

rather because they are stuck in dead-end jobs” (330). Moreover, in evaluating work-life integration, it is worth recognizing that “the division of labor within households is not taken into consideration in typical work structures”: “[m]en spend an average of 40 minutes each day on cooking and routine housework, compared to women for whom it occupies up to 2 ½ hours” (333). In fact, “[n]ot only do organizations fail to recognize that women carry more responsibility at home, but it is common for these facts to be turned around and used as the basis for prejudice against women” (333).

I wonder if, perhaps, the researchers might have gained from expanding the definition of “life”—that is, not focusing their research on life as it is framed by family responsibility. Editors Kossek and Lambert had considered such an expanded definition and decided against it, however, when practitioners in the field argued that redefining the field in terms of “quality of life” issues rather than work-life issues would make it even more difficult to sell work-life innovations to American employers (515).

In its charge to change the work place to fit the workers, this volume will appeal—widely and fully—to academics, practitioners, policy makers, and organizational leaders.

Birth and Birthgivers: *The Power Behind the Shame*

Janet Chawla, ed.
New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 2006.

Reviewed by Nané Jordan

Janet Chawla’s edited volume on “birth and birthgiving” in India is a significant collection of essays signaling new directions for critical, complex, passionate research and writing on birth and birthgiving within a context of ever increasing globalization. Focusing on the threatened practices of indigenous birth knowledge and the work of *dais* (traditional midwives) in India, this book celebrates indigenous traditions relating to birth and their practitioners, birthgivers.

Chawla’s opening essay records through a religio-cultural lens her journey toward *dais*-focused research, initiated by MATRIKA. She enters the complexities of Western and Indian feminisms, motherhood discourses, essentialism, the biomedical technologizing of birth in India, caste and gender disparities, religion, the targeting of *dais* in development discourses, and the problem of representing research subjects. Chawla studies “genealogies of the sacred as they pertain to birth and birthgivers” (52). For example, she discusses female procreative blood and its relationship to the “demonic” feminine in Vedic and

Brahmanic texts. Reframing the “polluting” power of female blood, Chawla asks, “what is this power, this bodily capacity to disrupt meditations?” (56). Chawla discusses the communicative entrance of MATRIKA researchers into the *dais* world of birth through “word-pictures” where *narak*—or Hell—was a central image. Variouslly referred to in conjunction with puberty rites, birth and postpartum practices, and as the underground fertile dwelling of the goddess-like *Bemata*, this complex term is used by *dais* “without distaste or moral judgement” (60). Chawla transcribes *narak* as signaling the inner world of the female body (and the earth), as an ethno-medical concept that allows for “a host of therapeutic interventions” (60).

Contributors to this book include Vidya Rao, Manju Kapoor, Anuradha Singh, Deepti Priya Mehrotra, Sarah Pinto, Sabadhra Devi Rai, and Alpna Sagar. Rao’s essay describes the rich tradition of “*sobar* songs,” a form of Indian music linked to the human life cycle. Sung by women to celebrate the birth of a child, Rao details how *sobars* map the living, emotional landscape of birth, the longing of a mother for her husband/loved, the speaking of her birth pain, “pleasure, shame, silence and speech” (96).

Pinto’s essay reads the “birth-work” of *dais* as a complex set of social relations, whose differing tasks, like birth attending, postpartum massage, and placenta/blood clean-up, are marked by caste and identity. Mehrotra’s piece describes her work as a MATRIKA researcher, working with “voices from the ground” (173) to tell *dais*’s birth stories, how they came to learn their craft, and documents their practices. Singh explores layered, textual, cosmological *Ayurveda* conceptions of maternity; “she both *knows* the body and *is* the body” (147). Kapoor narrates the satisfying home birth story of her fourth child (her first to be born at home) through engaging description of her thoughts and dialogue with those around her. Devi Rai sheds light on the unaccounted for monetary and social value of *dais*’s work. And Sagar, a medical doctor herself, explores the “business” of childbirth in India from doctors’ and women’s perspectives, considering how to make birth safer for poor women.

I highly recommend this book for anyone wanting to understand not only indigenous birth practices in India, but seeking to enrich their knowledge of the importance of birth giving traditions and midwifery dynamics within mother-and female-centred birth care.