



Philosophies of India

Heinrich Robert Zimmer, Joseph Campbell (Editor)

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The volume is divided into four sections: The introduction places the position of the Buddhist Tantras within Mahayana Buddhism and recalls their early literary history, especially the Guhyasamahatantra; the section also covers Buddhist Genesis and the Tantric tradition. The foundations of the Buddhist Tantras are discussed and the Tantric presentation of divinity; the preparation of disciples and the meaning of initiation; symbolism of the mandala-palace Tantric ritual and the twilight language. This section explores the Tantric teachings of the inner Zodiac and the fivefold ritual symbolism of passion. The bibliographical research contains an analysis of the Tantric section of the Kanjur exegesis and a selected Western Bibliography of the Buddhist Tantras with comments.

Philosophies of India Details

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From Reader Review Philosophies of India for online ebook

Ari Karishma Dewi says

Learn about all philosophies that India have only in one book!

Ron Krumpos says

"Philosophies of India" is one of the books in the primary bibliography of my free ebook on comparative mysticism. "The greatest achievement in life" at suprational.org/gail2012.pdf has been reviewed on Goodreads.

Minerva De la cruz says

Un análisis muy completo de las múltiples filosofías de la india.

Sanjay Vyas says

Tremendously insightful about the philosophies of India. As an Indian I was struck by the author's thorough grasp of the insights -- there are times it seems the author is describing his personal experience as a practitioner.

Still, at times it reads a little pedantically. That may be my shortcoming as a reader rather than the author's fault.

Dennis Littrell says

Zimmer, Heinrich (edited by Joseph Campbell) *Philosophies of India* (1951) *****
Authoritative, substantial, accessible

Professor Zimmer composed most of this book during the last years of his life. He died in 1943 while teaching at Columbia University. Joseph Campbell, who was one of his students, took up the task of editing and completing the work some years later. This 687-page volume is the result, published by Pantheon Books as part of the distinguished Bollingen Series in 1951.

Zimmer goes beyond the six orthodox systems of Indian philosophy to include Buddhism, Tantra, and various minor philosophies which are identified as philosophies of e.g., "success," "pleasure," and "duty." These are practical philosophies in the Indian constellation aimed at advising kings and princes on how to maintain power and govern (much in the manner of Machiavelli's Prince, by the way), and laypersons on

how to live within the caste system and conduct one's daily life. In the Arthashastra (the science of wealth) and the voluminous Mahabharata, for example, one learns how to approach a neighbor--that is, a neighboring tribe--safely and profitably. The seven ways are (1) saman, conciliation or negotiation; (2) danda, attack, assault; (3) dana, with presents; (4) bheda, divide and confuse; (5) maya, trick, deceive; (6) upeksha, pretending not to notice; and (7) indrajala, trickery in war, such as using a Trojan horse. What Zimmer has achieved here is something beyond the usual presentation of the ideas and tenets of the Indian philosophies. We are given a rich source of material for understanding the Indian mind and how it differs from the Western.

Unlike Western philosophy, Indian philosophy is intricately interwoven with religious ideas and practices. Unlike Western philosophy, Indian philosophy does not attempt a rigorous logical expression. Rather ideas are asserted and truths acknowledged symbolically and metaphorically. Analogy is a frequent device. Zimmer explains why this is so on pages 312-313:

"...[T:]he ultimate and real task of philosophy, according to Indian thought, and to such classical Occidental philosophers as Plato, transcends the power and the task of reason. Access to truth demands a passage beyond the compass of ordered thought. And by the same token: the teaching of transcendent truth cannot be by logic, but only by pregnant paradox and by symbol and image."

Western readers of an analytical philosophic mind should not be put off by the Indian style (as I once was), but instead might profit from an open-minded approach that accepts things on a symbolic level and does not get bogged down in the quicksand of apparent contradiction, because there will be contradictions aplenty! It is useful, I think, to see, for example, how the ideas of Brahmanism and the Sankhya philosophy were incorporated into the Buddhist teachings, how the Upanishads anticipated the Bhagavad Gita, and how rite and ritual evolved into something close to rationalism. Also interesting is how the unquestioned authority of the Vedas on matters of belief have been maintained in the "orthodox" philosophies of modern Indian and how they have been augmented or transplanted by the "heterodox" systems such as Buddhism and Tantra.

In the final analysis, the Indian mind sees reality as paradox. "Indian philosophy insists that the sphere of logical thought is far exceeded by that of the mind's possible experiences of reality. To express and communicate knowledge gained in moments of grammar-transcending insight [compare Zen "enlightenments":] metaphors must be used, similes and allegories." Zimmer calls these "the very vehicles of meaning." He adds, "Indian philosophy, therefore, frankly avails itself of the symbols and images of myth, and is not finally at variance with the patterns and sense of mythological belief." (p. 25)

Zimmer's style is relatively easy to read and is without obvious cant or prejudice. He writes as a historian with the emphasis on what was and why, rather than as a critical philosopher who would critique and criticize--although he is not above guiding the reader's sensibilities. Campbell's editing is substantial of course, as it must be with an uncompleted work of this size, compiled some years after the fact of composition; but his famous voice is subdued in favor of his distinguished mentor.

There is both a general and a Sanskrit index, both substantial, and a bibliography by philosophic category (Jainism, Buddhism, etc.). An appendix on "The Six Systems," Sankhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, Vedanta, Vaisesika, and Nyaya, which Zimmer regards as "points of view" and "aspects of a single orthodox tradition" is given and there is a time line juxtaposing events in India with those in the West.

There is a reason this book is still in print, and that reason is simple: Zimmer's work is one of the best on Indian philosophy ever written and is a storehouse of insight into the mind set of India. It would make a fine addition to almost anyone's library.

-- a review by Dennis Littrell
