

Niassans' understanding of the myth and, therefore, is essentially responsible for steering later researchers down the wrong path (298).

The author's discussion of megaliths constitutes one of the book's most interesting parts. Following the pioneering work of Martin Thomsen, he tries to determine the time when the megaliths were erected using genealogical information as the basis for his argument. As it turns out, most of the hewn megaliths in Nias are of a rather young date (374–75). By far the greatest majority of them were erected in the nineteenth century when slave trade was still flourishing on the island. Therefore, the author tends to correlate the erection of many megaliths with the slave trade. According to his view, the slave trade was a good source of income. The new income inevitable led to "feasts of merit." At such a feast, the host receives his "big name" (*töi sebua*) or the rank of chieftain and, connected with this, immortal fame. The megaliths were erected as long-standing memorials that would bring fame to the hosts (375).

Hämmerle's study is most valuable. The inclusion of an index and a glossary of native terms, however, would have enhanced the readability of the book and made it easier to study its contents.

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INDIA

EICHINGER FERRO-LUZZI, GABRIELLA, Editor. *Glimpses of the Indian Village in Anthropology and Literature*. Series Minor LVI. Napoli, Italy: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1998. xiii + 225 pages. Glossary. Paper Lira 50,000. (Distributed by Herder, International Book Centre, I-00186 Roma, Italy)

This book is primarily comprised of essays written from an anthropological perspective. The book is divided into three parts, with each part dealing with a specific aspect of a larger problem. The first and second parts consist of seven articles written by authors such as Jean Luc Chambard and Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi. The multifarious facets of the Indian village for anthropology are examined in Part I while those for literature are brought to light in Part II. Part III is a discussion on the influence of Tamil literary comments on anthropological themes. At the outset, it can be said that the present work is a novel and nice attempt to delve deep into the cultural fabric of the Indian village.

Oral tradition plays a pivotal role in enabling one to understand better some classical concepts in India. This point is evident in Chambard's essay "The bull named Dharma," which also includes an immensely useful annotated bibliography that is ordered chronologically.

In Hindu society the positive and negative aspects of the sacred are largely overseen by Brahmin and non-Brahmin functionaries respectively. Bradley R. Hertel in his article observes that Brahmins are the overseers of the auspicious rituals whereas the non-Brahmins oversee the inauspicious ones. The fact that the low-caste people are still destined to perform the birth and death rites associated with extreme pollution and risks bears witness to the sad plight perpetrated by the Brahmins and the high caste Hindus.

Marjatta Parpola's paper entitled "Kerala Brahmins and Sankara's Laws" analyzes the implication and implementation of Sankara's Sixty-four laws among the Namputiri families

in Kerala. It traces the aspects in which the above laws are followed, modified or disregarded. It is interesting to note that the Namputiris, who were once held in high esteem, had to inevitably yield themselves to social pressures and mingle with other castes. Rapid social changes have affected their life style, particularly in their dress, customs, ethics, hygiene, and marriage.

Another paper jointly authored by Neelambar Hatti and James Heimann presents a fair and unprejudiced account of village organization and the political, social, and cultural elements associated with it by examining the Yelandur Kaditās of the nineteenth century in Karnataka. It is said that a general decline in discipline, workmanship, and pride has crept into all walks of life in India. But the roots of this decline must be seen within the context of a general disruption of the moral universe within which society was functioning that was caused by either Western and native forces.

On the basis of the data collected among the Dalits in Gujarat, Shalini Randeria delineates in her paper how mortuary rituals and the memorial feasts produce a social order, and create a caste as a locally defined community held together by mutual exchange. The mortuary feast with its varied and colorful festive activities has its own bitter as well as salubrious effect. The mortuary feast may be viewed as a communal activity that indicates *inter alia* prestige and morale in the community. Under the guise of memorial feasts, the local community of kith and kin unites to celebrate the ties that bind it.

Emma Tarlo provides an article on "village dressing" in the South Delhi village of Hauz Khas. In modern contexts "village dressing" may seem appealing, but it is worth noting that national and international trends have contributed to its transformation.

Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi draws our attention to the cross-cultural and culturally specific aspects of a Tamil village with reference to the works of Rajanarayanan, who claimed that the ethnographic study of a people's literature may increase our knowledge of their culture by adding a touch of intimacy to the abstract anthropological reports hitherto in vogue. What is clearly shown here within the context of a Tamil village are the attitudes of the people toward land, tradition, animals and fellow beings, as well as the ignorance, skepticism, and pragmatism among the people.

The theme of Jan Philipsky's paper is the self-sacrifice and deification of village heroes such as Maturaiviran Mutuppattan who revolted against the social injustice prevalent during his time. Philipsky concludes that Tamil ballads of certain heroes serve as a clue for understanding the worldview of Tamil villagers.

In the concluding part of the book, Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi comments on all the themes discussed in Part I with reference to Tamil literary works. Her observation that Indians seem to compartmentalize contradictory ideas is relevant and valid. As stated in the conclusion, the anthropological glimpses into village life found in this volume will certainly add to our knowledge of Indian culture and literary works and will serve to inspire more research. The book opens fresh avenues to Indian anthropological studies.

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HILTEBEITEL, ALF. *Rethinking India's Oral and Classical Epics: Draupadi among Rajputs, Muslims, and Dalits*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999. xiv + 560 pages. Maps, tables, illustrations, bibliography,