

nirvāṇa about 480 BC, and summed up especially by A. Bareau (1953) and R. Hikata (1980/1985) are critically examined. Here Bechert succeeds in demonstrating that this chronology, limited more or less to those sources influenced by Sinhalese Theravāda tradition, and by no means universally accepted by all Buddhist schools, presupposes, among many details difficult to accept, an absurdly long life span of the first patriarchs of Buddhism. Many of these problems were broached as early as 1958 by E. Lamotte in his history of Buddhism. It is, however, only Bechert who convincingly argues that these difficulties disappear once the "shorter chronology" is accepted, which places the death of the Buddha, and consequently that of Mahāvīra, the founder of Jainism, who died a few years earlier, within a century or even less before Aśoka. Further, the obvious lack of development of Buddhism between the *nirvāṇa* and the time of Aśoka, which is hard to explain as long as the longer chronology is accepted, is easily understood if the Buddha lived in the decades before the campaign of Alexander the Great. This obviously implies a totally new evaluation of Buddhism within its historical context. A first step in this direction will be undertaken by a conference on the date of the Buddha to be held in Göttingen in April 1988 to follow up the new perspective opened by this thorough, important, and convincing study with its far-reaching consequences for the history of religion and thought in India.

Oskar v. Hinüber

Vyankatesh Madgulkar, Das Dorf hieß Bangarvadi. Roman. Aus dem Marathi von Günther-D. Sontheimer. (Neue Indische Bibliothek, Bd. 10). Freiburg: Wolf Mersch, 1986. 152 pages, DM 22.–

Shashi Deshpande, Das Dunkel birgt keine Schrecken. Roman. Aus dem indischen Englisch von Giovanni Bandini. (Neue Indische Bibliothek, Bd. 12). Freiburg: Wolf Mersch, 1986. 231 pages, DM 25.–

Here are two more exemplary editions of modern Indian literature chosen so felicitously by the editor L. Lutze.

The first book – well known to the English reading public for nearly 30 years – deals with village life in Maharashtra at the beginning of this century – a village of mostly shepherds as seen by the narrator, a teacher sent by the government of the then raja of Audh. How the villagers of Bangarvadi react to the educational programme, how the teacher has to adjust to their needs, their mentality, how in the end the whole village dissolves as it were because of a terrible drought (a theme equal-

ly relevant today) – this is depicted with unique artistic skill.

The modesty of the translator Günther-D. Sontheimer declares that “it is difficult to impart the intuitive realism, conciseness, hidden humour and unobtrusive melancholy of the original.” This has to be taken as the expression of the usual dissatisfaction of the expert – for his translation effectively transmits the dense and immensely human atmosphere created by the author. (With the exception of a few ‘wooden’ expressions which do not detract from the beauty of the translation.)

The stylistic means of Vyankatesh Madgulkar are literary realism applied with such a concentrated force as to result in a realization of the narrated lives within the reader – as if he could even feel the heat and smell the odours. The alternation between descriptive (objective and reflective) passages and dialogues whose side-light falls on the single characters, contouring them sharply, involves the reader in the patchwork of the social relationships of the villagers.

The small world of Bangarvadi is quite specifically an Indian one and at the same time of general human significance: in most trying situations there is no resignation (to satisfy an undying prejudice of Europeans) but a brave answer to the perils, joys and sorrows of life. The simple courage of these people when confronted with their total dependence on nature, moves the reader and fills him with admiration.

An artistic masterpiece of a very different kind is the novel of Shashi Deshpande. If, and only if, ‘feminism’ is understood as an integral part of humanism, then this book belongs to it. The novel describes the existential crisis of Saru – a socially successful woman, medical doctor, mother of two children – caused by the sudden outbreak of her husband’s manifest sadism in the nights. The obvious amnesia of the man during the day and her own reaction to it finally drives her back to her father. The whole book is the recollection of the psychologically relevant events of Saru’s life up to the time of her crisis and the catastrophic development of her marriage. There is no question of human existence *not* raised – by the experience of a woman who freed herself from the fetters of the Indian social tradition. Largely responsible for her guilty conscience are her mother and dead brother, not so much as the persons they are, but as disastrous figures of social ideology. No solution of course – but a Saru having integrated herself to such an extent that she has the courage to attempt to *talk* with her husband, to break the wall of silence, of the repression of facts and psychological truths.

In demonstrating the great complexity of Saru’s psyche and life the author uses her stylistic means with consummate virtuosity: narration, often mingling with reported speech, indicating a mind which is trying to fight itself free from the clasp of its personal subconsciousness; secondly, the lively direct speech in remembered and

direct conversations, and thirdly, the inner monologues emerging as associations her troubled soul is forcing on her consciousness. In accordance with the movement of the psyche in moments of crisis, the narration does not display a linear time-movement. This produces a tension within the reader, making him alert and transporting him into the same searching mental attitude as Saru.

The link between what seems to be a totally private affair between a man and a woman and its socially and culturally determined conflicts is shown with a subtlety and complexity that is almost unparalleled here in Germany. In some points it is a singular extension of our recognitions – as when the integrity of Saru includes the perception of her own violence, though this is ‘only’ psychological in character, or when the book dismisses its readers with the hope that the dialogue will be possible.

The translation by Giovanni Bandini – a few mannerisms, two stylistically wrong, excepted – is excellent. It gives the pleasure of meeting the richness of adjectives in German so neglected in our modern literature – a richness absolutely essential in this work where the quality of experience is of more importance than the experience itself.

Irmtraud Höhn

Walther Heissig/Hans-Joachim Klimkeit (eds.), *Synkretismus in den Religionen Zentralasiens*. (Studies in Oriental Religions, 13). Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1987. VIII, 226 pp., DM 90,–

Syncretism is now widely accepted as referring to the encounter, co-existence and integration of different, independent religions in a particular region. This may be seen in R. J. Z. Werblowsky's introductory survey "Syncretism in the History of Religions". Though limited to "Central Asia", the symposium on syncretism held in St. Augustin in May 1983 covered a vast area, involving at least three world religions and numerous regional and tribal beliefs. The editors of the papers read at the symposium chose a politico-geographical arrangement (Turkish and Chinese, Mongol, and Tibetan Central Asia), irrespective of the place of origin of the religions in question (Near East, Iran, India, etc.). The following systematic classification, on the other hand, is proposed by H.-J. Klimkeit in his provisional conclusion at the end of the volume: a) re-interpretation of existing myths, b) adoption of a world religion, c) superimposition of a world religion upon a popular religious substrate, d) confrontation of two or more world religions. Certain details ought perhaps to be re-