

Christopher Key Chapple and Arindam Chakrabarti Editors, *Engaged Emancipation: Mind, Monks, and Make-Believe in the Mokṣopāya (Yogavāsiṣṭha)*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2015, pp. 309.

This edited volume is a welcome addition of essays on the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, an eleventh-century Sanskrit poetic text that is also called the *Mokṣopāya*, an additional title that emphasizes the importance of liberation for the text. The text relates the narrative of the sage *Vasiṣṭha* counseling his student *Rāma* by telling the young man a series of sixty-four stories that are intended to bring *Rāma* from a condition of ignorance to one of wisdom. The text represents a non-dualistic philosophical position, reflecting the philosophy of Kashmir Śaivism. The sage *Vasiṣṭha* is credited with the authorship of the text along with being a major actor in the text.

The editors have arranged the book into three primary themes: reality shifts, human agency and world creation, and engaged emancipation. Under the first theme, a reader finds essays by Matthew Mackenzie on the body by discussing lived experience that is conceived as samsaric experience. Bruno Turco looks at the narrative of *Līlā* that subverts the reality of the world. Turco's interpretation of the text indicates that there is a single reality that is identified as consciousness, making the world a state of this consciousness. Sthaneshwar Timalsina focuses on appearance (*ābhāsa*), a term used in two senses in the text—self-luminosity and false appearance. The last three essays in this section address the theme of subjectivity with Arindam Chakrabarti discussing dreams, Garth Bregman examining quantum mechanics that actively suggests the possibility of multiple worlds that exist simultaneously, while Timalsina draws parallels between the magical realism of George Luis Borges and the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* in a second essay of his in this section, concluding that neither believes in a linear concept of time and agree that the conscious gaze is reality. Chakrabarti insists that the notion of impermanence can be

reduced to a dream thesis, whereas Bregman examines the notion of jagadānantya (endless worlds) in the text.

The second section of the book on human agency begins with an essay on the role of human behavior in determining the world that a person inhabits. Pranati Ghosal looks at human action, fate, and to what extent human actions are preordained. Roddam Narasimha indicates how the text reveals mental powers and is critical of the notion of fate, whereas Chapple shows how Rāma adopts the virtues of knowledge, restraint, and dispassion in an essay focusing on ethical and psychological issues. Next, Menaha Ganesthasan discusses dreams and how fictional allegories enable a person to recognize their errors. Finally, Arindam Chakrabarti examines the relationship of the self, will, and body in the text with the intention of examining the spiritual culture of the body.

Under the third theme of embodied liberation, Andrew Ford looks at detachment and worldly action by examining the body, mind, impressions, and states of consciousness with regards to the jivanmukti (a person liberated while alive), whereas Chapple examines the role of nature in the text and the sage's embrace of the great elements.

Readers will find the conclusions of some authors interesting. MacKenzie, for instance, interprets the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* as a transformative philosophical text that can radically transform a person's worldview and concrete experience. Mackenzie also finds the text subversive because it undermines common assumptions about reality. In another essay, Ghosal argues that the text is an uncompromising champion of self-determination. Ganasathasan thinks, for example, that the text is similar to other non-dualisms that have problems explaining the significance of moral behavior, although he does claim that the various narratives of the text are vehicles for moral knowledge.

The editors and the various authors of the essays in this fine book have successfully provided readers of South Asian literature with an invaluable scholarly resource that will contribute to their understanding and appreciation of the Yogavāsiṣṭha. These many scholarly essays function to also fill a gap in our knowledge of this significant text. The wait for this type of study of the Yogavāsiṣṭha has been worth it, judging by the well-crafted essays in this volume. Everyone with an interest in South Asian literature owes the authors and editors a word of thanks for such an important contribution to the study of the Yogavāsiṣṭha. The essays in this volume should prove to have enduring significance for a long time.

Despite the overall positive assessment of this book, there is one glaring omission for a text that contains numerous narratives, which can be preserved orally or in writing. Narratives are not static entities; they are, rather, dynamic because they often change over time in response to new challenges or events that are encountered by a culture. Narratives are often subjected to redactions that can assume the form of deletions or additions to a story. The various essays in this book being reviewed lacks this critical perspective and tends to treat the Yogavāsiṣṭha as something static, an unfortunate result.

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