

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).

Only later in the scripture, as the vilification of the caste system reaches its climax, do there arise three murders, including brahmanicide and culminating in (ahistorical) regicide, where the question of resuscitation does not arise (221–22, 242–43, 257–65). This does not seem to justify entitling the BP *Śiva's Warriors*. A hopeful view of the text would consider its violence fantastic fiction, meant to be taken as such (just as it is in the Tamil, caste-accepting *Periya Purāṇam*, on which the BP is partly dependent).

In the Introduction, Narayana Rao perhaps underplays the cornerstone that alone gives the text interest: *bhakti* (“devotion”). It is *bhakti* that is legitimated, described and redescribed, praised and glorified. The murders glorify devotion through the dramatic element of the morally bizarre. This scripture revels in the dramatic and the bizarre as a means of portraying how unlimited devotion may be if persons are totally given to Śiva. Perhaps the bizarre serves as symbolic of the transcendence in which they participate as they become united with Śiva. Narayana Rao does not speculate on such questions as these: “Granted that we do not know how violent historical Viraśaivas were, how much do similar fantastic sacred literary works propose actual imitation (rather than passive admiration) of the behavior they portray?” “Did medieval rejection of the caste system necessarily mean abandoning all moral guidance, or did its radicalness merely find no symbol adequate to its expression except tales of murder?” His lucid translation invites others to explore these and other puzzles, such as “Why did Viraśaivas, who rejected *advaita* (219) and saw Śiva as different from *ātman* (209), still expect devotion to lead to identification with Śiva rather than to encountering God as an Other who may judge and forgive?” “How much should these hagiographical legends be regarded as intending to be some kind of history and how much should they be taken as the collective imagination of people less historically-minded than Europeans of the same era?”

The BP’s rejection of caste strictures strikes a chord that may resonate with modern Indian struggles toward fuller democracy (although modern Viraśaivas have been thoroughly brahminized [15–16]). This volatile and potentially dangerous work can no longer be neglected. Its emergence into one of the common languages of the subcontinent is itself an anthropological fact of some moment. One can only hope that the mythological suggestion of violence as legitimate for some persons will be seen in its context and that, in the event, devotion will conquer anger, which Somanātha himself regards as a sign of failure to reach union with Śiva (127; cf. 57, where the initiates’ “eight-limbed path” includes *ahimsa*, and 61, where “aggressors” are rejected, as well as various introductions of heroes as “kind to all living beings,” e.g., 171).

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