

[Book Reviews](#)

Category : [July 1994](#)

Published by Anonymous on Jul. 01, 1994

Book Reviews

Deva Rajan

Dancing with Siva: Hinduism's Contemporary Catechism, An illustrated sourcebook, timeline and lexicon exploring how to know the Divine, honor all creation and see God everywhere, in everyone. By Satguru Sivaya Subramuniaswami, 1008 pages, US\$29.95 hb, US\$19.95 pb, Himalayan Academy Publications, 1819 Second Street, Concord, CA 94519 USA

Fast becoming the most authentic contemporary articulation of Hindu thought and culture, this catechism is as unique as it is remarkable. As soon as you open it, you know this is something special. The language is superb, the art unrivaled, the philosophy penetrating, the referencing a singular pleasure to navigate-even the typesetting is a joy to behold. Seldom do we see such care given to a book of substance. Usually artists focus on coffee-table tomes.

With the fourth edition sold out, Dancing with Siva is now being released in a new printing with sections such as the Hindu timeline and lexicon updated and new art and graphics added. Dancing with Siva is being sought after by reference librarians throughout the West as the best book available on Hindu philosophy, religion, beliefs. Before I say more, here's what scholars and pundits have said:

"Dancing with Siva is a truly remarkable accomplishment. It is the most comprehensive and sensitive introduction to the living spiritual tradition of Hinduism, a superb distillate of the essence of this vastly complex religious culture. Written in simple, inspiring language and edited with exemplary and loving care, this work is a feast for the heart and the mind." Georg Feuerstein, Ph.D., author of

Encyclopedic Dictionary of Yoga, California, USA.

"Dancing with Siva stunned me with its golden words of wisdom and lucid expression of the most ancient Hindu religion, which can now be understood from the beginning to the end even by laymen." Pundit K.N. Navaratnam, Jyotisha Shastri; Hallam, Australia.

"To me, Dancing with Siva is a complete course on Hinduism. It is the most useful book I've seen for students' education. This book should be presented to government bodies in various countries for teaching Hindu religion." Liladhar J. Bharadia, noted journalist; Nairobi, Kenya.

"This exceptional book offers an insider's perspective on Hinduism, from a useful angle which even an outsider may appreciate. The catechismal format of the book and the manner in which it unfolds serve to disclose Hinduism's 'coherent diversity' which might otherwise elude the reader." Professor Arvind Sharma, Ph.D., Dept. of Religion, McGill University; Montreal, Canada

In bringing forward this present-day sruti, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami followed an ancient Sanskrit literary form and discipline of "writing to length." The central catechism is composed of 155 key questions and answers, each with a four-line sloka and an accompanying 21-line bhashya. But, here's the hard part: each question, each sutra and each commentary is precisely written to the same length, not a comma longer or shorter than any other! When have we seen something like this since the old Jain and Hindu scriptures written on olai leaves? By not permitting things to be short or long, there is created a care and precision which reflects and refracts the content which possesses an exactitude of philosophical thoroughness and spiritual wisdom.

There is a magical quality about this "writing to length." As with any classical literary style, such as the Shakespearean sonnet, something comes alive through the literary form itself.

Dancing with Siva has received much acclaim as a sourcebook for the best of

the Vedas. Using some 630 verses from the Vedas, the author has traced every single philosophical concept and cosmological insight which he explores back to that most authoritative place for all Hindus. In this way, *Dancing with Siva*, as a creative and contemporary statement of Hindu belief, thought and custom, has taken us back to our spiritual roots. Buy it.

