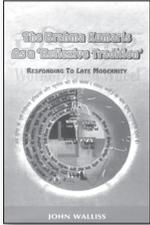


# REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,  
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications.



## **The Brahma Kumaris as a 'Reflexive Tradition'**

John Walliss

Motilal Banarsidass, 41 UA Bungalow  
Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi 110 007. E-  
mail: [mlbd@vsnl.com](mailto:mlbd@vsnl.com). 2007. xiv +131 pp.  
Rs 295.

Religious traditions are one of those social structures humans create to fulfil their multifarious needs. Over time, as with all structures, religious traditions lose their following as they are seen inadequate in addressing the changing needs of society. While some traditions appear to doggedly cling to their existing patterns, new movements spring up, supposedly bringing solutions to the questions left unanswered by the older traditions. While some New Religious Movements (NRMs) bring a refreshing change in religious understanding and practice, some others differ from the mainstream religiosity merely to appear novel and more suited to contemporary society.

Engaged in a constant process of adapting themselves to society, religious institutions have never been completely traditional, and constant questioning and rethinking have been integral to them. However, trends of reassessing past traditions and the emergence of new reflexive movements appear to be more pronounced in these postmodern times of ours. Interestingly, most of these new movements draw heavily from the mainstream religiosity, both in their philosophy and practice. For example, while many concepts of mainstream Hinduism like Brahma, Vishnu, and Lakshmi have been woven into the philosophy of the Brahma Kumaris, concepts like *raja yoga*, *kalpa*, and *yuga* have been radically reinterpreted.

NRMs freely reinterpret established principles of religion and supplement or complement them in consonance with the contemporary drift of social thought. For instance, if scientific spirit is dominating the minds of people in a given period, NRMs of that period draw parallels to scientific developments and resort to 'name-dropping' involving scientific thinkers.

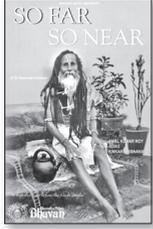
Evolved from his doctoral thesis, this timely book by John Walliss is a sociological analysis of the reflexivity of new religious movements and the extent of their 'detraditionalisation'. 'Reflexivity', in sociology, refers to the application of social patterns to the very institutions creating these patterns. Not giving any definition of reflexivity himself, Walliss tries to 'advance and develop Philip Mellor's notion of "reflexive traditions" as a hermeneutic tool for the examination of "post-traditional" spirituality'. Through the example of the inner workings of the Brahma Kumaris, also called Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, Walliss brings out the typical characteristics of an NRM. After discussing various theories of reflexivity of traditions, he proceeds to study Brahma Kumaris in the light of these theories. In his charmingly candid style, he takes us through an intricate study of the phenomenon of reflexive traditions, which will undoubtedly enhance the thought of students of sociology and religion.

Like other new religious movements, Brahma Kumaris had to face severe social opposition before becoming a socially acceptable institution. Consequently, their outlook has become more accommodating in contrast to an earlier isolation. The patterns of the beneficiaries of this movement have been minutely analysed to show the mixed nature of the NRM's following. Though the Brahma Kumaris may not be a typical representative of NRMs, striking similarities to other such movements cannot be denied.

Being a millenarian movement, the Brahma Kumaris have to constantly reinterpret their prophecies and alter or postpone the time of the apocalypse. These reinterpretations have led to inner strife in the institution. Walliss brings forth such differences—which are generally known to crop up amongst the followers of NRMs—by discussing the case of 'Advance Party', a breakaway faction of the Brahma Kumaris, and shows how such factions could themselves be prey to the failings of their parent institution. Concluding this remarkable work on religious movements in the late modern era, Walliss maintains that all religious traditions are reflexive and that the

forces of tradition and reflexivity are less dualistic and more dynamic.

Swami Narasimhananda  
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata



### So Far So Near

Amal Kumar Roy  
alias Kinkar Krisnananda

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Kulapati Munchi Marg, Mumbai 400 007. E-mail: [brbhavan@bom7.vsnl.net.in](mailto:brbhavan@bom7.vsnl.net.in). 2008. xviii + 165 pp. Rs 150.

