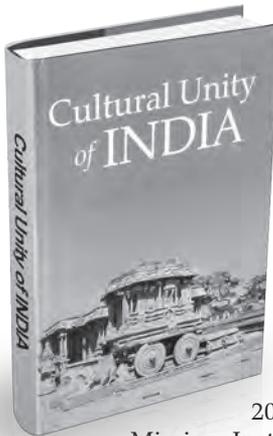


Book Review

FOR REVIEW IN THE VEDANTA KESARI,
PUBLISHERS NEED TO SEND US TWO COPIES OF THEIR LATEST PUBLICATION.



CULTURAL UNITY OF INDIA

Edited by **Prof. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya.**

Published by Secretary,
Ramakrishna Mission
Institute of Culture
Kolkata – 700029. 2013,
Hardback, Pp 478,
Rs.250.

The book under review is the proceedings of the conference organized in November 2011 by the Ramakrishna

Mission Institute of Culture, on the theme: *Cultural Unity of India*. The cultural unity of India is described by the participants from various perspectives; accordingly, the papers presented in the conference have been thematically grouped in this proceedings into five sections entitled (1) Continuities from the recent past (2) Anthropological Perspectives (3) Convergence of Ideas (4) Convergence of Traditions from History and (5) Cultural Unity Approaches in Modern Times.

Introducing the interdisciplinary approach to the theme as complex and wide as '*Cultural Unity*', the editor of the conference, Mr. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya tries to trace the concept of the cultural unity of India from the historical perspective and gives in nutshell, the overview of the papers presented in the conference.

In the beginning, the proceeding of the Inaugural Session is given. The first four sections are devoted to the approaches to cultural unity in India during historic and medieval times, while the last section views cultural unity from modern perspectives. The first two sections describe the evidences of cultural unity culled from Archaeology, archaeo-matereial science, pre-historic art studies as well as archaeo-genetics and DNA mapping. The study of these disciplines

traces the connectivity between distant past and the present scenario in these particular disciplines and proves the underlying unity and the continuity and convergences which characterize Indian culture and history. The essay addressing the genetic basis of unity throws light on the growing evidence of the similarity in genetic heritage across tribe and caste divisions of people in historical times. The third section comprises of the essays which discuss unity and convergence at the level of ideas and 'core beliefs' inculcated in India through religion, family and peer group. The essays of the fourth section examines the past tendencies towards unification of political culture, and traditions of theatre, dance, music and other performing arts in addition to tracing the relationship between various regions and mainstream. The fifth and last section views cultural unity from modern perspectives and contain the expositions of the ideas of Vivekananda, Tagore, Ambedkar, and others. An essay also depicts India's cultural unity in the context of her languages and literatures, whereas the other dwells on the choice of national symbols and cultural unity.

The last section has the concluding address by Secretary of the Institute of Culture, presidential address and a lecture by the guest of eminence. Profiles of the contributors and Index are given at the end.

Thus, the conference has treated the theme exhaustively, viewing the cultural unity from all perspectives of historical and modern times. A thoughtful and relevant publication indeed.

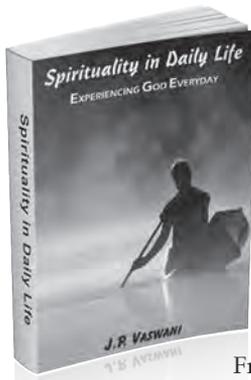
CHETANA MANDAVIA, JUNAGADH

SPIRITUALITY IN DAILY LIFE: EXPERIENCING GOD EVERYDAY

By **J. P. Vaswani**

Gita Publishing House, Sadhu Vaswani
Mission, 10, Sadhu Vaswani Path, Pune - 411
001, Hardbound pp.439, Rs.250.

