

origin. Indeed, one cannot legitimately consider the practice of *sati* as a form of suicide (as does Crawford), precisely because of its status as a religious act.

On the other hand, in some cases, as Crawford himself acknowledges, it is questionable whether the practice of *sati* is performed out of choice. The practice, although popularly revered as a virtuous act, is often the result of various social pressures for familial status, property rights, escape from the unjust maltreatment of widows, and so forth (as opposed to the Western notion of suicide as rooted in individual disturbance). Although there is no doubt a strong spiritual dimension to Hinduism (religion as a means to salvation), the tradition has other dimensions as well; for example, it serves as an instrument of social control with a variety of particular constraints. In fact, as in any traditional society, there is very little choice for the common person. Can this really be viewed as ethical openness about suicide?

Also questionable are Crawford's selective use and interpretation of religious texts (both Christian and Hindu) to support his argument. It is an admirable yet difficult task to discuss Hinduism as a whole because of the tradition's diversity—and, thus, its many inevitable contradictions. Just as there are written works which advocate the practice of *sati*, so there are others which challenge it.

Notwithstanding these critical reflections, the book is both provocative and stimulating, and is an important step in establishing an interface between divergent religious traditions.

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"Purāṇa Perennis": Reciprocity and Transformation in Hindu and Jaina Texts.
Ed. Wendy Doniger. Albany: SUNY, 1993. ISBN 0-7914-1382-9. Pp. xii+331.

This book is a collection of nine articles written by scholars from North America, Europe, and India, on problems of meaning and interpretation with respect to the enormous corpus of Purāṇic literature. The authors attempt to discern various paradigms in the Purāṇas by looking at the "intertextual" relations between the various layers of this corpus—Purāṇas from the classical Sanskrit, regional, and sectarian traditions. Although the subject material is specialized, the authors succeed in making intelligible what they consider to be significant hermeneutical issues in Purāṇic literature.

Purāṇa Perennis is divided into three parts. The first part, "From Vedic and Epic to Purāṇa and Upapurāṇa," illuminates the fluidity of the oral tradition and the relation between the Vedic, Epic, and Purāṇic texts. The article by Laurie L. Patton, "The Transport Text: Purāṇic Trends in the *Bṛhaddevatā*," discerns the eclectic nature of the *Bṛhaddevatā* and shows how it has drawn from the Purāṇas. There are two articles—"Echoes of the *Mahābhārata*: Why is a Parrot the Narrator of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*?" and "The Scrapbook of Undeserved Salvation: The Kedāra Khaṇḍa of the *Skanda Purāṇa*"—by the editor, Wendy Doniger, a dominant figure in the field; however, these are not her most

stimulating or influential works.

The second part, "From South to North and Back Again," contains essays that are creative and substantial, shedding light on the relationship of the classical Sanskrit Purāṇic texts to regional Purāṇic texts. Velcheru Narayana Rao's "Purāṇa as Brahmanic Ideology" examines the *pañcalakṣaṇa* as a brahmanical ideological framework found in the Sanskrit Purāṇic tradition by investigating the 'Purāṇizing' of the Telugu folk tradition. The three other articles in this part are particularly insightful on the interrelations of the different layers of Purāṇic literature. In "On Folk Mythologies and Folk Religion," concerned with folk mythology from Karnataka, A.K. Ramanujan compares Kannada and Sanskrit Purāṇic mythology. David Schulman's "Remaking a Purāṇa: The Rescue of Gajendra in Potana's Telugu *Mahābhāgavatamu*" deals with the similarities and differences in depiction of the same myth in the Sanskrit and Telugu traditions. "Information and Transformation—Two Faces of the Purāṇas," by Friedhelm Hardy, examines the interaction of the Sanskrit and Tamil traditions. Hardy's analysis is a first-class discussion of not only the interaction but also the transformation of Purāṇas, especially the relationship between Purāṇas from pan-Indian Sanskrit and regional Tamil streams.

Finally, "From Hindu to Jaina and Back Again" includes two articles which discuss the place of the Purāṇas in Jainism. John E. Cort's "An Overview of Jaina Purāṇas" is a clear and solid survey of Jain Purāṇas, which also illuminates the differences between Jain and Hindu Purāṇas. Padmanabh S. Jaini's "Jaina Purāṇas: A Purāṇic Counter Tradition" is a thorough study of the Jainization of the brahmanical (Epic, Purāṇic) heroes, i.e., Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, and the deliberate rejection of brahmanical doctrines, i.e., theistic creation.

The diverse articles which make up this work vary in terms of scholarly value. The book would benefit from an introduction to each part, integrating the articles more solidly, as there seems to be very little core binding the articles together. Despite these problems, the book will stimulate those interested in the challenge and complexity of Purāṇic studies.

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Christian Ethics and Political Economy in North America: A Critical Analysis.
By P. Travis Kroeker. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995. ISBN 0-7735-1267-5. Pp. xv+201.

In this densely written work the author, an associate professor of religious studies at McMaster University, attempts to demonstrate "what happens to religio-ethical discourse when it is translated and 'cached out' in the economic policy discourses of North American liberalism" (17). This discourse "orients society toward the creation of continual economic growth and expansion via technological development" (18). The "productivist paradigm" behind this discourse leads to two critical problems.

First, the hegemony of narrowly construed material and economic interests