How Nice is Spice?
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BOOKS

How Nice is Spice?

A turbulent history of taste

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Many of us today take for grant-ed favorite flavors and foods once unique to small communities across the globe. We are unaware that the same taste for spice was once satisfied only through long and dangerous voyages. In Dangerous Tastes (184 pages, University of California Press, US$27.50) Andrew Dalby takes an entertaining look at the human and plant relationships throughout history, exploring numerous regions and their part in the world culture and trade of spices. About sixty spices are highlighted, ranging from the very common, such as ginger, to the still exotic, such as cubebs. Many others are noted in passing. Dalby frequently speaks of India and Sri Lanka as the nexus for trade. "Spices from both East and West reached India very early in recorded history," he writes. Coriander, cumin, saffron, poppy, ajwan and nigella, all native to Europe, were brought to India courtesy of the Persian Empire and later Alexander the Great and, finally, Asoka. From Southeast Asia came black pepper, nutmeg, cinnamon and cloves. Dalby's narrative is filled with tales of people and plants. For example we read of Gonzalo Pizarro set out from Spain in 1540 with 2,000 men to find the fabled cinnamon

forests in Peru. Only eighty men returned alive, starving and empty-handed after two years. Dalby's scholarly account of spices and their world-changing effects provides an intriguing look into the complex political and epicurean world of these dangerous tastes and their relationships to people worldwide.

Dangerous Tastes, The Story of Spices, Andrew Dalby, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA 94720 USA. web:. www.ucpress.edu.

An EthicalConversion

David Frawley's book, How I Became a Hindu, My Discovery of Vedic Dharma (208 pages, Voice of India, Rs. 120), gives a deeply personal account of his own intellectual and spiritual journey from West to East. Frawley, whose

Hindu name is Vamadeva Shastri, came to Hinduism after being inspired by the Vedas, going against the flow of Western academia who, he writes, depict the Vedas as "primitive poetry, tribal rites or some strange babbling that arose from shamanic intoxications." We are invited to share in his early years while growing up and out of Catholicism, meetings with such erudite seekers as Ram Swarup, Sita Ram Goel, Dr. B.V. Raman, Indian journalists promoting anti-Hindu views, American journalists promoting Hindu views and Christian missionaries promoting intolerance. In eloquent, articulate style, Frawley guides us through his spiritual odyssey and rebirth as a follower of Sanatana Dharma. A fascinating and thought-provoking insight into one

soul's journey of discovery.

how i became a hindu, david frawley, voice of india, 2/18 ansari road, new delhi 110 002