

Dialogues in Early South Asian Religions: Hindu, Buddhist and Jain Traditions. Edited by Brian Black and Laurie Patton. Routledge 2015, 2016. 265pp. Hb. £73.99, ISBN 13: 9781409440123. Pb. £22.99 (ISBN 13: 9781409440130). E-book £21.84, ISBN: 9781315576978.

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Scholars working on early South Asia, especially those specializing in Buddhist, Hindu, or Jain narratives, will welcome this rich addition to the scholarship on this area. *Dialogues in Early South Asian Religions* offers a series of essays on the use of dialogue in and across various genres of early South Asia texts, expertly edited by Brian Black and Laurie Patton. This is the inaugural volume in a similarly named series, 'Dialogues in South Asian Traditions: Religion, Philosophy, Literature and History', also edited by Black and Patton, both well-respected, prolific scholars in this field. The essays are organized into three sections, 'Dialogues Inside and Outside the Texts', 'Texts in Dialogue' and 'Moving between Traditions'. Each part includes engaging articles that together cover each of the three major early South Asian religious traditions, creating a sense of balance in the collection.

First in Part I, 'Dialogues Inside and Outside the Texts', the Vedic Hindu tradition is represented by an insightful essay by Patton, who with her usual clarity translates and lays out the previous approaches, both Indian and western, to analyzing the 'frog hymn' (*Rg Veda* 7.103) with its delightful evocation of the first monsoon rains and rich metaphors for voice and chant. She acknowledges the controversy about possible satirical intent in this hymn and revisits her 2005 discussion of 'metonymy', her definition of *vinīyoga*,¹ a term used by Vedic commentators to describe the use of mantra, whether in formally ritualistic contexts or otherwise. She then delivers a cogent analysis of the frog hymn in terms of metonymy and simile.

Epic literature is highlighted by Alf Hiltebeitel, one of the leading authorities on the *Mahābhārata*. His densely woven essay focuses on Vālmīki's use of apostrophe in the *Rāmāyāna* and contrasts this with the intricately 'braided', partially submerged frame narratives of the *Mahābhārata*. Hiltebeitel argues that Valmiki's innovative employment of apostrophe is made in cognizance of the massive and slightly earlier *itihāsa* of the Pāṇḍava's exploits and dilemmas.

Anna Aurelia Esposito first lays out the various purposes dialogue serves in a variety of Jain Śvetāmbara canonical texts, identifying two pairs of speakers and listeners that typically serve to frame but also legitimate teachings and conversion stories. She then turns her lens to the oldest extant Jain narrative text, the *Vasudevahiṇḍī* ('Vasudeva's Wandering', c. 5th century CE), a particularly intricate text with seven narrative layers embedded within two outer frame narratives that

1. In her book, *Bringing the Gods to Mind: Mantra and Ritual in Early Indian Sacrifice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

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builds on material from the now lost *Bṛhadkathā*. (In a sense, there is also an intertextual dialogue here in repurposing of older material.) These nested narratives both facilitate the introduction of further explanation and illuminate the complexity of reality by revealing the rich strata of past lives experienced by the characters. Esposito's clear prose makes this a useful approach to Śvetāmbara canonical and narrative texts.

In the closing essay in Part 1, Naomi Appleton examines framing devices in the huge and wildly eclectic *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* or *Jātakatthakathā* (hereafter JA). Building on Sarah Shaw's work on the 'plait' of first- and third-person framing elements in JA, Appleton compares frame narratives in the JA to those of the late Canonical *Cariyāpiṭaka*, a far smaller collection of *jātakas* borrowed from the JA, and the morally unambiguous *Jātakamālā* (c. 4th cen. CE). In considering narrator, internal audience and purpose of all three, she exposes the richer functionality of the more complex frame narratives of the JA compared to the much simpler framing devices in the CP and JM. Appleton's study reaffirms not only her expertise in this genre but the continued value of the sprawling JA as a source for studies of early Buddhist practice and belief. An unexpected bonus is her response to Oskar von Hinüber's hypothesis that the order of nuns was not established in the Buddha's lifetime but shortly thereafter.

