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Reviews

Buddhism, Conflict and Violence in Modern Sri Lanka, by Mahinda Deegalle (ed.). Abingdon: Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2006. xv + 277 pp., £75.00 (hb), ISBN10: 0-415-35920-1.

As I write, Sri Lanka is on the verge of Eelam War IV. The Ceasefire Agreement of 2002 is dead. Civilians have been targeted by both main players: the Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Human Rights abuses are again widespread. In this context, this volume is a timely addition to existing literature on Sri Lanka. And, although its chapters were completed when there was still hope for the peace process that the Ceasefire had push-started, they lose no relevance because of this.

Eight of the contributions were first presented in 2002 at 'Buddhism and Conflict in Sri Lanka', a conference held at Bath Spa University, sponsored by the Buddhist Federation of Norway and the UK Association for Buddhist Studies. To these eight contributions, seven more have been added. The result is a credit to the editor. He has brought together a potent group of eminent authors, all of whom have written extensively on Sri Lanka and/or Buddhism.

The contributors represent different academic disciplines from anthropology to Pali and Sanskrit studies. One of the volume's strengths is that the resulting analysis is multi-dimensional and multi-vocal. Four key themes run through it: Buddhism and non-violence; the complexity of religious identity in Sri Lanka's pre-colonial past; that the causes of the present conflict are multiple; the role of the monastic Sangha as both peace-breaker and peace-maker.

Mahinda Palihawadana and P. D. Premasiri explore what the Theravada Canon says about violence. They are remarkably united in their conclusions. Both insist that Buddhism considers war an evil, the result of distorted perceptions rooted in attachment. Both, however, qualify this. Palihawadana stresses that the Buddha found it impossible to visualize a state without an army. Premasiri goes further. War is recognized as a possibility in the Canon, he stresses. It is an unavoidable evil, although to be avoided by all bent on attaining *nibbana* (Skt. *Nirvana*).

'Does Buddhism, therefore, bear responsibility for the war?' flows from this. Richard Gombrich in the opening essay rightly declares that it does not, although the actions of some Buddhists continue to aggravate the conflict. Ananda Wickremeratne adds to this. He is hard on academics who pathologize Sinhala Buddhism or the myths present in Sinhala Buddhist consciousness. Few mention the Sinhala Christians who have a strong sense of Sinhala consciousness, he points out, or Christianity's global involvement in violence. His point is that violence in Sri Lanka is not an aberration; it is part of a global phenomenon. Chandra R. de Silva, in contrast, implies that Buddhist monastic opposition to a non-unitary state has contributed to the conflict. He appreci-

ates the reasons for this, but pleads for a system of monastic education that would expose monks to other religions and cultures.

The complexity of Sri Lanka's religious and cultural identity in the pre-colonial past is probed in two essays by John Clifford Holt and Gananath Obeyesekere. Holt looks at the socio-political factors that led to Sri Lanka being 'somewhat awash in Brahmanic and Hindu influence' between the 13th and 16th centuries' (p. 61). Obeyesekere, using his research into Sinhala village rituals, explores how the non-Buddhist Vaddah or South Indian entered the imagination of villagers whose key identity was to be part of the Buddha *sasana*. He points out, for instance, that Tamils appear in Sri Lankan history in a variety of ways, sometimes as invaders, sometimes as allies.

The contribution of Peter Schalk, specialist in Tamil Buddhism, links into this by contesting that '*dhammadipa*' means 'island of the *dhamma*' , a translation used by those who insist that Sri Lanka is a Sinhala Buddhist country. In the Canon, he stresses, it referred to the light of the *dhamma* in the individual; in the *Mahavamsa*, it was the *dhamma* as light to the island. Important to his argument is that Sri Lanka's historical chronicles did not define Buddhist devotees in a racial way.

