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Jessica Frazier *Hindu Worldviews: Theories of Self, Ritual and Reality*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2017). Pp. xiii + 224. £24.99/\$37.95 (Pbk). ISBN 978 1 4742 5155 6.

As one of the foremost exponents of Hindu ideas to a largely western audience, Jessica Frazier's passion and enthusiasm for the subject are palpable both in her written work and in her teaching and occasional appearances in radio broadcasts and other popular media. The present book abundantly exemplifies this exuberance, constituting not merely an exposition but also a celebration of the Hindu worldviews that Frazier has selected for attention. The worldviews in question are primarily those that Frazier dubs 'classical' Hindu worldviews, although she sometimes slips into using singularized terms such as 'the classical Hindu worldview' (87), 'classical Hindu vision' (83) or 'classical Hindu culture' (163). The term 'classical' in these locutions is used to indicate that what are chiefly at issue are the worldviews articulated through early Indic textual sources, most notably the major Upaniṣads dating from the first millennium BCE and to a lesser extent some of the even earlier Vedic texts plus an assortment of later works from various genres, including epic and mythic narrative, codifications of ethical and legal rules, and speculative philosophy and theology.

Frazier's treatment of these materials is proficient and engaging, moving fluidly from source to source and integrating references to multiple interpreters and theorists along the way. Rather than telling a linear story of chronological development, the book depicts a veritable collage of perspectives, some of which are mutually complementary while others come into collision. Prominence is given to conceptions of selfhood that foreground 'embodiment' and 'enworldment' (197, 201), privileging these over spiritual detachment and disengagement. Without denying that the latter tendencies have a presence in Hindu traditions of thought and practice, Frazier wishes, provocatively, to portray Hinduism as

emphatically optimistic and world-affirming as opposed to being fixated on liberation from or transcendence of the phenomenal world. For this reason, the choice of the Upaniṣads as a primary point of reference is especially ambitious, given that these are standardly interpreted as paradigmatic expressions of world-renunciation.

Also ambitious is the task that Frazier sets herself in the book's introduction, where she speaks of the need for a hermeneutical approach that is genuinely 'multicultural', 'global' and 'choral' (10–13). By these terms, Frazier means to designate forms of interpretation that go beyond the way in which Hans-Georg Gadamer's 'fusion of horizons' is often understood. In place of the image of an encounter or dialogue between two initially disparate worldviews, Frazier advocates the 'triangulation' of multiple voices – hence 'choral hermeneutics'. She thus promises to not only 'illuminate some of the worldviews that exist within Hindu contexts', but also, by means of the proposed triangulation or '*interlocutory* investigation', to develop what Frazier, paraphrasing Roy Perrett, characterizes as 'coherent and "workable" theories for application to the world' (3, 7). It is questionable whether this vision of a multicultural hermeneutics that is both polyvocal and capable of devising new theories about the world is really fulfilled in the book as a whole; at any rate, Frazier does not explicitly highlight any novel theories emerging from her exposition and analysis beyond her interpretive theory, which accentuates the theme of embodiment in its reading of Brahmanical Hindu texts. But the book has other virtues that, in large part, compensate for these failures to fully live up to the bold aspirations enunciated in the introduction.

The book's structure comprises a total of thirteen chapters divided into three main parts. Part One, 'The art of embodiment: The self made of matter', by first outlining instances of how Brahmanical conceptions of the self have been construed in exclusively or primarily spiritual terms in the modern period, sets the scene for Frazier's recovery of a more vigorously embodied sense of selfhood derivable from the Upaniṣads. A distinction is made

between ‘structured’ and ‘modal’ conceptions of the relation between self and world. On the structured account, the self is connected with the cosmos as a whole by being embodied in a form whose constituents bear homologous relations to cosmic elements. For example, in the oldest Upaniṣads such as the *Chāndogya* and *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, features or capacities of the lived body, including speech, breath, sight, hearing and mind, are held to be mirrored at a universal level by fire, wind, the sun, the celestial quarters and the moon; each of these universal objects or elements is ‘the deathless or unlimited form’ of its bodily counterpart (48). On the modal account, meanwhile, the human being’s relation to the cosmos is that of mode to substance. At the ‘deepest level’ of reality, there is the all-pervasive substance, *brahman*, in relation to which all particulars, including human individuals, are analogous to waves or ripples on the surface of the ocean (58, 62). According to both the structured and the modal conceptions, human identity consists not exclusively in an inner spiritual core, but in a configuration of components or stratified layers. The relation between self and world is conceptualized in terms not of part to whole but rather of microcosm to macrocosm in the structured account and of fluctuating mode to underlying substance in the modal account.

Part Two, ‘Becoming the world: The self made of thought’, explores the thoroughly permeable conceptual boundary between knowing and becoming in the Brahmanical context. Poignantly, Frazier is here bringing out the extent to which epistemology and ontology become fused within the soteriological quest. Instead of standing opposed to each other, the search for theoretical (including philosophical and theological) knowledge through reasoning on the one hand, and for spiritual liberation on the other, are two aspects of a single project, with reason functioning ‘as an important tool for religious self-transformation’ (118). This vision of the spiritual path gives sense to the contention that life’s purpose is not to escape from the world but rather to realize one’s structural or modal ‘equivalence’ with it.