Part II, 'Texts in Dialogue', considers dialogue as a device for engaging with other religious and philosophical texts. First, Douglas Osto examines five *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*, ranging from the *Aṣṭasaḥsrika-* and *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrika-* on the longer end of the spectrum down to the highly condensed teaching presented in the short *Heart Sūtra*. Building on Alan Cole's recent work, with special reference to Cole's analysis of the *Diamond Sūtra*, Osto hones in on issues of orality, authority, use of mainstream Buddhist characters, 'the rhetoric of radical negation' (117), and a substratum of conservatism he sees in this literature. Interestingly, he suggests that the conscious use of oral elements as legitimation and the deployment of mainstream Buddhist monks, who are ultimately converted to the Mahāyāna in the *Prajñāpāramitā* corpus may have been intended to 'cushion the blow' of the radical, novel notion of emptiness (129). In terms of conservatism, Osto underscores the absence of both the powerful bodhisattvas and the striking cosmic depictions frequent in Mahāyāna texts like the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, as well as the consistent preference for the dialogic style and familiar speakers, including the Buddha, commonly found in early Buddhist texts.

Next up, Elizabeth M. Rohlman tracks the relocating of Sarasvatī's descent to earth from the *Skanda Purāṇa* and other popular Pan-indic stories to the medieval kingdom of Gujarat in order to create the regionalized *Sarasvatī Purāṇa*. She highlights the shift from the original Śaiva recension to a later Vaiṣṇavite reworking to fit the rise of this sect in the 15th and 16th centuries. Rohlman explores how the shorter version of the Vaiṣṇava recension incorporates the *Kapila Gītā*, imported from the *Bhagavat Gītā*, and infuses it with the *bhakti* traditions then popular in Gujarat. The re-envisioned text also reflects a significant shift in religious power, from Śaiva and Jain dominance to Muslim rule and emerging Vaiṣṇava dominance.

Rohlman contrasts the internal religious dialogue between god and devotee with the external 'dialogue' between the regionalized *Sarasvatī Purāṇa* and the *Bhagavat Gītā*, a source of considerably broader appeal in India, and the implicit dialogue of one sect replacing another in early modern Gujarat.

In an essay with a running thread of comparison of dialogic strategies in Indian and Greek philosophy, Andrew Nicholson examines dialogues in three types of Indian philosophical texts: *gītās*, philosophical 'polemics', and doxographies. Of the more than a hundred *gītās* linked to the *Bhagavat Gītā*, Nicholson catalogs briefly some of the philosophical developments in the *Anuḡītā* and a number of other later *gītās*. He cautions that the complex intertextual relations among these later *gītās* is often overshadowed by a Western fixation with the *Bhagavat Gītā*. In terms of philosophical polemics, Nicholson notes the dependence of commentaries by Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja on the formal analytical approach of the earlier Mīmāṃsā school, outlining the five-part analysis usually set in a teacher-pupil dialogue. He then compares the Mīmāṃsā analytical method to Socratic dialogue. He cautions against 'perennialist interpretations' of Indian philosophical polemics, reminding us they were crafted 'by and about human beings' (161). His section on doxographies is perhaps the most readily accessible to those with less background in Indian texts since it confines itself to two texts. Nicholson argues that specific features of Ch. 27–29 of Cāttanār's sixth century Tamil Buddhist poem, *Maṇimēkalai*, make it the earliest extant Indian doxography, a catalogue of the 'means of valid knowledge (*pramāṇas*)' (163). To reinforce this claim, he briefly highlights similar features in the fourteenth century *Sarvadarśanasamgraha*, a classic Advaita Vedānta doxology. Nicholson concludes by asking whether the current categorization of philosophy by modern scholars steeped in classic Greek philosophy is too limited and limiting.

