

BOOK REVIEW

*Review by Manisha Bose**

LIVING HANUMAN

(A Journey from a selfie to the Self through Shri Hanuman Chalisa)

Author: Pawan Kumar Mishra

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Living Hanuman is a syncretic commentary on *Shri Hanuman Chalisa*, a popular hymn of 43 verses originally composed by Goswami Tulsidas in 16th century CE. The book goes beyond the hymn, explaining the whole Vedantic tradition in the modern context. This is one of the best commentaries on the *Chalisa*. The author dives into explaining seed syllables and explaining the entire cosmic knowledge contained within these seeds. He interprets the *Chalisa* as applied to modern life. Every verse ends with *In-Journey* which is a section containing self-reflective questions for today's readers. This is followed by *My Action Point* which urges the reader not to merely reflect but act upon his/her own lives. Each verse is presented in a profusely holistic manner, including a section each on *HIM meditation*, *Yoga* and *Ayurveda*.

Very ingeniously, Hanuman has been used as a metaphor for breath awareness and *seva* (self-less service) which is a universal phenomenon, not restricted to a particular religion. The author inspires the reader not to look for Hanuman outside, but within oneself. The book stands out in its content as the author comes from this tradition. Thus, he could write from an inside-out perspective, giving a very valuable outlook on the subject. The book is a very well researched work and no leaf has been left unturned in that respect. Hanuman's *Mytho- biography* (p. 48) has been traced and his horoscope has been created. Many myths relating to Hanuman are debunked. One such being on gender neutrality establishing that "*at the level of conscious awareness of the self, no gender remains*" (p.67). The author deflates the belief that women cannot worship Hanuman by establishing that Hanuman's whole journey starts by using all his might to save a woman in forceful captivity. At the spiritual level, the author asserts, "*Compassion, surrender and living from the heart center are all feminine qualities*". Further, "*offerings that arise from these feminine attributes are accepted by Shri Hanuman, and not just dry masculine ranting of mantra and rituals*" (p.67).

The reader who is seeking to read a book for its language will truly marvels at author's writing style. His linguistic acumen resonates with the profound content he has written. The language in the book flows literally and literarily, holding the contextual ingredient of the book firmly.

***Manisha Bose** is Lecturer, Institute of English Language Education, Assumption University of Thailand.
Email: manishabose1974@gmail.com.

While explaining the *Chalisa* and beyond, in his effort in making Hanuman living, he juggles with the words, quotes, poets, *kavi* while quoting rishis, gurus, modern and ancient Vedantic texts. He does not stop at that, but quotes scientists, psychologists and mathematicians to explain spirituality. Every part has a traditional narrative along with modern anecdotes which can be used at domestic, corporate as well as spiritual levels. The reader will be pleasantly accosted with the new phrases and words creating an ingenious word play for those seeking linguistic pleasure.

After he explains the *Chalisa* using his all-rounded knowledge backed by linguistic acumen, the author goes beyond the *Chalisa* and writes about some very profound, thought provoking contents. To mention a few, I would begin with his concept of *Unifying Streams* (p.559) where the author connects all the religions as one stream of consciousness, thus disrupting the division and uniting all in one singular breath. He alludes to all the religions throughout the book as well in a dedicated section. Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Sufism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism and other world religious practices in African countries along with Atheism are explored for their common substratum. The author very fearlessly claims that Hanuman is **not** a Hindu god. The author urges the readers to follow the Vedic sentiment of *vasudhaiva-kutumbakam*, meaning thereby the whole world is one's family. He says, "Let us make a new beginning of *theo-synergy*". He further declares, "We have had enough of value education; now is the need for value infusion" (p.565). Islam (pp.642-674) has been prolifically presented for its shared message.

The burning social need of Organ Donation is profoundly interwoven with spirituality in this book, encouraging the readers to pledge their organs for donation. The author elucidates that Hanuman is called *Bajrangi*, meaning whose body is made of *Vajra*. *Vajra* was created out of the spinal column of the ancient sage Dadhichi who had donated his body to Indra. "Hanuman directly becomes a vector for organ donation", writes the author. He explains quoting the *Gita* that the body is merely a piece of cloth which is dropped at the moment of death. "Just as we donate our old clothes we need to donate our body upon our leaving it to those who need it - for retrieval of organs or for medical students to study". Very ingeniously, he has handled the spiritual aspect of people who are against it or dubious about it or confused about organ donation post-death. He has taken allusions from all the religions of the world to justify and explain this crucial need of the hour. He proves it that "all religions unanimously agree on the merit of saving life under all conditions, including human organ donation and transplant if needed".

The author has further translated the *Chalisa* into English poetry (p. 543). The lyrical quality of the original is very aptly retained. However, the original hymn written in Avadhi language still remains more profound in its rustic lore, being deeply embedded in our minds. The English version can be sung by those who are English speaking, to enjoy the essence of the original hymn.

The book is truly a life coach on path-finding through Practise (p.698) and spiritual progress (p.745). Along with discovering the embedded *mantras* in the *Chalisa*, like the *Gayatri mantra* (p.529) and the *Navaran mantra* (p.104), including the mirror on the wall of one's personal alter to offer prayers to one self where god resides, the Hanuman-yantra is presented and explained as the Happiness Yantra for those seeking self-growth. This 902 pages' book is a complete tool kit to self-improvement.