Book Reviews
Category : July 1995
Published by Anonymous on Jul. 01, 1995

Book Reviews

By His Grace: A Devotee's Story, by Dada Mukerjee. 1990, pb., 184 pages, priceless quality b&w photos, us$13.00. Shipping and handling add $3.00 US, $5.00 overseas. Hanuman Foundation Tape Library, 524 San Anselmo Avenue, San Anselmo, CA 94960, USA. Phone: 415-453-5111, fax: 454-4143.

There must be something compelling about a book which can induce even a jaded professor to go through it in two sittings! Perhaps I was predisposed to succumb to it, as I had met Neem Karoli Baba, the subject of the book, in person and had also lived in Allahabad, the city its author, an eminent follower of the Baba, hails from. The interest it aroused may have been initially generated by these facts, but they do not suffice to explain it. The book is compelling because it is so revealing-revealing of a relationship which is so central to Hinduism-that of guru and disciple.

The transparently authentic account which Dada provides of his life with (and the death of) Neem Karoli Baba is the latest contribution to the precious accounts Hinduism provides of the magical lives of her unfathomable gurus. This book should be placed alongside The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, The Autobiography of a Yogi, Sister Nivedita's The Master As I Saw Him and Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi. The narrative is enthralling and baffling at the same time, as is the case with the books mentioned above. Initially the apparently miraculous strains one's credulity. However, once one moves past that stage, something else emerges as even more striking-not the miracles, but the similarity of patterns in which these miracles occur, in the book on hand and those mentioned earlier. Equally astonishing is the uncanny similarity in the teachings of the Masters, a similarity which at times is not merely parallel in thought but identical in verbal expression.

Then there are those moments when, while one is flying high on the

transcendental, suddenly the mundane intrudes. There are outbursts of anger, feuding among disciples, reminders that however high the spirit may soar, it inhabits a body, as when Baba Neem Karoli has serious kidney trouble and urine keeps "coming too often." These one can understand. What one finds hard to assess are nuggets such as these: "Twice he put one of his Indian devotees into samadhi and brought him out by throwing his blanket over the man's head." "Look, the body is here, but don't you see that he is not in the body?" "We think we are running after the guru, but he is actually running after us." Are these similarities to be accounted for by the fact that they are speaking of the same reality or merely because they belong to the same culture? Each one of us will have to decide for himself or herself. It is not an easy decision to make. It is not merely a matter of life and death. It may be even more important than that.

Review by Prof. Arvind Sharma

"I've come on earth only for the spreading of dharma."

-Neem Karoli Baba

The Ultimate Medicine, As Prescribed by Sri Nisargadatta Mahara, edited by Robert Powell, Ph.D., pb., 215 pages, us$11.95. Blue Dove Press, P.O. Box 261611, San Diego, California, 92196, USA. Phone: 619-271-0490, fax: 619-271-5695.

A realized master of the tantric Natha lineage (1897-1981), Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj lived and taught in a small apartment in the slums of Bombay. In this book of conversations with him, his profound yet simple words jolt us into awareness of our original nature. In an abrupt and provocative style, his potent sayings cut through exotic verbiage to trigger shifts in consciousness. Nisargadatta provides advanced instructions for spiritual aspirants-not for those who like their spirituality watered-down, but for serious students who will find herein powerful antidotes to unawareness.

"Your real identity has no body and no thought. That Self, the spontaneous knowledge `I am,' you are. You must be bodiless. You must be bereft of the body

sense. You must fulfill this vow, that you are not the body but solely that indwelling principle `I am.'" Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

Rules and Regulations of Brahmanical Asceticism: Yatidharmasamuccava of Yadava Prakasha

Edited and translated by Patrick Olivelle, pb., 458 pages, us$18.95. State University of New York Press, c/o CUP Services, 750 Cascadilla Street, Ithaca, New York, 14851, USA. Phone: 607-277-2211, fax (US): 1-800-688-2877.

Rules and Regulations is the critical edition and translation of a twelfth-century Sanskrit text written by Yadava Prakasha who, according to tradition, was the teacher of the great Vaishnava theologian Ramanuja. It is the oldest and most comprehensive example of medieval literature devoted to examining the rules and duties of Vishishtadvaita ascetics. The pedigree of the author enhances its authority as he "describes in great detail the daily duties and practices, care of the articles an ascetic possesses-especially the staff, water strainer, begging bowl and water-pot-and the penances associated with the breach of proper conduct" and similar matters. The book is elegantly produced in addition to its intellectual merit. Olivelle has placed us in his debt by clarifying this vital dimension of the multiplex phenomena of sannyasa in medieval Hinduism. (English translation with the Sanskrit text.)

