

presented above, it should stand the test of time as a standard introduction to Indian television for the foreseeable future.

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Santi Rozario and Geoffrey Samuel, *Daughters of Hārītī: Childbirth and Female Healers in South and Southeast Asia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 306 pp.

Many are the purposes of this collection of papers. As the cover text suggests, the central issue is a close analysis of the figure of the midwife (*dai*) and her role in specific regions of South (Tibet, Nepal, India and Bangladesh) and Southeast (Thailand, Malaysia, Java and Bali) Asia. The contributors aim to portray a wide range of problems such as the socio-religious implications of childbirth and ritual pollution, the clash between traditional birth attendants (TBAs) and Western biomedicine, the role of women during childbirth and how women refer to their bodies and sexuality. Also, the dilemma for rural communities is illustrated in detail, i.e. are Western educated doctors or hospitals good enough? Are they affordable? And most of all: are doctors prepared to deal with rural illiteracy and folk beliefs?

The book is divided in two parts, dealing with South and Southeast Asian environments respectively. In part 1, Chapter 1, Geoffrey Samuel introduces the above mentioned questions along with a brief explanation of the relationship between the goddess Hārītī and childbirth, and remarks on the methodological approach of the research. Barbara Johnson and Linda Iltis (Chapters 2 and 3) analyse the role of the *dai* in Nepal, among the Newaris of the Kathmandu Valley. Northern India is examined by Patricia Jeffrey, Roger Jeffrey and Andrew Lyon (Chapter 4), who carried out fieldwork in the Binjor District of Uttar Pradesh. Maya Unnithan-Kumar in Chapter 5 illustrates her fieldwork in Rajasthan, mostly among Muslim women. In Chapter 6, Santi Rozario shows the role of *dais* in villages in Dhaka district, Bangladesh. Northern India is again analysed in Chapter 7 by Janet Chawla, who discusses the ethno-medical knowledge of the *dais* in the Bokaro District of Bihar, the Bikaner District of Rajasthan and slum areas of Delhi. In Chapter 8, Cecilia Van Hollen focuses on the conflict between tradition and modernity in Madras, Tamil Nadu, with special reference to the post-partum period. In Chapter 7 Rozario and Samuel describe the merging of Hindu and Tibetan concepts of pollution in the Tibetan refugee community of Dalhousie, Himachal Pradesh (India). In Part 2, Chapter 10, Andrea Whittaker deals with the demise of TBAs in Northeast Thailand and the conflict between women and modern medical structures. A similar approach is taken in Chapter 11 by Amanda Harris who discusses childbirth and post-partum practice among the Iban people of Sarawak, the largest non-Malay indigenous group in the state. The author is able to explain the ambivalent attitude towards hospitals and Western-trained doctors. A local study is also presented in Chapter 12 by Lynda Newland, who discusses traditional knowledge among Sundanese midwives in Western Java,

and the efforts made by local government to train midwives, primarily with the intent to reduce population growth through contraception. The book ends with the study of Cynthia Hunter on how Sasak people of Lombok (Indonesia) face their geographical isolation, how they consider modernity and how indigenous midwives deal with government-trained medical midwives.

