Bettina Sharada Baumer: *The Light In-Between: A Journey of Recognition*, ed. By Shivam Srivastava, Aryan Books International, Delhi, 2025.

The Light In-Between: A Journey of Recognition is the autobiography of Bettina Sharada Baumer, a renowned scholar of Kashmir Śaivism, Yoga, Tantra, and Indian Aesthetics. The book traces Bettina's journey into the divine: she was born in Salzburg and raised there as a Protestant, later came under the influence of Raimon Pannikar, grew increasingly religious, and converted to Catholicism. Then, inclined to understand Eastern religions, visited India and came into contact with yet another spiritual Christian seeker, Abhishiktānanda, who was living as a hermit there. Meanwhile, she continued her research and academic work, completed her Ph.D., and became more involved in the academic and experiential aspects of Indo-religious dialogue, especially Hindu-Christian dialogue. In her quest for Divinity, she began spending more and more time with Eastern religions and their wisdom. She decided to settle in Banaras, the seat of Hindu spirituality and tradition. She came into contact with a number of sādhaka and scholars of Vedānta, Yoga, Śaiva, and the Āgama tradition, among them Gopinath Kaviraj, Thakur Jaidev Singh, Rameshwar Jha, and *Pt. Ram Chandra Ratate, Ram Shankar Bhattacharya, P. Y. Deshpande,* and *Hemendra Nath Chakravarti.* Similarly, she provides some brilliant accounts of her meetings with great saints, sādhakas, and yogis, such as Ma Anandamayi, J. *Krishnamurti*, *Swami Muktananda*, *Swami Chidananda*, *Bhagawan Ram,* and *Baba Harihar Ram* of the *Aghora* tradition, HWL Punja, and Nochur. Her spiritual quest came to a climax when she met Swami Lakshman Joo and was initiated into the Trika tradition. Since then, she has devoted her entire life to Kashmir Śaivism, the Trika, or Pratyabhijñā tradition. It is wrong to say that Bettina became a Hindu; she still enjoys her Catholic beliefs and Protestant feelings, but is ever ready to the voice of the Divine coming from any corner. She has only broadened and deepened her religious horizon, which makes possible any form of interreligious and intercultural dialogue and coexistence.

Her autobiography presents a phenomenology of religious consciousness, a phenomenology of religious and spiritual quest. Bettina has referred to the influences of Pannikar and Abhishiktānanda. These people were great Christian priests; they devoted their entire lives to strengthening Christianity and remained fully dedicated to inter-religious dialogue. The same is clearer in Bettina's case. The quest for truth and true religiosity does not mean uprooting and shaking the firm faith in one's religion. It does not mean giving up one's own religious beliefs and adopting another's. It also does not mean that religion and spirituality are two different things. In fact, it fosters a better understanding and a more engaged commitment to one's own religion and religiosity.

The book The Light In-Between: A Journey of Recognition consists of 53 chapters, divided into three parts. The first part narrates the author's early life, from her birth and childhood to her university education and doctorate, as the section title reflects: Beginning and Education in Europe (1940-1967). The author openly discusses her close relationship with Raimon Pannikar. This event shaped Bettina Baumer's future life and career. Because of Pannikar, Bettina was initiated into the Catholic faith and became enchanted with Indic wisdom and mysticism. The second part of the book, Part II: Exploring Indian Traditions: Art and Spirituality (1968-1985), covers Bettina's encounter with Indic wisdom and her exploration of multiple religious-cultural life-forms of Indian traditions. In this part, she beautifully narrates her visits and her meetings with saints and sages, pundits and scholars, yogis and mystics of India. Although Bettina is known for her contributions to religion and philosophy, her contributions to art, poetry, music, and aesthetics cannot be ignored. She was equally a scholar, admirer, and seeker of Aesthetic and artistic experiences. Her passion for Art drew her to Odisha,