VAISNAVA INDIA, by Geary J.C. Sheridan, hb., 759 pages, US\$190.00, Vedic Heritage Foundation, 3709 Watseka Ave., Suite 305, Los Angeles, CA 90034, USA

They really pulled out the stops on this one. Massive (11"x14"x2.5", nearly 14 pounds) and sumptuous, this offering from the Vedic Heritage Foundation is perhaps the most lavishly produced publication available of its kind. The book takes us on a tour of eleven holy places, each one holding a key to Vaisnava philosophy, with nearly every page containing a high quality photograph of Indian life or a color reproduction, on glossy art-book paper. It can be appreciated in several well-executed dimensions: as a photographic essay, a valuable resource of Indian Vaishnava history and philosophy and as an art book. Chapters on Indian classical dance and art transcend the sectarian borders and provide excellent in-depth discussions of Hindu culture in its myriad expressions. There is a tremendous amount of information on Hindu culture here, exquisitely packaged and eminently readable. This is more of an investment than a purchase, but certainly well worth having for a deep, beautiful gaze into India's profound spirituality, fascinating history and monumental art.

REBIRTH AND KARMA, by Sri Aurobindo, pb., 177 pages, US\$9.95, Lotus Light Publications, P.O. Box 325, Twin Lakes, WI 53181 USA

A collection of essays originally published in the monthly journal *Arya* between 1915 and 1921 and revised by Aurobindo in the 1920s. The text of the present edition, the first to be published in the United States, includes in Section I twelve essays on reincarnation and karma. Section II presents four essays on the "Lines of Karma." These are classic and profound essays on karma and reincarnation from the pen of one of India's most respected spiritual and social leaders.

OUR RELIGIONS, The Seven World Religions Introduced by Preeminent Scholars From Each

Tradition, Edited by Arvind Sharma, hb., 536 pages, US\$30.00, Harper Collins Publishers, 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022, USA

This is a work at once dignified and scholarly yet highly refreshing. Why refreshing? The writers who contributed to this volume are not only respected scholars, but give us the impression of being deeply committed practitioners of their respective faiths: Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Editor Arvind Sharma, professor of comparative religion at McGill University in Montreal, Canada, wrote the chapter on Hinduism. And while the writing is of the intellect, one feels that it is permeated by the spirit. This is one more voice in the chorus for tolerance and appreciation as exemplified by last year's Parliament of the World's Religions. The very title, *Our Religions*, connotes a sense of the kinship, the family-hood of us all. We are a one family, and these are our religions. A laudable work.

THIRUMANDIRAM, A Classic of Yoga and Tantra, 3 Volumes, by Siddhar Thirumoolar, translated by Dr. B. Natarajan, edited by M. Govindan, Babaji's Kriya Yoga and Publications, Inc., Suite 608-165, de LaGauchetiere Street West, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, H2Z 1X6

Translated from the Tamil by the late Dr. B. Natarajan as a commission in the early 1970s for Saiva Siddhanta Church, the Thirumandiram was later published by the Sri Ramakrishna Math in 1991. This current edition from Babaji's Kriya Yoga and Publications in Montreal, Canada, is a worthy upgrade in printing quality and binding. Seeking to serve a wider readers' audience beyond South India, this edition has deleted the original Tamil verses, added many line drawing illustrations that enhance the text and included bottom page notes that attempt to unravel some of the secret language and metaphysical codes in which much of the esoteric knowledge of the Thirumandiram is concealed. Volume I contains a short glossary and handy index by word and concept to the verses. Recommended.

THE BOOK OF HINDU IMAGERY, The Gods and their Symbols, by Eva Rudy Jansen, pb., 148 pages, Distributed by Samuel Weiser Inc., Box 612, York Beach, Maine 03910, USA

An extensive compilation of Hindu deities in their many manifestations,

abundantly illustrated with line drawings and occasional photographs. Symbols, mudras, emblems, headdresses and hairstyles, garments and ornaments are illustrated with short explanations. Animal gods and vahanas are matched up by charts with their respective deities. Included in the appendix is an unusual chart illustrating all of the marks used on the forehead, arms and chest that denote various Hindu sects. A valuable contribution and excellent research.

YOGAVATAR BABA LOKENATH, by Swami Shuddhananda, pb., 201 pages, US\$12.00, Lokenath Divine Life Book Trust, 130 Motilal Gupta Road, Calcutta 700 008, INDIA, Distributed by Lokenath Divine Life Fellowship, 5028 Brook Hollow Court, Concord, CA 94521, USA

This is the story of "Mahayogi Baba Lokenath Brahmachari, 160-Year-Old 18th Century Siddha." I found it absolutely captivating, succinctly edited and rich in spiritual message. Carried away by its gripping narrative, I read every page.