Reviewed by Professor Arvind Sharma

History of Indian Immigration to the United States: An Interpretive Essay, By Roger Daniels 1989, pb., 55 pages, us$15.95. The Asian Society, 725 Park Avenue, New York, New York, 10021, USA.

This highly readable monograph documents, with great facility, not only the general history of Asian Indian immigration but also the significant points of contact this history had with the Indian independence movement. A reader cannot help but notice how easily the Indian collapses into the Hindu and how vulnerable the Hindu remains to physical intimidation. The lesson to be learned by the Hindus in their

history of a hundred years in the US is no different from the one they have yet to learn from the history of a thousand years in their own country-that they have a peculiar gift for inviting successful aggression against themselves. -AS

The Language of the Gods: Sanskrit Keys to India's Wisdom, by Judith M. Tyberg, 1976, second edition, pb., 297 pages, us$16.00. East-West Cultural Centre, 12329 MarshallStreet , Culver City, California, 90230, USA. Phone: 310-390-9083, fax: 7763.

This is an intriguing book. It starts out looking like a text on Sanskrit grammar, then begins to look like a dictionary-a lexicon of the Hindu philosophical and cultural tradition-but finally ends up as an introduction to Hindu and Buddhist thought. Words, of course, embrace meanings and meanings embrace thoughts as closely as husbands embrace wives. This book relies on this concatenation of the close association of word to meaning to idea to introduce the reader to the linguistic and philosophical atmosphere (but not the stratosphere) of Hindu and Buddhist thought. Highly recommended for the lay reader. -AS

Women of Power and Grace: Nine Astonishing, Inspiring Luminaries of Our Time, by Timothy

Conway, Ph.D. 1995, hb, 352 pages, 35 b&w photos, us$22.95.The Wake Up Press, P.O. Box 24156, Santa Barbara California, 93121-4156, USA. Phone: 805-564-2125, fax: 564-3376.

This is a landmark book full of dramatic tales and powerful teachings from nine truly outstanding, grace-filled, modern women of Spirit-timeless role-models from East and West: Frances Cabrini, Therese Neumann, Pelagia, Maria Skobtsova, Hazrat Babajan, Anandamayi Ma, Anasuya Devi, Shyama Ma and Ammachi Amritanandamayi. In an age when people like to talk about virtues, these women live them to an amazing degree. Witness their stupendous miracles of compassion and read 120 pages of their liberating wisdom-sayings.

Ayurvedic Beauty Care: Ageless Techniques to Invoke Natural Beauty, by Melanie

Sachs, 1994, pb., 285 pages, us$17.95. Lotus Press, P.O. Box 325, Twin Lakes, Wisconsin 53181, USA. Phone: 414-889-8561, fax: 8591.

This book is not about beauty in the conventional sense. It offers no quick-fixes, and hardly focuses at all on appearance. Instead, Sachs has given us a sourcebook on Ayurveda as it pertains to self-care, particularly applicable to women. You begin by negotiating the tables of attributes that will help you identify your prakruti, the "blend of qualities that makes each of us completely unique." The author provides brief explanations of doshas and of dhatur, or bodily tissues. In order to use the diets, strategies and treatments in the rest of the book, you must understand where you fit into this framework. From daily routines to lifestyles, massage techniques to diet, this book is an invaluable resource for anyone interested in the Ayurvedic approach to beauty and balance, inward and outward. An index, glossary and appendix with names and addresses of suppliers, professionals, study programs and more are useful additions to this very practical presentation of a fascinating subject.

Reviewed by Uma Krishnaswami

Ganesh, Studies of an Asian God, Robert L. Brown, editor. 1991, pb, 358 pages, us$19.95. State Univ. of New York Press, c/o CUP Services, 750 Cascadilla Street, Ithaca, New York, 14851, USA. Phone: 607-277-2211, fax (US): 1-800-688-2877.

Unfortunately, there are few books like this which deal specifically with Ganesha-the great, enigmatic elephant-headed God. The present volume consists of various articles on Ganesha, done according to an academic perspective, dealing with the worship of Ganesha not only in India but also in Tibet, China and Japan. The well-referenced articles cover His worship historically, philosophically and relative to art and myth. Naturally, such a work can only give several opinions on this vast subject and cannot claim to be authoritative. It does, however, draw attention for more research on Ganesha and serves to break the ground for a topic which merits many similar works.

