

Although the author makes use of both the romanized and Devanagari scripts for Sanskrit depending upon the place, romanizing the extensive verse index at the end of the book (covering a total of forty-two pages) might have made it easier to use for the novice in Indian studies who is as yet unpracticed in the intricacies of the Sanskrit alphabet.

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COBURN, THOMAS B. *Encountering the Goddess: A Translation of the Devī-Māhātmya and a Study of Its Interpretation*. SUNY Series in Hindu Studies. Wendy Doniger, editor. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991. xiv+257 pages. Figures, glossary, bibliography, index. Paper US\$19.95; ISBN 0-7914-0446-3. (Published in India by Sri Satguru Publications, Delhi, 1992)

Thomas Coburn, known for some time as a scholar of the Hindu goddess tradition, continues his study in *Encountering the Goddess*. The focus of Coburn's work is the *Devī-Māhātmya*, an approximately 1,500-year-old Sanskrit text exalting the Goddess. His analysis of the text and its usage and relevance in contemporary Hindu life is insightful and stimulating. In his introduction, Coburn sets out the three main factors that led him to the study under review. First and foremost was a desire to contribute to "the revolution in the way in which we think and behave with regard to matters of gender" (2); although Coburn does not pursue feminist issues in this work, stating he does not feel he is the right person to do so, his awareness of the relevance of feminism in academic study is laudable. Second was an interest in scripture and the place of books in religious life. He questions the fascination with the written word in Western academic circles, and recognizes that this fascination is not universal. In the study of Hinduism, with its ancient oral tradition, this is a particularly valid point, which is further highlighted in chapter 7, where Coburn refers to the coexistence of two separate traditions, one of which emphasizes the sound (*śabda*) of words, the other of which emphasizes their intelligibility and meaning (*artha*). Third was a desire to move away from a structural mode of analysis and take into account historical factors in both the translation and analysis of the text. Although he acknowledges that in dealing with India and "its proverbial aversion of attention from historical detail" (8) it is not easy to consider matters of chronology, he questions the level of understanding that is produced by structuralist methods.

One of the questions raised by Coburn is: What is it that people do with their verbal artifacts? In part 1 of the book, "The Text in Its Context," he places the text in its historical setting and then provides a translation that is readable and enjoyable, and yet does not mask such characteristics of the original as its occasional repetitiveness.

Part 2, "Encounters with the Goddess," begins with a chapter on the ritual and philosophy of the *aṅgas* (limbs or subsidiary texts), which are mainly concerned with ritual recitation of the text. A translation of the *aṅgas* is provided in an appendix. The next chapter, dealing with the commentaries, leads us into the realm of Tantra and *yantra* (design). Coburn clearly has a deep understanding of this intricate subject,

referring in his discussion to *Advaita Vedānta*, *Sāṃkhya*, Śāktism and *Śrīvidyā* philosophy. These two chapters are not easily accessible, which is partly due to the very nature of the subject matter and partly due to Coburn perhaps wanting to explain too much in not enough space. The resulting discussion is dense and slightly overwhelming, especially for the reader not familiar with the abundant terminology used. I make this point because on the whole *Encountering the Goddess* can be recommended for anyone with an interest in religious studies and should not be restricted to students of this particular strand of Hinduism. The last chapter is particularly useful, as it clearly illustrates Coburn's points about the place of scripture in religious life. On the basis of fieldwork, he introduces us to three men involved with the *Devī-Māhātmya* from different perspectives: a scholar, a *pūjari*, and a devotee.

Coburn is a scholar of great integrity, and his work is insightful, clear, and without extraneous adornment. His observations on gender, scripture, and the traditional approach to both of these subjects are stimulating and courageous. This is a model of scholarship, worthy of great respect.

The book includes thirty-five pages of notes, a glossary, index, and an extensive bibliography.

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HOWER, EDWARD. *The Pomegranate Princess and Other Tales from India*. Collected and retold with an introduction by Edward Hower. Original translations by M. K. Mukerjee. Illustrated by O. P. Joshi. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991. 134 pages. Cloth US\$29.95; ISBN 0-8143-2329-4. Paper US\$14.95; ISBN 0-8143-2330-8.

This slim, elegant little book, attractively bound and illustrated, is tailor-made to flip through for a short trip to the Indian countryside. Reading this book, one goes into the ocean of the past—a past that is the present for the Indian masses, who still enjoy folktales. People repeatedly tell stories heard from elders, parents, and others for the benefit of any interested listener. Hower is lucky to have been able to understand and appreciate these tales, with the able help of Mrs. Mukerjee and Mr. Joshi. Together, they have done justice to the richness of the Indian oral tradition.

The magic of folktales is the product of idleness and leisure. Scholars of past traditions must know that people today have less time for telling and listening to folktales than they did in earlier times, when they lived closer to nature and were surrounded by familiar sights and sounds. This book freshened memories of my own youth decades ago, when I collected hundreds of folktales, songs, and sayings from villagers. In the beginning it was a hobby, then later my first professional love and the subject of my Ph.D research. In Rajasthan such tales are told not only by the folk but by the educated classes as well. The art of the folktale flourishes both in the villages and in pockets of the cities.

The appendix, with cross references and notes, is very helpful for understanding the details of Rajasthani society and culture. It also indicates the parallels in human emotions and expressions in various times and places. I wish to stress, however, that the folktales are more delicate and, at the same time, forceful in the original Rajasthani dialect than in English translation (the same problem exists with any translated