Several contributors touch on the causes of the ethnic conflict. R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, a supporter of the peace process, cites the failures of the past – for instance, the failure to create a pan-island nationalism in the 1920s and 30s – and pleads for a complete re-invention of the State in the present. Alvappillai Veluppillai, a supporter of a federal option, gives needed balance by presenting a Tamil view of the conflict. In a hard-hitting contribution, he explains that the Tamil people in the 1950s and 60s would have compromised on the question of devolution if the Sinhala people had reciprocated. They did not. The Tamils came to realize that Sri Lanka's democracy gave them no hope. The separatist demand was, therefore, a 'step in desperation, from a people who felt profound alienation' (p. 106). Bardwell Smith spells out what he sees as the major challenges for both sides in the present.

Asanga Tilakaratne and Mahinda Deegalle look at the monastic Sangha. Whilst not uncritical of the Sangha, both sympathetically probe the dilemmas the Sangha face in an extreme situation. Deegalle's theme, for instance, is the emergence of the 'Buddhist monk party' – the Jathika Hela Urumaya (Sinhala Heritage Party) – in the 2004 elections.

I have no hesitation in recommending this volume as a serious contribution to the understanding of one of the most complex and intractable conflicts in the world.

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Filming the Gods: Religion and Indian Cinema, by Rachel Dwyer. Abingdon: Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2006. x + 208 pp., £65.00 (hb); £19.99 (pb). ISBN 0-415-31424-0 (hb); 0-415-31425-9 (pb).

The making of the first 'entirely Indian film' in 1913 was in fulfilment of 'the father of Indian cinema' D. G. Phalke's ardent desire to see the Hindu gods on screen, as he had previously seen Christ in a western biblical epic. Since these initial endeavours, Indian cinema has retained a close relationship with religion. The extent and complexity of this relationship is explored in Rachel Dwyer's most recent book, *Filming*

the Gods: Religion and Indian Cinema. She 'examines the relationship between film and religion...as a way of examining the religious imagination of India' (p. 1). She also offers her readers 'a re-examination of religiosity and secularism in India' (p. 3) through the medium of Indian cinema, predominantly North Indian Hindi cinema, although Marathi films (from Mumbai) are also included. This work is deliberately confined in scope, because for a study to also encompass a detailed analysis of regional cinema would, according to Dwyer, make it 'unwieldy' and 'encyclopaedic' (p. 10). Dwyer is most familiar with Hindi cinema, but does mention or allude to other cinema traditions wherever appropriate.

The book examines various genres of Indian film and some, such as the mythological film, the devotional film and the Islamicate or 'Muslim social' film are overtly influenced by religion. However, the other chapter, the religious and secular in the Hindi film, explores the more subtle and diffuse aspects of religious influence in the content of Indian films.

The book starts chronologically with an examination of a uniquely Indian genre (p. 14), the mythological. *Raja Harischandra* (1913, dir. D. G. Phalke) was not only the first Indian film, but also the first mythological film. Dwyer separates mythological and devotional rather than simply branding them religious (p. 15). This first chapter necessarily incorporates a discussion of the history of Indian cinema, since the mythological was the 'founding genre' (p. 15). However, the dialogue soon moves on from a definition of the mythological as tales of the gods and goddesses, many of them taken from the Epics and the *Puranas*, to the main audiences of these films and the religious effects that they have had. Particularly interesting are the sections that detail the way that the stars have become almost merged with the deities (p. 41) and the impact made by the film *Jai Santoshi Maa* (1975, dir. Ramesh Sippy) (pp. 45-48). Although the mythological was perhaps most popular during the silent era, its importance, even today should not be overlooked, for as Dwyer comments: 'There are clearly many parallels between cinema-going and religious experiences... The mythological film combines entertainment with religious purpose' (p. 56).

