



Riven by Lust: Incest and Schism in Indian Buddhist Legend and Historiography

Jonathan A. Silk

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Riven by Lust explores the tale of a man accused of causing the fundamental schism in early Indian Buddhism, but not before he has sex with his mother and kills his father. In tracing this Indian Buddhist Oedipal tale, Jonathan Silk follows it through texts in all of the major canonical languages of Buddhism, Sanskrit, Pali, Tibetan, Chinese, and Japanese, along the way noting parallels and contrasts with classical and medieval European stories such as the legend of the Oedipal Judas. Simultaneously, he investigates the psychological and anthropological understandings of the tale of mother-son incest in light of contemporary psychological and anthropological understandings of incest, with special attention to the question of why we consider it among the worst of crimes.

In seeking to understand how the story worked in Indian texts and for Indian audiences?as well as how it might work for modern readers?this book has both horizontal and vertical dimensions, probing the place of the Oedipal in Indian culture, Buddhist and non-Buddhist, and simultaneously framing the Indian Oedipal within broader human concerns, thereby contributing to the study of the history of Buddhism, the transmission of narratives in the ancient world, and the fundamental nature of one aspect of human sexuality.

Starting from a brief reference in a polemical treatise, *Riven by Lust* demonstrates that its authors borrowed and intentionally adapted a preexisting story of an Oedipal antihero. This recasting allowed them to calumniate their opponents in the strongest possible terms through the rhetoric of murder and incest. Silk draws on a wide variety of sources to demonstrate the range of thinking about incest in Indian Buddhist culture, thereby uncovering the strategies and working methods of the ancient polemicists. He argues that Indian Buddhists and Hindus, while occupying the same world for the most part, thought differently about fundamental issues such as incest, and hints at the consequent necessity of a reappraisal of our notions of the shape of the ancient cultural sphere they shared.

Provocative and innovative, *Riven by Lust* is a paradigmatic analysis of a major theme of world mythology and a signal contribution to the study of the history of incest and comparative sexualities. It will attract readers interested in Buddhism, Indian studies, Asian studies, comparative culture, mythology, psychology, and the history of sexuality.

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