

## Why I wrote this book

In the 21st' century, the Indian woman plays multiple roles of mother and daughter, wife and professional, trend-setter and homemaker. She gives birth, nurtures the newborn, plays the role of a life partner and weaves a family together with her love and care and yet she manages to keep her identity and her values intact. She diligently preserves her cultural heritage in order to pass it to the future generation.

In reality much of this effort is often taken for granted and it so happens she rarely gets a helping hand. As she moves out of her parents' home to establish her own family, she is often confused on how to practice the rituals and festivals that she grew up watching her mother perform. Not surprisingly, many of us lose interest in celebrating festivals due to lack of time or lack of right knowledge.

Though every attempt has been made to include the smallest details of rituals and festivals, this book is not an exhaustive treatise. It is a practical hand book for a discerning home maker, a working woman or for any person interested in understanding Hindu religion and its cultural heritage. Since the Hindu Calendar starts in the month of Chaitra, I have chosen to follow the same and started the book with the festivals celebrated during this month.

Also since I belong to the northern part of our country, I have largely followed the traditions and festivals of Rajasthan and its adjoining states. I am sure that my readers would be familiar with the cross-cultural references and relate it to the religion and culture they belong to.

This book is designed to be a ready reckoner for those who want to share the joys and celebrations that festivals bring in. Through this book I have made an earnest attempt to share the knowledge and inherent strengths of our rich Hindu traditions with the younger generations. Apart from the basic steps involved in performing rituals associated with the Hindu culture, I have corroborated these facts and wisdom shared by generations of practitioners of Indian traditions. Carrying on the *Shruti* tradition of orally passing on knowledge

from one generation to another, I collected most of the material in this book from listening to the elders in the community. To ensure that everyone benefits, these are explained in both Hindi and English.

The various festivals mentioned in the book may appear of no practical significance or may be even laced with superstition, but they are a slow imbibement of various factors which have gained great significance in the last two decades.

To mention a few, pujas like *Aanvla Navmi*, *Badh Amaavasya* and *Tulsi Vivah* have, ages ago, taught us what the environmentalists are propagating today as a means to preserve the life giving environment. *Naag Panchami*, *Bachwaaras* signify a respect to our fellow living creatures. Certain festivals where *Baayna* is suggested are a symbolic way of showing respect to the elders in the family. Giving away of *Seedha* and gifts to Brahmins is an indirect way of respecting wisdom and spirituality.

I have included a chapter on our last journey. Death is as much a part of our life as is birth. I have explained the rituals pertaining to birth in my previous book "A Wedding in the House". According to the Vedas and Shastras, there are certain essential rituals that our elders believe in and may wish to be performed after their demise. Respecting this, I have tried to explain the last rites and their significance.

In today's modern and pragmatic world, young girls might find it difficult to practice cultural rituals to the hilt, but a respect shown to these traditions by inculcating them as much as possible in your daily practices will definitely enrich your life and render it more meaningful to enable you to serve better the family and society.

I hope this book helps you to keep alive our rich traditions.

Anju Poddar —

OUR FESTIVALS  
OUR TRADITIONS