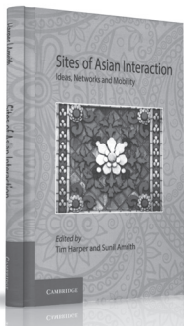


remained shrouded in mystery but for the pioneering work of Sir John Woodroffe aka Arthur Avalon, who gave us clear English translations of many Tantric texts. He spent a lifetime in the systematic presentation and exposition of the basic tenets of Tantra, in a time when India, the birthplace of this discipline, was still a slave nation, considered by the West as a land of magic tricks and savage customs.

Sir John Woodroffe was a judge in the High Court of Calcutta. Though belonging to the ruling race, he imbibed the Indian ethos, which led M P Pandit to call him 'truly an Indian Soul in a European body' (vi). He learnt various Sanskrit texts, including those of Tantra, under the tutelage of his friend, Atal Bihari Ghose. The result of the doctoral work of the author, this volume reflects well her painstaking efforts of the investigative trail into the life of Sir John Woodroffe. This book gives a concise yet overall view of the large and multifarious canvas of the personality that Woodroffe was. Including rare photographs, facsimiles of letters and notes, an elaborate bibliography and index, this book fills a void by fulfilling the long-felt need of a good biography of a soul, who preferred to remain anonymous and speak to the world only through this writings under his pen name, Arthur Avalon.

PB



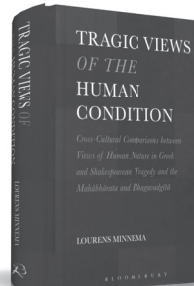
**Sites of Asian Interaction:
Ideas, Networks and Mobility**
Edited by Tim Harper and
Sunil Amrith

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge House, 4381/4 Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi 110 002. Website: www.cambridge.org. 2014. viii + 254 pp. ₹ 795. HB. ISBN 9781107082083.

Transnational encounters are a daily occurrence today. This book explores different inter-Asian interactions and tries to situate them as various paths of communication of ideas and ethos across Asia and studies 'how they are reshaped by myriad encounters along the way' (vii). A collection of essays originally published in a special issue of *Modern Asia Studies* in March 2012, this volume comprises the interactions of various

cultures including Singapore, Ladakh, Penang, and Istanbul. It also traces interactions over the sea and between various religious spaces. Businesses or inter-Asian joint-ventures are also included. Edited by professors of history, this book is a welcome addition to the scarce literature on transnational interactions within Asia.

PB



**Tragic Views of the Human
Condition**

Lourens Minnema

Bloomsbury Academic. 2013. xii + 572 pp. £ 227.99. HB. ISBN 9781441194244.

This is an extraordinary work of comparative literature studying the depiction of human tragedies from the Eastern and Western perspectives. The author takes the Mahabharata and the Bhagavadgita as samples of the Eastern stand on tragedy and compares it with the Greek and Shakespearean literature. This in-depth analysis shows that the very meaning of the word 'tragedy' changes considerably between these cultures. The narrative, artistic, communicative, social, political, literary, cultural, martial, psychological, ethical, and religious aspects of tragedy are dealt with. The thoroughness of the work is simply amazing and invites the reader to look at tragedy from an informed perspective. This book is a handy reference for all students of comparative literature.

PB



Truth

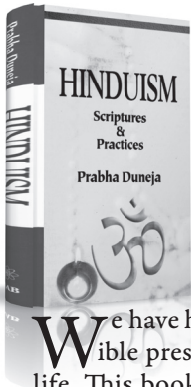
Alexis G Burgess and
John P Burgess

Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540, USA. Website: www.press.princeton.edu. 2011. xiv + 158 pp. \$ 19.95. PB. ISBN 9780691163673.

Truth and its various connotations have always intrigued us. Professors of philosophy, the authors have done a succinct and critical analysis of some theories of truth: deflationism, indeterminacy, insolubility, realism, and antirealism.

They also deal with the concepts of Alfred Tarski and Saul Kripke and their grey areas. Throughout the volume, one can see the mathematical precision of the reasoning of the concepts presented here that could be a model for all endeavours of research into complex areas of philosophy. This book could be an inspiration for further work on truth.

PB



Hinduism: Scriptures and Practices

Prabha Duneja

New Age Books, Naraina Industrial Area, Phase-I, New Delhi 110 028. Website: www.newagebooksindia.com. 2014. lviii + 448. ₹ 400. PB. ISBN 9788178224527.

We have here a very positive book on the visible presence of Hinduism in our everyday life. This book concludes with a chapter on the status of women in Hindu society: 'At present, a Hindu woman enjoys sufficient freedom at home and in society, while living by the time-honored cherished ideals of Hinduism' (428).

One can never have too many books on the subject. Hinduism is a vast area whose centre is everywhere and boundaries nowhere. There are the scriptures; the Itihasas and Puranas; literature; philosophies; theistic religions; religious practices; art and its renewable dictates; deep social concerns, and the connectivity between human beings. All the time something gets added to it too, like the extension of the Bhagavata cult into the West. Constant study of the ramifications of Hinduism has helped Prabha Duneja interact with people professing religions other than Hinduism. She begins at the beginning: the Vedas and the Upanishads. Then come Manusmriti and the great epics. One may say that Indian culture has drawn from all this to become an inclusive, tolerant, and creative force for the entire world.

Prabha Duneja grapples with the caste problem early in the book. The *varna*-dharma was due to the classification 'based upon the intrinsic qualities and inborn inclinations of human beings' (111). This was but a natural growth to help create an ideal society of mutual interdependence and

aim for achievement in every facet of community living. The motivating ideals are given in detail by the author. What follows will be a great help to the educated Indian who has made one's home in foreign climes as the overwhelming number of gods and goddesses does confound one now and then. Prabha Duneja prefaces the section on Hindu theism with an appropriate quote from the Shvetasvatara Upanishad: 'Just as the oil in the sesame seeds, butter hidden in the curd, water in the sediments of the spring, fire in the wood, so is the Supreme-Self veiled within one's own self and can be perceived by true austerity and knowledge of the soul' (290).

The numerous forms of this Supreme-Self and our own disciplines—call them rituals or *achara*—to draw close to it have evolved to help us gain the Vedantic oneness with God. Often we have 'blind' faith and follow the received tradition in a mechanical manner. This won't do, and so this handbook is most welcome as it explains briefly what we need to know. Prabha Duneja takes in her stride even concepts like yoga and meditation on a chakra. Her use of contemporary diction, which is easily understood by the younger generation is fascinating: 'With regular meditation we can access the software of our conditioned-self. Inner alignment with the same source helps to download the information and be aware of the dormant memories and Samskaras those initiate new actions. In silence we are introduced to the secret codes of our programmed life and the programmer. It allows us to become a witness of our life' (365).

One may say such language could make imperative terms like yoga and chakra sound too simplistic. However, if it helps the learner get interested enough to sail on the oceanic surges of Hinduism down millennia; the new approach indicated in this book is welcome. After all this is how Hinduism has survived and remained as young as in those early days when the Rig Veda lit the Agni of aspiration in the human being: 'The rising sun from beyond the horizon fills the auspicious dawn with a hundred auras of divine light and moves on her way to bless everyone in all the directions' (5).

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