

ANNA S. KING and JOHN BROCKINGTON (eds):

*The Intimate Other: Love Divine in Indic Religions*. viii, 425 pp. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2005.

This collection of articles derives from a conference of the Dharam Hinduja Institute of Indic Religions, held in Cambridge in 1995. Sadly, the decade separating the conference from this publication has extinguished two of its leading lights – Julia Leslie and Tamal Krishna Goswami; and it is to these two scholars that the volume is dedicated.

The range of the articles included here is broad in terms of subject matter, approach, and attitude. In keeping with the DHIIR's educational mandate, the various authors have generally adopted an accessible tone, and the volume as a whole will find a well-deserved place on many a college reading list. The best of the papers reflect distillations of profound scholarship, delivering poised overviews and new perceptions with lightness and clarity. In this regard there is no better starting place than the first essay in the collection, where John Brockington's discussion of 'The epics in the bhakti tradition' supplies the depth of field that is essential to a reading of medieval devotional texts, while also showing how perceptions of the epics and their supposed authors have been viewed retrospectively through the lenses of these medieval traditions themselves. Brockington's achievement of what might be called 'summary without dilution' is reflected in some of the other papers also. Ron Geaves writes eloquently and informatively on 'The Heart of Islam in the Subcontinent' (the subcontinent being Indian, the heart Sufi); he begins by arraying the opposing forces of Hindu and Muslim traditions like pieces on a chessboard, then skilfully demolishes this model by showing the complex interaction characteristic of devotional faith as lived out by kings, queens, knights, pawns and others across the board. Anna King's study of 'The Ganga: waters of devotion' is a highly articulate exposition of the multiple meanings of India's riverine epitome of sanctity.

One of the most satisfying of all the papers collected here is Kate Crosby's fine piece on 'Devotion to the Buddha in Theravada and its role in meditation'; Crosby challenges the view that Buddhism has no place for devotion and worship in modes familiar from Hinduism, and with an argument based solidly on textual exegesis she holds that 'in pre-modern Theravada Buddhism, devotion and meditation are combined and not contrasted'. In similarly fully-annotated style, Crosby's SOAS colleague Peter Flügel offers a compelling research paper on 'Present lord: Simandhar Svami and the Akram Vijnan Movement'; Flügel explores a strand of Jainism that offers salvation through a 'stepless' (*akramika*) approach involving surrender, grace, and devotion; and he suggests that this might be regarded as a kind of 'Jaina Mahayana'.

Among the many different strands running through this collection, the theme of 'devotional religion in the diaspora' links Paula Richman's wide-ranging paper on Ramayana performances in Greater London with Eleanor Nesbitt's on 'Young British Sikhs and Religious Devotion' (though the linkages remain mostly latent, because only rarely does any one article in this collection show awareness of its neighbours within the same covers). Richman, continuing her grand progress through the differing agendas of the many Ramayanas of South Asia and beyond, looks at three very different manifestations of Ramayana themes in the UK, and *inter alia* questions the sagacity of a multicultural education policy that represents a 'religion' through a reductive hotchpotch of cultural externalities. The sensitive ethnography underlying Nesbitt's report on Sikh children's expressions of faith reflects both the Punjabi quality of that particular tradition on the one hand, and the diasporic context on the other. (A detail rankles: Nesbitt makes much of the fact that devotional portraits of the gurus are referred to as 'photos', as though revealing some failure to distinguish different modes of representation: but in Punjabi and Punjabi-English usage, the word is merely a synonym for '*tasvīr*, picture' etc.)

Some of the authors, honouring the DHIIR's desideratum of public accessibility to scholarship, have contributed articles which usefully summarise or adumbrate lengthier treatments of similar material elsewhere. For example, Julia Leslie's piece on 'The implications of bhakti for the story of Valmiki' relates to a 2003 monograph, while in 'Kabir: do we sing his songs or someone else's?', Winand Callewaert takes us through some familiar territory in surveying the textual problems surrounding poets such as Mirabai and Kabir. Callewaert's article makes no reference to recent studies of Kabir by Vinay Dharwadker and J.S. Hawley.

The first-person pronoun in Callewaert's title echoes a sympathetically inclusive tone that characterises many of the articles here. In a deeply engaging paper originally conceived by the late Tamal Krishna Goswami, Graham Schweig writes on 'Dying the good death: the transfigurative power of bhakti'; the exegesis here is informed by a combination of textual scholarship with a devotee's understanding of the role of divine grace, Goswami and Schweig having shared a background in Chaitanyite Vaishnavism. Jameela Siddiqi's observations on 'The religion of music' derive from a passion for music that began with a 'mind-blowing' encounter with *qawwali*; but with its excess of generalities this piece is rather out-gunned by the more scholarly articles elsewhere in the collection.

Shaivites should be warned that although Shiva and Parvati adorn the handsome cover of the book, they are largely absent from the feast inside. Other quibbles are that the editors have let some authors get away with a certain repetitiveness, and there is some slippage in the pagination on the contents pages. But as a whole the volume largely lives up to the promise of Anna King's excellent introduction,

which supplies a very informative contextualisation to a wide-ranging and useful set of articles.

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