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BOOK REVIEW

Augustine Thottakara, *Religious-Social Ethos of Contemporary India*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2019. Pages: 435. ISBN: 978-93-84964-96-2

The book *Religious-social Ethos of Contemporary India* is the latest contribution to the academic world from Acharaya Augustine Thottakara published by Dharmaram Publications, Bengaluru in collaboration with the Chavara Institute of Indian and Inter-Religious Studies (CIIS), Rome. There are fourteen articles in the book which discuss the enigmatic and perplexing labyrinth of religious and social milieu of contemporary India. Some of the articles in the book are part of a lecture series offered by the author at Chavara Institute of Indian and inter-Religious Studies in Rome in honour of late Father Placid Podipara CMI, a prominent scholar of the St Thomas Christian Community of Kerala. The rest of the essays are added to the book by the author as they suit to the general theme of the religious-social ethos of contemporary India.

The author draws a vivid picture of how the unhealthy and unwholesome socio-religious issues like Poverty; illiteracy; superstitions; corruption in all levels of the society; discrimination and oppression of the Dalit majority of our land; caste, religion and language politics along with religious fundamentalism and fanaticism plague and bleed our mother land. It also makes clear how unhealthy interference of religion in politics; immoral practices in politics and business; use and misuse of women and children and the ruthless exploitation of Nature which results in ecological disasters ravage the socio-religious fabric of this country.

The book highlights on the other hand, a healthy and wholesome religio-social ambiance of India where people have become more conscious of the need, scope and relevance of inter-faith dialogue and champion vigorously and pro-actively on issues like gender justice, rights of women and children, protection of religious and cultural minorities. There is a gradual emergence of the general public support for the Dalit groups in their struggles for justice, their fight against all forms of oppression and their right to be included into the mainstream society. There is also a growing awareness about the need of a

sustainable development and protection of environment – our mother earth. The author is highly appreciative of the great strides India has made in the fields of science, technology, information industry, space sciences and digitalization in many spheres of human life.

The book promotes a progressive outlook to maintain and ameliorate the religious-social ethos drawing from the positive approaches supported by the observance of two sets of values and virtues – *yamas* and *niyamas* advocated by the Yoga school of Patanjali. According to the author Patanjali proposed the five *yamas* not only as vows, but also as virtues that are to be practiced by all for societal harmony, healthy interpersonal relationships, as norms for constructive and effective social behaviour. In the same way the *niyamas*, the five values and virtues for healthy and creative personal life, in turn enhance the religious-social ethos of the people.

The author deserves congratulations for taking up such important themes for reflection especially in the context of an emerging India of our times. The book is stimulating and thought provoking. The topics discussed are profound and have greater relevance for our contemporary thinking and acting. The reader would benefit greatly from the carefully prepared index given to the book.

Acharya Thottakara's great merit is that he has dealt with the ground to earth, concrete life situations of contemporary India and the problems and prospects. The selection of articles like Abrahamic Religions and the Hindu-Indian vision of Human Life, the Hindu Indian Renaissance, Gandhian ideal of Respecting all Religions as Equal, Inter-religious Dialogue, Inculturation in the Indian Church, A Trajectory of Himsa-Ahimsa Dichotomy in India, Women in India, Exigencies of the Subalterns, Yoga, Ecology, Quest for an Indian Christian Philosophy and the unique contribution of Kerala Christians to Sanskrit Literature, all of them reveal the deep knowledge, critical and creative thinking of the author inviting and leading every Indian to join the building up of a harmonious India – 'a sweet home' for all.

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