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Book Review: "Mysticism in Shaivism and Christianity"

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from different ancient texts and inscriptional evidence how our ancestors have practised the discipline of growing and sharing in abundances for ages. It is in fact a good source book on this theme – with Sanskrit text and English translation.

The intention of this book is to draw the attention of the readers to a noble practice of sharing with others, and thus building a community of love and concern. This is said to be the characteristic of Indian civilization. In fact, the Bhagavad Gita calls a person a thief if he cooks food only for himself, with no intention of sharing with others (p.3, 12). If this idea is taken seriously and people live up to it, the situation in India will be different.

But then, why is that such noble thoughts are ignored, or at least not practised by people in India? The authors assert that it was the onslaught of the British that brought about this decline in dharmic living. Deprecating the Indian manners, as in the book of Abbe Dubois, the British administrators expressed antipathy towards Indian ways, thereby disrupting the polity, as evidenced by the writings of Richard Welleseley (Governor General in Mysore, p. 195), and polluting the minds of the

Indians. This has gradually brought about the callousness which is almost institutionalized in Indian society.

That colonial rule in India had its negative impact is not to be denied. But to draw the conclusion from this that the present situation of poverty and hunger and the people's attitude of looking to one's own benefit and that of one's ethnic community is the result of colonial rule sounds rather naive. It is true the colonizers everywhere had their profit motive and displayed a superiority complex. But that does not explain the present-day callousness of Indian people and all that is happening in the socio-economic-political situation. The issue is complex, involving many factors. And we should take responsibility for the present situation in India and work for a change of attitude among the people.

However, the book is a valuable source of information concerning the practice of sharing in Indian culture that needs to be brought to the awareness of people so that they begin to see the abiding significance of such an Indian cultural value.

Anand Amaladass, S.J.
Madras

Mysticism in Shaivism and Christianity. Bettina Bäumer, Ed. New Delhi: D.K. Printworld Ltd., 1997. xviii + 365 pp.

THE BOOK UNDER review is the result of a seminar organized as a spiritual dialogue between the Shaivas and the Christians in 1990 under the auspices of the Abhishikhananda Society. The first article by Alois Hass was later added to this volume in order to clarify the very concept of mysticism. As it stands, there are seven entries from the Christian side and five from Shaiva perspectives.

The enlarged version of Raimon Panikkar on the mysticism of Jesus Christ

includes the historical perspective before presenting a few select Mahavakyas of Christ with an "intercultural exegesis". There is one presentation on Mysticism of Shaiva Siddanta by Swami Nityanandagiri and three entries on Kashmir Saivism (H.C. Chakravarty, B. N. Pandit and J. N. Kaul).

Among the Christian mystics Meister Eckhart (Sr Brigitte), Hadewijck (O. Baumer-Despeigne), Julian of Norwich (Murray Rogers), and Ignatius of Loyola (G. Gispert-Sauch) are discussed in this volume.

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The mystical traditions of Eastern Christianity are presented by S. Descy. The purpose of this volume is "to let the various traditions speak for themselves" (p.xvi).

It is also striking that from the Christian tradition individual mystics like Meister Eckhart, Julian, or Ignatius are presented. But from the Shaiva tradition it is mostly the basic concepts of the Shaiva school like Pratyabhijna or Sambhayopaya that are explained. So the volume might sound asymmetrical. However, the book itself offers an interesting reading of the accounts of Christian mystics, and it is presented in such a way that the reader is drawn into the mystic path of these great personalities.

In fact there is a growing awareness of

this mystic dimension of each tradition and this has been brought about by the inter-religious coming together where each one looks at his/her religious roots and rediscovers values that remained so far unthematic and implicit. This process has become also a self-discovery enabling people to enter into other traditions than their own.

It is not so easy to bring in partners in dialogue from different traditions for a "living together" and to allow the respective followers to articulate the insights of the tradition they have inherited. The editor has succeeded in this venture.

Anand Amaladass, S.J
Madras

The Bairagi Madonna: Leaves from a Calcutta Notebook. A. F. Thompson. Delhi: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1997, x + 105 pp.

FRANK THOMPSON SPENT the 1960s as a teacher at Bishop's College, Calcutta – the central seminary of the Anglican churches of India, Pakistan, and Ceylon. This small but wonderful book is based on a journal Frank wrote during his last year at Bishop's College, 1969-70. It records the experiences of himself, his wife Elaine, and their two small boys, living in a multilingual and interracial community in the Hindu-Christian context of Calcutta. Reading it brought back vivid memories of my own first stay in India which occurred at Banaras Hindu University at about the same time.

Appropriate to Calcutta, the book begins with a reflection on living in the heat and the humidity of the city. Following chapters detail a rich cross-section of life in India: a train journey to a summer holiday in the mountains, students arriving and settling into the daily routine of the College, the coming of monsoon rains, life in Calcutta, politics, movies, worship, Gandhi's birthday, Durga puja, and Christmas in Calcutta. The Teape

Lectures were given at the College in 1969 by R. C. Zaehner. Thompson describes the lectures as an academic "non-event" for reasons familiar to any of us who have given talks in India. The first lecture was to be chaired by an eminent scholar and senior administrator from Rabindra Bharati University in Calcutta. In introducing Zaehner, the scholar spoke for forty minutes on her own neo-vedantin philosophy, finally introduced Zaehner and then said that unfortunately, due to another commitment, she could not stay to hear his lecture. That disaster was immediately followed by the microphone and amplifying system being inadequate to pick up Zaehner's soft voice.

The title of the book, *The Bairagi Madonna*, refers to a painting installed in the college chapel shortly before Thompson left. It was a painting of a mother and child done by a young painter, Sama Bairagi, in the Bengali style of Jamine Roy. The painting responded to a complaint that the chapel needed to be made more "Indian".