

**Saraswati.** S. Kalyanaraman. Babasaheb (Umakanth Keshav) Apte Smaraka Samiti, Bangalore. 2000. 1115 pp. Price: Rs 1000/\$150.

In the Hindu Pantheon, the name Saraswati is given to the goddess of learning and wisdom. It is also the name of a mythical river which joined the Yamuna and Ganga at the Triveni sangam near Prayag (the present-day Allahabad). Despite the fact that recent archaeological and geological evidence has pointed to the existence of a major river on whose banks a wholly indigenous civilization flourished, there is reluctance on the part of Indian historians to give up the Aryan invasion theory as no longer tenable. There are still people who doubt the existence of the river Saraswati and the civilization that flourished on its banks. It has become necessary to project the facts of true history.

Kalyanaraman, the author of the present volume under review, was a former senior executive of the Asian Development Bank at Manila, Philippines, who developed an interest in the Saraswati river, especially the role it had played in the birth of the Indian civilization. He has organized a Saraswati-Sindhu Research Centre based at Chennai and has launched a research project for the development of the area which was watered by the river Saraswati. The project envisages the creation of a vast groundwater reservoir and the utilization of the stored water in developing the land presently covered by sands of the Thar desert in western Rajasthan. Probably the first to project the problem of the river Saraswati on the internet (<http://saraswati.simplenet.com>), he has now come out with a volume of encyclopaedic dimension running to 1150 pages and with 670 illustrations covering many aspects of the river Saraswati and the Vedic culture which developed on its banks. Nearly 1500 archaeological sites along the course of the lost river are listed and the author has an ambitious programme of covering all aspects of the problem in five volumes. The present volume is the first of the series and covers preliminary aspects relating to the river Saraswati, its first discovery and the stages of culture developed on its

banks. Although not directly involved in research in the fields of geology, archaeology, pre-history and linguistics, he has been able to collect a large volume of data pertaining to the river Saraswati. The persistence and zeal with which he has pursued this self-imposed task is truly commendable.

The interest that has developed in river Saraswati with its source in the high Himalaya and its course of nearly 1500 km over land which is now covered by the sands of the Thar desert, is because of the great civilization that flourished on its banks nearly 8000 years ago. The numerous archaeological sites which have been discovered on its banks emphasize the importance of this study. 'Reverence to the past is a necessary element of patriotism which springs from a correct understanding of the past.' The study of Saraswati and of the civilization that persisted on its banks, therefore, should be a subject of great interest to all of us.

Kalyanaraman has grouped the information collected by him into ten sections. The first two sections dealing mainly with the geological and archaeological aspects, form the core of this compilation. The remaining eight sections focus on cultural aspects such as arts and crafts, layout of settlements (Section 3), gold and silver smithy (Section 4), bronze age (Section 5), archaeology, language and script (Section 6), river Saraswati as a goddess (Section 7) and on astronomical aspects and their bearing in fixing the age of the epics (Section 8). Linguistic aspects and relationship with Indo-European and Persian languages form the substance of Section 9. Section 10 deals with broader aspects such as geneology, settlements and migration of people.

A vast amount of information has no doubt been collected in these pages, but is of variable quality and lacks focus. Facts and fiction are mixed up and data have not been presented in a chronological order. There is no attempt at synthesis at the end of each chapter or at the end of the book. A serious drawback of the compilation is the poor quality of illustrations, which has greatly reduced the value of the book. Figures are not numbered and lack captions. Source has not been indicated in most cases. Bibliography is fairly comprehensive but badly printed.

The normal practice of giving the author's name followed by the year of publication, the title of paper and name of the journal in which it was published has not been followed.

The book, in spite of the shortcomings listed, is of value as a general reference work to be kept in libraries and as a source book of information. The price however, is prohibitive, making it beyond the reach of students and individuals interested in the subject.

The prosperity of a large part of western Rajasthan is dependent on the availability of water resources. The buried channels of river Saraswati and its tributaries, in all probability, maintain their headwater connection with the Himalaya and if so, can function as vast reservoirs of groundwater. This however requires detailed study before it can be established. The zeal with which Kalyanaraman has pursued the subject and accumulated a vast amount of information will be amply rewarded, should his search result in the development of Rajasthan.

Taking note of the importance of the work already initiated, learned academics should now take interest in initiating multidisciplinary studies not only to probe the beginnings of Indian civilization, but also help in the development of a region which has now become a desert, restoring it to its past glory. Kalyanaraman, himself not a specialist in either geology, archaeology or ancient history, has taken a tremendous amount of interest in collecting information which throws light on the birth of the Indian civilization on the banks of the river Saraswati. Earth scientists should now come forward and take interest in unravelling the course of the river Saraswati and of the civilization which was nurtured on its banks.

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