

The book concludes with a section on modern (meaning Western-inspired) theater in India. Situated mostly in the bigger cities, modern theater can be found in all of India's literary languages and English. Although similar in form to theater in the West, the organization and popularity of modern theater varies considerably from place to place within India. Modern theater abounds on both amateur and professional levels (levels which are defined differently in India than in the West, however), but it can hardly be said to prosper in competition with India's massive cinema industry. Farley Richmond's story of how and why this is so makes for fascinating reading in one of the most interesting chapters of the book.

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This volume contains most of the papers read at a conference on the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Sankt Augustin, Germany, in September 1987. The title, *Rāmāyaṇa and Rāmāyaṇas*, is descriptive of the collection's contents, since the articles examine the great epic *Rāmāyaṇa* in various of its numerous versions (hence *Rāmāyaṇas*). This focus on the multiplicity of the epic is in accord with the trend in *Rāmāyaṇa* studies during the past few decades. Most scholars in the field are attempting to take *Rāmāyaṇa* research beyond the classic writings of Vālmīki, Tulsīdās, Bhaṭṭi, and Kampan; hence the recent emphasis upon "diversity," "variety," and "variation" as axioms of research, and the stress upon coordinating scholarly efforts through international meetings and the publication of research findings. These trends are noticeable in three earlier volumes that I know of: RAGHAVAN (1980), SRINIVASA IYENGAR (1983), and SĪNHA and SAHAI (1989). The present volume fits in well with these books, as will, no doubt, a recent work edited by RICHMAN (1991): *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*.

The stress on variation in the work of recent scholars is well justified. The geographic range of *Rāmāyaṇa* research is huge, stretching from Japan to Surinam and including many scattered islands with Indian populations. The cultural variations are equally great, placing enormous demands upon *Rāmāyaṇa* scholars. Not only must they know the language of the people whose version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* they are studying, but they must also be familiar with many aspects of the native culture (thought, beliefs, art, etc.). It is a daunting task indeed to keep abreast of all the research. The present volume of studies is devoted to India, past and present, and takes into account both the northern and southern regions of the country. Several authors also venture further afield to highlight similarities with *Rāmāyaṇas* outside of India.

The articles in the collection investigate a number of central issues in *Rāmāyaṇa* research. These include spiritual concepts in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, particularly the relation between dharma and the individual; folklore and the *Rāmāyaṇa*; the *Rāmāyānā* pageants; and the *Rāmāyaṇa* in modern Indian life.

The role of dharma in Vālmīki is analyzed in an article by H. M. Buck, with par-

ticular reference to situations of conflict. The author emphasizes the need to choose that faces individuals in certain passages of the epic. As a rule they closely examine the options, then make their decision in accordance with dharma; hence the term "dharmic choice" as the central concept of this paper. By way of illustration Buck selects a few major passages from the epic and analyzes the behavior of the characters, especially Rāma, pointing out in the process the impact of karma upon the course of human behavior.

From the issue of "dharmic choice" we move to R. Barz's consideration of "free will" in Bhānubhakt's *Rāmāyaṇa*. This mid-nineteenth century Nepalese poem is based on the notion of *bhakti*. *Bhakti* involves complete devotion to a divine figure, but the epic nevertheless leaves some room for individual responsibility, as exemplified in Kaikeyī's and Mantharā's perception that "they are acting according to their own volition."

The papers dealing with the relation between the *Rāmāyaṇa* and folklore (or "folk tradition," depending upon the author) comprise a treasure trove in the number and variety of field materials they present and the diversity of method they display.

H. G. Menon reports on several folk versions of the epic from Kerala on the west coast of India, particularly the *Rāmacaritam* and the *Rāmakathapāṭṭhu*. These works, written in a "strange language" related to both Tamil and Malayalam, are given an excellent linguistic description by the author. He points out, in addition, that the latter work contains episodes that do not belong to Tamil tradition, but to that of Southeast Asia.

S. H. Blackburn examines the evolution undergone by Kampan's Tamil version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* when it was adapted as a shadow-puppet play in central Kerala. Local folk tradition there has transformed the "northern king" (i.e. Rāma) into a "human hero."

C. Hospital examines a 1976 Malayalam play by C. N. Srikantan Nayar, in which Rāvaṇan, the demon-king of Laṅkā, is depicted as a Dravidian hero. This can be accounted for by a South Indian tradition that sees Rāvaṇan as a cultural leader and the abduction of Rāma's wife Sītā as necessary for Laṅkā's prosperity.

G. D. Sontheimer reports on the relation between the *Rāmāyaṇa* and folk religion among certain regional groups. The Kōji of the Konkan coast (labeled "criminal tribes" in the past) claim the sage Vālmiki as their ancestor, for example, and the forest in Maharashtra where Rāma and Sītā are said to have dwelt (i.e., *Daṇḍakāraṇya*) has become an important place of pilgrimage.

The *Rāmalilā* is a Hindu mystic pageant which has thrilled and awed many non-Hindu observers as well. Much information on this event is already available, including several gorgeous photographic albums, but A. Kapur adds a new dimension by introducing the active role played in the pageant by the Mahārājā of Varanasi. The Mahārājā's position as patron and upholder of the *lilā* tradition is well known, but few have been aware of his participation in the actual event. Whether in his palace or majestically riding his elephant, the Mahārājā is present throughout the *lilā*, renewing in this manner his royal leadership.

P. Lutgendorf provides a very detailed and vivid description of the *mahāyajña* (great sacrifice) connected with the ritual recitation of the *Rāmcāritmanas*. He also points out how this devotional ceremony, supported by a great mystic revival in India, has been subverted by commercialism and even politics.

Finally, we are taken deeper into the present Indian community by two papers. P. van der Veer discusses the modern face of Rāma's kingdom Ayodhya and examines the significance of pilgrimage; V. Dalmia-Lüderitz considers the relation between

the TV serialization of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and life in the Indian home. These papers are certain to be of value to anyone interested in the role of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in modern Indian society.

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