

Buddhist Saints in India: A Study in Buddhist Values and Orientations

Reginald A. Ray

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Reginald A. Ray : Buddhist Saints in India: A Study in Buddhist Values and Orientations before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Buddhist Saints in India: A Study in Buddhist Values and Orientations:

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Bringing the "repressed" background back to the conversation. By EdRay sets out to accomplish two tasks in this book. The first is to draw more attention to the individuals of early Buddhism as he feels they have fallen into the background of modern Buddhology. This "scholastic repression" occurs due to the methodological bias of the popular focus on doctrine, historical contextualization, comparative work and the like. The second task is to demonstrate how a study of saints can reveal how early Buddhism developed from a forest-based tradition to a monastic-based one. His first contention, that Buddhist saints are under-researched points of evidence strikes me as adding a significant amount of balance to more theoretical approaches. I find it self-evident that Ray is wont to work with data, and remarkable amounts of it at that, rather than work with theories. But the two are intimately related as theories are meaningless without data and data is meaningless without a theory to tie it all together. Ray uses a psychological metaphor of "repression" to explain the lack of popularity of his method, but I will offer a more suiting one. I'll choose Gestalt psychology's foreground and background dichotomy. If his field is "repressed," it has been repressed into the background, which is to say it hasn't really gone anywhere. Through following his research, I find that a more balanced and holistic perspective comes together, which has enriched my

understanding of the subject. Ray's second contention is to demonstrate how various points of data shifted values when the Buddhist community shifted from its forest dwelling roots to organized monastic living. Amongst other things, he examines the necessity of organization and rules in light of the irreplaceability of the Buddha's charismatic authority. One of his stronger and more illuminating arguments demonstrates how the values of various saints drifted over time to account for the emerging monastic order. "In fact [the scholastic] element of Sariputta's personality begins to emerge only in the more developed strata of the conversion account, gaining momentum in the later, even more developed segments of his legend and reaching a culmination in the Pali canon. This raises the interesting possibility that Sariputta was originally not the champion of the values and preoccupations of settled monasticism at all but was a saint along different lines--that he was, in effect, originally a saint of the forest and was only later monasticized." (135) Ray notes that earlier accounts of Sariputta extolled him for his meditative discipline (a virtue of forest asceticism) whereas later accounts treated him as an ideal monastic saint. In his conclusion, he makes a quick case for a "threefold" rather than "two-tiered" system, adding the forest dwellers to the more commonly accepted dichotomy of laity and monastic monk. Ray proposes that all three of these groups had always functioned together. I wonder; if Ray wanted to make this point, why didn't he centralize it throughout the book? Seems like a contentious point to casually bring up in the last chapter. The long and short of this book is that Ray provides extraordinarily thorough and broad research to bring to the foreground the Buddhist saints and their worship. In a sense, all of his arguments run the same; 1.) identify a data point in early Buddhism, 2.) list as many references as possible and 3.) demonstrate how the values associated with this point changed over time, away from forest values and towards monastic values. I do have a few concerns with this book, however. The first is that Ray is emphasizing "Buddhism" as a religion, as a topic of worship and veneration. In this light, he makes few distinctions between earlier, more authoritative texts and texts developing many centuries later. In this sense, the monks and laity in each generation worshiped and venerated these texts and this is the attitude of religious devotion Ray normalizes for his study, which strikes me at times as sociological. My own disposition gets a little uncomfortable with this. It is also in this sense that what he means by "Buddhism" is the broadest definition of the term imaginable. Although they strike me as odd, these two quirks seem to be necessary to a degree. If he were to address all of the problems that arise if these points were to be addressed, the entire focus of the book would be hopelessly lost. To read this book, I suggest reading chapters 1, 2, 4 as you'll get the gist of his argument. For the other chapters, read the conclusion at the end of each to get the gist of the sort of arguments Ray provides, or more accurately, get the gist of the topography of the field of data he amasses through his research, to see if it's what you're in the mood for. The bottom line with this book is that Ray assembles great, useful fields of data. This, in and of itself, is an accomplishment and a useful tool for research. My concern is that this may appear a bit cumbersome and perhaps unwieldy for those who have unknowingly "repressed" scholarship of this genus into the background. Nonetheless, it seems self-evident that spending more time investigating the relationship between the background (Buddhist saints) and the foreground (doctrine) is intrinsically valuable. 20 of 23 people found the following review helpful. many streams of teachings from one source By Clarke Fountain In the nineteenth century, many Western scholars began to study Buddhism, its texts and sources. For the most part, their orientation was either Protestant or materialist, and they weighed in heavily on the side of the Pali canon and what they perceived as "original, authentic" Buddhism. The teachings of the Buddhists of China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam and Tibet were labeled as made-up, inventions, or even "corrupt." Witness the title of a book by the Protestant divine, Waddell: "Lamaism in Tibet." The claims made by the Mahayana streams of Buddhism about their origin have largely been dismissed in scholarly circles - until now. Dr. Ray closely examines the case for the authenticity of the Mahayana and Sanskrit Buddhist teachings, and presents some persuasive Western scholarly support for the claims made by Mahayana believers that their way is also a teaching that comes directly from Shakyamuni Buddha.

The issue of saints is a difficult and complicated problem in Buddhology. In this magisterial work, Ray offers the first comprehensive examination of the figure of the Buddhist saint in a wide range of Indian Buddhist evidence. Drawing on an extensive variety of sources, Ray seeks to identify the "classical type" of the Buddhist saint, as it provides the presupposition for, and informs, the different major Buddhist saintly types and subtypes. Discussing the nature, dynamics, and history of Buddhist hagiography, he surveys the ascetic codes, conventions and traditions of Buddhist saints, and the cults both of living saints and of those who have "passed beyond." Ray traces the role of the saints in Indian Buddhist history, examining the beginnings of Buddhism and the origin of Mahayana Buddhism.

"Ray's work has major implications for the understanding of Indian Buddhist history from its origins through the development of Mahayana and helps to make sense of later Buddhist developments, beyond the scope of his subject."--Choice "Buddhist Saints in India is an extraordinarily impressive contribution to the study of Buddhism. The breadth of the research it embodies, its wealth of detail, and the rigor with which the argument is developed and sustained throughout distinguish it as the product of many years of careful scholarship....Ray's abundant offering should be considered essential reading for all who are interested in Buddhism and the religious traditions of India, as well as the study of the saints in the world's religions."--The Journal of Religion "Ray's substantial work surveys an extensive

body of primary and secondary sources with an eye toward a fundamental revision of common views about the sociology of the early Buddhist tradition."--History of Religions"...I think that this is a very significant book that should awaken some important scholarly interest and produce further study in this area."--Journal of the American Academy of Religion

About the Author
Reginald A. Ray is at University of Colorado, Boulder.