance with a conscious, intentional meditative technique (especially, *Language of Images*, 42).

In *Tantric Visual Culture*, Timalsina draws on a recent trend in Tantric Studies to use contemporary cognitive science theories to help elucidate the complexity of Tantric practices. He, along with other scholars, Glen A. Hayes in particular, incorporates Conceptual Blending Theory, an explanatory framework developed by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner to conceptualize how we generate novel imagery. Here Timalsina argues that the dual-coding that comes from Tantric praxis's use of both the visual and the auditory in meditation practices is a consciously adopted technique designed to facilitate memory in an interactive engagement with the deity visualized. For the earlier Vedic system, ritual performance enabled this dual modality; later innovations, particularly of Tantric visualization, he tells us, utilize multivalent symbols through contemplative visualization praxis (*Tantric Visual Culture*, 58).

Much of Timalsina's revisioning hinges on a key premise that never commands the center stage but is nevertheless tantalizingly invoked throughout—namely, that the effective function of Tantric visualization “works” because the deity invoked somehow comes alive through our human visualization practices. So he tells us that John T. E. Richardson's (*Mental Imagery and Human Memory*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980) conception that “mental images are representations” (*Tantric Visual Culture*, 25) must be revised, fundamentally because the combination of memory and visualization makes the visualized deity come alive. It is a new encounter and not simply a rote exercise of mental capacity. To this effect we discover the images of gods “seen laughing, crying, singing, dancing, exploding, sweating, opening and closing their eyelids, and walking” (*Language of Images*, 22).

Here ontology threatens to burst through unexpectedly: does the deity exist outside the practitioner's imagination?

Much of the metonymical symbolism Timalsina describes—for instance *Prajñāparamitā*-as-book becoming living goddess (*Tantric Visual Culture*, 44)—hinges precisely on recognizing the animate nature of ritual objects as live carriers of deity. Again and again he comes back to this foundational conceptual understanding which pushes up against a dominant modern Western conception that things are just things, lifeless objects. While not explicit on this score, this cross-cultural insight is helpful precisely because it undermines a Western Protestant conceptual heritage that relegates things to the category of nonliving.

Again, *Language of Images* highlights a key component of visualization practice: namely that this is not simply conjuring an image. It “works” when the image exceeds our conscious representations of it—when it talks back to us. Indeed, as Timalsina points out, an effective visualization leads often to an overwhelming interaction, where the imagery takes over; the visualizer “surrender[s] their subjectivity and thus becomes the vessel for the ‘spirit’ to take over the subject's body” (*Language of Images*, 8).

Is Tantric visualization somehow conducive to *āveśa*, possession? And does it connect to the ubiquitous if unpalatable claim of early *yoga* that practitioners are enabled to enter the bodies of other, and thus control them, even as later Tantric

writers like Kṣemarāja sanitize this possession into a less invasive process? Is there something about this dual-coding of Tantric practice that brings both the happy consequences of communion with a living deity and the uncomfortable sinister implications of possession?

If Timalsina's *Language of Images* comes closer than his *Tantric Visual Culture* to addressing the central question of "what is the 'what'?" that the self encounters in Tantric practice, nevertheless in both books, this crucial ontological presumption remains just below the surface, ambivalent, or multivalent, not just in Timalsina's provocative analyses, but within the Tantric tradition itself. Timalsina invokes the nondualism of Tantra that sees all deities as components of the Self, with a capital S. In this sense, philosophy offers relief, an escape route from the dark implications of possession to furnish instead a happier, noninvasive integration of Self with deity. This philosophical integration, or perhaps we may say "sacrifice" of the gods to the category of Self, entails a greater psychological mastery and benefit to the Tantric practitioner. Hence the title of the third chapter, "Better than Real," in Timalsina's *Language of Images* offers a healthy riposte to David Shulman's recent exploration of imagination in *More than Real: A History of Imagination in South India* (Harvard University Press, 2012). What is visualized in Tantric meditation is ultimately not different than one's own self and the practice is of benefit to the practitioner's sense of self-identity. The process extends beyond the physical body and by practice generates new habit patterns that re-orient a practitioner's experience of the physical body. We see at work then necessarily a psychological hermeneutic as an overlay—the deities the practitioner visualizes are merely different roles and functions, different "aspects of the single self"—a view Timalsina not only links to Tantra, but locates very early in the tradition even with the Yāska fifth-century BCE etymological treatise *Nirukta* (7.4; *Language of Images*, 29, 40).

In sum, with these two books Timalsina offers a culturally rich and visionary emic corrective to current methodological approaches to Tantric images that will likely shift the lens we use to understand these complex cultural phenomena.

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