

BOOK REVIEWS

Far Eastern Philosophies : K. Satchidananda Murty, University of Mysore, Mysore (1976), pages 24 + 205+ Bibliography and Index. Foreword by Prof. Hajime Nakamura and Introduction by Prof. Wing-Tsit Chan. Price. Rs. 16·00.

The book under review is a serious and scholarly study by a senior Indian Philosopher of the main strands of philosophies of China and Japan. As Prof. Hajime Nakamura notes in the foreword, the book is the first study of Sino-Japanese philosophies in their cultural context by an Indian philosopher. It deserves wide study for that reason and for the wealth of suggestions and information to be found in it. This is, of course, not to suggest that the book does not suffer from shortcomings. In fact, I have some very serious problems with this book, which I have outlined in Part II of this writing. Part I is devoted to a general presentation of the main accomplishments of the work.

I

Altogether there are five chapters in this book—one chapter each of a general nature on Chinese and Japanese philosophy, a chapter each on Confucianism and Taoism and the last chapter devoted to Shintoism which is the school of philosophy and religion indigenous to Japan.

The introductory chapters present main lines of development of the Chinese and Japanese philosophy in the context of the respective civilizations in which they developed. Due to patchy exposure and inadequate understanding of the history and culture of China, certain myths, such as that it is the ' oldest ' civilization on earth, that it has undergone ' no changes ' and has ' no history ', came to be entertained regarding her. Such myths have been examined and discarded by Professor Murty. The development of science in China including the inventions of printing, magnet and gunpowder and the question why in spite of these powerful inventions there did not occur some sort of industrial revolution has been raised, though not discussed in

adequate length. A bird's eye view of the six schools of philosophy in China is followed by an attempt to characterise the Chinese world-view. Professor Murty has offered a sympathetic account of the elements of the mystical and the magical, as also of the perennial yearning of the Chinese for social harmony and order which led to the development of an organic view of society. The importance of humanism and the Chinese insistence on the ethical to a relative neglect of the metaphysical and especially the epistemological merits a full discussion. However, the present work merely touches on these points. In this chapter, as throughout the entire book, treatment is comparative. Professor Murty draws from his vast knowledge of Indian and Western (including Greek and Medieval) traditions to put in relief the concept and ideas under discussion.

In discussion of Confucianism (Chapter II) the traditional concepts of *Jen, li, chih* are considered and the famous controversy between Hsun Tzu and Mencius on whether man's original nature is good or evil is again only alluded to. The importance and the philosophical implications of this controversy are for some reason not taken up. Some space is devoted to the achievements of Chu Hsi, the great exponent of Neo-confucianist school who harmonised Buddhist and Taoist beliefs with Confucian tenets. The last section notes briefly the pervasiveness and importance of the Confucian influence on Chinese philosophy and life.

The third chapter deals with Taoist philosophy. After mentioning a few interpretations of *Tao Te Ching* (pp. 97-98), the author offers his own interpretation of Tao as Absolute Action (pp. 99-100). Brief comparisons with Heraclitus, Plato and Buddhism (pp. 100-103) are followed by a discussion of Chung Tzu (pp. 103-108). Again Ching Hsi (Taoist peace) is compared briefly with Kaivalya, Mokṣa, Nirvāna, as well as with Atarxy of Democritus and Epicurus (pp. 110-114). This brings us to the final section on influence of Taoism (pp. 114-115).

In the general chapter on Japanese philosophy, the question whether Japan has any philosophy to offer to the world is considered. Quoting the late Professor Charles A. Moore, the author believes that regardless of whether or not it is considered

philosophy in the strict western sense, the Japanese thought has much to offer. To the Western and the Indian philosopher, it can be very suggestive and provocative precisely because it does not conform to the philosophical scene in the West. Because of its not displaying the familiar characteristics of western philosophy, Japanese thought has also been described as enigmatic. This displays an obvious western bias and is well rejected by Professor Murty.

