

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.

Arti Dhand

McGill University

***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

nature in Ancient India was “the fact that utilization often involves injuring or even killing of living beings” (4). Such consequences could not be taken lightly by Buddhists, according to whom the injuring or killing of living beings is believed to have evil consequences for the perpetrator’s future rebirths, and for whom it is considered immoral to bring injury or death to sentient beings who fear death and recoil from pain just as much as humans do. Thus the first moral precept of Buddhism is abstention from injuring or killing, and the cultivation of love toward all beings. Once this principle is extended to plants—for after all, plants are the abode of many little animals—we have in our hands ethical guidelines from which nature could only benefit. Yet a strict application of this precept is unthinkable since even the most basic activity of gathering and preparing food involves killing innumerable animals and plants. Accordingly, Schmithausen suggests that instead of devising various cleansing ceremonies to get rid of the bad karma “inevitably” accumulated, as the ancient Buddhists did, we should try to follow the first Buddhist precept to the best of our capacity and give up unskillful habits that encourage unnecessary cruelties and excessive exploitation of nature.

With regard to its evaluation of nature, Indian Buddhism is at best neutral and at worst negative in that all the different kinds of existence are characterized by unsatisfactoriness and inevitable decay. From the practical, or relative, point of view, however, nature receives a very positive evaluation in the hands of the hermit who finds in it the silence, solitude and constant reminders of the truth of impermanence that are so crucial to his meditative practices and spiritual awakening. Wild nature therefore provides the ideal conditions for the perfection of humanity and, translated into twentieth-century aspirations, this old Buddhist evaluation of nature could take the form of arguments for the conservation and restoration of nature as a means to promote mental health and global happiness.

Though brief, this study is an excellent introduction to both the possibilities and difficulties of using Indian Buddhist doctrines to address our environmental crisis. Well-documented, it abounds in footnotes providing useful information to the specialist—though this can also become distracting to the newcomer. One major shortcoming, acknowledged by the author, is the decision not to discuss the possible implications of the doctrine of emptiness for an environmental ethics. Through his clear argumentation, Schmithausen demonstrates that although some elements of ancient Indian Buddhist doctrine may be unfriendly to the environment, others, such as the moral qualities of benevolence and compassion, should appeal to us as adoptable attitudes for the immediate benefit of nature.

Raynald Prévèreau

McGill University

The Ideas and Meditative Practices of Early Buddhism. By Tilmann Vetter. Leiden: E.J. Brill. 1988. ISBN 90-04-08959-4. Pp. xxxvii + 110.

This book is a gift to the world of Buddhist studies. Most known for his work on the Buddhist epistemologist *Dharmakīrti* (seventh century CE), Vetter has here