

The Mahabharata in Global Political and Social Thought

The ancient Indian epic Mahabharata was first composed in Sanskrit and then rendered into Indian vernaculars as well as other Asian and European languages. *The Mahabharata in Global Political and Social Thought* positions the epic as an influential political text and explores its role in shaping the global history of ideas and modern social, political, and religious thought across India, Europe, Japan, China, Thailand, Iran, and the Arab world. Drawing on methodologies of global intellectual and religious history, contributing authors to this volume study how kings and peasants, statesmen and revolutionaries, intellectuals and activists have invoked the epic to forge their political visions over the past centuries. The epic has thus contributed to state formation, nationalism, as well as the decolonization and democratization of the modern world. This book helps us understand the non-Eurocentric roots of modern political and social ideas, in India and across Asia and Europe, and thereby the global origins of contemporary politics, society, and democracy.

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Edited by

**Milinda Banerjee
Julian Strube**



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and Priyanka Das, for shepherding us through the publication process with their usual cheerful generosity and care.

Banerjee first heard the Mahabharata's tales from his parents, Sonali Chakravarti Banerjee and Alapan Bandyopadhyay, and his grandparents, Sushama and Nirendranath Chakravarti, and Tripti and Birendra Kumar Banerjee. Nirendranath and Birendra Kumar were inspired by the epic to author their own literary works, in poetry and prose. Thanks to all of them, Banerjee's was a childhood of stories, rooted in India but branching out beyond. In recent years, Shuvatri Dasgupta has not only offered camaraderie and companionship, but also shared with Banerjee the pleasures of discovering how Indian texts, politics, and the world have shaped each other across the millennia. Banerjee sees this book as an offering to all of them, but especially as a libation to his grandparents, who passed away in the years between the Munich conference and this volume's publication.

Strube would like to thank all his colleagues and friends, especially those in Bengal, who have opened up the rich world of Indian literature and art to him. The Mahabharata stands not only as a monument that should motivate us to rethink established literary canons around the world, but it also demonstrates, through its many transformations and forms, the vibrancy and fluidity of knowledge and beauty. The diversity of its reception in different cultural and historical contexts, so beautifully illustrated in this volume, is a testament to its value as a common good of humanity.

Milinda Banerjee
Julian Strube

A Note on Transliteration

The authors in this volume use sources in multiple languages, including Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, English, Hindi, German, Japanese, Marathi, Persian, Thai, and Urdu. Given this linguistic diversity, our general policy in relation to transliteration has been to avoid using diacritics, in order to enhance ease of reading for the non-specialist reader. Specialists in these languages would be easily able to guess the words being transliterated. Only in a few exceptional cases have we admitted diacritics, where the absence of these would compromise intelligibility.