

Studying Hinduism in Practice, edited by Hillary Rodrigues. Routledge, 2011. 195pp., \$36.67. ISBN–13: 9780415468473.

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This volume is one in a series of edited books on studying religions in practice. Rodrigues notes in the introduction that the book is collectively written by specialists but intended for “readers relatively new to the academic study of the Hindu religious tradition.” The thirteen distinct chapters of the book are designed to serve two goals: 1) to emphasize “features of Hinduism as it is actually practiced, and 2) to illustrate some of the authentic experiences of researchers engaged in the study of those practices.” It is not a comprehensive textbook but is instead an anthology intended to serve as a “complement to a good textbook and a knowledgeable instructor” (1).

The style of the chapters diverges from what one ordinarily encounters in edited volumes of a scholarly nature. The chapters attempt to draw the reader “into companionship” with their authors by including descriptions of not just varied types of Hindu practice, but also the authors’ emotional and physical responses to the practices they witness and attempt to convey in their chapters (4). Hence the volume introduces readers to the ethnographic study of Hinduism through a kind of non-fiction storytelling that brings the scholarly gaze into the frame of analysis and encourages readers to reflect on the subjectivity of scholars as well as that of the “subjects” whom they study.

The individual chapters each have their own merits, and they are all engaging in different ways. Each contains preamble, narrative, and discussion sections, with two also including a brief conclusion. Rodrigues notes in the introduction that he made a deliberate decision not to group the essays under any thematic headings, fearing that doing so might “diminish the richness of the constituent chapters, undercutting potential benefits derived from such categorization” (7). Fair enough, but in that case, I wish the editor had done more than he does—briefly, on page seven—to highlight themes that emerge from the work as a whole. Several of the chapters, for example, emphasize that field research plans are not necessarily straightforward but can veer off in unanticipated directions (see for example: Beck, Courtright, Younger); others touch on the relationship between text and practice (see for example: Dold, Hilde-

beitel, Jacobsen) or aesthetic performance and religion (see for example: Gaston, Lidke, Sullivan). These are rich areas for critical and analytical reflection, and readers might have benefited from some larger theoretical discussion of these and other themes that emerge from the collective data presented here. Women's religious experience is underrepresented in the volume, which would have been enriched with a chapter or two on women's devotional practices, such as *vratas*, or "vows," about which so much has been written in recent years. Overall, however, *Studying Hinduism in Practice* offers a rich and diverse set of essays that help introduce readers to what it is like to conduct field research on Hindu practices. It will be especially useful in courses on lived Hinduism and religion in contemporary South Asia.