There is a rather well-known general characterisation of the Indian, Chinese and Japanese cultures as metaphysical, ethical and aesthetic. The author does not explicitly state it but appears to subscribe to it and emphasises the aesthetic as a central feature of the Japanese way of living. The aesthetic characterizes her religion and morality also. It is a tranquil mind that reflects without condemning or justifying the *tathatā*, *suchness* of things, in art or religion. A quietened mind reaches out to the object, becomes one with it. As the quotation from Nishida states, "The characteristic feature of Japanese culture lies in moving in the direction from subject to object (environment) ever thoroughly negating the self and becoming the thing itself; to see; becoming the thing itself to act. To empty the self and see things, for the self to be immersed in things, "non-mindedness" (in Zen Buddhism) or effortless acceptance of the grace of Amida (in True Pure Land teaching)—these, I believe, are the states we Japanese strongly yearn for..." (p. 119).

A brief account of Zen is followed by a similar one of Bushido, the Japanese code of action for the warrior, considered by some to be 'the essence of the Japanese ethical tradition.' As usual a similarity with the ideas of Bhagavad Gita is noted and a brief comparison of Bushido with Rajput Chal offered. (pp. 144-5).

The last chapter is on Shinto considered to be the basic indigenous thought and religion of Japan. Even though Buddhist metaphysics and Confucian ethics were accepted as valid, they were, not considered by Japanese to replace Shinto. The question of roots and national identity in the context of an indigenous thought and religious tradition coming in touch with powerful religions of foreign origins has been an acute one for Japan. The Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist influences have been powerful,

pervasive and lasting. Presentation of ideas of Hideyoshi and Ieyasu in relation to this question makes a good and instructive reading.

Ieyasu (early 17th century), did not object to the acceptance of religions from abroad, Confucianism and Buddhism, but insisted that acceptance must also go hand in hand with a firm respect and appreciation of the indigenous tradition. To ignore one's own country and its religions and adopt other tradition is to become rootless. "Rooted in one's own culture and tradition, one could legitimately accept anything of value which comes from without. A Japanese must retain his identity, remain a Shintoist, and then he may become a Buddhist, a Taoist or a Confucian, or accept elements from all of them, and harmonise them in his life and work." (pp. 157). Contrasted to Ieyasu's and Hideyoshi's tolerant and reverential attitude to Buddhism and Confucianism, was their rejection of Christianity. In fact they believed that whereas Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism harmonised well and had important contributions to make to Japanese life, Christianity was altogether an 'exclusive' religion and deserved a rough treatment. The reason for this was the internal feuds between Protestants and Catholics, its aggressive and intolerant attitude towards other religions, its allegiance to a foreign head, and Hideyoshi's and Ieyasu's perception of Christian missionaries in Asia as forerunners of colonial conquests. Thus forcible conversions to Christianity were banned and missionaries ordered to be banished from Japan. Professor Murty comments, "Ieyasu and his successors might be justified by some by the argument that an intolerant religion cannot be tolerated, especially so if it denationalises people and can possibly lead to foreign domination. It may be recalled that Locke in his essays on tolerance declared that an intolerant faith had no right to expect toleration from the state or from other faiths." (p. 157).

Further, the author rightly remarks that what Hideyoshi and Ieyasu had to say on this issue in the context of Japan, has a universal significance. A people have to be true to their own self which is constituted by their national history, their ancestry, cultural and religious inheritance. Only then can they meaningfully hope to enrich and enlarge their ideas and conceptions by interaction with others. One has to preserve the integrity of one's

self and allow to enter elements which will blend and harmonise with that. In support, pertinent views of Jaspers and Jung are stated. Views of Japanese thinkers and intellectuals including Buddhist scholars and practitioners such as Takakusu and D. T. Suzuki are given to demonstrate how the Japanese had in fact followed in the footsteps of Hideyoshi and Ieyasu. The basic concepts of Shinto are considered to constitute 'the gist of Japanese thought' and every Japanese regards himself as a Shintoist first. As Okakura Yoshisaburo has been quoted to say, "Speaking generally, we are still Shintoists to this day—Buddhists, Christians, and all—so long as we are born Japanese." (p. 160).

