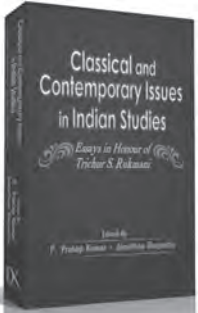


# REVIEWS

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## **Classical and Contemporary Issues in Indian Studies: Essays in Honour of Trichur S Rukmani**

Eds P Pratap Kumar and Jonathan Duquette

D K Printworld, 'Vedashri' F-395, Sudarshan Park, New Delhi 110 015.  
Website: [www.dkprintworld.com](http://www.dkprintworld.com). 2013.  
xviii + 461 pp. ₹ 1500.

In one of Rukmani's earlier works, *Samnyasin in the Hindu Tradition: Changing Perspectives*, we find the acme of her efforts to understand the religion of her birth, which has been so castigated recently by Wendy Doniger. While Doniger takes a destructive structuralist perspective and remains merely fragmented in her analysis of Sanatana Dharma, Rukmani approaches Hindu institutions and culture with *shraddha*, faith, being a *yogini* herself. Therefore, it is fitting that a scholar of her stature will be honoured with a Festschrift volume, wherein Indologists have come together to write on various aspects of yoga, Rukmani's own academic forte.

Part one of the book is devoted to the construction of a hermeneutics of comprehending Patanjali. Gerald James Larson, in the concluding essay of this part, assesses 'Yoga's Theism: A New Way of Understanding God'. Larson sees the Nirguna Atman within the framework of Sguna Ishvara, these again are seen through the lens of the *Yoga Sutra*. Part two is more familiar to the monist, in which the Vedantist's standpoint is interrogated, the starting point being Acharya Shankara's corpora. Part three has a unique essay that tackles headlong the issue of human freedom and agency: 'Freedom in the Bhagavad-Gita: An Analysis of Buddhi and Sattva Categories' by the editor P Pratap Kumar. Hinduism is mistakenly thought to be determinist and just another construction of the dialectic of history. Larson, and

now Kumar in this anthology, strongly posit the presence of a God equivalent to the Yahweh of the Christians, who participates in the human warp and woof of history and also allows human agency within temporality. For instance, Sri Ramakrishna has a similar role as Christ in the Judaic tradition: they show the point when eternity, or essence, or being, negates nothingness and non-being by interrupting chronicity.

The works of Dr Rukmani, Larson, and Kumar may be extrapolated to defend Hinduism against scripturally vacuous attacks of scholars whose understanding of the world is merely pragmatic, nihilistic, or plainly atheistic. These scholars have their roots in such false philosophies as that of Jean Paul Sartre. Sartre saw nothingness as the essence of the being within time: Martin Heidegger's *sund und zeit* had little value for Sartre, or later for Jacques Derrida—it seems that these two still rule philosophy departments throughout the world. This Festschrift volume under review corrects both misconceptions about Hinduism and works against various soul-negating philosophies—the latter is effected through a nuanced reading of not only Vedanta but later of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana as well. The essay on technology and archaeology of violence and ahimsa by Carl Olson is remarkable for its insights into the triad of simulation, Gandhi's concept of peace, and the very real threat of human atavism. Olson brings a close reading of contemporary Western thinkers to the politics of passive resistance in a world now regulated through the 'new media'. Rukmani's abiding interest in renunciation is honoured by Leslie C Orr in part five of this six-part volume. The biographical profile of Trichur S Rukmani at the beginning of the book seems to this reviewer the most interesting.

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