

Book Shelf

***We Who Wove with Lotus Thread* by Aarti Kawlra
Orient Blackswan
Price: Rs 695; Pp: 192**

This book is the first in-depth ethnographic study of the Telugu-speaking Padma Saliyars of Tamil Nadu, who claim a high status among hereditary weaving castes. The Padma Saliyars consider themselves "on par" with Brahmins, claiming difference through their "thread" and the divinely ordained work of weaving. Their origin's myth, as recorded in the Bhavanarishi Puranam, pronounces weaving as a divine boon, referring to their longstanding recognition and status as those who wove with lotus thread. The author beautifully reconstructs the organisation of the weaver household and the meticulous work that goes into producing a Kanchipuram silk sari, highlighting the unity of the work, the loom and the weaver. She explores handloom weaving in light of the different regimes of value ~ craft (as opposed to machine) aesthetic, traditional technology, cottage industry and embodied work ~ that define its lived reality in South India. She also addresses the need for a new approach to the subject of artisans in India, given the lack of critical anthropological and historical works on the subject.