

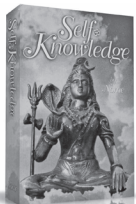
ciety brought about by a host of socioreligious reforms, particularly the bhakti movement. The chief characteristic of the bhakti movement was believing in one God as well as worshipping him with love and devotion irrespective of one's caste and creed. This is the central theme of the life stories of saints presented in this book. The bhakti movement spread slowly across North India because of the efforts of notable saints like Namadeva, Tukarama, and Ramananda.

This book contains twenty-seven biographical sketches of saints and mystics of the bhakti movement, largely from Maharashtra. Originally published between 2001 and 2006 in the *Bulletin of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture*, these well-researched articles have now been presented in a compendium.

Every life in the book is unique. Each of them portrays various facets of the personality and teachings of these saints. Many facts hitherto unknown to common readers make for interesting read. The incidents in the life of Namadeva—like offering of ghee to a dog—are inspiring and establish the unity of consciousness in all beings. These lives seem to echo the ethos of Indian scriptures. India's spiritual tradition has been kept alive for centuries by these saints. They believed that God could be seen and renounced everything to attain God-realization, the sole pursuit of their lives. Due to their faith and devotion, God revealed to them and often acted as their saviour. God was enslaved by the love and devotion of these saints.

The poetic outpourings of the devotion of these saints have been gracefully translated in verse. The lives of less-known saints like Kurmadasa enrich this volume, which could help researchers working on Indian saints and strengthen the devotional fervour of spiritual aspirants.

Sukanya Sinha
New Delhi



Self Knowledge
Noma

Atma Jnana Publications, PO Box 597,
Soquel, California 95073. 2003. xvi +
481 pp.

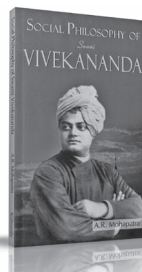
Ramana Maharshi laid stress on Self-inquiry leading to the knowledge of the Self. A teacher of Ramana Maharshi's philosophy and of Advaita Vedanta, Noma—also known as Jeffrey Smith—has put in simple English truths inaccessible to many because

of a lack of familiarity with Sanskrit. The first glance at the book may make one exclaim: 'Oh! A tome from Noma!' But careful study establishes its value as a reference work for the followers of the path of Self-inquiry propounded by Advaita Vedanta and Ramana Maharshi.

Divided into four parts, this volume contains aphoristic verses, transcripts of lectures, and answers to questions bringing out various aspects of Advaita Vedanta. English equivalents of the Sanskrit sutras, the verses explicate various traditional ideas like 'a rabbit with horns' (64) or 'a fruit in the hand' (68). One is reminded of a parable of Sri Ramakrishna by the following lines: 'Practice, practice, practice intensely/Like a man drowning/Reaching for air' (32).

The book elucidates various fundamental tenets of Advaita Vedanta and keeps one constantly reminded of the true nature of one's Self. The nature of the Self, of guru and grace, and concepts like self-annihilation are discussed in detail. The witty and lucid style of answering persistent questions encourages perseverant striving for knowledge. Truly, 'the answer comes when the mind turns from duality to nonduality' (432). For anyone interested in attaining Self-knowledge, this could be a good guidebook.

Swami Narasimhananda
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata



Social Philosophy of
Swami Vivekananda

Amulya Ranjan Mohapatra

Readworthy Publications, A-18, Mohan
Garden, New Delhi 110 059. Web-
site: www.readworthypub.com. 2009.
x + 110 pp. Rs 140.

Swami Vivekananda's philosophy of service to Shumankind had the realization of their innate divinity as its basis. His ideas of 'root and branch reform' were born out of a holistic world view. This handy book highlights the socialist perspective of the swami's thought. It establishes him as a social reformer and activist who knew education to be the panacea of all ills. Through a beautiful collation of Swami Vivekananda's utterances, the author points out that the swami's philosophy of humanism upholds the ideals of renunciation and service. To the swami, serving humanity was serving God. For anyone interested in serving fellow human beings, this book would offer help.

Swami Narasimhananda