

BOOK REVIEWS

Robert A. F. Thurman, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirthi- A Mahayana Scripture*. Delhi : Motilal Banarsidass, First Edition 1991, pp. x + 166, Rs. 125.00

The unique goal of all Mahayana teachings and techniques is to lead to Buddhahood. For persons with different aptitudes and inclinations to practice, a methodology to realize this goal is provided in the Mahayana Scripture.

This text passage titled – “The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirthi” is a series of conversational discourses between a certain Liuhari, by name Vimalakirthi and various disciples of Buddha. During the conversational discourse in about twelve (or thirteen, if Epilogue is technically to be taken as a chapter) Chapters, it brings out the finer points of Mahayana Buddhistic practices and precepts. The text purports to record events that took place during Gautamma Buddha’s time. This teaching of Vimalakirthi, revived by Nagarjuna (circa 1st cent. BC to 1st cent. AD) became most the popular text, since 3rd cent. AD. This text was translated into Chinese seven times. The present text is based on the translations of the Chinese book by Rev. E. Bangert into modern Thai and Sanskrit language. The text has very useful notes and glossaries for the benefit of the reader.

Vimalakirti claims inclusion among the “Great Sorcerers” (Maha Siddhas) most of all, perhaps for his generous use of miraculous feats in the course of teaching his fellowmen and women. Such being the description and method in this *sutra*, the question of whether Vimalakirthi and other referred characters are “living” figures of historicity or literary allegorical figures are best kept aside as these do not lend help in any way to reach the essence of the *sutra*. Vimalakirti’s methods of the reconciliation of dichotomies, as based on the inconceivable liberation of the *bodhisatva*, forms a rapid, effective method of simultaneously developing wisdom and great compassion to a high degree.

Vimalakirti lays great emphasis on the theme of inconceivability of all things – relative or absolute, to teach Dharma. This type of deepest

teaching is meant only to those disciples who are ready to receive it, and not for all lay practitioners. The technique adopted is to pit the polar opposite concepts against each other to eliminate the fixedness of each and to free the mind of the practitioner who applies himself to the polarities to open into a middle ground of reality beyond concepts.

Similar techniques are noticed in Upanishads which recommend contemplation on the polar opposite qualities of the ultimate and endorsed in the yoga practices to train the mind. Probably the yogic practical methods of Vedic systems were suitably incorporated into the Buddhist fold.

The translation is simple yet penetrating; it is in line with the purpose of authors to give a philosophical rather than philological presentation.

B. V. Venketa Krishna

V. F. Vineeth. *Songs of Solitude*. (2nd ed.) Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications 1993, Pp 125.

Songs and poems are the easiest means to approach the divine and the self in a direct and personal way. *Ekantagita or Songs of Solitude* is a collection of reflective songs and poems of Dr. Vineeth, who apart from his dedicated service in teaching philosophy and religion, is also committed in evolving an Indian-Christian spiritual movement among various religious communities.

In this revised and enlarged edition of *Songs of Solitude* we find four kinds of journeys - to the Divine Self, human selves, oneself and the nature. But, the journey into one's own innermost self is the journey par excellence. Instead of viewing the world through the goggles of a scientist who is primarily interested in classifying, or of a philosopher who seeks universals, the author sees in each thing highly individualized, and to him the world becomes an endless catalogue of sharply individualized selves. In "The Lily in the Wilderness," "The Tree," "The Mountain," "The Swan," "The Butterfly" and the like, he sets

down the particularity of each unique object in the nature. And "A Journey Into My Inner Depth," "My Guru," "My Prayer," "A Confession of Failure" and "My Life is a Journey" are autobiographical in nature.

Dr. Vineeth's insights into life and love are marvelous and his optimism can be illustrated from almost any piece in the *Songs of Solitude*. The Ancient wisdom and symbolism of India and the analytical knowledge of the West meet and merge throughout this work.

All the sections are excellently illustrated with creative and thought - provoking drawings. The artists have successfully conveyed the thoughts of the author clearly and powerfully.

Like Beethoven's deathless music, of which the composers said, "from the heart it has sprung, and to the heart it shall penetrate," these songs of solitude, through their own simplicity and rich symbolism, reach the deepest recesses of our emotions and spiritual awareness.

