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Published by Anonymous on Jul. 02, 1996

Book Reviews

Distraught by hearing how all of India's history depends upon a supposed invasion by "Aryans" 3,500 years ago? Distressed by so much violence in Hindu books for children? Disgruntled with Western allopathic treatment of your children? Disgusted with too much oil in your kadai phoolgobi? Here are some solutions for you.

VIVEKANANDA: EAST MEETS WEST, A Pictorial Biography
by Swami Chetanananda, 1995. 163 pages, hb., US\$35.00.
ISBN 0-916356-78-7

Vedanta Society of St. Louis, 205 South Skinker Blvd., St.
Louis, Missouri 63105 USA. Phone: 314-721-5118, fax:
314-862-0990.

We don't know about your library, but in ours books by and on Swami Vivekananda occupy several meters of shelf space. If you are on a budget or just starting your collection, you could do very well with just this one. Two-hundred-seventy-five photos--the classics and rare shots, too-- grace this elegantly designed, oversize presentation of the life and teachings of Ramakrishna's foremost disciple. Swami Chetanananda, a monk of the Ramakrishna Order and minister of the Vedanta Society of St. Louis (USA), has done a superb job of telling the story of the renowned swami's life, selecting excerpts from his

writings and sleuthing down photos of everyone who was anyone in those early years of Vedanta's introduction to the West.

IN SEARCH OF THE CRADLE OF CIVILIZATION, New Light on Ancient India

by Georg Feuerstein, Subhash Kak and David Frawley, 1995. 341 pages, hb., US\$24.95. ISBN: 0-8356-0720-8.

Quest Books, 306 W. Geneva Road, P.O. Box 270, Wheaton, Illinois, 60189-0270, USA. Phone: 708-665-0130, fax: 708-665-8791.

A lot of fine scholars of Indian history are going to detest this book. The reason can be traced to their urge not just to report history, but to speculate "why" events happened as they did. In the case of Indian history, the Great Explanation for the last 150 years has been the "Aryan Invasion of India." Never mind that it was at best a wild guess to start with. With steely dedication and true scholarly acumen, generations of PhDs have studiously and ingeniously (and not always ingenuously) invoked this concocted theory to explain just about everything in Indian history. Facts which contradicted the theory failed to thwart its application to any given event. But times change, and as we find out in this excellent book by three determined researchers of Indian history, even ancient times can change. Page by page they present the current evidence regarding ancient India and make a convincing argument that the Aryan invasion of India simply never happened. This poses a major problem for a lot of academics, as well as those who rely upon them, such as children's textbook writers. These embarrassed scholars have to rethink all sorts of things. If the Aryans didn't invade India, who wrote the Vedas? If the Aryans didn't invade

India, how did those Dravidians get to the South? If the Aryans didn't invade India, how did the caste system start? If the Aryans didn't invade India on horseback, how did the horse get there? If the Aryans didn't invade India, why was Mohenjodharo abandoned in ancient times? The list goes on and on. There will be so much embarrassment as all those tidy "The Aryans caused it" explanations don't work anymore. Take any book on Indian history and count how many developments in Indian history are attributed to this one now-discredited theory--it is shocking. The fun part of this book for Hindus is Chapter 9, "Why the Aryan Invasion Never Happened: Seventeen Arguments." Warning: This book is not suitable reading for the closed-minded.

REFERENCE ENCYCLOPEDIA, INDIA-2001

Volume One (of two), Hanna Myer, General Editor, 1995. hb., US\$110.00. ISBN: 0-945-921-42-X.

South Asia Publications, P.O. Box 502, Columbia, Missouri, 65205, USA. Phone 314-474-0116, fax: 474-8124. Indmark Publishing, "Om Ganesh," No. 2, Rest House Crescent, Bangalore, 560 001, Karnataka, India.