After this interesting and illuminating discussion follows a brief account of the main principles and features of Shintoism including the so-called ethnocentricism of the Japanese and their view of Divine Rulership. A brief account of the schools of Shintoism with a somewhat detailed account of Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801) of the Fukko Shinto School is given. Motocri's interpretation of the *Kami*, the role of the myths, the importance of feeling in religion, and his ethics are presented in a sympathetic manners. Especially noteworthy is the view of the world embodied in the poignant phrase *mono no aware*. It refers to the sensibility and a gentle sadness at the evanescence of things however beautiful and graceful. "The fading of a rainbow the fall of a flower, a leaf caught in the wind, the many sorrows and disappointments that befall and the evil that confronts any man—to be aware of all this and to respond to all this with appropriate feelings is *mono no aware* according to Motoori." (pp. 187).

II

Having presented to the reader the main ideas and orientation of this book, I shall now make some remarks by way of an assessment of its general nature and intellectual worth. I shall do so by taking a somewhat close look at the author's treatment of Taoism and to some extent Zen Buddhism.

A book of this nature may be viewed for evaluation from three different angles.

(1) It may be viewed and its worth considered as a work of exposition of Far Eastern Philosophies—meant for an intelligent layman who has little or only perfunctory knowledge of these philosophies but who seeks an authoritative as well as lucid and coherent account of the same. From this point of view the work presents certain problems. The reader of the category under consideration is likely to find the account rather too thin and disconnected for his purposes and the comparative insights in which the book abounds, rather too specialised to evoke his appreciation. He would have been happier if in the discussion of Taoism, e. g., the author had given a somewhat detailed and clearer expositions of its basic concepts and ideas such as *Tao*, *Te*, *Wu-wei*, spontaneity, void, emptiness, quiescence, the emphasis on the non-verbal and non-conceptual, the 'Nameless Uncarved Block' as well as of the Taoist conception of creativity and tranquillity, especially in poetry and the arts.

(2) Secondly and more importantly is the question of its value to the philosophers who may want to study it from their professional interests. Unfortunately, the philosophers are also likely to find problems with this book, most serious being that it lacks close and in-depth discussions of philosophical issues within (and about) the philosophical traditions of China & Japan. (And yet the philosophical reader may legitimately expect a philosophical excitement of this sort from a work entitled "Far Eastern Philosophies" by a philosopher.)

To illustrate once again from the chapter under discussion, we find only a brief mention of various interpretations of *Tao* without any discussion of their worth or merit. The author's own interpretation of *Tao* as Absolute Action can hardly be considered self-evident or obvious. And yet only a short explication, and hardly any philosophical considerations in its favour as a *valid understanding* of *Tao*, have been advanced.

To indicate the need for such an exercise on the part of the author, I present below in a paragraph, some ideas of *Tao Te Ching* by keeping close to the text. *Tao Te Ching* speaks of *Tao* in terms of,¹

" . . . a thing, a "gathering" chaos,
which existed prior to heaven and earth.

‘ Silent ’, ‘ Empty ’.

Existing by itself, unchanging,

Pervading everywhere, inexhaustible.

It might be called the mother of the world. ”

Tao is ‘ indistinct ’, ‘ ineffable ’ and ‘ unfathomable, ’² the ‘ form of the formless ’.³ Through ‘ emptiness ’ and ‘ quietude ’, having cleansed ‘ the dark mirror within oneself ’ of ambition and desire, concepts and judgments so that ‘ nothing remains there, ’⁴ one ‘ contemplates the ultimate void, ’⁵ and ‘ returns to the origin of the universe. ’⁶

Furthermore, there appears to be an excessive reliance on secondary sources. This gives the reader a somewhat wide view, no doubt, as he gets an idea of how other scholars and interpreters have viewed the matter under discussion. But it may also lead to a perpetuation of errors. For example, following Lin Ching-psi (as quoted by Needham), the author believes Lao Tzu to hold that “ useful knowledge conducive to ‘ filling up of stomachs ’ should be acquired ” and that “ Taoists valued rational and fruitful knowledge ”. (pp. 109). This is indeed an extraordinary thing to say about the Taoists and Lao Tzu who emphasised quiescence, passivity and held that there is nothing better than “ to remain in the state before things are stirred, ”⁷ and that