A WOMAN'S BEST MEDICINE: Health, Happiness and Long Life Through Ayurveda, by Nancy Lonsdorf, M.D., Veronica Butler, M.D., and Melanie Brown, Ph.D., hb., 372 pages, US\$21.95, Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc., 200 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016, USA

Produced by three women doctors of the Maharishi Ayurveda tradition, here is a sensitive and perceptive interpretation of this medical practice focused on women's needs. Much of the book covers the basic material of ayurveda: the three doshas, six tastes, etc, in conformity with Dr. Deepak Chopra's publications. The topics specific to women include: the monthly cycle as a purifying function; pregnancy and childbirth and the mother as healer; menopause and aging. The co-authors write in a warm, reassuring style. A resounding note throughout is the affirmation of women as healers, and their potential as healers of the world. This book loudly affirms the need to bring the nurturing Mother Spirit back to its rightful revered place in our societies.

THE AWAKENING, An Evolutionary Leap in Human Consciousness, by Steven S. Sadleir, pb., 157 pages, US\$12.95, Self-Awareness Institute, 219 Broadway, Suite 417, Laguna Beach, Ca 92651, USA

Traveling in India in 1992, Sadleir was visiting his two teachers, Vethathiri Maharishi in Madras and Shivabalayogi Maharaj in Bangalore. It was during this stay that Sadleir was immersed in meditation for forty consecutive days and nights, out of which the content of this book emerged. Composed of one and two sentence aphorisms, followed by a deeper, one to two page explanation, the book is designed to be read a little at a time or by randomly opening it to any page that catches the eye. Here is a thought provoking aphorism: "From where does the volition come for you to contemplate this question?" A one and a half page essay follows on "Thought Volition." Meditative, introspective, universal, from the author who brought us The Spiritual Seeker's Guide.

THE COMPLETE KAMA SUTRA, The First Unabridged Modern Translation of the Classic Indian Text, Translated by Alain Danielou, hb., 564 pages, US\$29.95, Inner Traditions Intl., One Park Street, Rochester, Vermont 05767, USA

Thank God for the amorous French, who through their distinguished scholar and writer, Alain Danielou, The Complete Kama Sutra, the classic text on erotic science, has at last found its appropriate and most explicit translation. Includes the Jayamangala commentary from the Sanskrit by Yashodhara and extracts from the Hindi commentary by Devadatta Shastra. First-rate, loving scholarship.

THE CHAKRA HANDBOOK, From Basic Understanding to Practical Application, by Shalila Sharamon and Bodo J. Baginski, pb., 190 pages, Lotus Light Publications, P.O. Box 325, Twin Lakes, WI 53181, USA

Of the many books on chakras now available, this seems to be one of the best. What makes this book intriguing is that, after a preliminary presentation of the usual information on the subtle bodies and chakras, the authors discuss blockages and insufficiencies in each chakra-how to detect them, and suggestions for healing and activating the chakras. Though it is a New-Age interpretation, divorced somewhat from its Hindu roots, this book will prove informative and helpful to students of meditation and yoga.

SIVA TEMPLE AND TEMPLE RITUALS, Edited by S.S. Janaki, in English and Tamil, pb., 208 pages, Rs.50, US\$8.00, The Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute, Madras, 600 004, INDIA

This is a formal publication of various research papers in Tamil and English presented at the 1983 seminar in Madras at the Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute. The papers cover a wide cross-section of important subjects relating to the structural details, symbolism and rituals of Siva temples as documented in Saiva Agamic texts. The paper "Development of Temple Rituals in India" by N.R. Bhatt describes the process and rituals for selecting a site, laying of foundations, and many other rituals regarding construction and the installation of the deities. Individuals and temple societies outside of India who are engaged in the design or construction of traditional Hindu temples will find this book an important resource.