

cause of his belief that, despite the many diversities of the Vedic religion, the texts appear to ceaselessly seek a kind of continuity. Accordingly, he affirms his preference for a phenomenological or morphological approach by drawing upon earlier and later texts simultaneously and disregarding historical chronology, since, according to him, approaching the Vedic texts as a rigid succession of texts is sterile if not impossible. However, he also hastens to add that historical change and development are factors central to his enquiry, and the book viewed in its entirety certainly does reveal to the reader a certain degree of historical development.

The reader is then led on to a rather extensive and well-researched presentation of the Vedic concept of *tapas* in its myriad manifestations, as Rainfall and Fertility, Birth and Spiritual Rebirth (*upanayana*), Purification, Knowledge and Spiritual Rebirth, Ritual Action and Sacred Knowledge (*karma/jñāna*), and finally Knowledge and Liberation (wherein he makes an interesting distinction between a higher and lower form of *tapas* as exemplified in the principal Upanisads, a distinction based upon the practices implied and the goals attainable). Also worth noting are the author's frequent references to and remarks concerning other well-known Vedic and Indological scholars.

Speaking of Vedic initiation, the author delineates two fundamental forms of initiation symbolism, both of which he describes as either "easy" or "dramatic," namely, that involving the womb, embryo, and birth as symbols, and the other involving the image of a passage leading the initiate from a less desirable to a more desirable state, and thereafter he provides thought-provoking examples of the "dramatic" element. He concludes with the assertion that the Vedic path from the beginning to the end was a *tapta-mārga* ("heated passage"), the *tapas* being understood in its diverse ramifications as the heat of Agni and the sun, sexual heat, the heat of physical and mental pain, the heat of asceticism, and the heat of contemplation.

As well as providing valuable notes and an index, the book has been written in clear and concise English and will certainly prove to be a boon to Indological scholars.

Cyril VELIATH
Sophia University
Tokyo

McDANIEL, JUNE. *The Madness of the Saints: Ecstatic Religion in Bengal*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989. xi+335 pages. Tables, appendices, bibliography, index. Prices (outside of the US and Canada) Cloth £45.00 (UK and Eire), US\$51.75 (all other), ISBN 0-226-55722-7. Paper £13.50 (UK and Eire), US\$19.50 (all other), ISBN 0-226-55723-5.

Saints in Bengal have always been a continuing source of fascination to Western scholars because of their peculiarities. Although they belong to different religious cults, they often share a common lifestyle. Most often they are taken as madmen by outsiders because of their unusual behaviour and because of spiritual practices that are quite the reverse of normal religious activity. Many of these saints are religious mendicants or wandering village singers. They are called by different names, such as: *aul*, *baul*, *vaisnava*, and *sahajiya*. Although they are taken as mad, their madness has a special meaning for them when viewed in the context of their total behaviour.

The author points out that saints are mad, not because they suffer from a disturbance of the brain, but rather, because their often strange behaviour and sudden ecstatic states of mind reveal a religious experience occurring deep within their hearts. Their goal is loss of self in oneness with God.

In *The Madness of the Saints*, McDaniel studies ecstatic states of the saints belonging to Indian Bengal, where she did field research. Though she never visited Bangladesh, she does make brief references to the saints of Bangladesh as well. It may be noted here that Indian Bengal and Bangladesh share more or less a homogeneous culture, one that is syncretistic par excellence.

In its six chapters, the book deals with all the significant features of the Bengali saints, their ecstatic states, and sexual ritual practices (*sadhana*) that are part of their religious belief. The book is a study of religious ecstasy in the Bengali devotional (*bhakti*) tradition, the texts that describe it, and people who experience it. The author has included *vaisnava*, *sakta*, *sahajiya*, *baul*, and holy women. She focuses on their religious practices in order to explore various indigenous understandings of religious madness and ecstatic states of mind. The saints include both Hindus and Muslims.

The author draws upon personal interviews with mystics and saints as well as other sources of both written and unwritten materials. Her interpretation of ecstasy and religious madness is illuminating and thought provoking. She suggests that religious or divine madness is not unique to Bengal or even to India. This has been explained in various traditions as found in Christianity, the Hasids of eastern Europe, and Sufism. She understands that divine madness is extremely difficult to distinguish from ordinary madness (146). She is rather inclined to use the term 'ecstasy' (*bhava* in Bengali), as it holds an important place in Indian as well as Bengali religious traditions. She considers ecstasy as a reaction to intense experience, to identification with deities and to visions of heaven-worlds (154). She comments that the yogi is disciplined and does traditional ritual practices and is respected for his efforts by his community, but the mad saint, intense and unpredictable, spends his life in ecstasy (*bhava*) and is revered (156). She holds that the madness of the saints may seem, to the outsider, irrational, weak, an escape from the world, illness or possession, but it is the glory of God, or *bhagavan*, and shows commitment to a spontaneous love that defies traditional social rules. The saint does not hallucinate, the saint has visions of the Real (158).

The book is a useful document on beliefs and practices concerning saints of Bengal belonging to different esoteric sects. For the first time, the author presents to her readers a very well-written and comprehensive study of religious ecstasy in Bengal. Her accounts of the lives of the saints in Bengal are superbly effective. The book is intended to serve as a guide to readers, Oriental and Western, for the appreciation of Bengali culture. The author makes a clear investigation and presents data which, it is hoped, will attract scholars and general readers interested in Indology, religion, and anthropology.

Anwarul KARIM
Folklore Research Institute
Kushtia, Bangladesh