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## Book Review: "Shabda Shakti Sangam"

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against that of Śaṅkara.

The whole question turns around the problem of defining Brahma in relation to space, time, and being, the problem of "becoming" as the problem of "limitation". Transcendence is to be understood as *triparicchedarāhityam*, that is, the dissociation from the threefold limitation of space, time, and being. Varadaguru's *Prameyamālā* treats also the question of *sarvavastuśarīrakatvam*, that is, all that is distinct from Brahma is to be considered as

the body of Brahma. Oberhammer's accurate and readable translation of these two dense philosophical concepts and their exegesis is in fact a rich contribution to the Rāmānuja literature in the present-day languages. It brings also a significant contribution to the contemporary philosophical discussion on the concept of God and its relationship to the contingent being.

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***Shabda Shakti Sangam.*** Vandana Mataji (Ed.). Bangalore, 1995, xxxii+376pp.; xxxvi+438pp.

**THIS VOLUME IS** in fact two books put together "upside down". It is an ambitious project of Vandana Mataji to bring two traditions together in one volume - Christianity for the Hindus and Hinduism for Christians. "Sangam" is the confluence of the Word (*śabdām*) and the Power of the Most High (*Śakti*) and to the surprise of both Christians and Hindus, in this book Word (*śabda*) stands for Hinduism and Power (*śakti*) - always associated with the mother aspect of God - represents Christianity.

The occasion for this book is to celebrate the two great sannyasis: Swami Vivekananda and Swami Abhishiktananda, Henri Le Saux, a Western Christian monk who lived in the Himalayas as a *sādhu* among the wanderers. The book stands as a symbol of interfaith dialogue - a meditative process - contributed by Hindus and Christians. There are 80 contributors to this volume, almost a who's who of the interfaith venture in India.

The contributors include among others Swami Chidananda, Swami Ramaswarupananda, Raimon Panikkar, Paulos Mar Gregorios, Murray Rogers, V. R. Krishna Eyer, S. J. Samartha, and George Suares Prabhu.

Some of the titles of the write-ups in this

volume might give an idea of the confluence that has taken place or is taking place in the thinking process of these two traditions in India. The core of Christianity, the Dharma of Jesus, Trinity-Sacchidananda dialogue, avatar and incarnation, God as Mother in Hindu and Christian traditions, prayer patterns: Hindu and Christian, Christic advaita, and so on.

The book is designed in such a way that what is considered the essence of Christianity is given as the truth and the life, the ways (to reach the Divine), Christian perceptions, Christian saints and mystics; there is also a critical appreciation (Christ and Christianity as experienced by Hindus) and their understanding of interfaith dialogue. The same pattern is followed in presenting the essence of Hinduism, their scriptures, their notion of the divine, the ways to reach It, Hindu Saints and mystics, Hinduism as perceived by Christians, and so on.

The book is unique in its kind. It is a record of sharing of people from two traditions, giving account of themselves to each other, with the hope that the other will understand at least the spirit behind this attempt. It is an achievement to get some eighty people to be involved in a project like this. Naturally it is a Christian initiative and

Christians among the contributors are more in number than the Hindus. But it is a praiseworthy venture.

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Madras

***Meditation.*** Klaus Engle. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1995.

**MEDITATION** IS NO longer an exclusive religious and spiritual practice today. It is offered, taught, and practised in a variety of milieus and groups of people in search of spiritual well-being, in psychological and psychiatric therapies as well as in physical training centres and even in sports clubs. Engle's work tries to counteract this modern reductionism of what is fundamentally a spiritual practice with a spiritual goal. Its real worth is that we have here a compendium of all possible traditions of meditation developed in the Eastern as well as in the Western world, briefly presented in their historical background. Thus we read about the varieties of techniques issuing from the traditions of yoga and the buddhist traditions. The physical meditations proposed in the empirical research takes a large part of this work. The last chapter attempts to put order in this meditation jungle: unipolar models attempting at relaxation, regression, or progression; bipolar models with subjective-objective, immanent-transcendent, introvert-extrovert, and the like categories; complex models with

ascendance, descendance, and transcendence polarities. The book provides also a list of spiritual masters and mystics connected with the techniques of meditation.

Looking at the bibliography it becomes evident that Engle works practically only with secondary literature except for some more recent testimonies on the experience of meditation. The concept of meditation and why and how such a variety of spiritual and religious techniques could be brought under this concept, is nowhere discussed. The technical Sanskrit terms are not put in with diacritical marks and are sometimes badly written.

As we said above, the book is nevertheless valuable to get initial information on meditation practised in the present-day spiritual circles predominantly influenced by a new-age ideology and which academic circles sometimes have to deal with.

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***Zeit und Geschichte im Viṣṇupurāna.*** Heinz Werner Wessler. Bern: Peter Lang, 1995.

**THE ITIHĀSA** AND *purāna* literatures have developed extraordinary concepts of time and revelled into fantastic discussions on them in spite of their timeless outlook of life and salvation. Wessler takes up a text analysis of the *Viṣṇupurāna* and brings out its concept and perception of time and their eschatological implications. The work in fact

is a history of time in Hinduism, starting from the vedas through the epics, an in-depth study of the fundamental time concepts of *yuga*, *yugānta*, *kalpa*, *manvantara*, *vamśa*, *pralaya*, and so forth. These mythological concepts are brought in contrast with the cosmic and historical chronology underlying the entire Hindu