

Jewish movements also provides useful insights for comparison. This book is a welcome contribution to modern scholarly studies on the caliphate.

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*Against Dharma: Dissent in the Ancient Indian Sciences of Sex and Politics.* By WENDY DONIGER.  
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*Against Dharma* is a comparative study of what we might call the *trivargapradhānaśāstrāṇi*. These are the premiere (*pradhāna*) instructional treatises (*śāstras*) of ancient India associated with each of the “group of three” virtues (*trivarga*): sacred law (*dharma*), material success (*artha*), and pleasure (*kāma*). All three texts will be well known to Indologists. The first is the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*, commonly known as the *Laws of Manu*. It is the most important of the *dharmaśāstras*, texts that enunciate tenets of Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy and orthopraxy. The second is the *Arthaśāstra of Kauṭilya*, the most extensive manual of statecraft to have survived from the classical period. The last is the *Kāmasūtra of Vātsyāyana*, the oldest extant handbook of erotics in South Asia. Based on Professor Doniger’s 2014 Terry Lectures at Yale University, *Against Dharma* puts these three texts in conversation and argues that the latter two give evidence of a robust tradition of scientific dissent against the dominant cultural ethos, which is expressed in the first.

The historical context of the study is the Maurya-Gupta interregnum (second c. BCE to fourth c. CE). Doniger characterizes this period as a time of foreign invasion and influence in which “[t]here were no great dynasties,” and small kingdoms were “almost constantly at war with one another”; it was “a creative chaos that inspired the scholars of the time to bring together all their knowledge, as into a fortified city, to preserve it for whatever posterity there might be” (p. 2). Among the intellectual products of this unsettled period were treatises “devoted to the three human aims (*puruṣārthas*)” (p. 5), another expression for the chief virtues pursued by humans. The elements of the *trivarga* have served historically to epitomize the disciplinary values that characterize the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*, *Arthaśāstra*, and *Kāmasūtra* as bodies of technical instruction. Although these texts claim that each virtue can be pursued in a way that reinforces the others, Doniger rightly points out that “[a]rtha and kama are in direct conflict with certain aspects of dharma from the start” (p. 13). The *Arthaśāstra* and *Kāmasūtra*, whatever else they might say, advise actions that go against sacred law as a matter of course. Based on “the power of the more traditional Brahmins” (p. 22), however, it was *dharma* among the *trivarga* that was hegemonic. The composers of the *Arthaśāstra* and *Kāmasūtra* had to contend with Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy as the dominant cultural ethos.

The detailed comparative study in *Against Dharma* is at once so promising and so fruitful that one wonders why it has not been attempted more often. The answer lies, perhaps, in the fact that few have possessed the requisite expertise to produce much more than superficial comparisons or narrowly targeted studies. Professor Doniger has co-translated both the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* and the *Kāmasūtra* and explored the relationship between the *Kāmasūtra* and the *Arthaśāstra* in her recent monograph, *Redeeming the Kamasutra* (Oxford 2016). Her fine-grained understanding of all three texts supports a depth of comparison that has, in general, been wanting, and her insight into their potential relevance to contemporary understandings of India’s past sharpens the conclusions that she is able to draw. By attending to what is harmonious as well as what is dissonant between these three important Brāhmaṇical texts, Doniger’s study illuminates the vibrancy and variegation of their intellectual milieu, which improves the potential value of each as a historical source.

Following on her previous work, Doniger shows that the *Kāmasūtra* was heavily influenced by the *Arthaśāstra*, in form as well as in content (chapter 2). Both “advocate blatant transgressions against dharma” (chapters three and four), but “developed mechanisms to allow them to pay superficial lip

service to dharma” (p. 23) (chapter five). Here she draws on James C. Scott’s distinction between the “public transcript” and the “hidden transcript” (pp. 21–23). The former comprises the texts’ manifest support for *dharma*, and the latter their actual “denial of dharma . . . dissent against dharma, and at times . . . subversion of dharma” (p. 23). Hence, we have evidence in Indic tradition of “the subversion of religion by science” (p. 23), something she claims was perpetuated “by the creation of a mythology about wicked skeptics and materialists (Charvakas and Lokayatas), whose words were always cited with shock and disapproval—but always cited, always kept alive in the Hindu tradition” (p. 23) (chapter six).

In an epilogue (chapter seven), Doniger briefly explores the destiny of the *Arthaśāstra* and *Kāmasūtra* in South Asian history, particularly in the colonial and postcolonial periods. She casts our own time as one in which “[t]he spirit of dissent that was nourished first by the scientific temper of the *Arthashastra* and *Kamasutra* and then by the Charvaka mythology of skepticism has now come up against a new incarnation of the forces of repressive dharma” (p. 170). Doniger traces the emergence of a nationalist sentiment during the British Raj that sought to identify India’s religious past as the actual source of “British science . . . and moral codes” that “members of Reform Hinduism came to admire” (p. 170). She argues that under the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, such “mythoscience” has thrived: “[the current] regime encourages the by now entrenched habit of seeking scientific authenticity in religious rather than scientific texts from the past” (p. 174). Doniger concludes with examples of resistance to this program within the Indian scientific community and a call to look to the *śāstras*, rather than the Vedas, for “the real history of real science in India” (p. 180).