This is the English version of the original Bengali work *Tad Dure Tadu Antike* published in 2004. The title is culled from the *Isha Upanishad* to signify the immanence and transcendence of Sri Sitaramdas Omkarnath's being. The author had the privilege of hearing directly from his master about four instances of divine communion on the occasion of the master's eighty-ninth birthday celebrations at Mehsana. These form the substance of the book, which has been prefaced by Dr Karan Singh and carries an introduction by the Dalai Lama. The latter had occasion to meet Sri Sitaramdas and was impressed by his deep spirituality and genuine global sympathies.

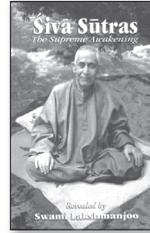
The four mystic incidents in the life of Sri Sitaramdas recorded in this book are: (i) his naming as Prabodh, (ii) a vision of Shiva at the age of six, (iii) a second vision of Shiva and an esoteric experience of the phenomenon of Creation originating from the primordial sound Om, and (iv) his merger in *mahakasha*, cosmic space, with the vision of his Chosen Deity.

The author interprets these mystic experiences and related utterances of his master in the light of the Upanishads, Kashmir Shaivism, and modern scientific thought. Many ideas from the Tantras and yoga are also woven into the text. The theory of Creation proceeding from *sphota*, Logos, is elaborated upon, reiterating the Upanishadic stand that this world is a projection of God. The master's intense spiritual practices and his disregard for bodily comforts evoke awe. His willingly stretching his legs to feed hungry mosquitoes is an eye-opener and speaks of his self-sacrificing nature.

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan is one of India's major cultural institutions and has been publishing important works representing the Indian spirit and culture. However, the present book could do with careful editing and systematic presentation of ideas. A brief life

sketch of Sri Sitaramdas would also have been welcomed by readers. The details in the book are sketchy and the frequent use of Sanskrit and Bengali terms hampers readability. A glossary of such terms would have helped. Hopefully these issues will be addressed by the author and publishers in the next edition.

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### Siva Sūtras: The Supreme Awakening

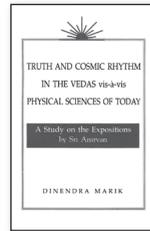
Swami Lakshmanjoo

Munshiram Manoharlal, Post Box 5715, 54 Rani Jhansi Road, New Delhi 110 055. Website: [www.mrmlbooks.com](http://www.mrmlbooks.com). 2007. xxviii + 322 pp. Rs 400.

Coming from the line of the masters of Kashmir Shaivism, Swami Lakshmanjoo brings out the wisdom of his spiritual experiences in this translation of the commentary on *Shiva Sutra*, called 'Shiva Sutra Vimarshini' by Kshemaraja. The *Shiva Sutra* comprises aphorisms on the knowledge of God-consciousness as revealed by Bhagavan Shiva to his devotee Vasugupta. The result of recordings of the swami's lectures, transcribed and edited by John Hughes and aptly subtitled 'The Supreme Awakening', this masterly commentary will guide spiritual seekers in unravelling and awakening the Consciousness inherent in them. The volume contains the original Sanskrit texts of the *Shiva Sutra* and 'Siva Sutra Vimarshini' as appendices, and is an essential read for students of Kashmir Shaivism.

PB

## BOOK RECEIVED



### Truth and Cosmic Rhythm in the Vedas vis-à-vis Physical Sciences of Today

Dinendra Marik

Hem-Tara Foundation, 17 Broad Street, Kolkata 700 019. 2006. 58 pp. Rs 35.

Sri Anirvan is one of the few original modern interpreters of the Vedas. His works *Veda Mimamsa* and *Rig Veda Samhita: Gayatri Mandala* have received high critical acclaim. This small book is an exposition of some of Sri Anirvan's thoughts in the light of the concepts and findings of modern physics.