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Danielle Feller, *The Sanskrit Epics' Representation of Vedic Myths*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2004, xiv + 369 Pp. Rs. 695. (Hardback)

In this comparative study of Vedic and epic literature, Danielle Feller presents her readers with a welcome departure from the usual scholarly debates about the authenticity and textual development of the Sanskrit epics. While maintaining a close eye upon textual detail (a quality that sometimes eludes other contextualist studies), Feller examines the changing roles of Vedic myth and ritual within the two epics. Perhaps it might be better to say within the *Mahābhārata*, for aside from one chapter on the Indra-Ahalyā myth, the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* generally receives scant and unsatisfying attention in this work. Feller's approach to her materials can be described as structural but 'minimally diachronic' — less concerned with the internal textual development of the epic than with its historical relationship to earlier Vedic literature.

Though it is structured around the life of individual myths, Feller stresses that this book is not meant to be a catalogue of "‘R̥gvedic legends through the ages,' taking one myth from the Veda and following its various avatars throughout Sanskrit literature" (p. 41). Instead, she offers a comparative study of how four different myths (and the four corresponding Vedic deities) are first presented within Vedic ritual contexts, and then re-presented within the 'new' social and religious context of the Sanskrit epics. After an introductory chapter involving an overview of Vedic and epic literature, secondary scholarship, and general theories of myth, Feller compares the Vedic and epic versions of the myths of Agni's hiding in the waters (Chapter 2), Indra and Ahalyā (Chapter 3), the theft of Soma (Chapter 4), and Upamanyu's salvation by the Aśvins (Chapter 5). Consistent throughout these chapters is Feller's interest in comparative hermeneutics — how Vedic and epic texts differently interpret motifs such as fire, water, *soma/amṛta*, initiation and sacrifice. Central to her analysis is the argument that surface-level changes in these myths are due to differing religious aims of their Brahmin composers. Before her conclusions (Chapter 7), Feller provides a lengthy analysis of the *Mahābhārata*'s representation of the Bhārata war as a Vedic sacrifice, as the '*raṇa-yajña*' (Chapter 6). Previously published in an edited volume, this chapter strays from the comparative mythology of the other chapters, and thereby detracts from the thematic unity of the book; the author might have done well to replace it with a discussion of other Vedic deities (e.g., Varuṇa, Vāyu, or Sūrya) who play key roles in the epic background, but who are otherwise neglected in this study.

Ultimately, this book provides ample evidence of *how* Vedic myths were retold in the *Mahābhārata*, but sheds little new light upon the question of *why* the

epic's composers should choose to do so. This publication is a slight modification of Fuller's doctoral thesis (University of Lausanne), and perhaps falls victim to some of the natural shortcomings of that genre. It certainly displays the virtues of a thesis: an exhaustive, up-to-date bibliographical apparatus and a meticulous reading of the primary texts. Both qualities make this a useful reference for readers interested in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* or ancient Indian mythology. On the other hand, Feller's analysis grows speculative when she applies the universalist theories of Eliade, Dumèzil, and other comparative mythologists to explain the meanings of motifs within the myths. Some examples include her assertion that the Aśvins' gift of golden teeth are "the tokens of the immortality which Upamanyu gains by successfully undergoing his 'épreuve initiatique'" (p. 241), or her critique that Dumèzil's theory of Indra's 'sins of the warrior' neglects "this god's raining and fertilizing function" in the epics (p. 155). While admittedly a valuable exercise within a dissertation, such imaginative interpretations fail to address the more provocative historical question that Feller identifies in the book's final pages: why did the *Mahābhārata*, in the first place, feel the need to re-tell Vedic mythology "in a changing world" (p. 314)?

As a potential answer, Feller offers the reader Biardeau's argument that "the Epics were primarily composed as a reaction to the threat of Buddhism" (p. 314), but remains herself not entirely satisfied with this solution. Perhaps this is because Feller's fascinating study of intertextuality (though she does not use this term) points to an altogether different possibility — that the *Mahābhārata* played an active role in this 'changing world' by consciously creating an ideological distance (an 'inter-text') between itself and the Vedas. If we realize that the epics are not simply parroting Vedic myths, but performing them anew for specific audiences and specific purposes, it begins to make more sense to treat epic versions of Vedic myths as *revivals* rather than survivals of the older religious culture. Rethinking the monogenetic or unilinear model of textual development might be precisely the methodological shift needed to understand the unique and powerfully normativizing work of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* within the religious culture of ancient India.

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Gerhard Oberhammer, *Materialien zur Geschichte der Rāmānuja-Schule VIII: Zur Eschatologie der Rāmānuja-Schule vor Veṅkaṭanātha*, Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2006, 174 Pp. € 44. (Paperback)

Outside India, the widespread notion still persists that Vedānta, if not Indian philosophy as a whole, culminated in the Advaita school of Śāṅkara, and that