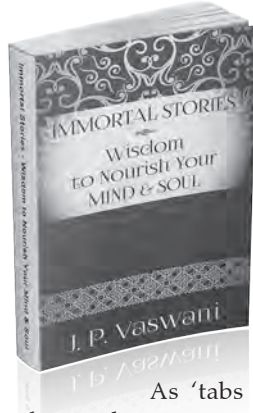


our descendants and bequeath to them a habitable world.

PREMA RAGHUNATH, CHENNAI



**IMMORTAL STORIES—
WISDOM TO NOURISH YOUR
MIND AND SOUL**

By **J.P. Vaswani**

Published by Hay House Publishers India Pvt. Ltd., Available at Gita Publishing House, 10, Sadu Vaswani Path, Pune - 411 001. email: gph@sadhuvaswani.org, 2014, paperback, pp.370, Rs.399.

As 'tabs and gaming devices' and other gadgets occupy children and elders, will a book of stories from scriptures be welcomed? Raising this query, the revered author, being an 'indefatigable optimist', is convinced that 'good things' will survive.

Thirteen popular faiths beginning with *Bahai*, the 'youngest', have been introduced.

The introduction is followed by selected stories in each case. Selfless service, love of God, empathy, compassion and other virtues are conveyed through stories. As the author points out, while sections of society appreciate other faiths, fundamentalists try to dismiss them.

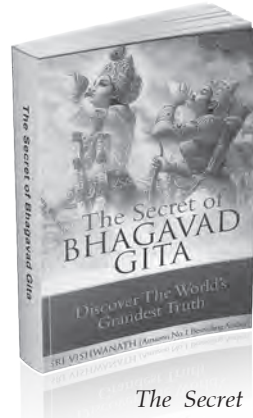
Incarnations of the Divine, their sufferings, are ridiculed by skeptics through ignorance. The resistance by vested interest who feared erosion of their authority by religious leaders has also been highlighted.

The concluding story recalls the interesting incident when the first group of Zoroastrians migrated to India. The 'Epilogue' has a very impressive account of Guru Sadhu Vaswani.

Stories have been a source of inspiration always. *Panchatantra* stories attract attention even today. Interestingly values are taught even by children (Prahlada and Dhruva) in *puranic* stories. Sri Ramakrishna conveyed abstract scriptural lessons through similitudes and allegories from our normal life experience.

'Immortal Stories' will serve to promote a healthy society and inter-religious harmony.

P. S. SUNDARAM, MUMBAI



**THE SECRET OF BHAGAVAD
GITA – DISCOVER THE
WORLD'S GRANDEST TRUTH**

By **Sri Vishwanath,**

Published by author B-605 Pine Wood, Vasant Gardens, Near Swapna Nagari, Milund West, Mumbai- 400 080. Email: vish@vish-writer.com; Paperback, pp.124, price not given.

The Secret of Bhagavad Gita offers an analytical but compact presentation for readers to 'discover the world's grandest truth.' On a personal note, Sri Vishwanath tells us in chapter 4 how he first came into touch with the eternal teachings. It was on a train journey when he came across a verse from the Song of God which was being quoted by the cyclonic monk Vivekananda to a disciple: 'Futile are your desires. Futile are your actions. Futile are your experiences if you do not know your real nature.'

The Preface of the book depicts the despair of Partha at a crucial hour after his chariot had been stationed by the Supreme Sri Krishna in front of the enemy lines in the battle between the cousins Pandavas and Kauravas. The despair of the protagonist Pandava is not unique but universal. Krishna says it is 'unbecoming' and the author says that word 'unbecoming' is the seed which the entire Bhagavad Gita is based. From thereon Krishna delivers more truths to Arjuna.

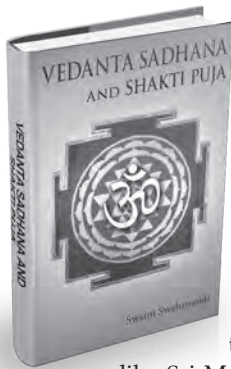
The book is divided into 8 short and readable chapters. The foreword by John Harricharan is also revelatory. Especially when John says—'Perhaps, in your reading of this book you may find some things that you want to question. That is fine. Questions are always good. But you will also find many thoughts that resonate with your deepest feelings.' This book is for both the serious student as well as for those who read to pick pearls in the ocean of life.

