

KATZ, RUTH CECILY. *Arjuna in the Mahābhārata: Where Krishna Is, There Is Victory*. Foreword by Daniel H. H. Ingalls. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990. xxi+349 pages. Bibliography, indices of authors and subjects. Rs175; ISBN 81-208-0744-8. (Published in the U.S.A. by the University of South Carolina)

This book by Katz, which happens to be the final outcome of a doctoral thesis submitted at Harvard University in 1980, is by any standards an extensive and well-researched work, for apart from a bibliography that runs to 20 pages, it is equipped with an authors index and subject index, a foreword by Daniel Ingalls, and numerous notes and references. Throughout the book the author ceaselessly draws the reader's attention to the profound symbolism and imagery expressed in this mighty poem of 100,000 couplets, which is eight times the size of the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* combined. In the words of Katz, the epic is "said to embody the abundance of India, a nation that has been through the centuries uniquely capable of living with untrammelled growth, even contradictions." Katz points out that to this day *Bhārata* ("the family of *Bhārata*") is the name for India in the modern Indian languages, with the implication that *Bhārata*, besides having been just an ancestor of the *Pāṇḍavas* and *Kauravas* (the two antagonists in the battle), was somehow the forerunner of the whole of Indian culture as well. What is especially noteworthy is the fact that the author in places draws attention to the moral and ethical conflicts, particularly those evoked by the trickery indulged in by the *Pāṇḍavas*, in order to secure victory during the battle of *Kurukṣetra*. The author concludes that the *Pāṇḍavas* used deceit to fight deceit, and that the epic as a whole attempts to rationalize these deceitful actions of the *Pāṇḍavas* during the war.

In the epic Katz clearly distinguishes the *Brāhmaṇic* and *Kṣatriya* strands, which, though overlapping and intertwining in places, nevertheless, she feels, remain strikingly separate. The *Kṣatriya* strand, according to her, supplies the basic heroic story, while the *Brāhmaṇic* accounts for a large portion of the didactic material, which she feels glorifies the *Brahmins* in a somewhat "heavy-handed manner" while preaching to the *Kṣatriyas*. At the same time she isolated a third strand, which transcends class and caste, namely *bhakti* or religious devotion. Katz is of the opinion that of all the texts in the Indian heritage, it is the *Mahābhārata* that first brought the concept of *bhakti* to the fore. She insists that the epic looks backwards towards the Vedas and forwards towards the *Purāṇas*, and that it combines these two influences, one of which is archetypically Indo-European while the other is archetypically Hindu.

As for her reasons for choosing Arjuna as the subject of her study, Katz observes that he is the great heroic figure of India, the one to whom the *Bhagavadgītā* was recited, the Indian Achilles, a religious role model, an "everyman struggling for truth." What is implicit in heroes such as Achilles, Arthur, Rustam, Gilgamesh, and others, is explicit in Arjuna. Arjuna for her is the "hero unedited," his disparate aspects hanging together displaying a unity in their diversity; and for her the study of Arjuna provides a unique opportunity to consider the figure of the "Indo-European Semitic hero" in all its aspects.

This study is undertaken in three parts: Arjuna as an epic hero, as a human being, and as a religious devotee. It is divided into fifteen chapters and a conclusion, and these explore Arjuna's birth and childhood, his marriages, exploits such as the burning of the *Khāṇḍava* forest and his encounter with the mountain man (*Kirāta*), the battle of *Kurukṣetra*, the *Bhagavadgītā* episode, the horse sacrifice, the ascent to *svarga*, and other connected events. In the opinion of Katz, the victory of good over

evil is apparent at the heroic and devotional level, but not at the human level.

By and large one might classify it as a highly scholarly work, one that makes interesting though somewhat difficult reading.

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RAO, VELCHERU NARAYANA, translator. *Śiva's Warriors. The Basava Purāṇa of Pāṅkuriki Somanātha*. Assisted by Gene H. Roghair. Princeton Library of Asian Translations. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990. xviii+321 pages. Bibliography, index of names. Cloth US\$49.50; ISBN 0-691-05591-2.

Advanced students of Hindu tradition will find the *Basava Purāṇa* a provocative challenge to orthopraxy. Beginners may be bewildered by complex references to Sanskrit materials (although the translator has provided ample footnotes and has somewhat reduced the plethora of epithets) and will need preparation in more conventional Hindu literature to realize how radical a departure this Vīraśaiva hagiography is.

This hard-won translation is excellently readable. I cannot assess its fidelity to the original in idiomatic, twelfth-century Telugu, which was quite difficult to unravel because it includes exceptionally numerous Sanskrit quotations, possesses no commentary, and departs from the Telugu of the dictionaries (based on Telugu translations from Sanskrit works) (xiii, 7, 19). One could only wish that the introduction were even more comprehensive and that the title chosen were more accurate. (By the way, Malledevaru's *Essentials of Vīraśaivism*, often cited in the notes, has been omitted from the Bibliography.)

The Vishnu avatars Rāma and Krishna can be seen as teachers of *kṣyatriya dharma* (roughly, "warrior duty"); the *Basava Purāṇa* (hereafter BP) rejects assessing devotees on the basis of *varṇaśramadharmā* at all (the system of duties based on caste and stage of life). V. Narayana Rao uses the word "legitimizes" for the BP's handling of "symbols of violence and hatred toward outsiders" (12). It is certainly true that the Vīraśaivas are supposed to regard all other initiates as one community, regardless of birth, and all outsiders—even other Shaivites—as untouchables, according to innumerable examples and statements in the BP.

It seems to me that what the BP especially legitimizes are Vīraśaiva devotees, no matter what they do. The bad karma they incur remains bad karma, but they are supposed to be above the distinction between good and bad karma; they are supposed to be as unaffected by deeds as Śiva himself. Moreover, I think, the violence of the BP is deliberately bizarre and miraculous, as if to keep it unreal. The few cases of warlike behavior include such elements as Shaivites cutting off their own heads in battle and fighting headless so as to be more terrifying! (212)

The bulk of the violence of the BP is not warrior-behavior but isolated, peacetime murders, which nearly all people reject even when they consider war an acceptable activity. Three murders in the BP are followed by resuscitations of the victims by the murderers, whose devotion makes them, it seems, like Śiva, capable of both taking and giving life (130-38, 144-47, 171-77). To humble pride in such high-powered devotion, there appears the story of a woman so "devoted" that she refuses to ask Śiva to revive her own son, whom she has murdered for a ritual fault (147-51).