

Swami Abhishiktananda,

"Saccidananda": A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience,
 Delhi: ISPCK, 1974. xi+208 pp. Rs. 20.00 \$ 5.00 (card);
 Rs. 25.00. \$ 6.00 (cloth).

Any keen and sincere mind can observe a slow but steady progress in the process of the meeting and understanding of the two great spiritual worlds of Hinduism and Christianity. In the beginning it was one of mutual confrontation and rejection rather than that of tolerance and openness towards each other. In the next stage we see some sort of mere 'shaking of hands' which simply remained on the superficial plane. We see this mutual relationship gradually reaching the intellectual stage giving rise to a number of comparative studies. Now every sincere 'Seeker of truth' is well aware of the fact that the real meeting of the world's two richest religious heritages cannot remain on merely intellectual or comparative level but has to go deep down to the level of mind and heart, truth and spirit. In this book Swami Abhishiktananda tries to convince us that this meeting can take place most effectively only at the deepest level of authentic religious experience, i.e., the advaitic experience of the Self in Hinduism and Trinitarian experience in Christianity. He says: "It would seem as if India, moved by the Spirit, invites the Christian to seek the mystery of God, Creator and Saviour, no longer outside or alongside himself, but in the profoundest depths of his own heart" (p. 13).

In the first part of the book (chapter 2 to 6) he explains clearly the challenge posed by vedanta to Christianity. The Vedantin is uncompromising in his opposition to every attempt to define the real experience of the self. Exactly as in the case with Christian faith, the advaitic experience takes place at a level which can allow no comparison. The author maintains that this challenge of Vedanta cannot be successfully met by the simple monotheism of Judaism or Islam. According to the Vedantin the proclamation of God's transcendence by Judaism or Islam is invalidated by the very fact that they try to formulate it. He affirms: "Only Christianity—that is, Christianity in its ultimate experience of the Spirit—can answer the dilemma posed by advaita to all the religions and philosophies of the world. Or rather, it will accept what is essential in the advaitic experience and penetrate to its very heart; and yet it will still remain itself, or even find itself anew precisely in those ultimate depths of the Spirit to which advaita recalls it". (p. 47).

The author holds that Christianity presents itself as the supreme message from God to mankind, possessing the definitive word in which God has revealed all that can be told of the divine life and love. Then it follows that Christian experience can and should accept and assimilate whatever is found to be true, beautiful and good. It does not follow that Vedantic experience can be accepted as such without being reformulated, if it is to express the Christian experience: "The Christian way in its inmost essence is a passing through death and resurrection, and this applies as much to what it takes in from outside as to its own development. Nothing that comes into contact with the incarnation can escape this law. Christianity takes hold of what is natural, rids it of everything in it that is relative and subject to decay, and raises it to a higher level, that of grace".

In part two (chapters 7 to 13) the author explains the Trinitarian experience as the highest and also the deepest level of Christian religious experience. He thinks that on the one hand Trinitarian Experience is basically 'advaitic', while on the other it contradicts the advaitic concept. The Trinitarian experience as revealed in Jesus implies an advaitic form—'My father and I are one'. And yet at the very heart there remains the 'face to face' of the Son and the Father. Again, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God'. Here also we cannot say 'two' of him and the father in the numerical sense. This basic oneness is maintained even in creation. He argues: "The revelation of the Trinity means that there is no distinction between God and his self-manifestation in the mystery of his inner self-manifestation".

"When the Christian Jñani awakes from the advaitic night, he finds himself alone in the presence of the father, or rather he finds only the presence of the Son to the Father, within which he himself is included".

Thus "Diversity is harmonized in love, multiplicity transcended in communion—such is the marvellous experience of the Christian Jñani".

The harmony and order of the universe culminates in the mutual communion—Koinonia—of conscious beings. Man, however, has also the power to refuse himself to others. To refuse communion with man is to refuse communion with God, since human Koinonia is the manifestation of the divine. Sin is the refusal of one 'absolute' to enter into communion with other 'absolutes' and therefore, with the Supreme Absolute himself.

In part three (chapters 14 to 17) the author shows that the concept *Saccidananda* handed down by the Hindu spiritual heritage is one of the best ideas to explain the Trinitarian Experience: *Sat* is the Father, the absolute beginning and source of being *Cit* is the Son,

the divine Word, the Father's Self-knowledge. *Ananda* is the spirit of love, fulness and bliss without end. The author convincingly explains that this is a pattern that properly fits into the Christian understanding of the Trinity of God.

It seems necessary to point out that chapter two—Death transcended—is apparently a misfit in this lofty work. The omission of this chapter will in no way reduce the merit or affect the integrity of this work.

A. Thannipara

Donald H. Bishop (Ed.),
Indian Thought, An Introduction,
 Toronto: John Wiley & Sons,
 1975, xv+427 pp, Rs. 36.00.

The great many and variety of introductions to Indian philosophy published recently in the West clearly indicate the felt need to interpret to the West "the wonder that was India". The books under review is typical since it represents the major complementary approaches emphasising the distinctive character of Indian thought, the vicissitudes of historical development of a philosophical tradition or, rather, several traditions in juxtaposition, India's philosophical contribution to the perennial problems of human thought, and the depth of experience that lie behind its rational formulations.

Indian Thought, compiled and edited by Donald H. Bishop has brought together in one volume the contributions of several prominent teachers of philosophy of the Indian universities. In the preface the editor lists the distinctive characteristics of Indian thought: It refuses to make a sharp distinction between philosophy and religion, these are supplementary and not antagonistic. Indian philosophy does not make an absolute distinction between the material and the immaterial, the sentient and the insentient; it views reality as an integral whole. It is willing to accept a variety of data, grounds, evidence and experiences as a basis for philosophy. Tolerance is its fundamental attitude. Insistence on relevance to the present world, the introspective approach, viewed man as a microcosm of the universe, and transcendence, are other characteristic traits mentioned by the author. He also presents a general survey of Indian literature.

Various stages of Indian philosophy are discussed by different contributors. Indian thought is fundamentally Vedic, developed from the *Vedas*, collections of hymns, chants and treatises containing the thought and experiences of the Aryan people. The *Brahmanas*, the *Upanishads* and their commentaries were made possible by the Vedic insight. Madhusudan Reddy shows how the Vedic men took life in