*Against Dharma* bristles with insights about the *trivargapradhānaśāstrāṇi* and the traditions of skepticism and materialism in ancient India. A few examples will have to suffice. Doniger identifies many points of contact between the texts of the *Arthaśāstra* and *Kāmasūtra* and demonstrates that the direction of influence runs from the former to the latter: “politics gets into the *Kamasutra*, but sex does not get into the *Arthashastra*” (p. 58). She analyzes attitudes toward *dharma* in both texts through a typology of *dharma* that divides it into three “levels” (action, speech, and thought) as well as three “aspects” (as moral law, social law, and theological law). She argues that the three texts enforce each of the three levels differently, while the *Arthaśāstra* and *Kāmasūtra* violate all three aspects, but “protect themselves from [. . .] consequences [such as excommunication], usually by providing a superficial coating of sanctimony, often in the form of moral dharma” (p. 62). Doniger lays out what she sees as the various strategies through which these two texts facilitated their dissent, such as “the bookend ploy,” which is “begin[ning] and end[ing] with statements ranking dharma ahead of artha and kama (statements that both texts contradict in the bodies of their works)” (p. 112), blaming potentially incriminating points of view on previous teachers and inherited traditions, and utilizing straw man (*pūrvapakṣa*) arguments “to bring in adharmic ideas that are rejected only officially (and perhaps unofficially recommended), as a device that could be used at the very least in the service of open-mindedness and, at the most, for subversion” (p. 121).

In a study such as this, which seeks to make both detailed and general claims about three complex texts, one is bound to find opportunities for disagreement with the author. For instance, how do we know that Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy was hegemonic throughout the period of these three texts? Should the manifest (if complex) support for *dharma* in the extant *Arthaśāstra* and the *Kāmasūtra* be read as a strategy for negotiating a dominant normative order hostile to their programs? Or should it be read as evidence of the transformation of disciplines that developed initially in a historical context in which Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy held less sway? In other words, are we really observing “dissent” in these texts or are we witnessing an orthodox turn in the statecraft and erotics traditions? The latter interpretation might have different lessons for our contemporary moment. Is it possible, as a third option, that the *Arthaśāstra* and *Kāmasūtra* possess a veneer of orthodoxy not because they had to hide their true intent nor because they reflect a sea change in the intellectual climate of the second to third centuries CE, but simply because they represent what we might think of as orthodox recensions of their respective disciplines?

Doniger is to be lauded for producing a work that not only will be of abiding interest to specialists, but will engage a more general readership in a lively and nuanced exploration of ancient sources and

their potential relevance to vital issues of the day. It is a detailed study that does not lose sight of the bigger picture, the enduring values through which individuals and traditions navigated divergent points of view over time. Simultaneously making ancient India more familiar to modern minds and putting contemporary politics in deep historical perspective, *Against Dharma* will be of interest to advanced undergraduates, Indologists, and South Asianists of all stripes, observers of contemporary Indian politics, and those interested in the resonances and connections between the modern and the premodern.

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*Seven Days of Nectar: Contemporary Oral Performance of the Bhāgavatapurāṇa.* By MCCOMAS TAYLOR. Oxford: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2016. Pp. xvi + 288.

In recent times there has been a growing interest in Hindu religious performances and the performative traditions connected to authoritative texts in modern and contemporary contexts. In order to analyze the ways in which well-established performance traditions are continued and transformed, the historical dimension of text-performances provides an important context of study. In academic debates about the relationship between oral and written forms of the composition and transmission of texts in Indian intellectual history, mainly focusing on the Veda, Sanskrit epics, and Purāṇas, representations of textual performances in classical and early modern literature and arts have been dealt with occasionally. The spectrum of older performance traditions has increasingly become a topic of historical research (for instance the 2015 volume edited by Francesca Orsini and Katherine Butler Schofield, *Tellings and Texts: Music, Literature and Performance in North India*). The relationship between written and oral forms of text reception and production is an important area of research. A considerable number of studies demonstrate that in much of Indian cultural and intellectual history the two forms of engagement in texts are interconnected, and this helps scholars to trace commonalities and differences between past and present textual performances. The study of performances in contemporary settings thus implies dealing with the features of the text and its transmission that shape its performance as well as with larger questions relating to Hindu religions in contemporary post-colonial, globalized contexts, in particular new media, transnational mobility, and political and economic appropriations of religion.

McComas Taylor attempts to address these topics in studying the so-called *saptāha*, a seven-day performance of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (hereafter BhāgP). *The saptāha* belongs to a well-known spectrum of performative traditions, but has only rarely been studied in detail. The author presents accounts of performances in the North Indian pilgrimage center Vrindavan, the village Naluna in Garhwal (Uttarakhand), and Australia's capital city Canberra. In presenting his findings, Taylor draws on what he calls the "metaphor of *yajña*" (p. 23), which provides not only the model for understanding the structure of the *saptāha*, but is also used for organizing the book's chapters. The elements of the *saptāha* treated by the author as well as the chapters of the book are presented by using Sanskrit terms from Vedic sacrifice: the account of the *saptāhas* is called *yajña*, the sponsor *yajamāna*, the exponent *hotṛ*, the text Veda, the verses *mantra*, the audience *viś*, the results *phala*. The metaphor of sacrifice also includes the academic framing of the analysis, as introduction and conclusion are called *kṣetropadhāna* and *pūrṇāhuti*. Such blurring of the boundaries between "inside" and "outside," emic and etic, perspectives does not lead to a discussion of the position of the researcher vis-à-vis the state-of-the-art research in anthropology and performance studies. The author also refrains from dealing with methodological issues with respect to the over-arching parallelism he draws between *yajña* and *saptāha*. His understanding of *yajña* remains unclear; it is referred to as Vedic sacrifice (which one?), an "ancient ritual" that is practiced in "Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina communities to mark various stage-of-life events" (p. 23), and "the paradigmatic form of worship in the Indic world," which currently sees a revival and reinvention (p. 23). A discussion of recent studies of contemporary *yajña* performances would have been helpful in clarifying the use of term and the suggested parallelism with the *saptāha*.