

but who always conveys a sense of being involved with the Meratus.

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INDIA

AITHAL, K. PARAMESWARA, compiler. *Veda-Lakṣaṇa Vedic Ancillary Literature: A Descriptive Bibliography*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1993. vii+755 pages. Appendix of verse index. Cloth Rs. 750; ISBN 81-208-1120-8. (Originally published in 1991 by Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart. Not sold in Germany)

This masterly work, the fruit of extended research by a noted specialist in Indology, is in my opinion a "must" for any serious student of the Veda. An extensive manual of 755 pages, it includes a total of 1619 entries, together with an exhaustive verse index that covers each and every one of the metrical passages appearing in the many texts cited (these passages are, incidentally, the verses or paragraphs that occur at both the beginning and the end of the works described).

In his foreword, Wezler describes the *Veda-Lakṣaṇa* in (to use his term) its traditional sense, that is, as a group of ancillary Vedic texts of (South) India. He writes that though the texts were given their due share of attention by scholars both in India and the West from the middle of the nineteenth century until approximately the first half of the twentieth century, they have been virtually forgotten for about forty years.

This bibliography will no doubt greatly facilitate all manner of Vedic research, since it will obviously prove a highly convenient tool for obtaining reliable information concerning the existence and accessibility of essential scriptural material.

A brief perusal of the work reveals concise descriptions of the contents of the various texts followed by their call numbers; these in turn are spiced up with useful comments concerning their availability in public libraries and research centers throughout the world, together with various constructive references to relevant secondary literature. Often too the physical condition of the manuscript in question is indicated.

The scholarly erudition of the author himself is manifested from time to time in his various thought-provoking comments and reflections. For example, he notes while discussing the *Vaṛṇacchandodaivata* (number 1091 of the bibliography) that the name of the author is not mentioned in the manuscript, that the title is not clear, and that, despite the name, the *Chandas* and the *Daivata* are not dealt with in the available portion. He concludes from this that the title was perhaps based upon a misconstruction of the invocatory verses. In the case of the text entitled *Veda-Lakṣaṇa* (number 1186), he quotes Aufrecht's description of the title as "a feeble and mischievous designation of Vedic works," then himself concludes that far from being the title of a work it is merely a description of texts related to the Veda that were catalogued without further identification.

In certain works (such as the *Aniṅgya-Prakarāṇa*) the author provides detailed summaries of the contents of several volumes. Often too he draws attention to incomplete chapters or to individuals who either quoted a particular text or made reference to it in their own works; in several places he provides addresses, a fact that will certainly facilitate matters for the budding young scholar.

Although the author makes use of both the romanized and Devanagari scripts for Sanskrit depending upon the place, romanizing the extensive verse index at the end of the book (covering a total of forty-two pages) might have made it easier to use for the novice in Indian studies who is as yet unpracticed in the intricacies of the Sanskrit alphabet.

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COBURN, THOMAS B. *Encountering the Goddess: A Translation of the Devī-Māhātmya and a Study of Its Interpretation*. SUNY Series in Hindu Studies. Wendy Doniger, editor. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991. xiv+257 pages. Figures, glossary, bibliography, index. Paper US\$19.95; ISBN 0-7914-0446-3. (Published in India by Sri Satguru Publications, Delhi, 1992)

Thomas Coburn, known for some time as a scholar of the Hindu goddess tradition, continues his study in *Encountering the Goddess*. The focus of Coburn's work is the *Devī-Māhātmya*, an approximately 1,500-year-old Sanskrit text exalting the Goddess. His analysis of the text and its usage and relevance in contemporary Hindu life is insightful and stimulating. In his introduction, Coburn sets out the three main factors that led him to the study under review. First and foremost was a desire to contribute to "the revolution in the way in which we think and behave with regard to matters of gender" (2); although Coburn does not pursue feminist issues in this work, stating he does not feel he is the right person to do so, his awareness of the relevance of feminism in academic study is laudable. Second was an interest in scripture and the place of books in religious life. He questions the fascination with the written word in Western academic circles, and recognizes that this fascination is not universal. In the study of Hinduism, with its ancient oral tradition, this is a particularly valid point, which is further highlighted in chapter 7, where Coburn refers to the coexistence of two separate traditions, one of which emphasizes the sound (*śabda*) of words, the other of which emphasizes their intelligibility and meaning (*artha*). Third was a desire to move away from a structural mode of analysis and take into account historical factors in both the translation and analysis of the text. Although he acknowledges that in dealing with India and "its proverbial aversion of attention from historical detail" (8) it is not easy to consider matters of chronology, he questions the level of understanding that is produced by structuralist methods.

One of the questions raised by Coburn is: What is it that people do with their verbal artifacts? In part 1 of the book, "The Text in Its Context," he places the text in its historical setting and then provides a translation that is readable and enjoyable, and yet does not mask such characteristics of the original as its occasional repetitiveness.

Part 2, "Encounters with the Goddess," begins with a chapter on the ritual and philosophy of the *aṅgas* (limbs or subsidiary texts), which are mainly concerned with ritual recitation of the text. A translation of the *aṅgas* is provided in an appendix. The next chapter, dealing with the commentaries, leads us into the realm of Tantra and *yantra* (design). Coburn clearly has a deep understanding of this intricate subject,