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# Book Review: "Jnaneshvari"

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contemplation in India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. Pennington lectured and taught the Centring Prayer (an Appendix discusses it in brief) especially to his Christian hosts but also to Hindu *sadhus*. Much as his Christian monastic counterparts who had taken refuge in Hindu ashram life – Bede Griffith, Henri Le Saux (Abhishiktananda), and Ignatius Hrundayam – he too is driven by the belief that the Hindu-Christian dialogue must be deeply rooted in the mystery of *sannyasa* between monk and *sadhu*. Yet the book remains a travel journal of one who is experiencing India for the first time, with all the wonder, shock, and perplexity of a neophyte.

He cites the hospitality of the people as one of the most moving experiences, and visits with Mother Teresa, her sisters and brothers, and their outcasts, as probably the most profound part of his experience. Reflecting upon his brief pilgrimage, anticipating distinctive spiritual experiences, it proved in fact to be a profoundly human

experience. The spiritual experience of India was, for him, more human than expected but not less but more sacred. He leaves India with a fuller openness to mystery and a greater sense of the connectedness of the expressions of divine presence and love. We do not have here a meeting of the faiths of ordinary people, Hindus or Christians, but a meeting of two ascetic traditions in mutual understanding.

The lasting value of this journal is the example it offers of one who possesses a readiness for interreligious encounter. Pennington went to India to learn from others, with such empathy and openness that he experienced *darshan* from many. His readiness for dialogue and encounter resulted from his rootedness in his own tradition, especially the Western meditative tradition.

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***Jnaneshvari***. Felix Machado. Mumbai: Somiya Publishers Pct., 1998, 145pp.

**FELIX MACHADO** IS a Maharashtra-born Roman Catholic priest, ordained in the Archdiocese of Bombay and presently serving as a staff member for the "Asia Desk" of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in Rome. He was educated and has taught in Maharashtra, the United States, and Europe. In his book *Jnaneshvari*, Machado undertakes a study of one of the most important *bhakti* texts written in Marathi. He explains that this work was taken on as a response "to a curiosity, born out of love for being a Marathi Indian Christian, its conflicts and joys" (Acknowledgements). He also notes that the work is a direct fruit of his own commitment to interreligious dialogue as taught to its members by the Catholic Church.

Machado's study is preceded by a long preface by R. Panikkar and an even longer introduction by Kala Acharya. Panikkar expresses the opinion that this work might

become seminal for the "still relatively virgin field" of comparative mysticism (i). The work cannot be called comparative, however, in the sense that Machado consciously draws comparisons across different religious traditions. He focuses exclusively on the *Jnaneshvari*. The only place in which he tentatively begins to raise comparative concerns is in his conclusion (61-62). His study is interesting, however, in that it is done by a native Maharashtrian (Panikkar notes that Machado's family comes from the same place in which *Jnaneshvar* lived 700 years ago) who is also a Roman Catholic priest.

Kala Acharya, the director of the K. J. Somaiya Bharateeya Samskriti Vidyapeeth in Mumbai, has written an introduction that is also interesting from a comparative point of view. She presents a Hindu account of the desire of human beings for union with God but is also very aware that this desire is

found in the people of religious traditions different from her own. She effortlessly uses what appear to be "Western" terms in order to express the Hindu experience. Thus she gives the strong impression that she is well-informed in Western theory in this field and uses it effectively to present the Hindu position.

Machado's study is short and not as organized and complete as one might have desired it to be. His thesis is that the three paths to liberation proposed in the Bhagavad Gita, that is the *karmamarga*, *jnanamarga*, and *bhaktimarga* are actually considered by Jnaneshvar as one "triple path" or a single yoga under the generic name of *bhakti* in the Jnaneshvari (3). The first section of the essay presents a brief account of the *bhakti* tradition, focusing finally on Jnaneshvar, his brothers and sister, and those who succeeded him in the Maharashtrian *bhakti* tradition.

The second section presents a very brief history of Maharashtra and then recounts the life of Jnaneshvar. In this section, Machado also raises the issue of the indeterminacy of the image of Vitthal/Vithoba in Pandharpur. Is it an *avatara* of Vishnu-Krishna or of Panduranga-Shiva? This lack of a clear identification in regard to the image is reflected as well in Jnaneshvar. Having written a commentary on the Bhagavad Gita that speaks of Krishna as the highest Brahman, Jnaneshvar was, nevertheless, as *advaitin* in the Natha tradition (17). This ambiguity in regard to Jnaneshvar's position is also reflected in the questioning of his authorship of devotional *abhangas* by some scholars. They do not

want to attribute such songs to Jnaneshvar because they consider him an *advaitin* philosopher who would never have written in such a genre (28).

The longest section of the essay is devoted to the Jnaneshvari. Quoting other scholars, Machado makes the point that the Jnaneshvari is not merely a translation of the Bhagavad Gita into Marathi but is a literary work in itself that "brought pride, prestige and maturity to the Marathi language" (33). Most of this section discusses the three paths to *karma*, *jnana* and *bhakti*, first in general, then as found in the Bhagavad Gita, and finally as presented in the Jnaneshvari. Machado quotes many other authors in this section but does little to integrate their insights into his own "argument" such as it is. Rather, he offers a series of his own thoughts along with quotations from others which, while being sometimes interesting, does not leave one with the sense that he has communicated any significant insight into Jnaneshvar's thought. In his conclusion, Machado stresses the importance of religion, not as speculative knowledge or indiscriminate activity, but as an intimate experience of God. The essay is followed by two anthologies. The first is of verses from the Bhagavad Gita and other sources describing the three paths. The second is Machado's "rather liberal" translation of selected verses from chapter 18 of the Jnaneshvari interspersed with his own commentary. A bibliography is also included.

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Andover Harvard Library

***Swami Vivekananda and the Modernisation of Hinduism.*** William Radice. SOAS Studies on South Asia. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, 299 pp.

THE ARTICLES COLLECTED in this very useful volume were all written for a workshop held at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, to mark the centenary of Swami Vivekananda's celebrated address to the 1893

World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago. The workshop sought to give scholarly attention to Vivekananda's social and religious ideals in the face of distortions that were being worked on them by Hindu fundamentalists keen to co-opt Vivekananda