HINDU BOOK REVIEW
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The Bhagavad-Gita

Translator: Barbara Stoler Miller

Reader: Jacob Needleman

Audio Literature Inc. $15.95

3800C Palos Verdes Way 2 audio cassettes

South San Francisco, CA 94080 USA

"Not enough time" has become the mantra of fast-lane living. Or, "too much to read already," is an excuse not to settle the mind into pages meant to uplift and not merely entertain. If reading and studying make your eyeballs and mind go dim, then try slipping The Bhagavad Gita cassettes into the tapedeck of the car while driving to work or at home while you struggle to sit in an appropriate yoga posture, or, if really strapped for rime, into the Sony Walkman during your jog. After all, daily life is the reality of the Gita's battlefield, and we are the troubled Arjunas.

Audio Literature has over the past year produced a series called "spiritual classics on cassette" that dip into seminal texts from Christianity to Taoism. The man

behind the series, Jacob Needleman, is a metaphysical philosopher well known and respected in the West.

This audio Gita-which as we all know means "song," and thus a listened-to version is more evocative of old ways-is carefully crafted, from the recording values which nicely ooze directly into the audio neurons of the brain to the translation by Miller that works well as recitation. Of course, English is clunky compared to the Sanskrit or Hindi versions, but Needleman's baritone, honey-glazed voice injects the narrative with strength and beauty. This is the straight 700 verses with no commentary, only the occasional special audio effects welling up under the reading. This tape is great for headphone listening or turning up on the living room speakers with the whole family snuggled into chairs (chariots) to hear timeless wisdom.

Religion as Knowledge

The Hindu Concept

Author: Janaki Abhisheki

Ms. V. Ranade pb Rs 30.00

162. Buena Vista 371 pages

Gen. J. Bhosle Marg, Bombay 400021 India

Abhisheki is a Hindu woman who ten years ago surveyed the general texts on Hinduism and concluded they were either too abstract or too rich in effect and too poor in information, or they indulged in misinformation. In other words, as far as the reading public goes, these books were albatrosses. This is a fair and largely

true perception. And to her great credit, Abhisheki just didn't grouse, but chained herself to a typewriter surrounded by stacks of resources and engineered a book that pretty much flies like an eagle. One of its feathered beauties is that the book is joyfully absent of all the scholastic fuss and bother that puts the lay reader into "snoremadhi." Nevertheless, the work is well-documented. But all of this doesn't mean that she avoids stumbling into pits of error, as when she identifies the Dasas (described in the Rig Veda as dark and snub-nosed) as the builders of Indus Valley (India's oldest Hindu civilization) cities. The Indus artifacts say otherwise and the Indus people-the most ancient Hindus-are still a mystery.

Abhisheki has not in this book covered a wide-angle view of Hinduism, but has opted to explore what could be called the average nucleus: Vedas, puranas, epics, a variety of shastras, karma, the six classical philosophies. Of course, this leaves out the watershed of Hinduism that is embodied in Saivism, Vaishnavism and Shaktism. But she does include a great chapter on women in Hinduism and a presentation of the Kamashastra that is rarely seen. And her chapter on Hindu Contribution to World Knowledge is an able summary.

The Hindu Temple

Author: George Michell

Univ. of Chicago Press pb $14.95

11030 South Langley Ave. 192 pages

Chicago, IL 60628 USA

This book, which is subtitled "An Introduction to Its Meaning and Forms," has been around since 1977 and is considered a classic. This is a fresh paperback edition with a new preface in which Mitchell professes that Westerners have become surprisingly familiar with Hindu temples through books, exhibitions, films and, of

course, the Hindu temple architecture rising from Hawaii to New York to Paris, France.

Michell has a Ph.D. in Indian archaeology and is as happy as an anteater in a termite mound when he's poking around ancient temple sites. He likes to get dirty, and this combined with his sensitivity to Hindu metaphysics and writing skills has created a book easy to enjoy. It is swift reading, but beware the first chapter that too breezily divides up Hinduism between Vedic ritualism and "devotional theism."

In the following chapter he writes, "The gods are never far away from man...In the Hindu temple the potentially divine becomes visibly manifest and therefore approachable by man. Sacred images in Hinduism are never mere effigies; their function is to make visible the world of truth." And thusly Michell careens the reader through metaphysics, iconography and, largely, the spiritual/architectural blueprints behind the temples. The account is well leavened with photos and diagrams.

Hindu Religion & Iconology

Author: Pratapaditya Pal

Vichitra Press pb, price unknown

Distributed by: Graeme Vanderstoel 157 pages

P.O. Box 599. El Cerrito. CA 94530 USA

This is a treatise on the Tantrasara, a short Bengali Shakta text by the 16th-century tantra scholar Krishananda Agamavagisa. Agamavagisa was a brahmin of Bengal who publicly condemned the lower castes and upheld the

brahminical elitism that women should not learn the scripture, yet privately he was an expert in the Shakta rituals that involve worshipping a mortal woman sometimes sexually-as Kali. The book is mainly a listing of iconographic features of rare Shakta deity forms. But its real value is in Pal's introduction that explores the dichotomy of Agamavagisa's hypocritical allegiances.