Job Edathinattu cmi

Chackalackal, Saju. *Ramayana and the Indian Ideal : A Search into the Prevailing Humanistic Values in the Ramayana of Valmiki*. Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1992. Pages : xvii + 122 Price : Rs. 40/-

Ramayana and the Indian Ideal is a study on *Valmiki Ramayana*, the great Indian epic, from the perspective of humanistic and ethical values. The book, after giving an introduction and a description of classical Hindu life as portrayed in the *Ramayana*, analyses the four *purusarthas* to unveil the humanistic ethos of the Valmikian epic.

The author analyses the subject matter in five chapters. The first chapter deals with the significance of the literary work in the field of moral philosophy. It also contains the technical details of the text. The author points out that his approach to the study of the *Ramayana* is from an ethical and humanitarian perspective, i. e., *Ramayana* as consisting of the account of the life of human beings. The main contention of the author is clear in this chapter itself, namely that *Ramayana* is a major source of value based living as it has a holistic approach to human life. The second chapter

gives in detail the life vision of *Ramayana*. It also deals with the intellectual culture, religious life and the philosophy of life. The chapter concludes that the *Ramayana* proposes adherence to and the practice of the moral virtues and values of life such as *Kama*, *Artha*, *Dharma* and *Svarga*, virtues which would lead one to a happy life in this world and in the world to come.

The following chapters deal in detail the value scheme of the *Ramayana*. The author says that the values of love and sexual pleasure (*kama*), material wealth and power (*artha*) are ideals to be realised with constant and conscious efforts for integrated personalities and for the betterment of society. The value of *kama* in all its aspects had been emphasized very much in the epic time. In fact, it is regarded as a very positive value for the complete growth of a person.

Yet, all attempts to acquire these values must be controlled and guided by the value of righteousness (*dharma*). The author infers from the epic that the performance of *dharma* always aims at the attainment of good. The highest good according to the *Ramayana* is *svarga*. Man in this world has to be concerned with *dharma* which makes him righteous and a worthy human being.

Logically building up this theory, the book's last chapter brings forth the conclusion that the *Ramayana* is really the embodiment of the principles which are life affirmative and which have a humanistic life vision.

Thus basing himself on a serious analysis of the text of *Valmiki Ramayana*, the author probes into the ethical principles of the ancient Indian society. He attempts to distill the vision and values from the descriptive narration of the *Ramayana*, and rearticulates them for an accurate understanding of the philosophy of life. At a time when ancient values are questioned everywhere and new values are not yet definitively formed, a critical and creative exploration into the ancient literature is a welcome idea.

This is a very positive study devoid of any critical bias and will prepare anyone to read this great epic of India so dear to our

people. The methodology is analytic; language simple and effective; fending mostly constructive and useful.

The positive and affirmative aspect of the Hindu ideals is very well brought out by the author, who in spite of his reliance on Western critics, doesn't spare some of them when their evaluation goes otherwise. Moreover, it is a timely service to us with its emphasis on value based approach to life, when India is being tormented by the dragons of fundamentalism and religious fanaticism.

A. Berriedale Keith *The Sanskrit Drama - In its Origin, Development, Theory and Practice*. New Delhi : Motilal Banarsidass, 1992, pp. 405, Rs. 175.00

Prof. A. B. Keith's original work published in 1924 has been reprinted by the publishers. This work has been one of the most widely read and popular reference text for the beginners in the field of classical Sanskrit drama.

The course of study by the author relates to the materials and information as were available up to the first decade of the nineteenth century. Since then, and after publication of the above work in 1924, new materials have been discovered and research has been carried out by the Indian and oriental scholars. The theatrical performances of Sanskrit dramas in the past twenty years have also helped in a better understanding of the dramatic theory and practices presented by Bharata in his *Natya Sastra* (circa 200 B.C.). In the light of these developments, many of the inferences and conclusions by the author needs a radical revision. Some such areas are - Greek origin of Sanskrit drama, the status of nine sub-varieties of drama (the tenth being *Nataka* - the main variety), the appreciation and critique of some of the classical playwrights like *Bhavabuti*, the stage technique and scenery presentation in performance and the like.

The book is of a great value for scholars as a historic document preserving the status of studies about the Sanskrit drama during and

upto the first quarter of Ninth century. This book has served its purpose as a reference book and inspiration for pursuing in the studies of Sanskrit drama along with another work on Classical Sanskrit literature by the same author.

The need of the present day is a consolidation of the studies made so far in this area. For any compiler who intends to do this, the present book is extremely useful as a reference work.

