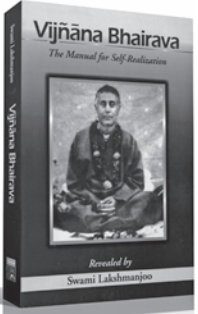


REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



Vijñāna Bhairava: The Manual for Self-Realization

Swami Lakshmanjoo;
Ed. John Hughes

Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers,
P O Box 5715, 54 Rani Jhansi Road,
New Delhi 110 055. Website: www.mrmlbooks.com. 2011. xliv + 271 pp.
₹ 600.

Kashmir Shaivism developed the unique yogic technique of *pratyabhijna*, spontaneous recognition, based on bhakti to understand one's identity with God. Shaivism is very popular all over India and the Shaiva Agamas, traditional texts, are innumerable. Like other philosophies of India Shaivism too diversified itself into various branches to form sub-schools within the system. Kashmir Shaivism is one such school and is also called *trika*, triad, because it teaches three entities: Shiva, Shakti, and the individual soul. The triad is not ultimately real but only apparent, as this school teaches monism. In the beginning Shiva, who is universal Consciousness, manifests himself through a special power as the first cause of creation. Then he manifests through his second power as the innumerable individual souls who, because of a veil of impurity, forget that they are the embodiment of Shiva. This veil can be torn off by intense faith and constant meditation on God, by which the soul transmutes itself into a universal soul and eventually attains liberation through *pratyabhijna* into its own nature. Hindus who adhere to this group consider the doctrine of Kashmir Shaivism a manifestation of the highest Reality.

Kashmir Shaivism has a rich and detailed description of the ascent of individual consciousness to universal Consciousness, called Paramashiva. This mystical philosophy has also been described as 'the mystical geography of awareness' because it

offers many practical approaches to the ultimate realization. In *Vijnana Bhairava* Shiva as Bhairava sets one hundred and twelve sadhanas to be used by different sadhakas. The narrative begins with Devi feigning ignorance and asking Bhairava the secrets of Consciousness, creation, and liberation.

Swami Lakshmanjoo (1907–91) was a saint, mystic, and master of this mystic philosophy. For more than fifty years scholars and numerous sadhakas studied *Vijnana Bhairava* with the swami, who also has many other commentaries on Kashmir Shaivism texts to his credit. John Hughes's masterful editing of the text and thoughtful inclusion of an audio CD is to be praised. His reason for adding an audio CD is solid: 'I am convinced that the deeper truths of this scripture will be revealed through hearing the spoken word of a realized master' (xviii). All contemporary texts of any worth today have CDs accompanying them, as repeated empirical research in psychology shows that the additive and salutary effect of synaesthesia—when two or more senses are simultaneously occupied—is more impressive than only reading a text. The CD is a fit accompaniment for a text that is a 'practical training guide, not a theoretical exposition' (xvii).

The *Vijnana Bhairava* is one chapter in the *Rudrayamala Tantra*, which is purely monistic. There is no doubt that this scripture resembles Advaita Vedanta. It is a very lucid text divided in concise topics. The first two, 'Cosmology' and 'Concealing and Revealing His Nature', directly address questions of soteriology: 'Why has Shiva created this external objective world, this manifestation of supreme energy?' The next part of the text deals with the means 'Upāyas': 'The first and highest means is called *śāmbhavopāya*. The second, for aspirants with medium qualifications, is called *śāktopāya*. The third means, called *āṇavopāya*, is regarded as inferior' (xxxi). These stages are the means of travelling from individual

consciousness to universal Consciousness. The Dharana and Upaya guide, at the beginning of the book, makes it easy to navigate the rest of the text. Finally, the book deals with 'Mokṣa' and its nature. Kashmir Shaivism teaches that Shiva has manifested this external world for only one reason: to create the possibility of recognizing his own nature—the objective universe is a means, a tool, to be used to realize the universal reality of Shiva. By contrast, South Indian Shaivism stresses on the duality of the seeker and Shiva.

The main body of the *Vijnana Bhairava* comprises of the original shloka in Sanskrit and its transliteration, followed by the swami's commentary. Each word and term is dwelt upon. The rest of the explanations are in the form of a Socratic exegesis on each shloka. For example: 'John: "What is the point of these lotuses, one up and one down? Is that just a simile, or a way of speaking?" Swamiji: "No, they are existing; these lotuses are existing there. One who perceives that in *samādhi*, he perceives these two lotuses, one in the upper side and the other in the lower side"' (88).

A few last technical observations: while the 'Guide to Pronunciation' at the beginning is a valuable addition, the bibliography is the only weak point in this excellent text; with only seven entries the bibliographic list shows lack of consideration for deeper researchers and puts a dampener on texts as old as 1918. If Kashmir Shaivism is to carve its niche in the world of philosophy, then such frail bibliographies will have to be improved. There could have been a 'primary texts' bibliography and then a sort of 'further readings' bibliography.

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Every once in a while a gifted person comes and astounds the world with his versatility. One such soul was Swami Gambhirananda (1899–1988), the eleventh president of the Ramakrishna Order. The book traces the life and times of the swami's spirituality, scholarship, leadership, administrative capabilities, and venerable personality, which made a lasting mark in every field of work. His presence helped shape the monastic consciousness of innumerable monks and novices, besides inculcating devotion in thousands of Sri Ramakrishna's devotees who flocked to him.

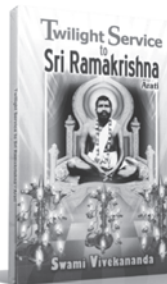
The book also chronicles many people—monastics and householders—who came in touch with Swami Gambhirananda and were inspired to walk towards the light of God.

PB

Twilight Service to Sri Ramakrishna

Swami Vivekananda;
trans. and commentary
Swami Asutoshananda

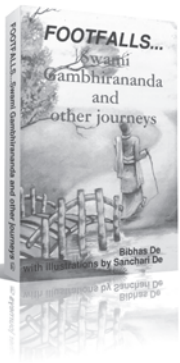
Ramakrishna Math, 31 Ramakrishna
Math Road, Chennai 600 004. Web-
site: www.chennai.math.org. 2011.
ix + 117 pp. ₹ 30.



On seeing his photograph, once Sri Ramakrishna remarked: "This represents a high yogic state. This form will be worshipped in every home as time goes on." Formal worship to Sri Ramakrishna was initiated by Sri Sarada Devi the Holy Mother, and today he is being worshipped in millions of homes of India and abroad. Swami Vivekananda's vesper hymns to Sri Ramakrishna have become integral to the worship. Thus, the combined power of these three divine beings, who came for the salvation of humankind, is palpably felt during the vesper worship.

The translations and commentaries of the hymns by Swami Asutoshananda is lucid and designed to help devotees to imbibe more fully the reality that Sri Ramakrishna is.

PB



Footfalls: Swami Gambhirananda and other Journeys

Bibhas De

5916 Highwood Road, Castro Valley,
California 94552. E-mail: bibhasde@aol.com. 2008. 351 pp. US \$ 17.95.