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Book Review: "Multiculturalism & Minority Religions in Britain: Krishna Consciousness, Religious Freedom, and the Politics of Location"

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concerning the Catholic Church in India. At this gathering she also met Swami Abhishiktananda and was more and more captivated by his idea of living the life of a Hindu samnyasi. Together with two fellow-sisters she revived the Christa Prema Seva Ashram in Pune. Founded in 1927 by a group of Oxford Anglicans under the leadership of (later) Bishop Jack Winslow, it had been vacant for many years. To become better acquainted with life in Hindu Ashrams, she undertook an extensive tour of North-Indian ashrams and felt particularly attracted by the ecumenical, welcoming atmosphere of Sivananda Ashram, under the headship of Swami Cidananda, who became a personal friend and guide.

Vandana Mataji describes with great warmth the six years she spent at Sivananda Ashram and summarizes Swami Cidananda's teaching in the maxime: "Adapt, Adjust, Accommodate. This is the highest sadhana." The next great step was the foundation of an independent Ashram some distance away from Rishikesh – Jivan Dhara Ashram in Jaiharikal. The practical problems of finding a suitable place, dealing with suspicious locals, establishing a routine and – surviving are vividly described. In the process some very fundamental issues are being raised about the meaning of the Christian presence in Hindu India.

It is not the purpose of a book-review to go into every detail – but everyone with a vital interest in the encounter of Christianity with India should carefully reflect on Vandana Mataji's observations, coming as they do from many years of living with

Hindus. This is especially true of the essays in the second part, where she shares many insights on vital issues in Hindu-Christian dialogue (and the absence of it) in India and the West. Not being a salaried theologian of the Catholic Church, but possessing theological learning and vast experience, and informed by a life of meditation, Vandana Mataji boldly suggests new approaches to evangelization, mission, conversion – touchy issues that have agitated lately not only India but also the West. In the final chapter – "The Third Millennium" – Vandana Mataji offers a number of practical suggestions for Hindu-Christian dialogue. If these were taken up, they would go a long way to improve Hindu-Christian relations. Only those who have tried themselves to live as Christians with Hindus will be able to fully appreciate the wisdom of this book, distilled from prayer, meditation, patience, suffering, talking and being talked about. I conclude this review by reproducing the motto found at the beginning of the book, which truly expresses the spirit in which it has been written: "Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy, else we may find ourselves treading on another person's dream. More serious still – we may forget that God was there before our arrival."

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Multiculturalism & Minority Religions in Britain: Krishna Consciousness, Religious Freedom, and the Politics of Location.

Malory Nye. Richmond Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001, 331 pp.

IN 1973 GEORGE HARRISON, the former "Beatle" donated a country house in the village of Lechmore Heath, England, to ISKCON (the "Hare Krishnas"). The house was renamed Bhaktivedanta Manor and was

to function as a theological seminar and as a place of worship. This book is a case study of the 15 year legal dispute that arose over the use of the Manor as a place of worship. It highlights the place of this minority Hindu

religion with the British multicultural but still hegomonically Christian society – a freedom of religion issue central to questions of law and public policy in many of today's pluralistic societies. The result is a detailed and will written book by an anthropologist working in a religious studies department that deserves to be widely read. It effectively complements *The South Asian Religious Diaspora in Britain, Canada and the United States*, edited by Harold Coward, John Hinnells and Raymond Williams (SUNY, 2000).

Written in three parts, the book begins in Part One by examining the concept of sacred space in the context of a minority Hindu religion in multicultural Britain and the new European Convention on Human Rights. The latter Convention, now part of British law, specifies freedom of religion for everyone. Nye helpfully suggests that the application of such a policy should not turn on debates over the definition of religion in terms of beliefs and teachings but rather on whether or not the practices of the group provide sufficient public benefit for the group to be given the legal protection of the act (6). In answering this question with regard to ISKCON and Bhaktivedanta Manor, Nye examines the history of ISKCON and how it has moved from the status of a cult to being a representative of the mainstream Hindu diaspora in Britain. In Part Two the author studies in depth how ISKCON and their supporters dealt with the threat of closure of Bhaktivedanta Manor and other issues that arose as they attempted to "save the temple." Part Three deals with principles and theoretical questions raised by the ISKCON case study, namely, how can one talk about "freedom of religion" in pluralistic social and political contexts? Here the focus is very much on "Religion and the Politics of Multiculturalism" (Chapter 9). Planning permission for minority religion temples proves to be a telling flashpoint for the practice of religious freedom.

