

["Ways to Shiva" Provides a Stunning and Sensitive Portrayal of Saivism](#)

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"Ways to Shiva" Provides a Stunning and Sensitive Portrayal of Saivism

A New Book, Written by Dr. Joseph M. Dye and Published by the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Receives Encomiums

In the Vijaya Dasami edition of the New Saivite World, the lead article, the "Manifestations of Shiva" story, covers the Siva iconography exhibition now touring the U.S. The exhibition, as the article noted, was and continues to be highly popular. Americans, naturally gregarious, are enjoying their introduction to Siva. Our article attributed the exhibit's well-conceived and thorough presentation to Dr. Stella Kramrisch of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. More than any other single person, she is responsible for the American public's introduction to Siva in a full cultural/religious context. In large part, due to her decades of effort there is mounting interest in the American scholastic community to really dig into Saiva soil - try to get to the ideological and sociological roots of the world's oldest living religion. Because of her long-acquired familiarity with Hindu-Saiva culture, Dr. Kramrisch is a mentor, both professionally and personally, to a very small group of Western scholars contributing to this field. It is somewhat of a renaissance in the scholastic approach to the very organic, esoteric Hindu religions. The labours of this renaissance have surfaced only in the past few years, and many of them are directly or indirectly connected to the "Manifestations of Shiva" exhibition.

One notable member of this emerging enclave is Dr. Joseph M. Dye, Curator of Asiatic Art at the Virginia museum of Fine Art. Beginning in 1967, Dr. Dye pursued his graduate study in Indian Art under Dr. Kramrisch at the Institute of Fine Arts for some twelve years. Among a handful of Dr. Kramrisch's earnest students, Dr. Dye speaks of her interest in her students as being very "guru-like." She teaches or, more correctly, immerses students in her reservoir of knowledge and expects the student to come out dripping wet in their efforts to swim. Dr. Dye not only swam, but also decided he wanted to stay in the water. Now in his mid-thirties, he has written numerous publications on various facets of Indian Art, and recently authored Ways to Shiva, a most singularly informative and well-presented publication released as a part of the "Manifestations of Siva" book series.

Combining extraordinarily photography and clear, non-academic text, *Ways to Shiva* discusses, in a broad setting of Hindu life, just that: the ways or paths that approach God Siva. In the book, these are: the ways of religious ceremony, of self-effacing bhakti, and of yoga and its fruit, jnana. Each path is simply and artfully discussed - not in chunks, but as a running narrative, so that the path is incorporated into the mainstream of Hindu life. *Ways to Shiva* moves through the incredibly profound and rich religion of Siva much as a Saivite experiences and understands it. Divided into 5 parts - "India: The Setting," "Traditional Hindu Life," "Existence and Release," "Shiva, Lord of Existence" and "Ways to Shiva" - this presentation, which can be read in less than an hour, scales down the immensity of Saiva though and practice into a graspable panorama. And it does it without losing any of its important features. The core theology of Saivism, which revolves around the three essential aspects or perfections of Siva, is lucidly articulated, as is the non-dual imperative of man's identity with Siva. Through conveying a palpable feeling of orthodox Saivism, the book as a whole nicely manages to exceed the sum of its parts.

As would be expected, *Ways to Shiva* grew out of Dr. Dye's personal experiences and explorations of Hindu life in India. His three trips there add up to 2 years spent traveling and living in India. In interviewing Dr. Dye about *Ways to Shiva*, he spoke of its personal meaning to him, "It was a topic and book that allowed me to sit down and drink in the daily experiences of living in Benares and put them together in a meaningful way." Living in Benares for one year, from late 1978 to late 1979, it was his vehicle for assimilating the vibrancy of Hinduism while living much as a Hindu would. Although it developed as a child of love, *Ways to Shiva* was also born out of necessity. As part of the preparations for the "Manifestations of Shiva" exhibition, Dr. Kramrisch and the Philadelphia Museum of Art had approached Dye about doing a short book for the exhibition that would introduce the Saiva religion in non-academic language. What was needed was a book on Siva that the American public could understand. Scheduled as the first of three books to be published and distributed in conjunction with the art exhibition, Dr. Dye allowed the idea of the book to "evolve in India" and began working on it actually as a second project - his primary scholastic interest was in researching and writing a publication on a school of Central Indian miniature painting. "It took 9 months to write *Ways to Shiva*. I would work on it in the evenings or on the weekends when everything closed down." Explaining how the book attained such telling authenticity, Dr. Dye told of his friendship with several Benares families who carefully tutored him in much of the exoteric and esoteric material that appears in the book. For months, he stayed with a very devout Hindu family, observing through experience the ebbs and flows of daily Hindu life. The complete experience went into *Ways to Shiva*, but also left indelible memories. As Dr. Dye says, "There aren't five minutes that go by that I don't think of India."

Dr. Dye has no current plans for doing other publications of this nature, but has a feeling of something may come along in the next few years.