To learn

One accumulates day by day

To study Tao

One reduces day by day

Through reduction and further reduction

One reaches non-action

And everything is acted upon.⁸

A reading of *Tao Te Ching* (i. e., Lao Tzu) and *Chuang Tzu* shows that contrary to what the author holds, a rejection of the ‘ fruitful ’ and ‘ rational ’ knowledge that may be ‘ useful to filling up of stomachs ’, is the very spirit of Taoism. It pervades the entire work of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, but has been as explicitly set forth in chapter 20 of *Tao Te Ching* as one can hope for. A chapter of rare beauty and charm, I strongly recommended it to the reader for savouring a flavour of this great poem. Quotation of only a part of it may, however, be in order here.

Having spoken of the sage's "quiescence" and "aimlessness", and his appearing like a "fool", Lao Tzu says further,

People are glorious and shining.
 I, alone, am dark and dull.
 People are clever and inquisitive,
 I alone am obscure, and blunt.
 How tranquil I am, like the placid sea.
 How loftily drifting, as I am bound nowhere.
 People all have their motives.
 I alone am good for nothing and uncouth.
 I am not like the others.
 I am nourished by the Mother.⁹

The man of Tao is 'dark and dull', 'obscure and blunt' 'good for nothing' and 'uncouth', in other words, an antithesis of the clever and the rational seeking useful and fruitful knowledge.

Apart from the question of adequate philosophical expositions, the philosopher-reader will look for engagement in philosophical issues raised by a study of Far Eastern philosophies. With regard to Taoism, e. g. this includes philosophical intelligibility and implications of such ideas and expressions as 'a gathering Chaos', the 'Uncarved Block', 'The Tao that can be spoken of is not the Tao itself', 'debating with words leads to limitations', 'As soon as intellection and prudence are esteemed. There is produced the great falsehood'. But this job, too, has been left undone, which is a pity.

Similarly to illustrate my point from the section on Japanese philosophies : from the brief account of Zen Buddhism given by Professor Murty, a *feel* of Zen is missing. And yet, Zen is above all a way of liberation with a unique atmosphere. The thinking mind moves away from the existing concrete reality and posits a symbol, an idea of ourselves apart from ourselves. Living as if this posited idea (an abstraction, an illusory idea) were the true concrete reality, is a source of conflict and pain, contradiction and sorrow. The mind has to be *teased out* of its conceptual thinking which takes the attention away from the given, concrete reality and deludes the mind to take as static and enduring that which is forever in motion and flux. Can the mind be made to suspend its intellectual operation by which it cuts up reality to

the measure of its categories and concepts and to experience afresh the here and now ?

These and many other interesting philosophical issues that arise from a study of Zen have unfortunately, not been taken up by the author. These include the meaning of 'doing nothing,' the meaning and possibility of 'emptying the mind,' the philosophical implications of *Koan* and teasing the mind out of its rational mode, the nature of 'Satori' and sudden enlightenment. The author is instead, content with making brief mentions of some of these concepts and ideas along with short comments of a comparative nature.

3. The comparative character of this book provides us with the third angle from which it may be viewed. I shall now say a few words regarding this. The book does offer an exposition of far Eastern Philosophies with an eye on noting comparable ideas from Indian and Western traditions. As I have said above it is an impressive work in that respect and makes for a fruitful and stimulating study. The comparative perspective allows the author to present these ideas in a sympathetic light and expose many criticisms of these traditions as based on cultural biases and ethnocentricism. However, here also, as the comparisons are not gauged *in depth* and are confined to similarity bearing ideas and concepts from traditions with widely different backgrounds and world-views, they seem to lack sound foundations. Consequently a true comparative perspective, in my view, fails to emerge.