Part III, 'Moving between Traditions', examines the way dialogue is deployed to negotiate differences between groups. First, with due deference paid to Gombrich's caution about attempting to draw social realities from Pāli Buddhist texts, Michael Nichols investigates dialogues in the *Dīgha*, *Majjhima* and *Saṃyutta Nikāyas* between the Buddha and a representative of either the Brahmins, Jains or *devas*. He approaches these on two levels: as literary dialogues (stories Buddhists tell themselves) and social dialogues (Buddhist interactions with other key socio-religious groups). Using earlier work by Black as a springboard, Nichols examines the methods used to assert the superiority of the Buddha and the rhetorical strategies used to interact with each group's representatives, noting that these are tailored to fit each group's perceived needs and priorities. Thus, topics vary by group with the key topic in Buddha-brahmin exchanges being Śākyamuni's superior position socially and religiously. With Jains, the topic is appropriate kinds of asceticism, while the Buddha's wisdom is the key focus with the *devas*. Elements of bodily symbolism, patronage, spatial positioning and conversion emerge as intrinsic to these interactions, although the degree of emphasis varies in accordance with the group. Not surprisingly, the Buddha-brahmin conversations are flagged as the most complex and nuanced negotiations.

Jonathan Geen's topic is the persuasive justifications of early male renunciation, using two dialogues from the Śvetāmbara Jain *Uttarajjhayaṇa-sutta*, and two dialogues from the *Mahābhārata Śantiparvan* and the *Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa*. All the Hindu fathers open with doctrinal objections that reflect a classical-era Hindu perspective. The Jain parents, however, lack doctrine to bolster their case, given the ideal of asceticism for all Jains. Instead, they counsel delaying that path so their sons might enjoy the pleasures of life while young. In all four cases, the sons prevail through bleak descriptions of the trials of endless *saṃsāra*, and in one of the Jain and one of the Hindu dialogues, these descriptions are based on memories of past lives that lend authority to the son's recitation. Interestingly, in all cases, the Hindu father joins his offspring in renunciation. The Hindu dialogues seem to be more intricate from a doctrinal perspective, and reflect the collision of early Hindu renunciation with Vedic perspectives that champion the householder. The doctrinal arguments and conversion aspects of these tales are fascinating though beyond the scope of Geen's article. Geen does rightly highlight the value of these dialogues as 'rehearsal-transcripts' for young renouncers (199) and the importance of persuasion in the competitive, multi-religious landscape of early South Asia.

In the aptly titled 'Trusted Deceivers', a richly detailed essay, Lisa Wessman Crothers examines the nonverbal dimensions of dialogue in court settings and the exercise of royal power. She begins by reviewing the paradigms for interactions in the *Arthaśāstra* between king and courtier, the king's four methods of governing (*upāya*) and six strategies (*śādgūṇya*), and the communication modes employed between royal spymasters and the wandering ascetics and religious mendicants they seek to recruit. Crothers then uses the nonverbal aspects of these śāstric models to illuminate how the silent aspects of dialogues between royal and non-royal participants in the *Mahā Ummagga Jātaka* (no.546) signal the presence or absence of trust in similar relationship. The nonverbal layers of dialogue in this *jātaka* illustrate Bodhisatta Mahosadha's skillful navigation of the risky waters of royal service. As the newest royal sage (*paṇḍita*), he outperforms, but also protects, the brahmin *paṇḍitas* already ensconced at the court. Crothers underscores the familiarity of this text's redactor with *Arthaśāstric* conventions and the broader dialogue across traditions.

In the final essay, Black explores three seemingly lopsided dialogues from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, the *Dīgha Nikāya*, and the *Mahābhārata*. While focused on forcing a concession that one side is superior to the other, each of these confrontations between two characters presents 'a discourse that transcends their differences (p. 252).' A certain ambiguity apparent in the endings of all three suggests a tolerant acceptance of differences and respect between opponents. Black argues such dialogues, which represent a vital and repeated element found in both religious and philosophical texts in India, support Amartya Sen's contention that public debate in India has long been a key method of navigating the differences inherent in a diverse population.

Of course, there is some irony inherent in this particular undertaking as these essays on the literary, religious and philosophical functions and implications of

past dialogic choices also reflect present-day, scholarly 'dialogues'. These occurred both on the level of scholarly interrogation of a particular text and setting it 'in conversation' with selected other texts. But it also applies to all the human conversations necessary among these scholars to produce such a tightknit, multi-layered and satisfying volume.