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Book Review: "Meditation"

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

Anand Amaladass, S.J.
Madras


MEDITATION IS NO longer an exclusive religious and spiritual practice today. It is offered, taught, and practised in a variety of milieux 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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THE ITIHÁSA AND purāṇa 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 Viṣṇupurāṇa 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, yugánta, kalpa, manvantara, vamśa, pralaya, and so forth. These mythological concepts are brought in contrast with the cosmic and historical chronology underlying the entire Hindu