

is a lack of specificity of where the information comes from, for example, which region, which village, which festival, etc.

However, this is not true of the latter three chapters, “Tamil Nadu: Guardians of Boundaries,” “Uttar Pradesh: Gifts of Elephants,” and “Orissa: Temples for Tulasi,” which focus on detailed case studies of three pottery families. Here is the detailed contextual knowledge the reader aches for in the first four chapters, where the pots go and what they end up doing in specific cultural contexts and how potters describe what they do. Each chapter centers on one potter and his family, with the potter’s voice articulating his ritual, economic, and artistic hopes. Also, there is a beautiful series of photographs showing in detailed steps how pottery is made in each of these regions. I was especially intrigued by the unusual chapter on Tulasi temples in Orissa, and the description of terracotta planter shrines for the *tulasi* plant, the Indian basil. However, the lack of a conclusion leaves the reader hanging uncomfortably at the end of the book.

As a whole, this book should be received with high interest by art and craft historians, anthropologists of art, and artists (especially potters) who have South Asia as a focus. Detailed footnotes and bibliography complement the photographs and text and make it a useful companion to students embarking on a contextual understanding of pottery in India. For those who have traveled in the Indian countryside and have seen the flumes of smoke coming from scattered small mounds stacked and layered with old broken potsherds, this book will be richly rewarding.

VIJAYA NAGARAJAN  
*University of California, Berkeley*

*Don't Marry Me to a Plowman! Women's Everyday Lives in Rural North India.*

By PATRICIA JEFFERY and ROGER JEFFERY. Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1996. viii, 294 pp. \$62.00 (cloth); \$19.95 (paper).

The Jefferys are well known for their previous publications on rural Uttar Pradesh and urban Delhi, for solid quantitative and qualitative ethnographic work. Here, the preface and introduction tell us, they are experimenting with the storytelling genre, and their chief concern is with women’s agency as they present women’s life stories from two villages in U.P. They discuss indigenous words for agency or autonomy and the ways in which women “being in control” or “having responsibility” is “problematic,” given that women “differ from other subalterns in having rather greater stakes in the system, at least in the long term” (p. 18). There is no real attempt to investigate this assertion comparatively in this book, or for that matter to better investigate “the system,” although the overwhelming impression one gets from their rich data on women’s lives lends credence to the observation if the family is the system they mean.

The design of the book is complex. It alternates eight long stories, about four Muslim and four Hindu women, with “thematically organized interludes” of songs and accounts (p. 3). The chapters are also organized topically, with sections focused on childbearing, marriage arrangement, marital careers, relationships with natal kin, and, finally, widowhood. For the long stories, the Jefferys tried to choose ordinary women, ones whose lives are both unique and also representative of women’s experiences in rural northern India.

The stories tell overwhelmingly of conflicts and sorrows. In many stories, marriages were arranged without complete knowledge of the bridegroom's family circumstances, so that a bride was almost sure to face poverty and/or unhappiness in her new home. One story is that of a purchased wife, an unhappy example of options at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale. In most of the stories, women's reproductive lives were not their own to control, and one gets a fairly horrific impression of family planning and medical services in U.P. The Jeffreys tell us how they got to know each woman and some of the ways in which they participated in the experiences recounted here, but they speak as a united front, always as "we"—one wonders if they could have brought different perspectives to bear on the material. However, their goal was to present the women's stories in a way that made the material exciting and accessible.

I wish I could say that this experiment in presentation had succeeded, but the eight individual women do not stand out vividly and distinctly. The authors describe the women and their interactions with them at length, and the women's own words are used liberally, but somehow each woman's speech has been dulled by translation into standardized prose hardly different from that of the authors or of the other women. Another reason that the eight women are not memorable may be that the interludes include so many short stories like the longer ones, giving an effect of muddle and repetition. One even questions the stated organization of the interludes and stories into separate topics, since all of the topics seem to be covered in every chapter. The absence of a final analytical chapter reinforces one's impression of repetition within and across the chapters. (The page and a half afterword does not engage the intellectual issues raised in the introduction but presents the authors as modest and rather passive recorders of changes which neither they nor their subjects are able to predict.)

It is a shame that the presentation is not more compelling, for one can only commend all the hard work, careful listening, and thoughtful organization and writing that went into this book. By chance I read another book at the same time, Judith Stacey's *Brave New Families, Stories of Domestic Upheaval in Late Twentieth Century America* (New York: Basic Books, 1990). Stacey uses ethnographic and oral history methods to focus on two women and their families, and the similarities in intention and material are really quite striking. Stacey's account offers a suggestive model for thinking and writing about the rural North Indian women and their encompassment in a system beyond their control.

KAREN LEONARD  
*University of California, Irvine*

*Poverty: Human Consciousness and the Amnesia of Development.* By RAJNI KOTHARI. London: Zed Books, 1995. vi, 186 pp. \$55.00 (cloth); \$19.95 (paper).

This book is about awareness—specifically, the author's awareness of poverty as a problem for the people of India. Most broadly, it concerns recent modes of thinking and forgetting about poverty, and new efforts to revitalize public awareness. This is an argument for the ethical and political importance of poverty—as the author says, "a personal statement on a matter that I consider to be very basic, yet one that the human community may already be turning its back on" (p. i). Rajni Kothari has written many books about Indian governance that discuss economic development; he founded the international journal *Alternatives* and the Centre for the Study of