I shall conclude by saying that as a work of its kind, this book makes a significant contribution to an understanding of a comparative nature, of the major intellectual traditions of China and Japan. The historian-scholar and interested readers will find it stimulating and useful. However, as I have maintained above, thorough and in-depth philosophical discussions of at least some of the concepts and ideas presented and issues raised would have greatly enhanced the value of this otherwise good work and would certainly have gladdened the hearts of the philosophers.

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NOTES

1. *Tao : A New way of Thinking*, A translation of *Tao Te Ching* by Chang Chung-yuan, Harper & Row, New York, 1975. Chapter 25.
2. Ibid. Ch. 21
3. Ibid. Ch. 14.
4. Ibid. Ch. 10.
5. Ibid. Ch. 16.
6. Ibid. Ch. 6.
7. Ibid. Chapter 5.
8. Ibid. Chapter 48.
9. Ibid Chapter 20

Hegel's Philosophy of Religion : By Bernard M. G. Reardon.
McMillan 1977

The author is of the view that Hegel may justly be regarded as 'the founder of the philosophy of religion as a systematic study.' Though such claim does not seem to be justifiable, the author makes it clear beyond doubt that Hegel has a philosophy of religion of his own. Hegel is considered to be a deep thinker and that he could be understood with great difficulty only. The author has expounded the views of Hegel in an understandable way.

Hegel has a historical perspective on religion, and this perspective is linked with human destiny. Man's search for the true nature of God throughout history is traced from the early Greek and Roman gods, Judaism and finally ending in Christianity. Hegel does not agree with Kant that the essence of all true religion is human morality. He emphasises the need of revelation culminating in the reconciliation between man and God. The three stages : (i) God being by Himself, (ii) manifesting in the world and finite spirit, and (iii) reconciliation through Christ is a historical process through which the Absolute, the spirit is revealed. All these points are lucidly explained in the book.

The author feels that Hegel has no proper information of Hinduism and Buddhism. Brahman is depicted to be 'formless and abstract substance' without comment. Perhaps Hegel could not have access to the relevant Indian sacred books. But it is well known to all in the contemporary world that Brahman is the self and very useful comparisons can be made with the Absolute spirit of Hegel. So is the status of 'Sunya (Buddhism)'. Description of the ultimate reality in Buddhism negatively as 'non-being' is not justifiable. In a sense, 'Brahman,' 'Sunya', and the 'spirit' (Absolute) indicate the same reality in different ways. This section of the book requires more thorough discussion.

That there can be no proof of God, and that religion is a matter of experience is well brought out. Discussion of the merits of the traditional proofs for the existence of God is illuminating.

One who may be groping to grasp Hegel's views and struggling to understand him by reading Hegel for himself, will find this book very useful. Hegel's views on religion and God are very well laid out. This is definitely a worthy addition to writings on Hegel.

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The Roots of World Religions : by Saral Jhingran. New Delhi : Books & Books publishers, 1982. pp 247. Price : Rs 150/-.

The book is divided into seven chapters. The *first* is Introductory. It differentiates 'religious experience' from 'religious expression'; and it is this distinction which lies at the basis of the author's work. The *three* following Chapters are descriptive of three major religious experiences of mankind — the Hindu, the Christian and the Islamic — in that order. The *fifth* offers an analysis of mystical experience; and the *sixth* points to the complexity produced by differences of beliefs, attitudes, and practices in different religions. In the *last* Chapter, the basic affinity of religions as found in certain common moments of religious experiences are identified and the possibility of inter-religious dialogue is envisaged on the modes available in the arts, literature, and the sciences.

Jhingran's is a philosophical study, not a sociological or an historical one. Nor is it carried out in a vacuum as it happens frequently in philosophy. Her strategy is to describe *first* the checkable statements of beliefs, attitudes, and experiences as found in the authentic texts of the religions discussed, and *then* do philosophy in the light of good acquaintance with the actual facts of those religions. This makes her work distinctive and worthy of serious attention. For her information the author draws upon the original sources, while at the same time taking into account the secondary sources as well.

