
Book Reviews

Women Writing in India, Volume I: 600 B.C. to the Early Twentieth Century. Ed. S. Tharu and K. Lalita. New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1991. ISBN 1-55861-027-8. Pp.vii+537.

Women Writing in India, Volume II: The Twentieth Century. Ed. S. Tharu and K. Lalita. New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1993. ISBN 1-55861-029-4. Pp. vii+641.

Recent years have seen an increasing interest in the writing of Indian women in India. As a result, a number of anthologies have appeared which translate the works of Indian women writers into English from many of the regional languages of India. The two volumes of *Women Writing in India* fit into this larger enterprise. By all accounts, this two-volume set is a monumental work, presenting perhaps the greatest sample of women's writing to be compiled anywhere in the world: a tremendous achievement of painstaking research, translation, and editing.

Together, the volumes span a period of 2500 years in the history of women's writing in India, starting with the *Therigatha*, the poetry of the first community of Buddhist nuns, and concluding with the works of major contemporary writers, such as Mrinal Pande and Amrita Pritam. In sum, they represent the works of some 200 writers writing in 13 vernacular languages. The decade-long project includes works of writers already well-established in their regional communities, as well as those of little-known writers whose histories are shrouded in obscurity and whose works were located with difficulty, sometimes on withering manuscripts or in private libraries. Despite this impressive spectrum, however, it does seem curious that the renowned Alvar poet-saint Antal is not mentioned in the section on Bhakti poetry. Yet, such an oversight may be forgiven, perhaps, when one takes into account the sheer mass of material from which the editors had to make their choices.

The work is also valuable for the theoretical framework which it provides. The introduction to each volume situates the work in the larger context of feminist literature and literary criticism. The editors are critical of the universalist assumptions of much feminist literary theory, arguing that it blithely subsumes the oppressions of class, caste, race and imperialism under the dominant ideology of gender oppression, and ignores the complicity of women in these other oppressions. They are critical of Elaine Showalter's project of Gynocritics, or "scholarship concerned with woman as the producer of textual meaning" (18), pointing out that "[w]omen writers—critics and editors of anthologies no less—are clearly

as implicated in the ideologies of their times as men are" (34). Furthermore, "not all literature written by women is feminist, or even about women. Neither is the scope of women's writing restricted to allegories of gender oppression" (35).

One of the novel and welcome concerns of this work, then, is to identify the positions—moments of privilege—from which different women have written. This self-consciousness then informs the structure and texture of the work, thereby avoiding the homogenization of the concerns of one group of Indian women (which has been the practice in the past). Consequently, each section is preceded by an introductory graph, discussing the major historical events which have shaped and defined women's writing in different times. The literary selections are in turn preceded by a detailed biography (where available) of the writer, locating her in the historical, political, and social circumstances of her time. In this way, a uniquely decentralized is achieved which highlights and celebrates the diversity of women's experiences, and their responses to their experiences in the different milieux in which they wrote. *Women Writing in India* explodes all facile stereotypes of Indian womanhood, and forces the reader to view the Indian woman in the overall complexity of her life. For this reason alone, *Women Writing in India* should be required reading for all students focusing on the participation of Indian women in Indian society.

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***Buddhism and Nature. The Lecture Delivered on the Occasion of Expo 1990: An Enlarged Version with Notes.* By Lambert Schmithausen. Studia Philologica Buddhica, Occasional Paper Series VII. Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1991. ISBN 4-906267-23-8. Pp. 67.**

This book is a balanced attempt to demonstrate that some old ethical and doctrinal principles of Indian Buddhism, while not originally having ecological purposes, can be given an ecological flavour and serve as a mobilizing force to address our current environmental crisis. The study is a valuable contribution to the fields of Buddhology and environmental ethics. Schmithausen not only identifies elements of the Dharma potentially receptive to an ethics of the environment, but also exposes some doctrines that are not so environmentally friendly, and which even reinforce our destructive instincts.

The book is divided in two parts, the first being the lecture that he delivered at Expo 1990, the second dealing with more complex issues complementing his discussion of part one. It is in terms of practical behaviour and evaluation of nature that Schmithausen proposes to examine the ancient Indian Buddhist doctrines and their relation to the conservation of nature. By "nature," he means both eco-system (i.e., wild nature untampered by human activities) as well as natural entities (i.e., individual animals and plants), for it is with reference to the destruction of these that we talk today of an environmental crisis. With respect to practical behaviour, he suggests that the major inhibiting factor in the utilization of