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Greg ACCIAIOLI

The University of Western Australia

Perth

INDIA

HILTEBEITEL, ALF. *The Cult of Draupadi 2: On Hindu Ritual and the Goddess*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991. xxi+533 pages.

Maps, figures, tables, plates, bibliography, general index, index of temple and festival sites. Paper £21.95 (UK and Eire), US\$31.75 (except USA, Canada, Australia); ISBN 0-226-34048-1. Cloth £59.95 (UK and Eire), US\$86.25 (except USA, Canada, Australia); ISBN 0-226-34047-3.

As we read the epic tales of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, the need to understand the fuller context of these classics becomes imperative. We need to know *precisely* how these didactic stories crystallized to form the “living Hindu traditions” of village India. Professor Alf Hiltebeitel, drawing on his extensive fieldwork and research, invites us to concentrate on the cult of the supreme goddess called Draupadī. His first volume (1988) was an impressive study of the mythologies and history underlying the folk cults which originated in the Gingee area of South India. One of the strengths of volume 1 was Hiltebeitel’s patient listening to the nuances and variations of the living oral traditions of today; this enabled him to report on how several local cults blended and bonded with the classical epic tradition.

In volume 2 Hiltebeitel expands and develops much of what he learned during his many years of exacting fieldwork. His analysis of cultic rituals as they are now actually performed gives insight into both Hindu ritual and the central importance of the goddess Draupadī. Again this research focuses on the core area from the ancient center of Gingee to the Thanjavur region just to the south. When one first looks at Hindu ritual there, the variants, variations, and complexity of the ritual appear bewildering and impossible to comprehend. Indeed, without the aid of a local *pūcāri*, it probably would be impossible to fathom the meaning of the ritual at all. So Hiltebeitel decides to simply follow the festivals at Tindivanam temple and to listen to a variety of explanations, to learn of as many as he can access. Wishing to “move with the festival” (473), he sets out to recognize the “physical, spiritual, and cosmic renewal”

(475) that is promulgated. Following the order of the festival itself, his work studies: 1) the enactment of the drama within the Draupadī temple itself, 2) the stage and precise setting for the drama, 3) the meaning of a ritual battlefied (*paṭukaḷam*), and 4) the celebrated firewalk (*tīmiti*). Following the rhythm of the “ritual battle” which proceeds through and yet impacts on all four of these intertwined arenas, the triumph of Draupadī is retold again and again, thereby inviting us to the new age of dharma which the ritual has initiated (481–82).

By concentrating on actual festivals within the context of a variety of surrounding local folk cults, many interesting insights emerge. Among them are: 1) the links between the “ritual officiants” and the local shamanistic cultic traditions; 2) the connection between the local rituals and the ancient Vedic as well as the classical epic tradition of sacrifice, which often included living victims; 3) the sexual dimensions implicit in the ritual cults; 4) the multiple connections between Draupadī and Kālī; and 5) the reenactments of Kurukṣetra within the temple precincts as the site for “ritual battles.” Hildebeitel comments: “If Draupadī requires no *real* animal sacrifices *within* the time and space of her festival, she *allows* them—and according to the myth of Muttāl Rāvuttan and his pregnant sister, actually arranges them—on its temporal-spatial periphery, the place where Muttāl Rāvuttan is stationed at the northeast of her sanctum” (146). “By looking backward at ordinary rituals that take place within and at the boundaries of the Draupadī temple, one can work back from them to the Vedic sacrificial structures that carry the implications of a ritual of battle” (166). “Just as the *Mahābhārata* transforms the Vedic sacrifice into the ‘sacrifice of battle,’ goddess festivals . . . are probably most pivotal in transforming the Vedic ritual into the ‘festival of battle’” (206).

Volume 2 of *The Cult of Draupadī* is a work that offers special insight into the inner tensions and workings of the lived and living traditions of popular Hinduism (*bhakti*). It presents a much needed map to identify the complex and elaborate details of Hindu cult and ritual; it focuses on the reenactments of the Draupadī cult aimed toward physical, spiritual, and cosmic renewal; and it illustrates how the folk traditions have blended and bonded with the classical tradition in so many different ways. In sum, it is a work of genuine scholarship that opens new avenues of future exploration for students of the Hindu tradition.

Volume 3 will conclude Hildebeitel’s analyses of the supreme Hindu goddess. It is to be hoped that this volume will attempt to relate the story of Draupadī to the extraordinary work on goddesses that has appeared recently. May I also suggest that a concise glossary would be a most useful addition to this final volume.

Frank R. PODGORSKI
Seton Hall University
South Orange, New Jersey

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Although type and motif indices have an important role in folklore methodology, not all of us have been enthusiastic about the practice of cataloguing the haphazard collections of variants available to researchers. This practice creates the impression of