

This little book may not be in the mainstream of classical Indology, but should still prove to be of considerable interest to the Indologist as well as the student of comparative religion, and music, and last, but not least, to those Hindus who take an active interest in their cultural traditions. This study provides a good example of how to tackle a diffuse mass of texts in a systematic manner and in a language (pp. 14–5 give guidelines of transcription) that avoids confusion – unfortunately often a characteristic of contemporary material from South Asia –; thus it becomes agreeable to traditional Indologists to have a look at what is presented here.

For this unassuming work is a model in another way. In her foreword (p. 7), the author emphasises that not much research has been done on the large mass of Sanskrit *stotras* of the Hindus, that a great part of this literature has never been printed and is only available in manuscript form, that many specimens of this particular text are widely circulated and regularly recited in India, and that neither Western Indologists nor Indian scholars are so far familiar with the *stotra* literature. The author, in other words, points to a well-known gap in our knowledge of Indian religions and religious traditions, namely our lack of expertise in popular traditions, both medieval and modern, and the literature connected with them. The situation is, by the way, similar in the study of Indian laws, where again we have not, so far, been able to acquire much expertise in the customary traditions of the Indian peoples. It must be apparent that such fields cannot be left entirely to anthropologists, who are not normally equipped with expertise in Indian languages; here therefore, is a definite new task for the Indologist.

The justification for, and purpose of, the present study is to present the several versions of a particular popular text and to show its different interpretations and uses. The *Rāmarakṣāstotra* (Hymn to Rāma for his Protection) was chosen as an example of this class of literature, apparently because it is one of the most popular Sanskrit *stotras* of Mahārāṣṭra.

The introduction (pp. 9–15) contains an interesting classification of *stotras*, which does not claim to be complete but is, nevertheless, useful especially for a newcomer. The first major part of the study (pp. 23–68) presents different versions of the text, beginning with the modern one which is commonly recited today (pp. 23–33). Versions found in innumerable Indian manuscripts follow (pp. 33–54), then versions found in the *Padmapurāṇa* (pp. 54–62) and the version from the *Ānanda-Rāmāyaṇa* (pp. 62–67). In order to demonstrate the wide geographical range of the material, the author has included a reference to the Balinese version (p. 68), which has been edited by T. Goudriaan and C. Hooykaas (Amsterdam and London 1971). The second part of the work (pp. 69–87) shows how the *stotra* was interpreted by two medieval commentators (Mudgala and Nīlakaṇṭha Caturdhara) and by three modern Marāṭhī writers (S. K. Devdhar, Satyadevānand Sarasvatī and S. D. Sātavalekar). The finding that the medieval commentators extract a meaning from the text that suits their particular intentions is certainly interesting, but not surprising. The author finds that the explanations of the three Marāṭhī commentators “seem less fantastic” (pp. 69), but do not on the whole, differ from those of their medieval predecessors. The third part (pp. 88–119) describes the *tāntric* and other applications of the *stotra*, first according to Sanskrit sources, giving the text of the *Agastya-saṃhitā* and the *Rāma-rakṣā-prayoga*, which contains relevant details, then according to modern Marāṭhī sources. The information that this *stotra* is learnt in traditional families and is also recited in primary schools (p. 103) seems of particular interest, showing that this tradition is alive. The, apparently optional, methods to make the *stotra* effective (p. 104f.) sound fantastic (i.e. recitation of the *stotra* 15000 times during a period of 121 days), but more realistic applications are given, too. The generally protective nature of this *stotra* seems to warrant its use to keep the evil eye from children (p. 105) and to give relief to a sick person (p. 109). An apparently not very well-known *yantra*, the *rāma-rakṣā-yantrarāj*, is also given in the text (p. 107).

Musicologists will be interested to find a small chapter on the recitation of the text (pp. 109–119) with a number of examples. The author herself states that this section is rather incomplete; it contains, however, a fine collection of 18 melodies.

Altogether this little treatise is set to achieve fully its aim of stimulating interest in hitherto undeveloped fields of study. It is a most interesting collection of material which, though not necessarily suitable for the total beginner, provides a good introduction into a number of related fields in late medieval and modern Indian studies.

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