Part Three, 'Shaping the world: Classical embodiment in practice', reorients the focus away from theoretical reason and towards ritual action. Here Frazier acknowledges that few Hindus these days are likely to have much direct familiarity with either Upaniṣadic teachings or the texts and rituals of the Vedas themselves, yet those teachings and ritual formations have percolated through into contemporary ritual practices, which continue to shape the lives and the implicit conceptual repertoires of Hindu individuals and communities (142, 153). Of particular interest to me in this portion of the book was the discussion of interactions between human beings and spiritual agencies such as demons and deities – interactions that are facilitated by worldviews capable both of envisaging the natural environment as pervasively inhabited by these agencies and of treating sanctified statues or other representations of deities as, in some sense, animated by the deities themselves. In this last connection, Frazier fruitfully draws on work by Diana Eck and others to inform her analysis of the ritual phenomenon known as *darśan* or *darśana*, which consists in the devotee's seeing of and being seen by the deity in an event of mutual disclosure: 'just as the meeting of someone's eyes creates a psychologically powerful interaction', Frazier writes, 'so the meeting of the deity's gaze – directed outwards through the eyes of the image – also creates a unique moment of interpersonal relationship that is intimate in a more intense, immediate and embodied way than is found in many other traditions' (170). This account, though far from original to Frazier, affords a pertinent reminder of what she rightly considers to be one of the hallmarks of Hindu human–divine exchange. Considering Frazier's knowledge of the western phenomenological tradition, which comes through elsewhere in the book, I was half expecting some mention of Emmanuel Levinas to occur in this context. His emphasis on beholding the face of the other as the irreducible ethical encounter might usefully be incorporated into future analyses of the phenomenon of *darśana* (cf. Gregory Price Grieve (2006) *Retheorizing Religion in Nepal* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), 131–132).

Frazier's erudition is impressively displayed throughout the book, guiding the reader smoothly through the primary and secondary literature. Although the transitions from one theme or text to the next leave little time for thorough contextualization of the sources, Frazier implies in a 'Note on texts and translations' that part of her purpose is to provide a gateway through which readers previously unacquainted with the primary sources might pass in order to discover more. The book has the air of a taster, allowing glimpses of many facets of the Hindu traditions without dwelling long on any one of them. At some points this high degree of motility can be frustrating, for it tends to detract from the depth of exposition and analysis. For example, when Frazier remarks that 'many tantric traditions sought to systematically dissolve the body and mind in order to rebuild it again in new form', whereas 'traditions such as classical Sāṃkhya and certain schools of non-dualist Advaita sought to de-structure the mind until no structure of embodiment is left at all' (153), the reader could be excused for desiring further exposition of the traditions in question along with comparative analysis of the purported differences, but Frazier moves swiftly on to outlining some features of Hindu devotional movements instead.

The least satisfactory aspect of the book, for me, is the treatment of western philosophical thought and of its relation to the Indian material. In view of Frazier's aspiration to typify a global/multicultural/choral hermeneutics that generates fresh theories to be applied to the world, there is disappointingly little sustained comparative analysis. Instead, what we get are occasional sweeping contrasts between 'the West' or 'Western thought' on the one hand and Hindu viewpoints on the other (e.g. 61, 64, 173). For example, western psychology is said to lack the fine-grained distinctions of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (70–71); Hinduism's 'dynamic view of materiality' is valorized over 'Western assumptions about the stable, material, mechanical nature of the world' (64); and there is said to be a 'Western tendency' towards dualistic styles of thinking, which 'these Hindu classical worldviews' have purportedly overcome (66).

While there may be grains of truth in these insinuations, articulating the contrasts in terms of ‘Hindu’ worldviews versus ‘western’ assumptions runs the risk of underplaying both the diversity within each of these categories and the continuities between them. On a similar note, there are moments when Frazier’s eagerness to vindicate her sources’ transcendence of dualism obscures certain dualistic implications of the sources themselves. Especially puzzling is the remark that, according to the sources, ‘the image of the self as something that is “clothed” in the “garment” of the body is a misleading analogy, for embodiment is better understood as the synonymous self-expression and self-making of the self in its physical being and social identity’ (82). Since Frazier has quoted, only six pages earlier, the *Bhagavad Gītā*’s famous dictum that the self casts off worn-out bodies in favour of new ones like someone discarding old clothes and replacing them with new, it is unclear why we should regard this as a misleading analogy. Is Frazier implying that the *Gītā* – or, at any rate, this particular verse of the *Gītā* – has misrepresented its own ontology?

Notwithstanding these misgivings on my part, *Hindu Worldviews* constitutes a valuable addition to the literature on South Asian traditions from a perspective that is informed both by intimate acquaintance with the Indian material and by a solid grounding in western hermeneutical approaches. For the philosopher of religion the importance of a book such as this resides in its capacity to enrich one’s appreciation of the diverse possibilities of religious life and of ways of viewing the world. In an intellectual environment still dominated by theories about a ‘theism’ based largely on abstractions from the Abrahamic traditions and from Christianity in particular, windows into alternative domains of religious and philosophical thinking are to be welcomed. Frazier provides such a window while, at the same time, offering a stimulus to scholars and students of South Asian traditions to reflect carefully upon the significance of embodiment in the Brahmanical Hindu milieu.

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