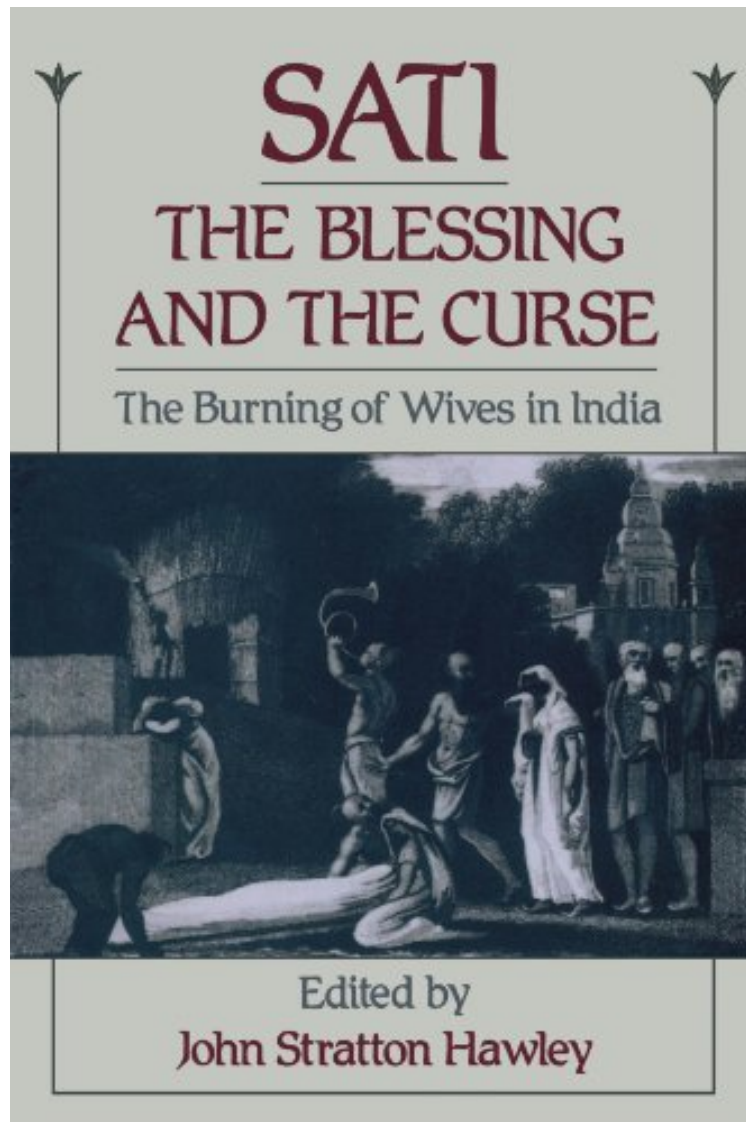


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Sati, the Blessing and the Curse: The Burning of Wives in India

From John S Hawley

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Several years ago in Rajasthan, an eighteen-year-old woman was burned on her husband's funeral pyre and thus became sati. Before ascending the pyre, she was expected to deliver both blessings and curses: blessings to guard her family and clan for many generations, and curses to prevent anyone from thwarting her desire to die. Sati also means blessing and curse in a broader sense. To those who revere it, sati symbolizes ultimate loyalty and self-sacrifice. It often figures near the core of a Hindu identity that feels embattled in a modern world. Yet to those who deplore it, sati is a curse, a violation of every woman's womanhood. It is murder mystified, and as such, the symbol of precisely what Hinduism should not be. In this volume a group of leading scholars consider the many meanings of sati: in India and the West; in literature, art, and opera; in religion, psychology, economics, and politics. With contributors who are both Indian and American, this is a genuinely binational, postcolonial discussion. Contributors include Karen Brown, Paul Courtright, Vidya Dehejia, Ainslie Embree, Dorothy Figueira, Lindsey Harlan, John Hawley, Robin Lewis, Ashis Nandy, and Veena Talwar Oldenburg.

"This book is great--presents elegant and thoughtful essays on a very disturbing issue, one that my students ask me about endlessly."--Martha Ann Selby, Southern Methodist University
"Should be required reading for all those interested in women in world history. It expertly displays the recent controversies in a manner that illuminates both historical and contemporary issues."--Lynda Shaffer, Tufts University
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"This volume serves to widen the perspectives on sati and to speak to audiences of varying kinds.... a must for scholars of Hinduism, of gender and religion, and of human rights worldwide."
History of Religions
About the Author
John Stratton Hawley is Professor and Chair of the Department of Religion at Barnard College, and Director of the South Asian Institute at Columbia University. He is the editor of *Songs of the Saints of India* (Oxford, 1988) and *Fundamentalism and Gender* (Oxford, 1993), as well as numerous other books on Indian religion and literature.