In contrast to the mythological, the devotional genre is centred on the singer-saints who were so revered in the *bhakti* (devotional) movement. These films were generally situated in historical time, although the lives of the characters may well be 'legendary' or at least 'hagiographic'. Dwyer does not forget her intended general readership and in this chapter she includes a section on the *bhakti* movement, before going on to discuss four devotional films – in some detail *Dharmatma* (1935, dir. V. Shantaram), *Sant Tukaram* 1936, *Sant Dnyaneshwar* 1940 and *Sant Sakhu* 1941 (dir. V. G. Damle and Sheikh Fattelal). These films were 'often set outside Brahmanical religion or questioned some aspects of it' (p. 65). In this chapter Dwyer continues the dialogue started earlier on the appeal of particular genres to specific audiences, with lower classes being attracted by miracles while the higher classes preferred the more 'social and historical aspects of the film' (p. 93)

The chapter on the Islamicate film or Muslim social indicates that this genre does not depict god, but does point out that it is centred on a particular religious and social population. Dwyer calls it an umbrella term that encompasses a range of subgenres, most notably the courtesan and the historical film (p. 112). Dwyer identifies a significant problem with the depiction of Muslims in these very popular films that 'locate Muslims in the past... This dominant form of Indian public culture continues to position the Muslims as Other, making it unclear how the Muslim can be a citizen

of modern India' (p. 122). In this chapter Dwyer also examines the Muslim influenced aspects (literature, music and language) that permeate many films, not just those that might be labelled Islamicate.

The final (genre related) chapter examines the concept of religious and secular in Hindi film. Here, Dwyer highlights the divergent meanings of the term 'secular' in the West, where the term implies 'non-religious' as opposed to India where the term means not 'concerned with one religion, but respectful of them all'. Many of the non-religious films, especially those from the 1990s onwards have been described as embodying 'Hindu Family Values'. However, this, according to Dwyer, is not simply Hindtva 'Hinduness', a term associated with the political rise of Hindu Nationalism. These films 'focus on the family rather than on the political' (p. 156)

Modules on Religion and Film are becoming popular inclusions in Religious Studies degree programmes. In this context, *Filming the Gods* is a welcome addition to the growing number of texts that explore the complex relationship between religion and film. The book is aimed at, and is accessible to, students and those interested in Indian cinema. This is a rich field of study, for as Dwyer points out 'Indian cinema's serious consideration of religion is part of understanding Indian history and society, if one is prepared to engage seriously with it' (p. 167).

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Religions of South Asia: An Introduction, by Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby (eds). Abingdon: Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2006. xvi + 308 pp., £65 (hb); £19.99 (pb). ISBN 0-415-22390-3 (hb); ISBN 0-415-22391-1 (pb).

The religious traditions of South Asia this book examines fall into two main categories: those which originated within the region of South Asia itself and those which came from beyond the region's borders. South Asia covers a large geographical area, encompassing many sovereign states. Yet, although the editors emphasize there is no firm consensus about how many countries constitute South Asia, Mittal and Thursby indicate most scholars would consider the subcontinent of India to be its geographical and cultural centre, and it is upon this geographical and cultural centre that their edited collection of essays principally focuses.

The volume begins with an Introduction in which the editors give an account of key terms, such as *dharma* and *karma* – terms frequently used in the chapters dealing with Indic religions and employed in a variety of nuanced ways by contributors to the book. The Introduction also briefly delineates the major faith communities that have developed in India but which came to it from outside; and it offers some helpful recommendations about ways of approaching the book's chapters (as well as makes mention of further suggested reading), particularly for the beginning student of religion.

Following the introductory remarks, the book unfolds in three separate sections. Part I examines religions originating in India, with chapters on 'Hindu Dharma', 'Jaina Dharma', 'Bauddha Dhamma', and 'Sikh Dharam'. While all of these chapters are skilfully crafted, clear and provide much detail about the major characteristics of Indic traditions – ranging from an account of the history of the traditions, their institutions, practices, cosmological terms and conceptions, through to their sacred texts, ethical

views as well as their modern expressions and their relations with other religions – they are not all equally comprehensive. Thus, the chapter on 'Hindu Dharma', which is the largest in the book, covers 70 pages. The chapter on 'Jaina Dharma', by contrast, is only a mere 15 pages in extent. The book's editors, who are mindful of their somewhat unconventional approach to chapter length, however, state that it is by design. They write: 'It is intended to reflect the differences in historical depth of presence and in the number of contemporary adherents among the traditions treated...(as well as the traditions')...differential degree of influence in South Asia' (pp. 8-9). The stated rationale for disparity of chapter length seems tenable; but, while the reader is able to achieve much by way of understanding from the chapter dealing with religious life in respect of Hinduism because of extensive discussion of the tradition, scope or possibility for gaining understanding of other Indic religions is somewhat reduced. Thus, although the chapter dealing with Jainism sheds light on salient features of the tradition, issues of complexity surrounding sectarian schisms, divisions and reform, for instance, are given only brief mention, and this is unfortunate, particularly as in very recent years there has been much renewed academic interest here as well as a considerable burgeoning of new scholarly publications on Jainism.