Dr. B. V. Venkatakrisna

Chattopadhyaya, Lester Embree, Titendra Mohanty (eds.). *Phenomenology and Indian Philosophy*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992, pp. 376, Rs. 290.00

This is a collection of twenty seven papers on the topic of phenomenology and Indian philosophy. The proceedings have been a result of interaction of Centre for Advanced Research in Phenomenology and Indian Council for Philosophical Research in the late 80's.

The connotations from the words 'Indian Philosophy' and 'Phenomenology' are not very definite and unified to different group of scholars. There are not only different schools (systems) of Indian Philosophy, but also subschools and subsystems under each one of them. Similarly phenomenology is not limited to European philosophers like Husserl (1859-1938), but is present in all forms of human thought- be it Indian or European.

Though trade and commerce between continents in Asia and Europe existed for a long time and an interactive admixture of religions and cultures existed, the second half of nineteenth century witnessed a different phase of this. The comparisons of Indian philosophies, with the Christian, Jewish and other philosophies attracted the attention of the scholars. In Germany Schopenhaur was strongly influenced by the thoughts propounded by Buddhism, which he rated as the highest religion in the world, because it was 'atheistic religion'. Thus started a movement which had for its object to compare the existing philosophies and find an articulate solution for the problems of philosophy. By its very nature unanimity of conclusions is not,

perhaps, the most important things in such a pursuit; one desires to achieve unanimity in the modes of reasoning.

In the book, complex issues of each topic and relative studies have been scholarly analyzed from varying angles. The contemporary issues of human relations, hermeneutics, and technology as cultural instruments are also discussed as a part of these studies. Each paper is a unit in itself for it operates on unique considerations and view points.

It is noticed that the general understanding of the word 'Indian philosophy' denotes the Buddhist, Jain, Upanishadic and monistic (advaita) views. But there are other equally important philosophical schools of logic (nyaya), Samkhya and religious schools of thought which should be pursued by such analysts. Hermeneutics, though covered in Indian studies, is not an exclusive system of philosophy for Indians. So also is the aesthetics.

The present work serves the following important purposes. That, it has been the result of an interaction of European and Indian thinkers to find common grounds of philosophy; and it establishes clearly the lack of clarity and commonality of denotation of the terms and techniques used in such studies. A frequent interaction of such nature could eventually lead to infuse more clarity and proper understanding leading to fruitful results. This book can serve as a starting point for such efforts.

Dr. B. V. Venkatakrishna

Adrian Snodagrass, *The Symbolism of the Stupa*.

Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992, pp. 444, Rs. 300.00

Symbolism is an integral part of all the major religions. This symbolism finds its expression in ritual, religious practices, art, architecture, literature and music. The explanation of the significance of the symbol of Stupa is provided in this book in the light of philosophy, mysticism and the tenets of religion to suit that particular type of expression.

Stupa is a symbolic form found throughout the religious and architectural expressions related to the religions of Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism. It is a cultural artifact. The plan and the pile

of stupa stands out for the metaphysical principles and generates multivalent meanings. The wheel, lotus, circle, square, mandala, dome, egg and superstructure carry out the spiritual and aesthetic message of symbolism. Each religion projects the spatial and temporal form of the stupa with its unique flavour. Down the historic lane, these expressions have acquired the cultural dimensions, ethnic and national characteristics. In the present book the author explores these areas.

The book covers in 286 illustrations spread over 444 pages with an extremely useful glossary and index the symbolism of the stupa in relation to Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and in its practical aspects as spread over the countries of India, China, Sri Lanka, Japan and the like. Backed by an indepth, first-hand studies at the source, the observations of the author are scholastic.

Symbol here means a representation of reality on a certain level of reference by a corresponding reality on another. It is believed that there exists an analogous or analogical correspondence between the physical and the metaphysical orders of reality, that the sensible world is a similitude of the intellectual, in such a way that this world is the image of that and vice versa. In one sense all things that exist, images, words, languages, physical and mental phenomenon are symbols of supra empirical levels of reality. Symbols are clear, cogent and perfect reflections of principal relationships and sufficient expressions of transcendental truths. They possess dimensions of meaning and a resonance of significance lacking in ordinary objects.

Symbol is amaagic leading to the understanding upward to a metaphysical meaning. The buildings, temples and related architectural expressions are capable of rendering the symbol, in sensible forms. Stupa is one such symbol. The author has explained with adequate material, explanations and cross-references the significance of stupa-symbol.

The book carries in it very useful and sufficient material to pursue the symbolism of other types found along with stupa in the same line of study. It is a book worthy of being called a source book on this topic.

Dr. B.V. Venkatakrishna