

(190–91) in which the tales are seen as “waves in an ocean of stories that absorbs and carries the stories along through the centuries.” To this we might add that this “ocean” contains not just the *wayang* stories themselves but also the scholarly commentaries that have influenced them over time, including the present one. Just as things floating in water may sometimes end up for a while in pools and eddies, so, too, may certain styles of telling or fashions in interpretation pick out aspects of these tales, only to have them reabsorbed by the larger whole in different contexts, leading to ever-changing perceptions of them.

The author gives a glimpse of these changes in the very lively final two chapters, which discuss what is happening to the tales under the influence of both the current regime’s efforts to control their message and the mass media’s “telling” of them in print. New presentations primarily meant for puppeteers, and new forms created by the academy in Solo, have widened the perceptual context, while moving the stories from the screen to the printed page has freed them from older stylistic limitations. The effect of these changes will depend on the outcome of the continuing discussions about the meaning of the stories, discussion that are, in effect, also debates on what it means to be Javanese today. In brief, the book is worth thoughtful consideration, even if the reader may disagree with some of its arguments. It certainly is no book for the neophyte.

Robert WESSING
Rotterdam

INDIA

HAWLEY, JOHN STRATTON and DONNA MARIE WULFF, Editors. *Devī: Goddesses of India*. Comparative Studies in Religion and Society. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996. xiii + 352 pages. Maps, illustrations, glossary, bibliography, index. Paper n.p.; ISBN 0-520-20058-6. Cloth n.p.; ISBN 0-520-20057-8.

Devī: Goddesses of India is a well-written, engaging anthology devoted to furthering our understanding and appreciation of the multifaceted ways in which India’s goddess traditions are negotiated and become meaningful in practice. Edited by John S. Hawley and Donna M. Wulff, the essays in this volume draw from scholarship and ethnographic fieldwork conducted throughout India; they offer insightful interpretations of the continual reinvention of the goddess traditions in relation to contemporary gender and social issues. As such, this volume is a significant contribution toward “clearer contact with the feminine dimension in religious experience” (1).

The essays in *Devī* are divided into two broad sections: goddess as supreme and as consort, and goddesses as mothers and possessors. This organization of the essays allows the reader to fully appreciate the richly detailed accounts of *devī* worship against compelling and sometimes polemical social contexts of devotion. In part I the authors explore feminine qualities of the goddess traditions; the essays play with the slippage between *devī*’s positions of independence and of consort with masculine counterparts. Coburn discusses the sixth-century *Devī Mahatmya* in which the goddess is independently feminine. Humes addresses the *śakti* tradition of the great goddess as practiced in Vindhyaçal. Though the great goddess is understood for her transcendent qualities, Humes adroitly contextualizes the process of renegotiation in contemporary practice, exploring ways in which the *Vidhya Mahatmya* is becoming subordinated to the panregional appeal of the Mahatmya. Kinsley explores *devī*’s qualities of *maya*, *prakṛti*, and *śakti* as manifested in Kali. Kali’s attributes are, in this case, not counter-

part to a husband or consort; rather, they stand as her own power and appear as threatening. She stands paradoxically, expressive of both liberation and affliction. Narayanan, like Humes, addresses the slippage between theology and practice in his presentation of Sri, Visnu's wife, subservient yet transcendent as understood among the Sri Vaisnava community of South India. Wulff explores Radha's multiple roles again in the negotiations that emerge in the forms of the theology and practice. As Krishna's consort, Radha's divinity is often understood through her longing for Krishna, but in this divinity she in fact often transcends Krishna.

The essays in part 2 examine *devi's* roles as nurturer, healer, and the embodiment of feminine *śakti*; we see how practice is interwoven with theology in productive, sometimes oppressive, ways. Eck illuminates the aspects of Ganga Ma: tangible as the embodied river goddess, transcendent as found in all rivers of the earth. In her omnipresent qualities Ganga Ma connects all things and is thus the embodiment of *śakti*. Doniger explores the multiple faces of the goddess Saranya/Samjna, wife of the sun. She is a mother goddess, yet one who abandons her own son. Erndl's account of two "mothers" who are frequently possessed by the goddess, who "rides" in them, is a fascinating ethnographic description of how the goddess becomes Mata (mother). She explores the space of possession, self-expression, healing, and nurturing that is created in the all-night vigils. This is an insightful and illuminating account of women's subjectivity, their possession of *śakti* (power), and the culture surrounding women's embodiment of the divine. Caldwell's ethnography of the public, dramatic ritual of *mudiyettu* in Kerala is a compelling, personally dialogic account. She describes the battle between Kali and the demon king Darika, and invites the reader into the ambiguous spaces where desire and anger, release and control, play out a complex dialogue of socially suppressed sexuality and public displays of passion. Interestingly, Caldwell notes that this ritual is for the benefit of men rather than women, allowing the former a social means of negotiating their sexuality.

Harlan turns to a discussion of western Rajasthan to explore the *sati* (truthful one) who is understood as being in possession of her own *sati*, or truth. The *sati* is controversially seen to embody the ideals of woman and marriage. Her resolve to commit suicide on her husband's funeral pyre is also exemplary of her power and resolve. Fortunately, Harlan also appropriately addresses the issues of caste, class, and gender surrounding this polemical practice. Hers is a discerning account of how theological notions of the goddess are used to negotiate pressing social concerns regarding women's status and economic pressures. McKean moves the discussion of the role of *devi* into the sociopolitical realm with her account of contemporary devotional practices to Bharat Ma. She ties together the recent temple in Hardwar, Indian patronage, and political incentive in an engaging discussion of religious nationalism. McDermott concludes this volume with a comparative essay of goddess figures in both Indian and Western practice. She locates this discussion in terms of devotional understandings of the goddess Kali, her worship, powers, and perceptions.

One of the most compelling aspects of this collection is the consistent attention given to the agentive qualities of *devi* as well as to the ramification of syncretic *devi* myths throughout her proliferation of forms. Overall, the reader is led through a web of complex negotiations between "great" and "little" traditions, the transcendent and the embodied, "tradition" and "modernity," and local and nationalistic devotional practices. Though some essays are not ethnographic and therefore do not address the relationship between theological positioning and contemporary practice, most of the essays do specifically explore this pertinent issue. Those interested in anthropology, folklore, Indian studies, religious studies, and feminist studies will welcome this volume as an important contribution to the literature of ethnographically oriented religious studies in South Asian traditions.

Sharilee M. JOHNSTON
The University of Texas at Austin