SRINIVAS, CHENNAI

VEDANTA SADHANA AND SHAKTI PUJA

By **Swami Swahananda,**

Published by Advaita Ashrama, 5, Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata - 700 014. E-mail: mail@



advaitaashrama.org 2012, Hardbound pp.336, Rs.70.

‘Vedanta...is divided into three main schools – advaita, vishishtadvaita, and dvaita’ (148) and yet the aim of all Vedanta is epistemic Self-knowledge for ‘the world, even though fleeting, is real because it is perceived as real’ (149) to even an apparent dualist

like Sri Madhvacharya (1199–1299 CE).

Thus all Hinduism deal with modes of *seeing/* of *hermeneutics*, of *darshana* (as against the etymologic Greek idea of philosophy) and all Hindu *praxis*, all Hindu *theologies* are concerned with this construction of *insight* and thus Swami Swahananda writes of ‘a saying among the advaitins that they are advaitins in views but dvaitins in deeds’ (155). The Shaiva Tantras from Kashmir and the Mahanirvana Tantra speak of union with an attributeless *Purusha* as the ultimate end within those paths. Swami Swahananda rightly observes that within Vaishnavism Bhakti ‘becomes Bhava. Next is mahabhava, then prema, and last of all is the attainment of God’ (179). Earlier in the book he stresses the true nature of the Mother Goddess Kali as ‘trigunamayi. . . as well as gunatita’ (95). Sri Ramanujacharya (1017-1137 CE) is rightly shown by Swami Swahananda as he truly *is*—a believer and propagator of non-qualified, non-dual monism: Ramanuja advocated *swarupa-samarpana*; *phala-samarpana*; *bhava-samarpana* leading to the negation of ‘the sense of being the “doer” [who offers] this “doership” to God’ (143).

Advaita Vedanta has an ancient lineage whose best known advocate is Adi Shankaracharya (circa 8th CE) on whom Swami Swahananda justly

devotes an entire chapter (303-311). This is fitting since Adi Shankaracharya not only transformed Indian metaphysics but influenced Europeans like Immanuel Kant’s (1724-1804 AD) narrative of the *categorical imperatives* which make their presence felt even now (308). Special notice must be taken of the treatment of the Ramayana in this book. The Swami rapidly recapitulates the various Ramayanas avoiding reductive readings of the epic which see it as pastiches; instead the author focuses our attention to the core of the Ramayana and takes us through the Adhyatma Ramanaya ‘which presents the glory of ... the Paramatman’. Thus Swami Swahananda’s reading of the Hindu canon corrects Marxist readings of sacred Indian Scriptures: the cultural work performed by this book is needed to understand what makes for the Hindu religion as against Hindu ethics or rituals. The Swami asserts the vitality of Hinduism since even though it is certainly polyphonic, heteroglossic and *carnivalesque*; the aim of all Hindu teleologies is *jouissance*; or *samadhi*. Critics of Vedanta forget that Adi Shankaracharya exhorted us to do japa in his famous Bhaja Govindam and The Tripura Sundari Ashtakam. The value of Hinduism is that it is an open-source project which does not believe in *inculturation* but in dialogic assimilation; yet always asking us to realize first through the *naamrupa* and then move on to the *Brahma-rupa* for it validates the ‘synthetic vision of Ramakrishna’ who contained within Himself ‘all honest doubt’ since it is ‘Better to have practising sectarians than talkative liberals’ (335). Swami Swahananda throughout this syncretic book negates any theoretical approach to Hinduism which is not based within a unique *faith community*. He has little time for the subtleties of scholasticism unless the latter helps one to reach *samadhi*.

— SUBHASIS CHATTOPADHYAY, BISHNUPUR, WEST BENGAL



Work and worship must go hand in hand. . . . Two types of men can sit still without work. One is the idiot, who is too dull to be active. The other is the saint who has gone beyond all activity. . . [Hence along with work] Make a regular routine for your spiritual practices. You must have certain fixed hours for meditation and study. Under all circumstances follow this devotedly.

—Swami Brahmananda