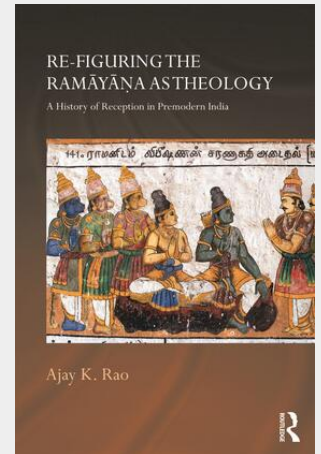


Rao

Re-figuring the Ramayana as Theology

A History of Reception in Premodern India

The Ramayana of Valmiki is considered by many contemporary Hindus to be a foundational religious text. But this understanding is in part the result of a transformation of the epic's receptive history, a hermeneutic project which challenged one characterization of the genre of the text, as a work of literary culture, and replaced it with another, as a work of remembered tradition. This book examines Ramayana commentaries, poetic retellings, and praise-poems produced by intellectuals within the Srivaisnava order of South India from 1250 to 1600 and shows how these intellectuals reconceptualized Rama's story through the lens of their devotional metaphysics. Srivaisnavas applied innovative interpretive techniques to the Ramayana, including allegorical reading, slesa reading (reading a verse as a double entendre), and the application of vernacular performance techniques such as word play, improvisation, repetition, and novel forms of citation. The book is of interest not only to Ramayana specialists but also to those engaged with Indian intellectual history, literary studies, and the history of religions.



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