



Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Moral Knowing in a Hindu Sacred City: An Exploration of Mind, Emotion, and Self.* by Steven M. Parish: *The Rulings of the Night: Ethnography of Nepalese Shaman Oral Texts.* by Gregory G. Maskarinec: *The Householder's World: Purity, Power, and Dominance in a Nepali Village.* by John N. Gray

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*Moral Knowing in a Hindu Sacred City: An Exploration of Mind, Emotion, and Self.* By STEVEN M. PARISH. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. xii, 342 pp. \$49.50 (cloth); \$17.50 (paper).

*The Rulings of the Night: Ethnography of Nepalese Shaman Oral Texts.* By GREGORY G. MASKARINEC. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995. xi, 276 pp. \$65.50 (cloth); \$22.95 (paper).

*The Householder's World: Purity, Power, and Dominance in a Nepali Village.* By JOHN N. GRAY. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995. xv, 302 pp. Rs 450 (cloth).

These books deserve entire reviews of their own. Indeed, although joined by geographic area, these ethnographies offer important yet almost entirely unrelated arguments and data; to lump them together calls into question the contemporary state and relevance of area studies, or compels one to note that for the novice working in Nepal all three should be read. I would urge the latter stance even if, given their specificity and in view of Nepal's enormous cultural and religious pluralism, they collectively could still not be called "representative" of Nepali culture in its entirety. These authors would, I suspect, agree.

Parish offers a cleanly-written and compelling account of the ways that Bhaktapur Newars of the Kathmandu Valley come to know things morally, contemplate and express emotions, and act in a world that has a moral foundation. His scope includes Hindu rites of passage, caste inequality, marriage, gender hierarchy and the social and cultural conflicts that compel Newars to confront the idea of the sacred. Newar emotions and morality, he argues, are drawn from a cultural repertoire that distinguishes them as unique. So, even though forced to resort to terms that enable translation into such things as shame, shyness, love, anger, desire, conceptions of nature, culture, and purity, Parish shows that these are not entirely the same emotions or concepts as those Americans experience and which compel us into certain "knowing" actions. His descriptions of the articulation of Newar caste relations in terms of the "moral" is terrific in this regard.

Parish's ethnography calls for a greater willingness on the part of ethnographers in general to deal explicitly with the moral dimensions of culture—a useful suggestion for ethnographers overly committed to political, economic, instrumentalist, and/or structuralist interpretations of social behavior and culture, to name a few. It also offers a useful discussion of the ways that contemporary debates within psychological anthropology frame the problems of morality and emotion, drawing extensively from R. D'Andrade. Parish shows that moral knowing is not a matter of drawing from fixed rules and maps, as if the moral were either implicit in every aspect of culture or, conversely, separate from it as a distinct realm set apart from the panoply of cultural forms that make life meaningful and help people to explain the "way they feel." The moral is formulated specifically as people engage culture as practical and sacred action. Drawing from culture is what enables Newar morality to be unique, as against psychological theories of universalist moral sentiment. On this point, his book is a great success. Another of his points is that just as cultural essentialism is untenable, so too is a reading of moral culture as essential. Here, however, he might have used

more case stories that showed different and contested deployments of moral concepts within the community. This would be as opposed to simply stating that there is not a uniform Newar moral guidemap. The same is true for his claim that moral bases of cultural life are “remade” but also reformulated in practice, for in the materials presented the moral knowings of the Newars, although clearly able to engender internal conflict, seem here always able to be fairly easily reproduced in the same patterns. These specific interests aside, the book is well worth reading for generalists and specialists.

Maskarinec’s masterful study is appropriately titled “an ethnography of Nepalese shaman oral texts,” for it is not so much about people as it is about the textual world brought into existence through the oral recitations of Nepal’s most popular healers, *jhangaris*. Making extensive use of oral texts collected over six years in Nepal and nine outside, Maskarinec weaves together a shamanic-like description of the ways that these healers create the world through their utterances, and in so doing, work toward the reestablishment of order in society. The first major contribution of the book is its illustration of how *jhangaris* are neither reciting impromptu ceremonies, ad lib, nor making use of “secret” languages that their audiences cannot understand, as has been frequently assumed by ethnographers of Inner Asia. On the contrary, although clearly enormous improvisation occurs, *jhangari* repertoires are surprisingly uniform across healers and over time, and villagers often understand the language healers deploy with a high degree of detail and meaning. Specialists will note that there are other shamans in Nepal whose recitations *are* determined by the spontaneous “conversational” dialogues of spirits themselves, uttered *in* secret languages through the body of the shaman, but not among *jhangaris*. For the sake of the nonspecialists, Maskarinec could have spent more time exploring both the contextual data that framed specific healing events (what social order had been disrupted?) and the local theories of the relative authoritative merit accorded oral versus written texts (given the preponderance of written textual traditions in Hinduism and Buddhism). The chapter devoted to *siyo*, meaning “boundary,” “fragment of soul” and a category of affliction is exemplary in its attempt to go beyond these problems, but leaves one wanting to know more about the people involved and why they believe the shaman more than nonoral textual healers like Buddhist lamas or even biomedical doctors. The same holds for the chapter devoted to the recruitment and death of shamans, which may leave one wanting to know more about the lives in-between of these healers, who themselves live in the world between humans and spirits. These probable desires of the regional specialist aside, the ethnography is excellent. It is no surprise that it was awarded the Birendra Prajyalankar, according to the *Anthropology Newsletter*, Nepal’s highest award for research presented to a foreign scholar. It should be read by anyone working on religions of Inner Asia but also by others working on the issue of oral texts and discursive power.