The task which Jhingran has set for herself is threefold : (1) To identify the core features of what she calls world religions. (She does not discuss Buddhism. Perhaps, for good reasons. The work would have been bulkier then.) (2) To recognize their different beliefs, attitudes, and experiences; and (3) to envisage by means of interreligious dialogue and communication the possibility of harmonizing them at the philosophical and, by suggestion, at the practical level in spite of their mutual differences.

This task is quite difficult; but she handles it with care by adopting fundamentally the *Rg Vedic* principle, namely, *Ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadanti* (Truth is one; individuals describe it in several ways). This makes her subscribe to William James,

'distinction between *experience* and *expression* and also emphasize the role of the mystics' experiences and their individual, socio-culturally conditioned expressions of those experiences arising out of which we have the variety of religions. Thus, she rejects on the one hand Rudolf Otto's thesis that the entire religious phenomena are reducible to what he calls 'numinous experience' the experience of 'the terror fraught with inward shuddering that no created thing can instil' (Jhingran's quotation p 210). Also, she rejects on the other hand, Ninian Smart's thesis that "each religion has a unique character," and "even the apparently similar concepts have quite different meanings in the different contexts of various religions" (p 211). Her argument is that, while Otto's thesis is reductionistic and tends to overlook "the variety and richness of the religious experience", Smart fails to recognize "the undercurrent of spiritual affinity between the apparently diverse types of religious experience" (p 210). Her own position is that *there is no need to seek* either unity or uniformity of all religions, and that if, we want to enquire into the roots of different religions, *we ought to* "understand and appreciate their similarities behind the differences" (p 213). This alone will enable us to appreciate the complexity of religious experience (p 216), the expression of which involves an interplay of diverse beliefs, attitudes and individual life-styles conditioned by different socio-cultural environments.

This is Jhingran's value judgement. It presupposes a lot and one is free to make a choice with respect to it, or go in for an alternative. To my mind, her thesis stands or falls with how one responds to this value judgement. But, and here she is religiously right, that "only a man who is a sincere and ardent follower of his own religion could understand and appreciate the truth of other religions and *vice versa*, that is, only a man who could understand the true spirit of other religions, could be true to his own religion" (p 239).

There are rich references and detailed notes appended to each one of the eight Chapters, though there is no separate bibliography. The Index is quite helpful. The getup of the book is good. I must say that Dr. (Mrs.) Saral Jhingran's present work will be received by both the specialist and the general reader equally well. It is informative, and illuminating; and it

is an important addition to the fast growing literature on the philosophy of religion. Coming from the hands of an Indian who takes into account the major religions of the country, describes them accurately, and discusses them at the philosophical level, I welcome it; and I hope that others too will.

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The Lotus Sutra, A New Interpretation : Dr. Naresh Mantri;
Hokke Journal Co. Ltd., Tokyo 1977 : PP. xxi+182.

The book under review is the thesis by Dr. Naresh Mantri submitted to the Rissho University, Tokyo, for the D.Litt. degree. It is a treatise on *Saddhmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* (popularly known as The Lotus Sutra), the Buddhist religious text which is widely read with reference in the Buddhist world. As stated by Professor Yenshō Kanakura in his forward, this Sutra, has a direct connection with the religious faith of the Japanese people. Dr. Mantri has got himself acquainted with the enormous Japanese literature on this Sutra and this book proves informative especially to those who do not know Japanese.

In all the seven chapters of the book the author discusses different subjects and concepts which appear in the Lotus Sutra. He discusses most of the topics in historical perspective and helps the reader to have an idea of the personality of Buddha and of the sociological aspects of the change in the Buddhist religious culture. In every orthodox school of thought and religious sect, there are tendencies to deviate from the tradition as circumstances demand, and yet to pretend that the tradition is intact. The author shows how in Buddhism the same thing happened. Customs and practices which Buddha did not allow, were later on accepted in Buddhist sects and they were interpolated in Buddha's teachings. Stupa-worship is a good example. Buddha advised monks not to bother themselves with the worship of relics. However, gradually after Buddha, worship of relics, stupa or caitya became an inseparable part of the religious practices of Buddhist monks. Regarding the status of women in the Saṅgha, similar thing seems to have happened. Buddha, according to the author, does not seem to have any reservations for accepting women in the Saṅgha. Buddha thought that women can achieve any high stage of enlightenment which the monks can attain. But later on religious leaders changed the tradition and created an impression that Buddha was reluctant to accept women in the Saṅgha and give them the status of other monks.

