

Cross-reading normative texts and Sanskrit literature on women's say, telling examples to nuance views

This presentation will aim at nuancing views on the representation of women in Sanskrit texts by outlining the large spectrum of female behaviours and statuses as they appear in literary representation, contrasting them with the śāstric corpus (dharmaśāstras and kāmasūtras, and their commentaries). I will focus here on some examples from Somadeva's *Kathāsaritsāgara* and Kalhaṇa's *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*. While the behaviour of some female characters corresponds to the expectations of the legal texts, that of others can seem surprising and atypical: risk-taking women, sometimes picturesque, clearly deviate from the norm. Between these two extremes, the female characters are more or less prone to take advantage of whatever space they have to manoeuvre in, and to take benefit of whatever decision-making power they might have. While the authors are men who subscribe to the essential core of Brahmanic social norms, their point of view on women is, however, ambiguous. Not only does the treatment of the female characters vary according to the authors, but it can also vary within the same work. Reading literary works sometimes helps to delineate what appears as essential in the legal texts. This study also allows for the evaluation of some of the legal texts' assertions about women.