

of research into both great Sanskrit epics. Historically speaking we might ask why this profound questioning occurred only a century or two after the systematization and universalization of *dharmā* as a behavioural system? If the idea of *duḥkha*, and the means of confronting it, is so central to the *MBh*, this may invite us once more to ask whether this is a further instance of the *MBh* tradition confronting the centrality of *duḥkha* as developed so extensively in the Buddha's four noble truths. Hudson does not ask this question and it would be remiss to regard it as a defect in her book, but it is a tantalizing thought coming out of left field.

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JÜRGEN NEUSS:

Narmadāparikramā – Circumambulation of the Narmadā River: On the Tradition of a Unique Hindu Pilgrimage.

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Celebrated by Hindu pilgrims as one of India's most sacred rivers for over two millennia, the Narmadā today has been better known as a site of controversy. The highly publicized debates surrounding the large-scale river dams proposed by the Narmadā Valley Development Project (NVDP) have called attention to the human costs of development: the displacement of whole communities and tribal cultures and the unsettling of the riverine ecosystem. Another pressing yet less frequently discussed consequence of the re-routing of waters and subsequent flooding is the disruption of the Narmadāparikramā, a holy pilgrimage that has led thousands of devout Hindus on a complete circuit around the river. In addition to rendering inaccessible key portions of the pilgrimage path, the dams have contributed to the loss of archaeological material at crucial stops along the way. Given the impending loss of history, Jürgen Neuss's new book on the *Narmadāparikramā* is not merely an important contribution to the growing literature on river routes and pilgrimage practices, but it is crucially significant in terms of its timing.

Organized into three main chapters, the book functions both as a serious scholarly engagement with a wide range of textual and archaeological sources and as an authoritative compendium of the places encountered along the pilgrimage path. The brief introduction provides a welcome overview of the geography, geology, and cultural history of the Narmadā River Valley that establishes a clear base for the chapters that follow. In the first chapter, Neuss traces the development of a collective corpus of *Narmadāmāhātmyas*, or works extolling the merits of the Narmadā, from the earliest mentions of the river in ancient Sanskrit texts and foreign travel accounts, through medieval *purāṇas*, and finally to modern nineteenth- and twentieth-century pilgrimage pamphlets in Hindi, Marathi and Gujarati. Throughout, Neuss's approach remains laudably both intertextual and sensitive to geography. Neuss situates each text within the larger corpus in a way that reveals much about how the corpus itself was formed. In the conclusion, he draws attention to the shifting emphasis on specific places in different sources in relationship to the changing extent of brahmanical influence over more sparsely populated regions, a finding that re-emphasizes the historical importance of the Narmadā river valley, even today, as a refuge for non-brahmanical tribal groups.

The turn towards geography at the end of the first chapter provides a worthy precursor for the extensive gazetteer of the sites along the Narmadāparikramā that comprises the core of the second chapter. Before beginning the journey, Neuss establishes the historicity of the pilgrimage and its proper practice, the origins of which he locates in the middle of the nineteenth century as an effect of the rise of Marāṭhā culture and dominance in the region. From there, the chapter proceeds following the path along the river, starting at the Narmadā's source in Amarkaṇṭak and then moving westwards along the river's southern bank. Each stop along the way is treated in detail, with attention given not only to textual sources, but also to geography and mode of travel. Neuss's integration of textual and oral mythologies with information drawn from colonial-era imperial gazetteers and his own personal observations is particularly effective as it aptly creates a framework for tracing changes in transportation and historicizing the pilgrim's changing encounter with each site. As a result, Neuss's account evokes a wonderfully layered landscape where mythology, geography, and history intertwine. The third and final chapter functions as a compendium of Sanskrit textual sources and consists almost entirely of comparative synopses of different versions of *Narmadāmāhātmya* texts. This chapter will be extremely useful to Sanskrit textual scholars.

Through the book, Neuss's extensive maps, based on GIS data and satellite imagery drawn from Google Earth, help to localize the Sanskrit sources and draw out the complicated relationships between accumulated histories represented through textual narratives and the physical realities and distributions of real world places. Most of the maps are well designed, and the fact that many are integrated with the text aids greatly the presentation and legibility of the argumentation. However, occasionally the satellite views appear too dark to distinguish geological features. This is a problem at the level of publisher and production rather than author; Neuss's book is one that would have benefited significantly from higher quality images and possibly a few colour plates. In addition to the maps integrated into the body of the chapters, complete geographic documentation of every stop on the Narmadāparikramā is included in a separate section preceding the five appendixes, which provide further details pertaining to key texts.

Throughout his book, Neuss wisely and self-consciously resists the temptation to force his material to fit a single hypothesis or thesis. As he himself notes in his preface, any attempt to make a claim for a "distinct cultural landscape", as has become very common in regional studies, would have required extensive considerations of archaeology, numismatics, and art history, which would have made the project unwieldy. However, Neuss almost does himself a disservice by his disclaimer. In bringing so many carefully rendered maps and narratives into a close reading of texts, he has presented a strong argument for an integrative methodology, for juxtaposing widely disparate sources in order to capture a deeper history. His argument emerges not through thesis statements and hypothetical claims, but through what he does with his material. In the end, the book demonstrates how the Narmadā Valley, as a pilgrimage circuit, has evolved through frames of religious encounter, and how the river itself served as a site for the making and remaking of memory and meaning for different communities. It will be of great interest to religious studies scholars, archaeologists, anthropologists, art historians, geographers and historians.

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