

*Motivating Ourselves, The Metaphors of Life, A New Spring for the Elderly and The End of Life.*

2. Abundant examples: Ven. Master Hsing Yun illustrates his points by using examples from his own experiences as well as from ancient and modern times, Chinese and foreign countries, Buddhism and non-Buddhism, and monastics and laity. We can read examples of Venerable Master Huiyuan, Jesus, and Judas in *Overcoming Setbacks*; Nero, Hitler, Mussolini, King Asoka and the Buddha's son Rahula in *Reforming Ourselves*; and Socrates and Christopher Columbus in *Marriage*. In *Setting a Good Example*, he says, "In education it is far better to teach by personal example than with empty words. If we ask others to be good, we must first set an example ourselves with our own actions. Benjamin Franklin once said, 'A good example is the best instruction.'"

3. Presentations of opposite aspects and perspectives to solve dilemmas: Ven. Master Hsing Yun not only describes the advantage of the positive side but also enumerates the disadvantages of the opposite one such as *Overcoming Setbacks*. He concludes that our success in life depends on whether or not we can overcome setbacks and turn them into conditions for progress. When there is no darkness, there is no brightness, and without vices and mistakes we cannot discover the good and the beautiful. When there is no filth, we cannot appreciate cleanliness and without differences there will be no unity.

4. Exceptional insights: Ven. Master Hsing Yun expresses his positive and critical thinking skillfully in *Tending Life's Garden*. He says, in *Self-Deprecation*, "People who know how to be self-deprecating are undoubtedly wise, cultivated and sympathetic. If someone in a senior position can resolve unintentional offenses by his/her subordinates with self-deprecation, it is

a form of compassion." Roger Coreless (Professor of Religion, Emeritus Duke University) also says, "Master Hsing Yun speaks his mind in this anthology on a wide range of subjects...the book could be used for daily reflections or as a prelude to meditation."

In addition to the above-mentioned, between the lines in the book, Master Hsing Yun really presents the six characteristics of Humanistic Buddhism – humanism, emphasis on daily life, altruism, joyfulness, timeliness and universality which are the manifestations of his mind. As long as we make a commitment and take actions to tend our life's Garden, we will enjoy a carefree life. The spring of life is here and now just as Venerable Master Hsing Yun says that "Ignorance and enlightenment lie in just a thought! A thought of ignorance may cause sorrow and pain while an inspiration of enlightenment can bring out the sun of wisdom." (V.I,II Between Ignorance and Enlightenment)

– Yung Dong

## **Tantric Revisionings: New Understandings of Tibetan Buddhism and Indian Religion**

**By Geoffrey Samuel  
Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi,  
India, 2005, 384 pages**

Geoffrey Samuel, trained at Cambridge University in South and Southeast Asian Studies, under the mentorship of Stanley Tambiah, has assembled in this volume an impressive set of fifteen scholarly papers written over a period of sixteen years on a variety of topics pertaining to the historical and anthropological study of the religions and cultures of India and Tibet.

The author demonstrates throughout the volume a most convincing erudition concerning this part of the world, that is as broad in its scope as it is deep and densely-packed in its details about the beliefs and practices, social organizations and worldviews of both India and Tibet.

As impressive as is his command of the languages and histories of this area of the world, Samuel's unique and most beneficial contribution to the study of South Asia is his application of the method of comparative religious studies to topics that, in the past, have been explored either as textual/ideational (and hence, *idealistic*) articulations or as cultural/anthropological (and hence, practical/pragmatic) expressions of the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, but with each methodological perspective pursued to the exclusion of the other.

In his lengthy and extremely informative Introduction to the volume, traces the development of his increasing dissatisfaction with the textual versus anthropological approaches of the past and his dedicated attempt to fashion a fresh angle that would combine the perspectives of Buddhology and Anthropology into a single, bi-focal approach to the scholarly study of South Asian Regions.

In accomplishing this goal, he self-consciously embraces what he believes to be the most valuable contributions of his Buddhological predecessors (e.g., Alex Wayman, Herbert Guenther, David Snellgrove and Giuseppe Tucci) and his Anthropological ancestors (e.g., Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf, Robert Ekvall and Melford Spiro) to South Asian studies, but then goes beyond all of them in producing a perspective that seamlessly synthesizes these two perspectives to form a richer and more comprehensive methodological viewpoint.