The fact that South Asia Publications has advertised in Hinduism Today longer and more consistently than any other company has nothing to do with our glowing review of this outstanding book whose printing they have helped sponsor. Indeed, mere gratitude for their support would not generate the enthusiastic cheers with which this book was greeted in our offices. (Then, on the other hand, maybe it would have--but, be that as it may, we have fully revealed our potential, if not actual, bias.) We do like the book--it covers myriad interesting aspects of Indian history, and is up-to-date

enough to NOT adhere to the Aryan invasion theory [see above review]. You can read about India's government, religions, ancient sciences, musical instruments [illustration], archaeology, ancient and modern education, famous people, dance, music, sports. There are numerous halftones, maps, charts and line illustrations provided throughout. Just look in the index for whatever you need... Wait! There is no index?! This rather depressing drawback (endemic among older Indian books) is compounded by the fact the book is not organized as are most encyclopedias--alphabetical by the topic of each article--but instead under 24 broad headings such as "People" and "National Symbols." Pages are not even numbered sequentially from front to back (each individual section is numbered) and, without physically counting the pages, we can only tell you the book is an inch and a half thick. This is still a wonderfully useful, even outstanding, book, and we are assured by South Asia Publications that Volume Two, due in just a few months, has an index for both volumes!

THE BOOK OF HINDU FESTIVALS AND CEREMONIES

by Om Lata Bahadur 1994. 177 pages, pb., RS85.

UBS Publishers' Distributors Ltd., 5 Ansari Road, New Delhi 110 001, India.

If there is anything Hinduism has developed to a fine art, it is the celebration of festivals. With the help of this detailed book, you too can celebrate every single major one in grand style. Bahadur has included complete instructions for each (such as the 11 items needed to do Pongal correctly), including recipes for the obligatory dishes and sweets.

A STUDY OF SKANDA CULT

by S.S. Rama, 1995. 180 pages and 17 plates, hb., RS300.00.
ISBN: 81-7081-303-4

Nag Publishers, 11A/U.A. (Post Office Building), Jawahar Nagar,
Delhi, 110007 India.

This is a comprehensive review of the appearance of Lord Skanda (Murugan or Kartikkeya) in Indian history and sacred literature. There are few books devoted to this beloved God, second son of Lord Siva and brother to Lord Ganesha. Among several conclusions drawn by Dr. Rama is that Skanda was prominent in the Indus Valley Civilization.

CHANDI PATH

by Swami Satyananda Saraswati, 1994. 425 pages, pb.,
RS175.00 ISBN 81-208-1307-3.

Devi Mandir Publications, 5950 Highway 128, Napa, California,
94558, USA. Phone 707-966- 2802. Also Motilal Banarsidass,
41 U.A. Bungalow Road, Delhi, 110007, India.

The important Shakta scripture, Chandi Path, forms a section of the Markandeya Purana and is perhaps 2,800 years old. It is in the form of a commentary on two Rig Veda hymns, the "Rati Sukta" and the famed "Devi Sukta." This able English translation was completed by Swami Satyananda Saraswati of the Devi Mandir in California headed by Shree Maa of Calcutta's Sanatan Dharma Society. Original Sanskrit and transliteration.

CHILD HEALTH CARE IN AYURVEDA

by Abhimanyu Kumar, 1994. 337 pages, hb., US\$20.00. ISBN 81-7030-389-3.

Sri Satguru Publication, 40/5, Shakti Nagar, Delhi, 110007, INDIA.

This is a very technical book systematically recounting the advice of several ancient Ayurveda authorities on the medical care of children. We don't recommend that you simply pick it up and apply the mentioned remedies to your ailing child. However, distilled here are several thousand years of Hindu experience and insight into the care of children and we believe that mothers and health professionals alike can benefit from studying that accumulated wisdom.

THE POLITICS OF HISTORY

by Navaratna S. Rajaram, 1995. 244 pages, hb., RS150. ISBN 81-85990-28-X.

Voice of India, 2/18, Ansari Road, New Delhi, 110 002, India.