Gray’s ethnography of a high caste Chettri community offers a “reading” of community from the “inside out” by deploying the Brahminical notion of “householder” as a cultural idiom that informs status relations, productive relations, domestic and extradomestic, and political processes in a “suburban” town in the Kathmandu Valley. The book’s insights that the domestic domain blurs with that which we would call extradomestic, and that the tropes which organize household life are carried over into these other nonhousehold domains, is extremely useful and original. These views go some distance toward directing our attention to the ways that a study of high caste Hindus could proceed ethnomethodologically—taking our analytic tropes from those studied. But Gray also attests to his interest in deploying

“chaos theory” and “a theory of practice,” as translated by Ortner, moving him fairly dramatically away from local practices toward a more synthetic analytical foundation. One of the effects of this mixing is that rather than gaining an ethnomethodological insight into what might be a householder’s ethnographic strategy, the text reads methodologically as simply quite solid, and still useful, symbolic interactionism. One of the drawbacks of the book is that the data are quite old, and seem mostly to be drawn from fieldwork done in 1975 (the conclusion aside). One also wonders, despite the careful presentation of sometimes quite rich data, whether the analysis is very original in parts. Indeed, readers who have read works by Gerald Berreman or Lynn Bennett, to name a few, might find redundancies. Finally, as a study of the elite members of this community, one gains from this book insights about the power felt and held by seniors, males, caste and class elites, and the cultural systems that sustain their power. But we are never offered an understanding of this power in relation to those on whom elite’s power is inscribed. Nor is the nature of their “power” ever fully explored. Indeed, the presence of caste and class subordinate members of the community are forever hovering at the fringes of this ethnography, but they are persistently erased, as one would guess a Chettri would like to, but knowingly (according to Parish at least) cannot.

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*The Rise of the Goddess in the Hindu Tradition.* By TRACY PINTCHMAN.  
Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994. xii, 288 pp. \$14.95  
(cloth).

This textual study traces the development of the Great Goddess in the Brahmanical tradition through the integration of three defining concepts: *śakti*, the energizing principle of the universe; *prakṛti*, the material source of the cosmos; and *māyā*, the creative power of delusion. Focusing on the cosmogonic and cosmological aspects of the tradition, Tracy Pintchman examines Vedic, philosophical, and Purāṇic texts to show that the Goddess arose from a blending of orthodox cosmic ideas with popular, nonorthodox notions of female divinity, proving that goddess worship is central to the orthodox tradition.

Chapter 1 explores the Vedas, in which a feminine principle that takes part in creation and cosmological speculation begins to form. In the Saṃhitās and Brāhmaṇas, this feminine principle is embodied by different goddesses and is both the activating power of creation and the gross material that forms the cosmos. Power and materiality are not clearly distinguished; some goddesses are associated with the active pole of creation, some with the material pole, and some embody both principles.

The second chapter details the formulation in philosophical discourse of the feminine principle in terms of *prakṛti*, *śakti*, and *māyā*. *Prakṛti* is developed most thoroughly in Sāṃkhya philosophy, as the cause of the universe, the ultimate source of the material world. *Prakṛti* unfolds itself through its *śakti*, its power to manifest, which is a part of *prakṛti* itself. *Māyā* is closely connected to *prakṛti* as well: in the early Brahmanical texts *māyā* refers to the power, the act, and the form of creation, so *prakṛti* is a dimension of *māyā*. *Prakṛti* and *māyā* become clearly distinguished from each other in the later literature when *māyā* as delusion or illusion is foregrounded. According to Śaṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta, *māyā* is the creative power (*śakti*) inherent