Part II examines religions not originating in India, but which are now firmly established there. These include the non-proselytizing faiths of Zoroastrianism and Judaism and the proselytizing traditions of Christianity, Islam and Baha'i, the latter being a relatively new religion whose largest community of adherents today is found in India. As in the earlier section of the book, one chapter (on 'Indian Muslim tradition') is disproportionately long (being three times larger than all the others in the section). But the chapters here are informative and are written in a lucid, easy-to-read style, and each of them affords much insight into the traditions they discuss. Moreover, because they deal with their subject matter in accordance with categories of description and analysis utilized in Part I, this enables the reader in the second section of the book to engage in helpful comparative assessment of the traditions that came to India from outside, as well as to compare the traditions with Indic religions.

Part III contains only one chapter, which essentially serves as a conclusion to the book. This discusses a number of perspectives in religious studies, and it aims to promote ways of achieving balanced, critical insight in the study of religion. The chapter is helpful, but is not specifically focused on India or on the religious traditions found in South Asia.

Throughout the book many terms employed in discussion of religions of South Asia are given, and in each case academic conventions of transliteration are engaged, with diacritics provided for purposes of ensuring correct rendition. However, while appropriate glosses for all such terms are presented in the book (though, importantly, not in a separate section or as an appendix, which would have been helpful), no pronunciation guide is supplied. Given that Mittal and Thursby state that their edited collection is 'intended to serve students in a first course of study of the religions of South Asia and to be understandable to intelligent readers' (p. 9), this omission is an obvious weakness. Nonetheless, despite the book's limitations, it will be of great benefit and value to its intended readers, and it will also be of use to university lecturers delivering introductory courses on the religions of South Asia.

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The Clay Sanskrit Library, founded by John and Jennifer Clay, general editor Richard Gombrich, edited by Isabelle Onians and Somadeva Vasudeva. *Mahābhārata Book Two: The Great Hall*, trans. Paul Wilmot, 588 pp., 2005. *Mahābhārata Book Three: The Forest, Volume Four*, trans. W. J. Johnson, 374 pp., 2006. *Mahābhārata Book Four: Virāṭa*, trans. Kathleen Garbutt, 516 pp., 2006. *Mahābhārata Book Seven: Droṇa, Volume One*, trans. Vaughan Pilikian, 473 pp., 2006. *Mahābhārata Book Eight: Karṇa, Volume One*, trans. Adam Bowles, 604 pp., 2005. *Mahābhārata Book Nine: Śalya, Volume One*, trans. Justin Meiland, 371 pp., 2006. Published by New York University Press and the JJC Foundation.

Readers of this journal may be familiar with the Clay Sanskrit Library. The books are small but perfectly formed green hardbacks, with smooth thin supple hard yellowish ('acid-free') paper of rare quality. Each book contains a short document entitled 'CSL conventions' (these are unusual but easily negotiated), an introduction, the text (Sanskrit on the left, English on the right, or sometimes at the bottom or top of the page one way or the other overleaf on the right), endnotes, glossary (here mostly of names), index, and a sandhi grid.