Here is a fine companion book to *In Search of the Cradle of Civilization* published by our friends at Voice of India. Professor Rajaram's purpose is not to attack the Aryan invasion theory of India--he considers it already dead--but rather to examine the nefarious political motivations behind the origin and propagation of this theory.

LAXMI'S VEGETARIAN KITCHEN, Simple Healthful Recipes from India's Great Vegetarian Tradition by Laxmi Hiremath, 1995.

256 pages, pb., ISBN 0-9627345-9-4. US\$18.95.

Harlow and Ratner, 5749 Landregan St., Emeryville, California

94608, USA. Phone: 510-654-6838.

This book is a God-send for anyone who has ever despaired at wringing two ounces of oil out of a single piece of cauliflower in an Indian dish. Without compromising the traditional "look and feel" of Indian food, Laxmi offers up a healthier version. Somosas, for example, are baked instead of fried. There are lengthy sections on desserts and beverages, as well as advice on kitchen equipment and even table manners (or floor manners?).

THE ARYA SAMAJ MOVEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

by Dr. Thillayvel Naidoo, 1992. 194 pages, hb.

Motilal Banarsidass [see address under Chandi Path]

Dr. Naidoo has managed in this one book to simultaneously recount both the original development of the Arya Samaj in India and its considerable impact upon the history of the Hindus of South Africa. He has done an excellent job conveying their feisty missionary spirit.

THE BROKEN TUSK, Stories of the Hindu God Ganesha retold by Uma Krishnaswami, 1996. 98 pages. hb., US\$19.95. ISBN 0-208-02442-5.

The Shoe String Press, Inc., P.O. Box 657, 2 Linsley Street, North Haven, Connecticut, 06472-2517, USA. Phone: 203-239-2702, fax: 203-239-2568.

We haven't recommended very many collections of Hindu

stories to parents for one central reason: violence. Whatever the reason, our ancient oral tradition of stories has a liberal proffering of blood and guts. Uma has skillfully managed to minimize the ferocity and present 17 traditional stories on Lord Ganesha in a sweet and kindly manner sure to delight your children, and the child within you too.

WHO'S CALLING THE SHOTS? How to Respond Effectively to Children's Fascination with War Play and War Toys

by Nancy Carlsson-Paige and Diane E. Levin, 1990. ISBN 0-86571-165-8, 204 pages, pb., US\$12.95.

New Society Publishers, P.O. Box 582, Santa Cruz, California, 95061, USA.

Speaking of violence, the people at New Society Publishers are on the warpath against war. They are responding to the astounding level of ferocity in American society, where metal detectors are routinely installed in secondary schools to detect guns and knives carried by pre-teenage students. War toys and games are today fundamentally different than in the past, state these two education professors. Compounded by thousands of hours of graphic television and movie violence, entire generations of children now graduate from play violence to the real thing with no perception of the moral difference. Witness the 6-year-old California child who recently tried to kill a neighbor's baby. The book has suggestions, practical ideas and resources for parents to direct children into a less violent and more healthy childhood.

THE STORY OF SANTOSHI DEVI

by Gayatri Rajan, 1995. 38 pages, pb., US\$9.95.

Buddhi Publication, P.O. Box 208, Canyon, California, 94516, USA.

The engaging tale of a young Hindu girl and her personal relationship with Lord Ganesha. The book is charmingly illustrated by the author, who intends to produce more such books to form a series for children.

Sidebar: Coming Attractions

1996:

October: Women in Hinduism
(reviewer: V.G. Julie Rajan).

1997:

January: Vedic Resources,
Translations and Anthologies
(reviewer: Vamadeva Shastri).

April: Sadhus and Saints.

July: Sacred and Medicinal Plants.

October: Photographic Books on Hinduism and India.

In an effort to present new (and sometimes old) books on Hinduism in a useful fashion, we are switching to a thematic organization for our reviews. Publishers and readers are invited to send or suggest books to be included under each theme. We are also looking for writers to review the 1997 April, July and October themes.