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Book Review: "Yoga and Psychology: Language, Memory, and Mysticism"

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Tagore and Andrews also, as internationalists, felt that Gandhi was sometimes too narrowly nationalist in orientation, citing especially the boycott of British cloth. Besant was opposed outright to Gandhi's desire for complete independence from the British, as well as his method of confrontation through noncooperation. For Sarvarkar, on the other hand, Gandhi was not nationalist enough, being a traitor to Sarvarkar's chauvinist vision of a Hindu nation. Would-be allies across the spectrum were repeatedly disturbed by Gandhi's authoritarian unilateralism in decision-making, consultation being subordinated to the authority of the Mahatma's "inner voice." Rukmani (113) cites Tagore's description of Gandhi as one "enamoured of his own doctrines, which is a dangerous form of egotism that even great people suffer from at times." The authors document how Gandhi's relations with Muslims and Sikhs were undermined by sudden changes of course and withdrawals of support, without warning or consultation, which caused them to regard him as an unreliable – and perhaps untrustworthy – ally.

Of course, Gandhi's critics were not always of one mind in respect of the Mahatma. Nehru's frequent exasperation with him, for example, was encompassed in a relationship of friendship and respect. Christians, Muslims, and other communities

were likewise not of one mind on Gandhi. A most valuable feature of this volume is its articulation of the rich complexity of this saint cum politician's conflicted historical relationships.

I am impressed by the consistent quality of the pieces in this volume. There is no chapter here that is weak. The editor has done an admirable job of selecting fine contributors, and keeping them all on theme with a consistent approach. If I would have any criticism, it would be that the contributors and the editor have confined themselves too strictly within the stipulated historical period. With the conflicts described in this volume still working themselves out so momentously in contemporary South Asia, as the contributors do in fact hint, one might have expected some kind of forward-looking analysis of the connections between then and now, if only briefly, perhaps in the conclusion. The editor might argue that this is the job of some other book; if so it is a work urgently needed. Meanwhile, the volume remains a significant contribution, highly recommended for students and general readers as well as specialists.

Lance E. Nelson
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Yoga and Psychology: Language, Memory, and Mysticism.
Harold Coward. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2001, x + 115 pp.

THE author, known to scholars worldwide for his expertise in Hindu and other traditions, examines Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* not only in relation to Bhartrhari's (c. 500 CE) philosophy of language and theology of revelation, but also in regard to the influence the *Sutras* have exerted on modern Western

psychology, especially on Freud, Jung and Transpersonalists such as Washburn, Tart, and Ornstein. Whether the Western psychologists just named have been influenced to some degree by Patanjali's *Yoga* or rejected it outright, Coward notes that they are unified in their specifically

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Western view of human nature, which remains markedly different from Eastern anthropologies and psychologies. The author draws the important conclusion that "there is a crucial difference between Eastern and Western thought with regard to how limited or perfectible human nature is - the West maintaining that we as humans are psychologically, philosophically, and theologically limited or flawed in nature and thus not perfectible, while Patanjali's Yoga (and Eastern thought generally) maintains the opposite." (ix) This slender, densely written, informative and lucidly argued book deals, then, with the limits and possibilities of attaining a perfect ego-transcending consciousness. The work is the outcome of twenty-five years of study and reflection (and also, I think, of spiritual endeavor) and could easily have been published as two separate lengthy studies.

Chapters 2 through 4 are concerned exclusively with ancient Indian thought, the first with Patanjali's philosophical and spiritual understanding of language and mantra-recitation, the latter two with Bhartrhari and his indebtedness to Patanjali's understanding of language and psychology. Coward emphasizes here the power of language to convey supersensuous knowledge as also the efficacy of chanting AUM for mind-purification. For both Patanjali and Bhartrhari the five *kleshas* or human afflictions are finally overcome by renouncing worldly desire, by the repetition of syllables, by the study of Vedic texts, and by intense devotional concentration on the Divine. Language is used to elevate and purify the mind to attain a state of consciousness that is finally beyond words.

