

Review

Hinglaj Devi: Identity, Change, and Solidification at a Hindu Temple in Pakistan, by Jürgen Schaflechner. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. xiii + 343 pp., £85.96 (hb). ISBN 978-0-19-085052-4 (hb).

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Despite an estimated six to ten million Hindus living in today's Islamic Republic of Pakistan, studies of Hindu traditions and sacred Hindu sites in Pakistan are relatively few in number. Drawing on six years of extensive ethnographic fieldwork and a wide-ranging literary study encompassing historical sources in six languages, Jürgen Schaflechner brings to the forefront a much-neglected area of research, studying the Hindu goddess tradition and pilgrimage site of Hinglaj Devi in Balochistan, Pakistan. This monograph, along with its accompanying film, does not just address the understudied beliefs and practices of Pakistani Hindus, but explores the themes of sacred space, identity formation, and solidification of tradition. *Hinglaj Devi: Identity, Change, and Solidification at a Hindu Temple in Pakistan* is a book that unpacks what it means to be Hindu in postcolonial Pakistan, and explores a thriving Hindu community replete with a lively tradition and culture.

For centuries, the shrine of Hinglaj had been notoriously hard to reach due to its remote location in the empty desert of Balochistan, though pilgrimage to the site dates back as far as the fourteenth century. The earliest mentions of the name Hinglaj are found in Sanskrit texts dating between the ninth and fifteenth centuries. A place of importance to both Muslims and Hindus, Hinglaj carries the sacred status of one of the oldest Śākta pīṭhas ('seats of power' where bits of the goddess Sati's body fell after Vishnu cut it into pieces). Over the past three decades, it has become one of the most important centres of Hinduism in Pakistan. With the construction of the Makran Coastal Highway (MCH), sponsored by the government in efforts to ease access from Karachi to Gwadar, new accessibility has opened up the shrine not only to increased crowds, but to changing contours of pilgrimage, Hindu identity, and cultural practices.

The site's power to attract various castes, classes, sects, and ethnicities is reflected in the assorted truth-claims about the shrine and its varied practices. Due in part to its remoteness, no single coherent tradition or narrative of Hinglaj has emerged over time, with many different communities documenting diverse rituals and pilgrimage routes—it is through these variances that contestations over 'true' or 'authentic' practices and beliefs arose. Along with infrastructural development, the formation of the Hinglaj Seva Mandali (HSM) group in 1986 has contributed to significant changes to the shrine and its interpretation(s). The increased publicity of the shrine from these new developments is giving rise to a new process of solidification; a growing number of actors are now attempting to claim authority to define which practices are 'true' to the goddess tradition. Weaving through its many histories, traditions, and understandings, Schaflechner argues that the shrine of Hinglaj and its pilgrimage have begun to be solidified (p. 12)—that is, institutionalized—following the construction of the MCH and through the efforts of the HSM. This solidification has given rise to a new process of reinterpreting the many cultural and religious practices of Hinglaj.

In an attempt to address the methodological question of how to properly represent the plurality of truth-claims encountered when dealing with the shrine and its many practices, Schaflechner lays out the theoretical grounding of his study in the first chapter: solidification (p. 38). Though there is not a singular understanding of the site, recent attention to the site has resulted in attempts to establish a particular interpretation as the authentic or hegemonic one. Drawing on post-foundationalism and emerging anthropological theories of ontology, Schaflechner argues that there are not a multitude of perspectives of this singular site, but the multiple perspectives themselves bring that site into being. Thus, despite the many actors who attempt to establish 'one true' Hinglaj practice, the multiple practices produce multiple Hinglajs (p. 26).

The second chapter details three interdependent genealogies of the goddess's history, along with recent infrastructural developments around the temple and their effect on each of these historical narratives. Chapter 3 presents the tradition of ritual journeys and sacred geographies in South Asia, and then focuses on a detailed history of the arduous and complicated pilgrimage associated with the shrine of Hinglaj. Moving from texts to ritual practices, the next three sections draw from his rich ethnographic data to detail the evolution of the pilgrimage, presenting both representations of the pilgrimage and current ritual practices at the shrine. Chapter 4 elaborates on the current conditions faced by Pakistani and Indian pilgrims, and Chapter 5 demonstrates the causal relationship between material alterations, and new narratives and ritual practices at the shrine. Drawing on the theoretical work of Henri Lefebvre, this chapter employs a rich spatial analysis to highlight how the shrine is brought into being through the various claims to it. Chapter 6 explores how multiple claims to the practices and the spaces surrounding

the site are expressed, and also takes a look at the annual pilgrimage festival, where despite the plurality of religious landscapes, a hegemonic interpretation of the shrine's traditions is being pushed by a local community. The concluding section extends the study's temporal and geographic scope by raising questions concerning religion and identity in postcolonial Pakistan amongst the Hindu population.

Schaflechner's analysis is robust and engaging. Grounded in theory and supported by rich and detailed ethnographic work, this study contributes to scholarship on not just the overlooked Hindu minority in Pakistan, but also to studies of religious sites and pilgrimage. Unpacking the relationship between infrastructural development and religious sites, Schaflechner demonstrates the ways in which rituals and pilgrimage routes are affected and transformed. Building on this, he goes on to show how the increased accessibility of the shrine creates new meanings and interpretations of the shrine, translating into the realities of the shrine itself.

This work is a highly detailed, meticulous study that investigates this place of pilgrimage from multiple angles; however, the reader is left with a few lingering questions: What are the effects of the solidification of Hindu practices at the shrine on local Muslim-Hindu interactions? What are the different perspectives of the shrine and the goddess as related to different Hindu castes, such as the Dalit critiques of the dominant Lohana caste practices mentioned in the last chapter? What is the transnational nature of pilgrimage, as undertaken by Indian pilgrims? And finally, what is the relationship and meaning of the site to the Baloch people that live in that province, a group that is similarly dealing with their own struggles of postcolonial belonging and identity? An interesting point to further explore would be how and why certain practices are being privileged as true or authentic. Are they related to conceptions of progress and modernity? The anthropology of Islam is currently dealing with such questions, and it would be beneficial to see a comparison between traditions. These questions are not deficiencies in the work, but a surge of interest resulting from a fascinating study.

The recent but not all too uncommon attacks of vandalization and destruction of Hindu holy sites, as well as threats of violence, especially make this study both salient and relevant to Pakistan's ongoing persecution of minorities. Schaflechner ends the book with an optimistic hope that this work will spark an interest in and more studies on Hinduism in Pakistan. *Hinglaj Devi* has certainly generated interest in an overlooked subject and will undoubtedly provide a foundation for further research.