Devadatta—story, as the author explains, is, very instructive. Brational image of Devadatta is that of wicked man who hated Buddha and whom Buddha denounced. On the other hand there are

a few Buddh'ist texts in which Devadatta has been proclaimed to have attained Buddhahood. After narrating such conflicting references, the author explains in his own way how and why Devadatta disagreed with Buddha. This explanation at least suggests that the condemnation of Devadatta at the hands of the orthodox Buddhists who hated Devadatta's schism may not be fair. The author also shows that in Lotus Sutra an attempt is made to bring together the followers of Buddha and the followers of Devadatta, by depicting Devadatta as the spiritual mentor of Śakyamuni.

The main thesis of the author is that the true motive of the Lotus Sutra was to synthesise different religious sects under Buddhist thought. This motive is expressed through Devadatta depicted in the Lotus Sutra, by preaching stūpa worship which attracted common people, through the concept of Ekayāna (a way towards which all other religious paths proceed), through the concept of eternal Buddha (which was parallel to though not identical with, the concept of God or Brahman). In this way the author of the Sutra had a compromise even with the theists and ritualists who belonged to the Vedic school. Such a historical event may generate diverse reactions in the minds of modern scholars. The Indian idea of synthesising opposite views seems to please different scholars even today. In fact the Indian tendency of synthesis involves falling into ambiguities, vagueness, misinterpretations and interpolations. People imposed their desires, beliefs etc. on the ancient sages and to this end either misinterpreted their teachings or interpolated many 'teachings' in their names. The original teaching of the sage is thus lost. Dr. Mantri has efficiently shown how some of the Buddha's teachings were distorted in the hands of later scholars and the Buddhist priests. In fact we can see that through the ideas like Eternal Buddha, where Buddha was not only deified, but was also given the status of the eternal ultimate reality, the author of the Lotus Sutra distorted the core of Buddha's teaching. Permanence had no place in Buddha's teachings. That everything is impermanent was one of the foundations of Buddha's Philosophy. But the later so-called Buddhists, who claimed to be the sincere followers of Buddha, distorted this foundation. Now what should be our reaction to this? Should we praise these

blind destroyers of the heart of Buddhism, because they have 'succeeded' in synthesising the controversial doctrine under one head or should we condemn such an activity ?

Dr. Mantri's attitude seems to be ambivalent. Although as sociologist of religion he need not take any value-oriented approach towards these tendencies in early and later Buddhism, the author seems to be both, rational and religious-minded. He is tempted to praise the synthesising attitudes seen in the Lotus Sutra, to praise the Lotus Sutra itself as a big stūpa (which deserves worship). In the same book he has a temptation to praise Buddha as a man of insight, a rational being who condemned stūpa-worship, who thought women to be equal to men and so on, as if all these things were justified. Buddha was justified and also synthesisers were justified. Ofcourse to react normatively to these historical events was not Dr. Mantri's purpose at all, and his ambivalent reaction, as we put it, is very implicitly seen in his writings. But one thing is clear that the book has a capacity to stimulate any normal rational reader, to take one stand or the other with regard to these historical events and processes. In fact this is a strong point of this book.

This book is a clear evidence of Dr. Mantri's thorough-going scholarship in Buddhism. His style is lucid and simple. This book does not give the exhaustive picture of the Lotus Sutra, but Lotus Sutra proved to be an occasion for the author to discuss some major aspects of the social history of religion, with reference to Buddhism. We recommend this book for reading to the students of religion and philosophy of religion.

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