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BIOGRAPHY

As We Cherish: My Great-Grandfather Sri ANNA N. Subramanian
Sahana Jayaraman
CreateSpace
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Five Stars (out of Five)

For Sahana Jayaraman, a New-Jersey high-school freshman, having a saint-like great-grandfather, meant much more to her than it might for a typical teenager. As an Indian-American, she deeply respects the culture, history, and spiritual values of her family's homeland. In this light, she was so moved by Sri ANNA's extraordinary legacy, that with the encouragement of friends and relatives, she decided to compile a book about him. She writes with skill and wisdom well beyond her years, and readers of every age will find *As We Cherish* profoundly inspirational and a pleasure to read. Even the appendices, with their lists, quotes, and time-lines, are charming additions.

Sri ANNA (*Anna* means "older brother" in Tamil and it is capitalized throughout the book by the author) was born in 1895, and lived in southeast India all his life. Though a devoted householder, the passion of Sri ANNA's life was the Ramakrishna Mission, and its fascinating story runs a germane parallel to his own. He was a student, teacher, headmaster, and indefatigable volunteer at the mission for nearly all of his adult life, and donated the bulk of his income and all his royalties to its maintenance.

Sri ANNA wrote or translated over one-hundred books on religion and philosophy in Tamil, Sanskrit, and English, and many of them are classics still in use. He was also a prolific public speaker and traveled throughout India and Asia speaking on history, philosophy, and religion. One of his speeches is included in the appendix, and it is an excellent overview of India's spiritual history.

The professional details of Sri ANNA's life, though impressive, pale in the light of his astoundingly flawless character and unwavering commitment to fulfilling his spiritual, familial, and social duties.

The author's sincere and enthusiastic use of superlatives never feels excessive or unjustified, for she conscientiously shares telling anecdotes and effusive endorsements by Sri ANNA's students, friends, and family.

The chapters are cleverly divided into different aspects of Sri ANNA's life. Not surprisingly, in the chapter on *pujas* (religious ceremonies) and beliefs, Mahatma Gandhi is revealed to be one of his role models, "…he [Sri ANNA] believed in reducing his wants to a bare minimum and was never materialistic…and he practiced Gandhi's ideals of morality and simple living."

The chapter, "As a Friend," begins, "Friends of Sri ANNA found him to be perfect in every single detail. They always enjoyed every moment they spent with him because he had a striking, magnetic, and multifaceted personality. His presence was magnetic not because of the words he spoke, but because of his exemplary life, in which he had integrity in every aspect."

Sri ANNA practiced hatha yoga well into his eighties, never took a pill, appeared to have no bad habits, and was alert and active until he died in 1992 at the impressive age of 97, a few years before Sahana was born. Her youthful excitement and guilelessness as a writer, worked as assets in this labor of love to a man she never met. This heart-felt biography is also a beautiful primer on how to behave perfectly in every facet of life. Jayaraman is to be commended for such an inspiring debut project.

Patty Sutherland