

The Asrama System: The History and Hermeneutics Of A Religious Institution

Patrick Olivelle

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The Asrama System: The History and Hermeneutics Of A **Religious Institution**

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The Asrama System: The History and Hermeneutics Of A Religious Institution Patrick Olivelle The lesser known and explored of the two pillars of Hinduism-=a'srama and var.na-=a'srama is the name given to a system of four distinct and legitimate ways of leading a religious life: as a celibate student, a married householder, a forest hermit, and a world renouncer. In this, the first full-length study of the =a'srama system, Olivelle uncovers its origin and traces its subsequent history. He examines in depth its relationship to other institutional and doctrinal aspects of the Brahmanical world and its position within Brahmanical theology, and assesses its significance within the history of Indian religion. Throughout, he argues that the =a'srama system is primarily a theological construct and that the system and its history should be carefully distinguished from the socio-religious institutions comprehended by the system and from their respective histories.



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