

Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty (Ed. and trans.),

1. **Hindu Myths**,  
Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1975,  
358 pp; \$ 2.95.
2. **Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Siva**,  
London: Oxford University Press, 1973, xii+386 pp;  
\$ 25.75.

In India, mythology often appears at odds with philosophy; myths seem to revere "the flame of life far more than the ocean of release". *Hindu Myths* (1975) and *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Siva* (1973) represent two efforts by Professor Wendy O'Flaherty to illuminate the panorama of Hindu mythology.

1. *Hindu Myths* is a valuable contribution to the developing literature of Indian mythology. From the maze and complexity of the countless myths of India, Professor O'Flaherty has determined to share "as varied a taste of this delicious repast as possible". Therefore, she has carefully selected and beautifully translated seventy-five seminal myths, ranging from the serpent slaying Indra of the ancient Vedas to the puzzling and paradoxical medieval gods. Widely varied deeds and various tales of Indra, Agni, Siva, Visnu, and Devi are retold and narrated with charming simplicity and fond empathy. Included are several of the early sacrificial myths, most of the key *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* tales, and even some of the non-sectarian *Purana* myths as well as the more common sectarian myths of Visnu, Siva, and Devi. Traditional themes of birth, life, love and death are presented in selections which appropriately mirror the awe, puzzlement, and yet frank candor with which India ponders these most basic and fundamental questions of man. The total result of *Hindu Myths* is a graphic kaleidoscope of the complex variations of ideology interwoven within the fabric of the almost three thousand year cloak of Hindu mythology. It is easy to sense the admiration and awe with which Professor O'Flaherty regards this cloak as she invites us to ponder its beauty.

Each group of myths is preceded by a preface while each myth is accompanied by a helpful explanatory paragraph. A slight regret is that these explanations are not more detailed and more interpretative. The author should recall that it is all too easy to wander from such a crowded and complex path.

2. However, not even the slightest charge of omission of detail may be brought against *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Siva*. This superb study makes two valuable contributions to Indology.

First it focuses on a corpus of mythological literature of which only a minute portion had previously been translated; this focus alone would make the study valuable. Yet perhaps even more significantly, the author applies the "structural analysis" method of Claude Lévi-Strauss to the Saiva myths with considerable profit. "Structuralism" is particularly useful in this study because almost any Indian myth cycle is usually cloaked within complex variations, modifications, repetitions and contradictions; yet such complexity is the necessary focal-point of "structural analysis". Accordingly, Professor O'Flaherty approaches the complex Saiva mythology with the presumption that any "myth derives its significance not from contemporary or archaic institutions of which it is a reflection, but from its relation to other myths within a transformation group" (Lévi-Strauss). She then applies this methodology to the Saiva mythology with intricate detail. The tension and contradiction of "Siva: permanently ithyphallic, yet perpetually chaste" is detailed and traced through any number of themes, sub-themes, variations, and transformations within this cycle. The principles of Lévi-Strauss are then applied, yielding considerable new light on the meaning and function of Siva. The ultimate conclusion of Professor O'Flaherty is that "variety and contradictions are ethically and metaphysically necessary; this constitutes the peculiar charm and strength of the Hindu world-view."

If, in the author's own words, "the face of mythology goes against the grain of philosophy," then Professor O'Flaherty has presented philosophers with two valuable "stimuli" to challenge and deepen their understanding of myths. *Hindu Myths* presents a broad panorama of appealing texts; *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Siva* is a brilliant detailed study of the complex myth of Siva. Both works profoundly challenge and cordially invite to a reconsideration of the importance, meaning, and function of Hindu myths; both are very valuable contributions to the developing literature of Indian mythology.

Frank Podgorski

James Hall,

**Knowledge, Belief and Transcendence,**

Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975, xiii+240 pp.

"One writer, knowledgeable and sensitive to the working of ordinary religion, misses all the philosophical nuts and bolts. Another writer bristling with philosophical expertise fastens on the most arid reaches of intellectual theology and would never reach anything a student would recognize as religion." (P. XI) The book is an attempt