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Book Review: *Hindu Perspectives on Evolution: Darwin, Dharma, and Design*

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mending the trauma caused by political struggles and acts of vengeance, even though these mediation efforts are not yet completely successful. As Joshi rightly notes, this reconciliation work could benefit from understandings of “pluralistic healing” as exemplified in her work, and not just the tools

from any one religion. This constructive pluralistic conclusion is one that would be advantageous to any ongoing work in conflict transformation.

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***Hindu Perspectives on Evolution: Darwin, Dharma, and Design.*
C. Mackenzie Brown. London and New York: Routledge,
2012. xii, 276 pp.**

THIS book confronts the relationship between science and religion from a Hindu perspective. It begins with an assessment of the six traditional Hindu schools of philosophical thought against the background of the purely materialist Cārvāka view. The middle part of the book surveys 19th and early 20th century thinkers who were in dialogue with the emerging modern scientific discourse and ideas espoused by Darwin. The third part of the book examines the prevailing attitudes held by 1000 Hindus queried by the author through a Survey Monkey poll created in consultation with practicing Hindus and social scientists.

The Vedas and the Upaniṣads include speculations regarding the physical form and purpose of the universe. The Vaiśeṣika school posits nine eternal substances (*dravya*) that comprise reality. Nyāya advances systems of logic to better understand nature. Sāṃkhya expands the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika analysis to 25 factors (*tattva*) with increased emphasis given to perceptual processes. Sāṃkhya also introduces the teleology of freedom. Yoga provides methods of attaining that freedom. Mīmāṃsā remains agnostic on the possibility of

freedom, maintaining a doctrine of eternity that relies on ritual to establish and maintain harmony. Vedānta sees the universe as emerging from a consciousness that is fundamentally united yet differentiated, giving birth to both nondual and theistic systems of belief. Brown posits that the Vedāntins believe that mark of this consciousness can be found in the world and characterizes their belief system as one of intelligent design with the exception of Ramanuja who ascribes to a more organic model that allows for the ongoing active presence of God-consciousness.

Rammohan Roy employed the design argument to assert that the presence of God could be found in all things, vindicating the Hindus against charges of idolatry. Similarly, Debendranath Tagore ascribed to what Brown refers to as an "intuitive theism." Keshab Chandra Sen learned about Darwin's theory of evolution while in England in the 1870s and taught about a harmony between science and religion, suggesting that religions themselves evolve. Dayananda Saraswati advanced a view of "modern Vedic creationism" that largely

rejected Darwinian principles in favor of intelligent design.

Swami Vivekananda criticized the Christian rejection of Darwinism and scientific speculation in general, proclaiming that Hinduism, particularly Advaita Vedānta, was more accepting of its insights. He was influenced by the writings of Helena Blavatsky that "assimilated various evolutionary views of her day into a modified Advaitic framework" (133). Vivekananda rejected the design argument as a form of passive deism, preferring the inspirational and aspirational aspects of the progressive evolutionary model that he applied to spirituality. According to Yoga teachings, Vivekananda asserts, the individual can understand and transcend the physical universe. Sri Aurobindo later developed a theory of integrative evolutionism that placed more value on world affirmation, "assimilating Western science and contemporary evolutionary philosophies into a traditional Vedantic framework" (171).

Post-independence India forged a new relationship between science and religion. As Hinduism exerted its authority in new ways, several thinkers rejected scientific perspectives as Western and anti-Vedic. A.C Bhaktivedanta rejected evolutionary ideas, holding the view that the world and humans were created by God billions of years ago. Swami Prakashanand Saraswati considers Darwinian evolution to be illogical. Kisor Kumar Chakrabarti states that Darwinism does not take into account the existence of the soul, and Deepak Chopra criticizes what he considers to be the emphasis on random selection, preferring what might be

seen as a "creationist world view, but replacing a personal God with the transpersonal ideal of Pure Consciousness with an overarching evolutionist framework" (185).

Brown summarizes the work of several contemporary scientists who have written on the topic of Hinduism and science, including P. Doshi of South Africa, Subash Kak of Louisiana and Oklahoma, N.C. Panda of Orissa, Gopala Rao of Virginia, V.V. Raman of Rochester, New York, and Amit Goswami of Oregon. Each of these writers attempts to reconcile science and spirituality. Though not as fervently critical of their work as Meera Nand, Brown does gently suggest that some deeper study into evolutionary developmental scientific research would be helpful. Brown concludes the book with the results of a survey conducted between October 2009 and January 2011 revealing that most Hindus believe that science and Vedantic teachings are compatible, with the exception of adherents to the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

Brown quotes the philosopher Sangeetha Menon in his conclusion, who wisely reminds readers that science and religion are mutually independent and distinctly valuable modes of discourse. In his final remarks, Brown suggests that, in the realm of science, the Cārvāka materialist view might be the most valid course of pursuit for Neo-Hindu thinkers. A provocative and even-handed study, this book should be included in the collections of all university research libraries.

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