The Clay Sanskrit Library is to be commended for focusing much of its initial energies into translating the *Mahābhārata*: the *Mahābhārata* introduced by these half-dozen volumes, if and when completed, will be the first English/Sanskrit parallel-text edition to be made widely available in Europe and America. However, although this will no doubt succeed in furthering the Clay Sanskrit Library's noble aim 'to introduce Classical Sanskrit literature to a wide international readership' (http://www.claysanskritlibrary.org/index.php), the *Mahābhārata* critical edition produced in the last century, to which almost all international scholarship now refers by numbered chapter and verse, is not the text translated here; rather, this is the version also known as the 'vulgate' *Mahābhārata*, put together (by comparing and collating various manuscripts) by the pandit Nīlakaṇṭha Caturdhara in the seventeenth century and upon which he wrote his famous and innovative commentary *Illuminating the Inner Meaning of the Mahābhārata* (*Bhāratabhāvadvīpa*). Like the vulgate, the critical edition was created by comparing various manuscripts, but in its case these were accumulated from the length and breadth of India and beyond; the material common to the extant manuscript traditions was isolated as a 'reconstituted text', with the additional material presented as footnotes and appendices. Although attitudes may differ as to the ancient integrity of this text, scholars have been grateful to take it up as a referential yardstick, and the Clay *Mahābhārata* would be a much more useful research tool if it incorporated a parallel numbering system so that readers looking up a critical edition reference could find it here more easily. Of the first six translators only Pilikian includes a chapter concordance.

The *Mahābhārata* tells of the origins, the conduct and the effects of the great war fought at Kurukṣetra, principally between the five sons of Pāṇḍu and their cousins the one hundred sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. The events described in Wilmot's volume are the war's most obvious cause. The ancestral kingdom has been split in two in an attempt to avoid difficulties, but the growing imperial fame of the Pāṇḍavas upsets Duryodhana, whose blind father is prevailed upon to host a dice match between the cousins, at which the Pāṇḍavas' wife Draupadī is assaulted and Yudhiṣṭhira loses the Pāṇḍava share of the kingdom for a fixed term of twelve-plus-one years. Johnson's volume documents the end of the twelve-year period, including two wonderful stories told to the Pāṇḍavas by the visiting sage Mārkaṇḍeya – 'The story of Rāma' and 'The

glorification of the faithful wife' (that is, Sāvitrī) – as well as two episodes in which Karṇa (Duryodhana's best friend, the unknown eldest Pāṇḍava) and Yudhiṣṭhira have important encounters with Indra and Dharma respectively. Garbutt's volume covers the thirteenth year of exile, in which the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī live incognito at a neighbouring royal house with various dramatic and amusing consequences.

These three volumes present narrative material already covered by the Chicago translation, which began in 1970 at the beginning of the text, broke off (due to the death of translator van Buitenen) at the beginning of the Kurukṣetra war, and took up the tale again in 2004 at the war's end, thus for the time being missing out the five books detailing the combat. To this reader, the most exciting of the Clay *Mahābhārata* volumes are thus those of Pilikian, Bowles and Meiland, which fill in some of the intervening martial stretch. These volumes are the first instalments of the books (*parvan*s) of Droṇa, Karṇa and Śalya, which, like the book of Bhīṣma which precedes them, are named after the successive leaders of Duryodhana's army. Each of these books present the war's events as described in retrospect to Dhṛtarāṣṭra by his attendant Saṃjaya, a combatant who has been given special extra-sensory powers to aid his narrative purpose. In each book Saṃjaya begins by telling Dhṛtarāṣṭra of the fall of the latest leader, and the grief of the blind old monarch – who is partly responsible for the war – serves to frame the detailed events of the conflict. Dhṛtarāṣṭra's horror at the gradual destruction of his sons and their allies causes him to lay blame for the slaughter in various directions, but never succeeds in quelling his curiosity or his thrill at hearing about the hair-raising acts of heroism on Kurukṣetra. The battlefield mêlée, although it may be assessed in various ways, is never less than compelling when viewed up close. Pilikian writes in his Introduction: 'There is no question in my mind that the battle books yield the finest poetry of the epic... Cultures across the world, particularly the more civilized, have always enjoyed the spectacle of violence, and in the materialist cosmos of the "Mahābhārata" it is the moment at which life is turned into death that is fetishized and that fascinates' (p. 21).