These collected papers cover far too broad a topical terrain to be reviewed

here in any more than a cursory manner, but hopefully in a manner that will introduce the prospective reader to the many provocative issues raised and the large bulk of new and "redigested" information provided in this weighty volume. The author himself defines the parameters of his intention in preparing these studies by declaring, "For the most part, these chapters are less concerned with presenting finished arguments than with opening up new directions /of thinking/ . . . Such value as they have, I think, will be most in their ability to stimulate new ways of seeing perhaps over-familiar material."

In Chapter One, the author explores Tibet as a Stateless society, over which no single individual (whether a religious or political authority) ruled as a self-contained political entity. He compares traditional Tibetan culture with three Islamic societies previous embedded in anthropological literature: namely, the Berbers and Arabs of Morocco, the Bedouin of what is now Libya, and the Pathans of Swat in Northwest Pakistan, thereby, placing each of these societies in a broad, cross-cultural context of interpretation.

Chapter Two investigates some of the defining similarities and differences that distinguish various types of "religious functionaries," in Buddhist and Muslim societies, his goal being "to seek to understand the basic human abilities and potentialities that have manifested in one way in Tibet, and in other forms else-where."

Chapters 3-8 focus on the historical backgrounds of a number of core cultural elements that have come to constitute the dizzyingly complex cultural terrain that is Indian Religion (Hinduism and Indian Mahayana) and Tibetan Buddhism: the dissenting tradition of Tantra in India and its partial integration into Tibetan society, Tibetan Buddhism as a form of Shamanism, the inter-linkage among Shamanism, Bon and Tibetan Religion,

the evidence supporting the impact of the Indus Valley Civilization upon early Tibetan culture, and the origins and meanings of the tenth-or-eleventh Tibetan epic, the Ge-sar of gLing.

Against this panoramic historical background, Samuel attempts to assemble a dependable picture of Hinduism and Buddhism in contemporary South Asia.

In Part III Samuel addresses four issues pertaining to religion in contemporary South Asia, namely, the influences coming from the Southeast Asian Highlands on Tibetan history, Vajrayana in the context of Himalayan folk religion, the relative effectiveness of Goddess rituals as exemplified in rituals dedicated to White Tara (the Tibetan goddess of Long Life), spirit possession in Rajasthan, the cult of Kumari in Nepal, the veneration of the Virgin Mary in Roman Catholicism, and the cult of Brigid, a pre-Christian Celtic goddess that, with the introduction of Christianity into Ireland, was sanctified under the name of St. Brigid and finally, an exploration of the attitude toward women in South Asian religion as reflected in specifically *female* rituals, especially those dedicated to the Hindu goddesses, Lakshmi, Durga, Manasa and the ten Mahavidya goddesses.

The concluding section, contains three illuminating essays on the relationship between Tibetan Buddhism and other western religions in modern times. In the chapter entitled, "Tibetan Buddhism as a World Religion: Global Networking and its Consequences," Samuel traces the changing character of Tibetan Buddhism from pre-modern times, to its survival following the Chinese invasion in 1959, its transmission to the West and its formation of transnational networks to oversee and promote the survival of Tibetan religion and culture in the state of diaspora.

In chapter 14, he delves more deeply into the variety of changes (social,

religious, and philosophical) that the interaction between Tibetan Buddhism and western culture is producing in both traditions. Specifically, he points out four areas of western culture that he believes represent serious needs of reformulation, which he sees Tibetan Buddhism in a position to address: namely, the need for an authoritative kind of knowledge growing out of an alternative kind of science, a need for a new kind of moral authority, the need for a redefinition of community and a need of new technologies of the self that would redefine concepts of the human person in a more wholistic form.

In the concluding chapter, the author explores the attractions of Tantric Buddhism in the west by analyzing two "moments" in the history of Tantrism: the formation of the Tantric lineages between the eighth and the twelfth centuries and in the twentieth century, as exemplified in the writings of numerous western novelists and poets, among whom are the novelists Aldous Huxley, Lawrence Durrell, Doris Lessing and the poet, Robert Graves.

This volume of fifteen essays, most of them published in other resources between 1989 and 2005, is a most illuminating and provocative collection of "revisionings" of previous views of Tibetan Buddhism and South Asian religion. The author skill-fully combines the methodologies of textual studies, sociology, anthropology and iconography in laying a new and, what he believes to be, a more accurate and comprehensive picture of religion in South Asia.

The reader can benefit greatly in reading individuals essays on topics of special interest. But this reader would recommend a reading of the entire volume in order to get the full-sweep and depth of the results of the masterful exploration of Tantric Buddhism and South Asian Religion by this most erudite scholar.

– J. Bruce Long