

## Yogic Discipline for the Worldly King: Meditation and Self-Mastery in Sanskrit Manuals of Statecraft

Is yoga practice appropriate for everyone, or is it only for monks and renouncers? What benefits of yoga might there be for those who are not seeking liberation in their current life from the cycle of death and re-birth? To begin to explore such questions, in this presentation I will examine techniques of self-mastery, such as meditation and the “conquering of the senses”(indriya-jaya), described in manuals of advice to kings. I will make particular reference to Nāgārjuna’s “Precious Garland”(Ratnāvalī, circa 2nd. c. CE) and Kāmandaki’s “Essence of Statecraft”(Nitisāra, circa 6th c. CE).

Texts on kingship in pre-modern India have often been stereotyped as amoral, anti-religious, or even “Machiavellian.” This barely disguised disdain among scholars, however, overlooks important features of these texts. Here we can find a specifically masculine ideal of perfection where the roles of “warrior” and “yogi” are blurred, such as the Mahāyāna Buddhist monk Nāgārjuna’s inclusion of “vigour” or “warriorhood”(vīrya) as one of the six virtues that a bodhisattva-king must cultivate. Although Kāmandaki understands the goal of the king to be power, not spiritual liberation, the means he prescribes may often serve both ends. Such advice offered to kings presents insights that are relevant to the lives of householder yogis in the 21st century.

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