Fr. Anthony de Mello SJ (1931-87) had compiled anecdotes which proved that no one

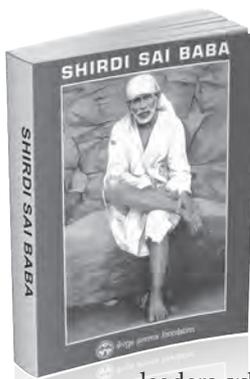


religion is the sole repository of Divine Knowledge; de Mello's bestsellers include *The Prayer of the Frog* in two volumes and *One Minute Nonsense*. J. P. Vaswani's book is in the same line as Fr. de Mello's works and it would be fair to acknowledge Vaswani's debt (*vide* Vaswani, p. 57) to Fr. de Mello.

Having established the contemporary lineage of this book by Vaswani, we may go a little further back and connect it with the Indian tradition of story-telling: for example; the tales told by *Betal* to King Vikramaditya. Stories have the power to tell us more about abstract theological truths than dry treatises; one of the key reasons why Sri Ramakrishna spoke of God and the Divine Life through witty anecdotes. J. P. Vaswani does this well. Yet it appears that there is an effort to pack in too much in too short a space: we have cursory discussions at the beginning of the book about what spirituality is; then the book is punctuated with these anecdotes followed by references to various spiritual masters. One example is to be found in page 184: there is a quotation by the late Trappist monk Thomas Merton (1915-68).

The book tries to cover every aspect of formative spirituality but needs better organisation of the matter. Though the book inspires one to live holy life, it could have done well with a good editor especially providing citations and sources.

_____ SUBHASIS CHATTOPADHYAY, BISHNUPUR



SHIRDI SAI BABA

by **S.G. Subramanian.**

Published by Divya Prerna Foundation 1A, 'SRINIVAS', 30, Maharaja Surya Rao Road, Alwarpet, Chennai 600018. Email: sgsmaniam@gmail.com. 2013, Paperback, Pp.68. Rs. 30.

India has been the home for great spiritual leaders whose influence acted as the

bulwark against degeneration of values from rising materialism. Baba, 'a unique and extraordinary saint', led an unusually frugal lifestyle in a dilapidated mosque, was uneducated yet possessed profound wisdom and knowledge of scriptures. He cared for the welfare of his devotees sharing their sufferings and guiding their spiritual progress. He sometimes resorted to unconventional ways to relieve distress; sometimes giving strange recipes.

Shirdi Baba's birth and life before he appeared in Shirdi are shrouded in mystery. Although many miracles are associated with Baba and some of them are mentioned in the book, the author points out that the Baba himself had claimed he did nothing but remained a mere witness and, 'The Lord is the Sole Doer and Inspirer. . .' The warning by Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa about miracles and the explanation by Bhagwan Ramana Maharshi have also been mentioned. The author also points out that 'Baba as far as possible avoided interfering with effects of karma. . .' but responded to 'pressing prayers' either by taking over the devotees' sufferings or finding some other solution.

Baba's sermons are simple and their spirit reflects similar thoughts expressed by other great spiritual leaders. For example:

'He who loves Me most always sees Me. . . He who sees Me in all these creatures is My beloved. . . There will never be any dearth or scarcity regarding food and clothes in My devotee's home. . . If any men or creatures come to you. . . treat them with due respect. . . In whatever faith men worship me, even so do I render to them. . .'

He advised devotees not to respond with bitterness to those who criticize but show courtesy to any visitor, even to animals or other creatures. The episodes concerning goldsmith Mhalsapati and Abdul among others, are remarkable.

This book is based on the 'Shri Sai Satcharita', offering the essence of the life and teachings of Shirdi Sai Baba. Readers, unfamiliar with Marathi, will find the Glossary at the end of the booklet very useful.

_____ P. S. SUNDARAM, MUMBAI

A SAINT OF MODERN INDIA —A BIOGRAPHY OF SADHU VASWANI, by **Hari P. Vaswani**

published by Gita publishing house, Sadhu Vaswani Mission, 10, Sadhu Vaswani Path,