The Clay Sanskrit Library's piecemeal translation of the *Mahābhārata* is inevitably rather uneven in its English, but each translator manages to make the text their own, and what may seem to be infelicities of word choice at the beginning of a volume may end up being friends by the end. Here and now I think it would be contrary to the spirit and intent of the Clay project to engage in detailed critique of each translation: it goes without saying that translation is an impossible business, and though we might raise eyebrows at passages which might have been treated differently, we need those who try to bring a text alive. Even a terrible translation is better than no translation at all (these *Mahābhārata* translators will be learning from each other), and the parallel presentation of the Sanskrit text means that errors are transparent and corrigible in the reading by those familiar with the language. Translators are urged to volunteer their services to Richard Gombrich for future volumes. Of those presently under consideration, Bowles's volume is remarkable for its constant fidelity to the Sanskrit, and Pilikian's for the plangent and visceral poetry of its English. Indeed, Pilikian has produced passages here which jump off the page (sometimes careering around the room) as few ancient texts can do in translation.

The *Mahābhārata* volumes vary considerably in the extent and nature of their introductions and notes. The genre of 'Clay *Mahābhārata* volume introduction' is delightful and open, particularly given the multi-volume nature of many of the books. In the six volumes under review, introductory overviews are not lacking of the story as a whole

(or at least so far), or of the events and characters to be presented in the volume, but depth of reference to scholarly literature and to connected events in what are or will be other volumes is variable. Wilmot's introduction mentions the tension between *daiva* ('that of the gods') and human effort that runs throughout the *Mahābhārata*, and locates the text's production in terms of post-Aśokan rivalry between Buddhists and brahmins; Johnson's introduction briefly discusses the relation between the *Mahābhārata*'s Rāma story and Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, and the place of *dharma* in the other three passages he translates; Garbutt's introduction (at only seven pages the shortest of the six) remarks upon the humorous and carnivalesque aspects of the *Virāṭaparvan*; Pilikian's introduction suggests that 'the epic is a highly ironic text' with a 'very modern sense of the absurd' (p. 18), and highlights its cosmological metaphors; Bowles's introduction (at 36 pages the longest of the six) gives a superb survey of Karṇa's story and character and is notable for its use of critical-edition chapter and verse references; Meiland's introduction takes up again the question of epic inevitability and also refers back to the events of the *Karṇaparvan* in assessing Śalya's character.

One cumulative effect of these first six volumes is to highlight the characters of Śalya and Karṇa, both of whom at some level are fighting on the wrong side, and whose *Karṇaparvan* dialogue as charioteer and chariot-warrior is one of the finest passages on show here. Another cumulative effect of these volumes is an accidental concentration upon the charioteer/chariot-warrior dynamic, which is seen also in the *Virāṭaparvan* (when Arjuna-the-transvestite plays the driver for Virāṭa's son) and in disguised form in the ongoing relationship between Saṃjaya and Dhṛtarāṣṭra, as well as most famously in the *Bhagavadgītā* to which we look forward as part of Alex Cherniak's forthcoming *Bhīṣmaparvan*.

The text's multiple naming of most characters is more or less dealt with by the Clay volumes, sometimes simply by translation, sometimes by an introductory listing of each main character's names, and sometimes by using endnotes. In regard to the latter, which may be frequent and break up the reading, the Chicago method (of one-name footnotes) is preferable but perhaps would waste space in the parallel text. It is to be hoped that future volumes will be proofed more thoroughly than these (the frequency of typographical errors is sometimes unfortunate), and that material essential to each volume (such as Meiland's list of his departures from Kinjawadekar's edition) will be included within it rather than promised on the Clay website.

The *Mahābhārata* is the multi-jewelled crown of Sanskrit literature, and if and when it is completed this parallel-text version will surely be the Clay Sanskrit Library's most memorable product. With regard to the interpretation of the text as a whole, we may broaden a sentiment found in Garbutt's introduction: 'Though many suggestions have been offered, one should not necessarily accept that only one is right, but, rather, that all these varied theories are useful and not mutually exclusive. Much of the Sanskrit literature we still have today is highly complex and functions on many levels, so we should not underestimate how sophisticated 'Viráta' was intended to be' (p. 19).

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