Reviewed by David Frawley

The Religious Culture of India: Power, Love and Wisdom, by Friedhelm Hardy, 1994, hb, 613 pages, us$74.95. Cambridge University Press, 110 Midland Ave., Port Chester, New York, 10573, USA. Phone (US): 1-800-872-7423, fax: 914-937-4712.

This book deals with the religions of India-the different sects of Hinduism, as well as Buddhism and Jainism. The author explores the universal themes of Indian religious culture, using references to Western cultural approximations. Well-written and entertaining, it takes a story-book line to present its material. It is well researched and referenced, showing a vast knowledge of this subject. Yet it is not an organized, academic or systematic study, nor is that its purpose. It is instead a poetic study, which makes it more valuable. The author is broad-minded in his presentations and does not try to draw any conclusions. These are left to the reader, who will come away with a deeper view not only of Indian culture but also of life itself. -DF

The Unknown Guru, by Swami Parampanthi. 1994, pb, 328 pages. us$11.50. Available from P.P. Basu, 35 Slide Rock Rd., #19, Sedona, Arizona, 86351, USA. Phone: 520-284-9585, fax: 6863.

Swami Parampanthi's absorbing book deals with current and ancient topics in the light of Eastern wisdom, modern sciences and the human condition. The format is unique: a "dialogue" between the author and the "paradigmatic guru, the universal spokesperson, the unknown guru in all of us." A broad array of subjects are examined, such as: the role of modern women; the impact of science and technology; the nature of reality; good and evil; mythology; suffering; maya and a long chapter on Hinduism. Swamiji also explores the perspectives of the Western and other Eastern religions on selected subjects.

More Fine Books:

- No Full Stops in India, by Mark Tully. 1992, pb., 336 pages, b&w photos, Rs.95. Penguin Books. Ten essays, written with clarity, warmth of feeling, critical balance and understanding which provide a lively view of the panorama of India.

- A Teen's Guide to Going Vegetarian, by Judy Krizmanic. 1994, pb., 210 pages, us$6.99. Puffin Books (div. of Penguin), 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA. Covering all the basics: from eating a balanced, nutritious diet to anxious parents and skeptical friends, from environmental concerns to tough questions on important issues.

- Mysticism of the Devi Mahatmya: Worship of the Divine Mother, by Swami Jyotirmayananda. 1994, pb., 206 pages, b&w photos, us$9.95. Yoga Research Foundation, 6111 Southwest 74th Avenue, South Miami, Florida 33143, USA. Swamiji reveals the divine art by which aspirants can turn to the Goddess for guidance and support and experience Her compassionate grace.

- Spirituality by the Numbers, by Georg Feuerstein. 1994, pb., 251 pages, us$11.95. G.P. Putnam's Sons, 200 Madison Avenue, New York N.Y. 10016, USA. A uniquely fascinating compilation of the significant numeric principles of the world's religious traditions-from "0," the void, step-by-step to 144,000.

- Wisdom of the Upanishads, by Sri Aurobindo, compiled by M.P. Pandit. 1988, pb., 134 pages, us$7.95. Lotus Light Publications, P.O. Box 2, Wilmot, Wisconsin 53192, USA. A guide to the Upanishads: A dictionary and translation of major symbols, concepts and recurrent images.

- Transits of the West, Dasas of the East: How to Predict Your Future, by James Braha. 1994, pb.,464 pages, us$24.95. Hermetician Press, P.O. Box 1961, Hollywood, Florida 33022, USA. A large and exhaustive resource on methods and description of predictive astrology from the East and West (for astrologers).

- A Pilgrimage to Hindu Temples in North America, by The Council of Hindu Temples of North America. 1994, pb., 99 pages, b&w photos. 227 Woodglen Lane, Oakbrook, Illinois 60521, USA. A rare resource of information on thirty-five temples in North America, from Connecticut to Hawaii.

- 50 Simple Things You Can Do to Save the Earth. 1989, pb., 96 pages, us$4.95. 50 Simple Things Your Business Can Do to Save the Earth. 1991, 120 pages, us$7.50.

Both books by The Earthworks Press, 1400 Shattuck Avenue, Box 25, Berkeley, California, 94709, USA. Practical, informative manuals full of earth-friendly advice!