

All parts of this very interesting book prove the author's high erudition. Her comprehensive study significantly enriches our knowledge of ritual tradition in India.

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HÜSKEN, Ute: *Viṣṇu's Children. Prenatal life-cycle rituals in South India*. Translated from German by Will Sweetman, with a DVD by Ute Hüskén and Manfred Krüger. Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden 2009. 322 pp. ISBN 978-3-447-05834-6

The present book is the 9th volume in an excellent series Ethno-Indology, Heidelberg Studies in South Asian Rituals. It is a reworked English version of a thesis originally submitted in the German language. In her book the author concentrates on the ritual tradition of the Vaikhānasas, a Brahmanic community in South India. Members of this community perform rituals in South Indian Viṣṇu temples and consider themselves to be Viṣṇu's children who are preordained for this service already before birth due to the prenatal life-cycle ritual viṣṇubali. This crucial ritual is at the heart of the author's research and as such it is examined from various perspectives. In five parts of the book the author investigates the interpretation of this ritual in relevant Sanskrit texts, its performance as well as its adaptation and interpretation under changing circumstances.

The text of this well-designed book is supplemented with a list of Sanskrit texts, a list of secondary literature, an appendix *Tabular view of six Guruparamparās*, and two appendices regarding an exquisite DVD, *Text of the DVD booklet*, and *Text of the 'Introduction' to the DVD*. The book also includes abbreviations and an inevitable index.

Part One of the book is devoted to the analysis of the Sanskrit text *Daśavidhahetunirūpaṇa* by the Vaikhānasa scholar Śrīnivāsa Dīkṣita which explicitly expresses the Vaikhānasas' superiority over other vaiṣṇava traditions. The position of the *Daśavidhahetunirūpaṇa* within the Vaikhānasa literature is discussed and due attention is also given to its author Śrīnivāsa Dīkṣita and the editor Parthasārathi Bhaṭṭācārya.

Part Two (pp. 53 – 141) investigates rituals in the *Daśavidhahetunirūpaṇa*. In this text, Śrīnivāsa Dīkṣita claims that it is the Vaikhānasas' familial origin expressed and confirmed through saṃskāras that entitles them to perform temple rituals. He also seeks to rid the Vaikhānasas of accusation of being devalakas, that is temple priests who perform rituals for money or material goods. He excludes them from this definition and argues that it was Viṣṇu himself who allowed the Vaikhānasas to live 'from his goods' (p. 63).

Next comes a description of Vaikhānasa life-cycle rituals (saṃskāras). Particular attention is given to the prenatal saṃskāras niṣeka, ṛtusaṃgamana, garbhādhāna, pūmsavana, sīmantonnayana, and mainly to viṣṇubali. Ute Hüskén analyses relevant texts and shows how the viṣṇubali ritual changed in performance and in interpretation and how it came to express the Vaikhānasas' specific identity in this process – their

membership of the group of Vaiṣṇavas as well as their claim to superiority within these groups (p. 79). U. Hüsken compares the depiction of viṣṇubali in the *Vaikhānasasmārtasūtra* with the corresponding passages from the *Baudhāyanagrhyasūtra*. Then she investigates treatments of viṣṇubali by Nṛsiṃha Vājapeyin, the character of Vasantoyājin's Vṛtti, and Śrīnivāsa Dīkṣita's sūtra-commentary *Tātparyacintāmaṇi*. Next she describes the beginnings and the present of the initiatory ritual pancasaṃskāra and shows how pancasaṃskāra and Pāncarātra are reflected in *Vaikhānasasamhitās* that prohibit branding for the *Vaikhānasas* as their vaiṣṇava nature results from the prenatal marking which takes place during the viṣṇubali saṃskāra.

Next the study of viṣṇubali and pancasaṃskāra in the *Ānandasamhitā* follows. Attention is given to viṣṇubali in Veṅkaṭayogin's *Nibandhana*, Gopānācārya's *Sūtrānukramaṇikā*, Saṅjivayājin's *Nibandhana*, and Kodaṇḍarāmayajvan's *Smārtakarmānukramaṇikā*.