Several points are of particular interest for the readers of this Bulletin. One is the Christian-based norms adopted by the

village council in determining that *Krishna-lila* plays put on in the Manor grounds were "entertainments" rather than authentic parts of Hindu worship. Another is the way in which planning and "Green Belt" concern can be employed by a Christian dominated "host" culture to cover radical and or religious bias against minority Asian places of worship. The author offers a detailed and balanced account of the 16 year struggle between the Bhaktivedanta Manor and the village (involving committees, an Inspector, a public enquiry, courts at all levels and the Secretary of State) resulting in the resolution of a road being built from the back parking lot of the manor across adjacent fields to a major highway, thus keeping the heavy traffic of worship and festival times completely out of the village. In the process ISKCON's cause is championed by the immigrant Hindu community. Although it takes some 200 pages to tell this story, the reader is well repaid with careful analysis throughout. The insights gained, although especially appropriate to Britain and the EU, can be applied to most any modern Western country with Asian immigrant minority communities.

In the final 100 pages (Part Three) the author leaves the details of the case study behind and engages in excellent theoretical reflections, such as the problem of using modern western liberal rights discourse (as assumed by the 1948 UN Declaration on Human Rights with its individualist assumptions) in contexts of immigrant minority religious cultures with quite different worldviews. He tests out his reflections by applying them to "freedom of religion" issues in a variety of countries, and particularly in Britain and the European Court of Human Rights. The book concludes with some observations on "Religion and the Politics of Multiculturalism" as seen in Britain – a secularized society, which is multicultural and yet still has an established Anglican Church (256). Here the author makes good use of Charles Taylor's "politics of recognition." In the end through its legal, political, and media struggles the Bhaktivedanta Manor of ISKCON received

recognition from both Britain's immigrant Hindu community and Britain's secular Christian host society. This timely and well-told story should be in every University library and would enliven any graduate or

senior undergraduate course on Hinduism.

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Christianity is Indian: The Emergence of an Indigenous Community. Roger E. Hedlund (Ed.). Delhi: ISPCK, 2000, xiv + 458 pp.

THE TITLE of this volume might sound rather apologetic, as if one tries to assert one's right to exist in a country like India. Thus it makes the readers curious about the content of the book. There are 27 entries in this volume apart from the introduction of the editor, divided into three parts as : historical and critical studies, narratives of emerging movements and accounts of participants and observers. These are papers presented in a seminar held by Hyderabad in 1998.

The editor points out the goal of this publication: It "is designed to advance the understanding of Christianity in the contemporary Indian context, strengthen the self-identity of India's Christian community, and document the historical importance of Christianity in the region as well as provide information for historians and research scholars." (p. xi).

The title itself is quite suggestive at a time when a debate is going on about the national identity of the Indian citizens: who is an Indian and who is a foreigner? Christianity and Islam are considered to be foreign to India, since they had their origin outside of India. It is historically true that Christianity in India is as old as Christianity itself. But the question is whether it has become part of "Indian culture".

This volume enumerates several attempts of Christians to be "indigenous". Indigenous churches in different parts of India are presented from Kerala, Tamilnadu, Andhra, Bengal and so on. Integration of Christian presence with the Indian culture is highlighted through the example of Roberto de Nobili, Sadhu Sundar Singh and others.

The Christian presence among the Dalits and tribals is another important feature of this book. Thus, this volume is a useful document to assess the Christian presence in India.

The editor remarks that the various Christian movements in India "are demonstrations of the translatability of the Gospel, an authentic Indian incarnation of Christian faith" (p. ix). This volume occasions also for raising several questions. It is rather strange that even after 2000 years of Christian presence in India, the Christians have to prove that Christianity is Indian. One has still to explain the historical fact that after 2000 years of missionary work, this community's strength is about two and a half percent of the total population – a marginalized group, as one could say in today's context. All its struggle seems to be in integrating with the major community in India.

Christian contribution to the national culture is also minimal for example compared to the Islamic presence in India, in spite of its claim to run several educational and medical institutions. It has not acted as an antidote to the several ills of the Indian society like the caste factor that is vitiating also the Christian community in India. This book is said to be opening the door for further research in this direction and hence it is a welcome contribution to the Christian thinkers.

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