The connection between the goddess Hārītī and midwives is undoubtedly an intriguing subject. Yet although the name of Hārītī appears in the main title of the book and reference is made to the *dais* – the actual object of this collection of papers – as daughters of the goddess, little attempt has been made to inquire why this ambiguous deity is so revered among traditional midwives from Tibet to Bali. Indeed, the book does not want to be an Indological survey on Hārītī. However, further inquiry into the role of birth attendants and the worship of Hārītī might have been appropriate. Samuel shows the malign-cum-protective aspect of the deity and – providing a good amount of bibliographical references – he traces the development of Hārītī worship to ‘her legendary origins as a child-eating demoness’ (p. 2). *Dais* are not easily identifiable: caste, religion, age and marital status vary as well as their actual knowledge of delivery techniques. Some TBAs go through Tantric initiation and receive esoteric knowledge by shamans or gurus (p. 151–2), while others are ignorant about minimal medical requirements. What then is the actual relationship between *dais* and the Hārītī cult? This question remains unanswered despite its potential in exploring the historical figure of the *dai*, its modern positions and future perspectives. Only Iltis (pp. 73–76) provides a satisfactory description of Hārītī in India and Nepal. Furthermore, she analyses the role of TBAs (*dya: māju*) under both the esoteric and exoteric point of view: not only is a *dya: māju* the vessel of the goddess (a practice grounded in initiation and possession phenomena), but she also ‘fights’ to relieve the pain of childbirth. The figure of Hārītī is not marginal in midwifery. Women are traditionally believed to be weak, particularly when pregnant. They are vulnerable to spirit attacks, which in a South Asian context are broadly identified with ambivalent goddesses. As Samuel remarks (p. 5), ‘the physiological process of giving birth is widely described in humoral terms, using the hot/cold distinction. Generally speaking, the mother is hot before the birth [...] and cold afterwards’ (see also Jeffrey, Jeffrey and Lyon, p. 96 and Van Hollen, pp. 165–70). Interestingly, the same process is attributed to folk goddesses: they are worshipped in order to cool their wrath/hunger. If not pacified, such hunger manifests itself through barrenness, illness, death, etc. Malign-cum-protective goddesses like Hārītī are important in analysing crucial aspects of rural South Asian life in that they simply reflect nature. It is hoped that a more comprehensive survey of Hārītī as child-eater/child-protector will increasingly lead to a more complete perception of the *dai* phenomenon.

The next crucial point of the book concerns the competence of South and Southeast Asian midwives: do they share any practical knowledge or do they simply reflect local superstitions? Are they shamans/priestesses or a product of poverty, illiteracy and seclusion (*pardā*)? Chawla points out that in the 1990s UNICEF ‘had to cut funds for *dai* training because their anthropological studies showed that nobody could identify, precisely, who was (and who was not) a *dai*’

(p. 150). All the contributors agree with that and confirm that rather than providing actual help during delivery, *dais* are mostly required because they are expected to remove the ritual pollution caused by birth. The role of *dais* as pollution-removing agents is thoroughly proved, but an aetiology of such pollution is not always sufficiently examined. The papers deal with different socio-religious environments: religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity are considered from Tibet to South India, from Nepal to Bangladesh through North India, from Thailand to Malaysia and Indonesia. Yet the problem of focusing exclusively on how TBAs accomplish their work in particular areas (sometimes villages or individual districts) means that while much emphasis is placed on the medical and/or anthropological factors of their role, the main reason for their presence is missing. In the countries under examination, pollution is a major social concern and involves religious but also local beliefs. So while an insight of pollution (its origin, agency and removal techniques) is present in both the Vedic/Brahmanic tradition and local Hindu folklore (see Rozario pp. 132–3, Chawla pp. 158–61, Rozario and Samuel, pp. 185–90), an accurate analysis of childbirth pollution in Islamic and Christian local traditions is missing. Muslim countries such as Bangladesh and Indonesia and large Islamic and Christian communities in India and Southeast Asia – though practising syncretistic forms of religion – are grounded in a non-Aryan religious background. Accordingly, more remarks on the Semitic taboos related to blood and childbirth might have been desirable. The same can be said for local forms of Buddhism in Nepal, Tibet, and Thailand.

Finally, the discourse on modernity and development of delivery techniques is carefully analysed. According to secularist Islamist and neo-Hindu points of view, *dais* are a result of superstitions and their role is of limited use. Instead, Western medical structures and Western biomedical knowledge are seen as safer. Contributors show how this perspective does not consider the real needs of rural, often illiterate, communities. In fact, one of the major accomplishments of the book is the persuasive way Western values and secularist models are explained to be ‘equally dismissive of local traditions and folk practices such as those associated with childbirth’ (p. 7).

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Dhooleka S. Raj, *Where Are You From?* (London: University of California Press, 2003), 267 pp.

Where are you from? This is an often daunting and difficult question that seems to persist in its attempt to freeze international migrants’ and their offspring’s identity within the framework of a particular culture. It is this very question that Raj successfully attempts to unpack as she navigates the concepts of ‘culture cum ethnicity cum community’. As experiences of alterity are considered, the author