

poststructuralist formulations. The volume would have been strengthened with essays on the mass media, as well as attention to issues of the “reception” of knowledge, but is otherwise a good sample from this growing field of study.

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Ruby of Cochin: An Indian Jewish Woman Remembers. By RUBY DANIEL and BARBARA C. JOHNSON. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1995. xxvi, 211 pp. \$29.95 (cloth).

Ruby of Cochin presents a recollection of the life experiences of Ruby Daniel, a Jewish woman born and raised in the southern Indian state of Kerala. Kerala is known for its substantial populations of Syrian Christians, Latin Christians, Muslims, various Hindu groups, and the oldest diaspora of Jews outside the Middle East, of which Ruby and her family were members. The Jews who immigrated to Malabar (another name for Kerala) originally settled in a trading town north of Cochin called Kodungallur (Cranganore), possibly before the fourth century C. E., but eventually moved to establish synagogues and businesses in the port city of Cochin. Through Ruby's memories, expressed in her own words, we see a view of growing up in a Jewish family within the diversity of twentieth-century Cochin society. Ruby candidly explains family legends, impressions of members of other religious communities, and describes the conflict between “white” (Paradesi) and “black” (Malabari) Jews and how this status distinction of “foreign” and “Malabar-born” affected the Jewish community of Cochin. She relates many anecdotes about people she personally knew, and also retells stories of the Jewish community told to her by her relatives.

This book is particularly engaging because, as an autobiographical narrative, Ruby's depictions of her world and the stories about her family and people she grew up with are extremely well told, very accessible, and have an almost childlike intimacy and frankness. Ruby narrates not only memories of such events as being at school, vacation travels, stories of ghosts and spirits, her tenure in the Indian army, and interactions with other caste communities during holidays, but also how she felt about her associations and how they challenged, defined and formed her. The telling of family legends is often woven into Ruby's descriptions of religious celebrations and the preparations that preceded them. It was “Grandmother” who kept all the traditions in passing down the dietary laws, and the reader “tastes” the flavor of the domestic culture of Ruby's family life.

The book is divided into three sections. Part 1 concentrates on Ruby's life story as a whole, from her family's history (complete with a diagram of the family tree) through her childhood, and concludes with her move to an Israeli kibbutz. The shorter second part deals with the structure of the Cochin Jewish community, the building of its synagogues, and its relationship with the local ruler and with the British. Part 3 is probably the most interesting section for scholars of religion and folklorists. Descriptions of holidays as celebrated by Ruby's family actually form a substructure for the flow of Ruby's narration of family legends throughout the book, but in part 3 she outlines the calendar of holy days and gives a thumbnail sketch of family practices and activities associated with Hanukkah, Purim, Passover, Rosh Hashanah, and other holy days. A wonderful collection of photographs accompanies these descriptions. Both parts 2 and 3 also document songs preserved and sung by the

Jewish women of Cochin, and give their texts and performance settings. These songs (*ḡattu*) in Malayalam embody part of the unique heritage of the Jews of Kerala and recount historical events, such as the fleeing from Kodungallur and the building of synagogues, and retell biblical stories remembered on holy days and at weddings.

Barbara Johnson carefully preserves Ruby's autonomy as narrator, which enables the reader to get a substantial feeling for Ruby's personality. Ruby relates some memories, such as her ability to talk at ten months and that she was the favorite student of her teacher, with quite a childlike enthusiasm. In other places, it is apparent that Ruby misunderstood aspects of the habits and customs of other caste communities or religious groups in Kerala society, for example, the *sambandham* relationship in the matrilineal system of the Nayers (one of the main Hindu castes of Kerala) and the rules that dictated the caste status of the lovers that Nayar women were permitted to take. Johnson often leaves Ruby's social stereotypes to speak for themselves, but informative footnotes outside Ruby's narrative provide a "meta-structure" to contextualize Ruby's personal memories within broader documentary evidence. Johnson is able to clarify historical settings without detracting from the sense that Ruby is in control of the telling of her story. Ruby comes across as very intelligent, strong-willed, and charming. This is a book rich in cultural anecdotes and descriptions of ritual celebrations as remembered by a woman of the Cochin Jewish community. As Ruby herself said, it "is a Cochin cake full of secret goodies," and it is a great contribution to the literature on the diverse lives of Jewish women and the religious communities of Kerala.

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Water and Womanhood: Religious Meanings of Rivers in Maharashtra. By ANNE FELDHAUS. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. viii, 250 pp. \$49.00 (cloth); \$18.95 (paper).

Rivers in South Asia play a crucial role in the religious culture of the subcontinent. Rivers are places where water meets underworld, earth, and sky. In auspicious times rivers feed the landscape and its inhabitants, and they may give too much or too little water in floods and droughts. They are demonstrable sites of the circulatory system of the world, and they serve as appropriate locations for moments of crossing in the cycles of life and death. Their waters have the capacity to dissolve sin in gods and humans, especially sins of physical and sexual violation. These many dimensions of the cultural meanings of rivers have existed in one way or another in India as far back as there are traces. And, most importantly for the book under review, rivers have sacred qualities, and they have gender: they are female.

In her new book, *Water and Womanhood*, historian of religions and scholar of Maharashtrian literature and culture Anne Feldhaus has brought many of these connections together in a rich mixture of textual study, ethnography of religion, and analysis of sacred symbols. Maharashtra, a part of India that has not enjoyed the level of scholarly patronage that some others have, receives welcome attention in this volume. Maharashtra, for Feldhaus, is more than a geographical locale—a topos—with the major river systems of the Tapti, Bhima, and Krishna, and tributaries such as the Mula, Mutha, Karha, Nira, and Purna. It is also an imagined place—a mythos—where gods and goddesses and forces engage human life. Feldhaus's inquiry works with exemplary subtlety at the intersections of these two locales. In terms of her