

REFERENCE CITED:

HEISSIG, Walther

- 1979 Gedanken zu einer strukturellen Motif-Typologie des mongolischen Epos [Considerations concerning a structural typology of motifs in the Mongolian epic]. In Walter Heissig, ed., *Die mongolischen Epen. Bezüge, Sinndeutung und Überlieferung* [Mongolian epics: Relations, interpretations, and transmission]. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 9-27.

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INDIA

HANCHETT, SUZANNE. *Coloured Rice: Symbolic Structure in Hindu Festivals*. With contributions by Stanley Regelson. Delhi: Hindustan Publishing Corporation, 1988. xx+335 pages. Price not given; ISBN 81-7075-006-7.

In the Preface the author states that "in 1966-67 Dr. Stanley Regelson and I lived for sixteen months in the villages we came to call 'ours'. . . . In the villages I call Chinapura and Bandipur, the duration of our joint work and the great skill of our assistants enabled us to gather a wide range of cultural and social survey data" (xi). The result is this interesting study of Hinduism and the Hindu family through the rituals and festivals currently observed in those two villages. Early in the book the author also observes:

The folk festival is one of India's greatest arts. It ornaments the daily life of Hindu villagers with ritual and mystic designs. Festival activities, choreographed around vessels of water, give form to cultural concepts of men and women, of the family as a whole, of life and death. (1)

There is no denying that the "life cycle" of a Hindu family is interwoven with colorful ritual-offerings having their roots in the remote past. But we have no way of confirming the author's statement that "the coloured foods offered in the festivals are intended to delight the gods" (1).

The symbolic use of colored rice, flowers, and food in various Indian festivals bears a deep, mystical meaning within the ethnic culture of each particular area. Color symbolism has a significant role in Indian iconography and ritual drawing also. Rice being the major food of people living in India, it is used abundantly in the rituals of numerous Hindu deities. Similarly, colored rice is conspicuously used in Hindu marriage rituals all over India. Yellow being the symbolic color of fertility or of a fertilized egg, or even of menstrual fluid, it has a functional meaning in Hindu rituals.

Part I of the book is devoted to the study of "The Cultural Setting," and the remainder deals with "Family Festivals." In a study that is both interesting and scholarly, the author has meticulously deciphered the inner and socio-cultural meanings and processes of transformation of color in ritualistic Hindu functions taking place in the two villages. Vermilion (red) and turmeric (yellow) are commonly used by married women in Hassan District for the dots on their foreheads (61). "There are seven colour terms in local Kannada usage with generally accepted meanings" (60). "The benign goddesses of wealth and married woman status are adorned with golden flowers, and their rituals make much use of turmeric root and powder. Violent spirits, especially feminine ones, receive both red flowers and blood, expressing the wasted vitality that their stories and images represent for Karnataka villagers" (60-61). Green

and black stand for new growth and physical death, respectively (61).

"*Bannagur*" (colored rice) is an old word in Kannada (63). Rice is also the most plastic medium in family-centered Hindu rituals (63-64). Various foods are prepared from rice. Rice offerings to nature—birds as well as animals—are also a popular ritual in almost all parts of India; in eastern parts of the country it is known as "*navanna*" (new rice). The use of color in foods is surmised to be the influence of tantric rituals and color symbolism on Hindu rituals and festivals. Even some tribals have been influenced by this custom.

The floral *rangolli* drawings offered to the ancestral spirits represent the structure of a family. Even the cobra deity is propitiated by offering white flowers and white food. This might be a case of white magic during a period of benevolence on the part of the deity concerned. When the snake goddess, Manada, is worshipped in Bengal, a white goat or white swan or white flower is offered in order to gain the desired blessings from the deity. Hanchett has collected numerous illustrations for her target area and discusses the entire mass of materials with precision and logic; as well, she used three variants of the "Mangala Gauri" myth and analyzes the ritual for Prati with its operational meanings.

I agree with the author's statements that: "Like actual persons, [the family] grows or does not. It is vulnerable to the 'process-stasis' alternation. It bleeds or blooms in festival symbolism" (279). The rituals and myths found in the target area may be called "a Hindu family drama." The kinship system and the complexity of ritual patterns are interrelated. "In ancestor worship a pattern of organisation of kin expresses a concept of wholeness or completeness" (279).

Appendices A and B as well as the glossary are very useful for future work on the subject. I would have expected more myths on the mother goddesses, more photographs, and more coverage of ritual drawings. Still, the synchronic and diachronic studies of colored rice in relation to the two target villages reflect an insight of the author, who quite rightly brings to light a strong ambivalence about women and deep anxieties about the future of the family as a whole. The present work will be useful for general readers as well as for scholars who would like to do further investigation into the subject.

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ISRAEL

BIN GORION, MICHA JOSEPH, collector; BIN GORION, EMANUEL, editor; LASK, I. M., translator. *Mimekor Yisrael. Selected Classical Jewish Folktales*. With introduction and headnotes by Dan Ben-Amos. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990. xiii+271 pages. Bibliography. Paper US\$12.95; ISBN 0-253-20588-3. Hardcover US\$29.95; ISBN 0-253-31156-X.

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