and her love for music, spirituality, mysticism, Yoga, and philosophy eventually made her a resident of Banaras, where Assi soon became her permanent home. Actually, here, her sadhana was fulfilled, though she credits it to Kashmir and the Great Śaiva *Gurū Swāmi Lakshman Joo*. Bettina says that her spiritual quest was fulfilled only when she met *Lakshman Joo* in Kashmir. The unending journey ends with the meeting of the Yogini of Salzburg and the Swāmi of Kashmir. Unlike the Italian Brāhman Roberto Nobili, Bettina's project was not to convert others or herself, but to dive into the ocean of mystic experience with the Masters. Bettina is a true seeker of the spiritual truth. She not only expanded her horizon of religious experience but also broadened the horizon of any seeker of Truth worldwide. This was not a conversion into any particular faith but a full dedication to the pursuit of the truth, a foundation for all that is good in religion and spirituality, yoga, and mysticism.

Creation is itself a play. Śaivites call it the Dance of *Śiva,* whereas the Vaiṣṇavas call it the *līlā* of *Puruṣottam*. This is the foundation of Bettina's philosophy of life. All her aesthetic, yogic, mystic, and even spiritual pursuits trace back to this foundation. Bettina did her Ph.D. on this very theme at the University of Munich in 1967. Her Ph.D. thesis was titled Creation as Play: The Concept of Lila in Hinduism, its Philosophical and Theological Significance. The Vaiṣṇavas present the theory of *Līlāvāda*. Creation is a *līlā*, a play. It is not *Māyā,* as the Saṃkhāras hold.

The title of Part III of her book is Fulfillment in Kashmir Saivism (1986-). As stated, Bettina's quest for spirituality was finally fulfilled in Kashmir Saivism and her meeting with *Swami Lakshman Joo*. In this part, she very beautifully depicts her various meetings with the great Kashmiri *Śaiva Ācārya Lakshman Joo* and her initiation into Saivism. She gives a brilliant and probably the last account of how Saivism was still practiced in the Kashmir Valley in the late eighties and early nineties of the last century. It provides a living account of the social and religious life of people, saints, acāryas, paṇdits, and yoginis of the great tradition. This part is very interesting, not only for those interested in Kashmir Saivism but also for those interested in the History of Kashmir, especially for that period when the great tradition of Kashmir Saivism was completely wiped out from the Kashmir valley. Bettina was a witness to that. The third part comprises 21 chapters. The last chapter of this part, of course, of the autobiography itself, presents a beautiful summary of the Trika system-the Essence of Trika. Here, readers are amazed by Bettina's serious scholarship and understanding of Kashmir Saivism. Kashmir Saivism is famous as the *Anubhava* (experience) *sampradāya*. Bettina's account of the system is totally based on her own experience. Bettina calls her autobiography a journey of Consciousness-*saṁvid yātrā*. In Kashmir Saivism, reality is consciousness, which is a dynamic force – *saṁvid devī*, cit-*śakti,* which moves and proceeds in history. By writing her autobiography, Bettina wants to share her experience of participation in 'the story of *saṁvid*'. Then, by writing an autobiography, one is related to the other- it leads one to *abheda* from the *bheda*, universality from individuality-it is a form of *advaitācāra*. The subtitle of the book is A JOURNEY OF RECOGNITION. This is very suggestive. Bettina's whole journey is a journey towards one's own spiritual 'root'. It is also a journey to the great Philosophy of *Pratyabhijñā* (recognition). Kashmira Saivism is also known as *Pratyabhijñā* philosophy. Bettina writes, "Thus, another way to describe my life and to summarize this biography would be a journey of Recognition". In her preface, *Bhūmikā*: The Ground of the Autobiography, Bettina explains in an interesting way why she is writing an autobiography.

Overall, the book is very interesting and informative. For people working in the fields of Tantra, Yoga, Mysticism, and Interreligious dialogue, this is a must-read. I congratulate the author, especially the editor, Shivam Srivastava, for bringing out such

a wonderful work.

Dr. ANANDA MISHRA, Professor, Department of Philosophy and Religion, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India, Email: anadaphil@gmail.com.