

## Review

*Hindu Rituals at the Margins: Innovations, Transformations, Reconsiderations*, edited by Linda Penkower and Tracy Pintchman. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 2014. xiv + 235 pp., \$49.95 (hb). ISBN 1-61117-389-5 (hb).

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The papers in this volume, developed from presentations at a 2006 conference celebrating the retirement of Fred Clothey, forefront the general challenge to monolithic constructions of Hinduism. By highlighting practices in different eras and communities, these highly respected scholars not only challenge narrow visions of both ritual studies and what gets labelled but also illustrate a number of shifts within ritual studies that have expanded this subfield's methods and topics. The expansions beyond narrow bounds, therefore, are not limited to contemporary ethnographic descriptions but include analyses of texts and inscriptions from earlier periods.

The range of methods, topics, and regions collected in this volume is one of its strengths. The varied methods are particularly surprising, as only a few chapters focus on ethnographic descriptions of a narrow set of practices, with others presenting broader historical movements, textual analysis, and other methods. Particularly useful for a specialized course on ritual studies or a seminar on contemporary Hinduism, the diversity provides students with both examples of different approaches that challenge dominant narratives and engaging detailed accounts of practices. The range in this volume can push scholars at all stages to further analyse the ways categories like Hinduism are constructed, policed, and historicized.

The editors organize the volume into three parts. Part 1, entitled 'Transformations: History and Identity', focuses on various ways that ritual studies can challenge identifications and historical narratives. In 'The Medieval Murukan', Leslie Orr details images and inscriptions that show the significance of Murukan in the ritual practices in some parts of Tamil country from the seventh to the thirteenth centuries CE. She uses this data to challenge persuasively the common narrative that Murukan was subordinated to Śiva

throughout this period, emerging as a significant deity, even the Tamil deity, after the fourteenth century, describing that narrative as a ‘literary event,’ which she attributes to one account of Śiva in the Tamil hymn *Tēvāram* (p. 37). In ‘A Tale of Two Weddings’, Tracy Pintchman compares the annual celebrations of the marriage of Tulsī that women perform at the Varanasi ghats and that renunciants perform at Śrī Maṭh. Her comparison highlights differing understandings of the marriage that illustrate the ways that rituals are malleable and reflect the ‘cherished ideals and aspirations’ of those performing the rituals (p. 55). In ‘The Roles of Rituals in Two “Blockbuster” Hindi Films’, Philip Lutgendorf develops a contrast between the representations of rituals in *Jai Santoshi Maa* (JSM) and *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* (HAHK), highlighting the individual innovation in JSM’s narrative and the collective tradition and opulence of HAHK. Lutgendorf further analyses the influence of these films on ritual performance, both JSM’s role spreading devotion to this form of the goddess and HAHK’s less obvious influence on weddings (and their opulence) among some classes.

Part 2, entitled ‘Innovations: Globalization and the Hindu Diaspora’, emphasizes the ways people who have migrated from India construct their practices in new contexts. In ‘The Politics of Ritual among Murukaṅ’s Malaysian Devotees’, Elizabeth Fuller Collins and K. Ramanathan highlight the caste and class divisions that generated conflicts over the control of temples and significant efforts to reform the body mortification during Tai Pūcam that was popular among some working-class communities. These conflicts intersected with the challenge of insuring stability as a minority in Malaysia that has also generated a shift towards a militant Murukaṅ. In ‘Women, Ritual, and the Ironies of Power at a North American Goddess Temple’, Corinne Dempsey describes a guru-led temple in Rush, New York, where women hold positions of prominent ritual leadership. Dempsey explores the irony that the guru bars women from the temple during the first days of menstruation and his explanation that separates this restriction from the common description of menstruation as polluting. In ‘Hindu Ritual in a Canadian Context’, Paul Younger concludes this part of the volume with an analysis that connects the varying temple styles (in both architecture and ritual) to the particular social, political, and legal contexts that successive waves of immigrants inhabited. Younger’s analysis suggests that the legal necessity of forming governing boards who appoint ritual specialists to perform weddings, without legal restrictions on those rituals or specialists, encouraged the formation of temples without concern for maintaining claims to authenticity, freeing communities to create practices in diverse ways.

Part 3, entitled ‘Reconsiderations: Context and Theory’, looks at textual representations and contemporary trends to reflect on the development of ritual theory. In ‘The Accidental Ritualist’, David Haberman uses narratives from the Purāṇas to consider possible answers to the question about the source of ritual efficacy. He suggests that some considered the physical act of

ritual as more significant than the intention of the actor or the actor's knowledge. In 'Ritual as Dharma', Alf Hiltebeitel illustrates the shifting nature of 'dharma' in texts ranging from the Vedic hymns to the epics and the Laws of Manu. He argues that these texts employ 'dharma' differently in relation to different caste groups and positions, especially when discussing the role of the king in relation to the expiation of violence. In 'From Diaspora to (Global) Civil Society', Joanne Waghorne returns to contemporary ritual formations, analysing the ways that guru movements in Singapore have de-emphasized priest-led rituals and ethnicity to appeal as self-help movements to people who identify with non-Indian and non-Hindu heritages. Waghorne connects these moves both to the context, with Singapore's effort to manage the potential of conflict from ethnic and religious difference, and to certain depictions of global civil society that are not bound to traditional religions.

As the editors acknowledge, many of these chapters could fit in at least two of these sections and other organizational paradigms are possible. One alternative organization further highlights the diverse approaches that the volume contains. Three chapters (Orr, Haberman, and Hiltebeitel) employ non-contemporary textual and material evidence to challenge dominant views and theoretical questions. Three chapters (Collins and Ramanathan, Younger, and Waghorne) analyse historical developments to construct a broad conception of particular choices diasporic communities have made. The three remaining chapters narrow their focus to particular rituals in limited contexts. Two of these three (Pintchman and Dempsey) provide the common ethnographic description of unique ritual formations, while Lutgendorf focuses on the influence of two Bollywood films. All together, these discussions of transformations challenge a narrow view of ritual studies and the assumption that ritual is about a defined form with attention to the ritual specialists. In that sense, this volume is an outgrowth of the expansion within South Asian studies over several decades beyond the 'proper' forms of largely elite males and thus provides a useful collection that demonstrates the insights and new questions that such expansions provide.