Equal attention is paid to the question of 'taking refuge in Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa'. The author shows that according to Śrīnivāsa Dīkṣita, the viṣṇubali is the *Vaikhānasas'* way of 'taking refuge' and their 'taking refuge' is superior because it is vedic, whereas other modes of 'taking refuge' are tantric and therefore inferior (p. 125). This idea appears in the text *Daśavidhahetunirūpaṇa* and it is further developed in the *Vaikhānasamahimamañjarī*.

According to the author, the analysis of the passages on viṣṇubali proves the faithfulness of texts to sūtra tradition. They confirm the *Vaikhānasas'* hereditary profession as temple priests and the idea of viṣṇubali as a protective ritual. The idea that a child becomes a follower of Viṣṇu already in the mother's womb is also included in them followed by the introduction of a new rite into viṣṇubali – the branding of the milk porridge which differentiates the *Vaikhānasas* from the rite of other Vaiṣṇava groups – the branding of the upper arms with the two symbols of Viṣṇu, disk and conch.

In Part Three the efforts to make *Vaikhānasas* deviate from their tradition and to force them to undergo branding of the upper arms at the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th centuries are discussed. As Ute Hüsken claims, this problem produced quite extensive literature and a conference was also held on this issue. The controversy regarding branding was even taken to court. Although it was decided there that the *Vaikhānasas* did not require branding, they were actually obliged to undergo the ritual of branding if they wanted to perform services in Viṣṇu temples. Ute Hüsken describes three instances of local conflicts and points to different solutions of this problem there. In Śrīperumbudūr the branding is performed within the *Vaikhānasas* families while, for example, in Vānamāmalai the *Vaikhānasas* are forced to draw their legitimization from the Śrīvaiṣṇava ācāryās, that is from personalities outside their own tradition.

In Part Four named *Samskāra performance in the early 21th century* an account of three contemporary viṣṇubali performances is given. First the author introduces the texts and translations of the passages on viṣṇubali in two ritual handbooks –

*Sūtrānukramanikā*, which is used in Andhra Pradesh, and *Pūrvaprayoga*, which is used in Tamil Nadu. Ute Hüsken compares these texts and comes to the conclusion that 'Despite all differences in detail, the similarities between the two ritual handbooks predominate in the description of the viṣṇubali saṃskāra: there can be no doubt that they present one and the same ritual of this specific tradition. Not only the similarities in what is said, but also that which is not dealt with in both texts is significant' (p. 188).

Next U. Hüsken describes three performances of viṣṇubali that she observed in South India. She introduces a detailed comparative description of the three rituals. She shows that the performances differ from one another and also from the texts and explores the factors that influence the performance of a ritual. She considers as a decisive factor for the ritual form the development of a ritual specialist – brhaspati who leads the ritual. Therefore relevant attention is also given to the training of ritual specialists of the Vaikhānasa tradition which usually takes place in Vaikhānasa training institutions. Two of them – the pāṭhaśālā in Nanguneri and the Veda pāṭhaśālā in Tirumalai – are introduced in more detail.

Part Five is devoted to the variation in life-cycle rituals and the stability of tradition.

The author claims that the central work of the Vaikhānasas *Daśavidhahetunirūpaṇa* 'is not only the work of its author Śrīnivāsa Dīkṣita, but also product of its transmission'. She explains why was this particular text chosen for transmission over several generations. She also shows in what ways the Vaikhānasas' religious tradition changed in the conflict of the Vaikhānasas with the Śrīvaiṣṇavas and what role rituals played in this change.

The book presents a profound description of ritual tradition of Vaikhānasas in South India. It brings a very good analysis of relevant Sanskrit texts completed by the author's personal knowledge achieved during her fieldwork conducted during repeated stays in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh in 1998 – 2006. The publication is an excellent part of the series Indo-Ethnology and can be highly recommended to all who are interested in Vaiṣṇavism in South India, Hindu life-cycle rituals and Hinduism in general.

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NDULU, Benno J.; O'CONNELL, Stephen A.; BATES, Robert H; COLLIER, Paul; SOLUDO, Chukwuma C. (ed.): *The Political Economy of Economic Growth in Africa 1960 – 2000*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009. 452 pp. ISBN 9780521127752.

The book examines economic growth of African countries in the years 1960 – 2000. Under term African countries one should understand the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa. The team of specialists looked at the problem of economic growth on the country level. They had country-teams, which collected data. The first chapter is an