In the second part of the book, chapters 5 through 8, Coward surveys the various responses of Western psychologists to the possibility of overcoming human limitation and attaining the experience of pure consciousness. While noting the significant though limited agreement of Yoga, Freud, and Jung on the impact of the unconscious on the processes of memory and motivation,

the author nonetheless points out the rejection by Freud and Jung that the unconscious could ever be totally overcome or transcended. Jung, moreover, rejected the Yoga claim that the individual ego could be deconstructed or transcended. He simply did not see the traditional Indian claim of ego-transcendence as rooted in actual religious experience, but rather saw it as resulting from a misidentification of philosophy with psychology.

Coward, by contrast is of the opinion that the Yoga analysis of ego and of the emotional obstructions to mystical experience "achieves depths of sophistication beyond anything known in the West." (7) Patanjali's four-fold distinction of ever-purer mystical states is able to account for Jung's object-oriented mysticism while going far beyond it to the ultimate mystical experience of objectless imageless mysticism.

The author's discussion of Western psychologies culminates (chapter 8) in a review of the various theories of Transpersonalists, some of whom show a greater openness to Yoga psychology than did Jung, especially with the recognition of an Indian "we-self" beyond the "I-self" of common Western psychology. Coward pays special attention here to the work of Alan Roland who demonstrates that different conceptions of human nature and self are themselves the product of cultural conditioning. On that basis Coward is able to critique skeptics such as John Hick who would absolutize Western assumptions about the perduring existence of individual identity which allegedly remains even after mystical experience. Coward suggests that Hick take up Yoga practice under an accomplished teacher before passing judgement on whether an egoless state is psychologically impossible.

Coward advocates in his book a greater scholarly respect for the Yoga tradition on the part of Western psychologists. At the same time he does not declare himself to have decided in favor of a more Eastern or a

more Western view on the limits of human nature. (92) What he argues for is a critical openness to both points of view, an attitude he sees to be a necessity for good comparative scholarship.

The present book has focused on the place of language and psychology in the debate about human nature. In his final remarks Coward notes that such a discussion has profound implications also for philosophy and theology. It is to be the subject of his next book. The readers of

Yoga and Psychology await the appearance of its sequel with great anticipation. Harold Coward has done a marvelous service in summarizing and critiquing very disparate voices on a most significant and difficult theme.

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Singing the Body of God. The Hymns of Vedantadesika in their South Indian Tradition. Steven Paul Hopkins. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002, xx + 344 pp.

VEDANTA Desika, a fourteenth century poet-philosopher from South India, is not known very much outside his traditional circles, mainly because there are not many translations of his works in any of the European languages. He wrote in Sanskrit, Tamil and *manipravala*, a form of Tamil-Sanskrit mixture. Hence this publication does a great service to a thinker like Desika by drawing the attention of the wider academic world.

This work concentrates on the devotional hymns of Desika. It is divided into three parts containing seven chapters besides the introduction and conclusion. After dealing with the details of the author's background based on internal evidence, traditional accounts and several legends about the author, the hymns are taken for analysis and discussion. Chapters 3 and 4 deal with three of the most important Tamil works of Desika. Chapters 6 and 7 deal with hymns in Sanskrit and Prakrit, and they are all Desika's stotras in praise of the forms of Vishnu. The concluding chapter sums up the major themes discussed here like Desika as poet-philosopher, the relationship between Tamil, Sanskrit and Prakrit, the roles of intellect and emotion in Desika's

bhakti poetics, the icons, the body of God and Desika's theology of beauty.

The title of the book significantly highlights the content of these hymns. The author argues that, "these poems, in literally bodying forth the god, become themselves, in a particularly vivid way, 'verbal icons' of icons." (p.139). In fact these poems describe Lord Vishnu from head to foot. This type of description, limb by limb, comes from the poetics of early Indian Kavya, both Hindu and Buddhist. One can here cite examples of the Alvars in praise of Lord Vishnu and Abhirami Bhattar in praise of the goddess Abhirami.

Desika writes a commentary on Tiruppanalvars' *Amalanatipiran*, one of the most important descriptions of the beloved god in the Vaishnava Tamil Tradition – beginning with the Lotus feet, the red cloth He wears on His waist, shining navel, waist-band around his lovely belly, the chest, his throat, his red lips, face, and the dark body. It is said Vishnu's beautiful body seizes the heart of this Tamil devotional poet like a beloved seizes the heart of his lover, inspiring in him a rich "language of joy." (p.147) One should keep in mind that here one deals with cultic context of temple