

Jesus Christ Needs No Birth Certificate From

Sita Ram Goel♦

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Aristotle had sensibly pointed out that something is better understood in its causes. Sita Ram Goel's book *Jesus Christ: An Artifice for Aggression*, New Delhi: Voice of India, 1994, with its biased and selective approach and its preconceived and forced conclusions betrays the causes that have given birth to it, namely, feelings of hatred and antagonism against Christianity, on the one hand, and those of insecurity and jealousy, on the other, aroused by the growing fascination Jesus exercises on many Hindus. This explains very well the title and the content of the book.

The author is really (but unnecessarily) worried about the positive approach of the many open minded Hindus towards Jesus. The following words in the preface reflect his reaction to it and also explain the setting and purpose of the book. He writes:

Flattering the bully may become necessary when the bully is powerful and there remains no other way of softening him except by extolling his heroes or his cult. Hindus have experienced such emergencies vis-à-vis both Islam and Christianity. But there is no reason for their continuing with the same psychology (p. vi).

Is Goel so simple to believe that most of the Hindus today are under the impression that they have to still flatter the Christian bully by loving Jesus? If he really thinks so, it only betrays his poor opinion about his fellow Hindu brethren and this amounts also to an insult to them! His deep concern is reflected in the following pieces of advice to the Hindus: "Most Hindus know the story of Raja Nala who made it easy for *Kaliyuga* to enter into him and make him lose his kingdom by showing weakness for gambling. Weakness for Jesus is the same sort of vice" (p. 83). He continues: "It is high time for Hindus to learn that Jesus Christ symbolises no spiritual power, or moral uprightness... There is no reason why Hindus should buy him" (p. 85).

All this bears witness to his above-mentioned internal unrest and unfounded sentiments behind writing the book. Precisely such a negative and emotionally charged bias makes his book hardly a scholarly work; in fact, it turns out to be a part of the strategy aimed at systematically sowing hatred against other religious minorities in India, especially the Christians and Muslims, as is implied in the

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following words of the preface, where he addresses his fellow Hindus and writes: “We object to Christian missions, but refuse to discuss Christianity and its God, Jesus. We object to Islamic terrorism, but refuse to have a look at Islam and its prophet, Muhammad” (p. vi). The suggestion is that it is not enough to merely object to Christian missions and Islamic terrorism; something more has to be undertaken if an effective change is awaited. Curiously enough, Goel has nothing against Hindu missionaries working in the West! The words “Islamic terrorism” also betray his communalistic antipathy.

Goel is definitely uneasy about the Hindu appreciation of Jesus. There is, however, nothing to be alarmed about it. Great men and leaders like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen, Bhavani Charan Banerji, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda, Sadhu Sundar Singh, Mahatma Gandhi, etc., were drawn to Jesus Christ and they esteemed him and his teachings very much. Goel’s words suggest that they all were foolish and he alone is the wise one. His above quoted sweeping assertion that “Jesus Christ symbolises no spiritual power” (p. 85) is just one example of the prejudice and the poor scientific nature of the book. In addition to this we note that the author conveniently leaves out everything that does not suit his *pre-conceived* (!) conclusion, yet tries to create among the uncritical readers an impression of having made a scientific assessment or a scholarly treatise on the issue. For academic reasons as well as sincere dialogue Goel’s book, even after a decade of its publication, needs an answer. It is appreciable that he took the pains and spent much time to study some materials related to the theme.

Goel is very well aware of the damages that could be caused in any scientific study by selectiveness and citations out of context. He is, hence, very particular to request a certain Mrs. Martin: “My only request is that you will not quote me at random, or selectively, or out of context” (p. 99). The irony, however, is that he himself does not respect this principle of fairness in his treatment of the very delicate issue of Jesus’ historicity; instead, he writes without any prick of conscience whatever he finds in his *selected* “scholars” against Jesus and his real existence!

If the publishers (Voice of India, Delhi) and Sita Ram Goel are sincerely against Western culture and patterns of thought (which they fear are being brought by Christianity to India to destroy the Indian culture), one would expect that they are about to launch a vehement attack against Indians doing studies and researches in the West, against television and cinema, against tourism to and from the West, against western books and periodicals, and also against the English language which all *do* bring western culture to our country. Further, one wonders why the entire book, written in English (!), is discussing precisely a *typically Western* issue of historicity by employing *purely a western* methodology! The issue of historicity has never been in our country a concern with regard to religious faith, as is manifested in the Hindu faith

in the *Avatāras*. No one has ever questioned nor made a research about the historical Rama or Krishna, their lives, dates of birth, exact words and deeds, etc.

If now, as the book suggests and argues that one's historicity is decided *solely* on the basis of certain *written* records or documents, and that too by those *outside* one's own circle, then the historicity of many a Hindu as well as other personalities would be threatened! Further, no one of us would be then able to defend the historicity of many of our grandparents, rather we would be forced even to *deny* their historicity, simply because we may not have documents about their birth, life, activity and death, that too by other families or antagonists!

Let us now analyse Goel's treatment of the subject page by page. On page 1 Goel writes: "The scene in the modern West, however, has undergone a great change. What we witness over there is that this 'solid historical figure' [i.e., Jesus] has evaporated into thin air as a result of painstaking Biblical and Christological research undertaken over the last more than two hundred years." This is a very shallow statement and it betrays merely Goel's *wishful thinking*. His assertion is simply not true. It is contrary to truth to claim that the people in the modern West have rejected Jesus as a non-historical figure. Some stray works questioning and even denying his real, historical existence have not achieved this goal. People in the modern West are not that foolish and uncritical to swallow any rubbish that come in the book market.

Further, there have been also sound and reasonable studies and researches that have convincingly established the historicity of Jesus. If at all there is a change in the West with regard to Christian religious life, it is not in terms of Jesus' historicity or non-historicity, but in terms of one's *commitment* to his church. The present tendency is, thus, expressed in the slogan: "Jesus, yes; Church, no," meaning that they are ready to accept and follow Jesus but not the institutional church. The theologies of liberation in all their different shades (e.g., feminist theology, black theology, theology of revolution, etc.) are stressing presently more and more the historical Jesus and his cause of liberation. To assert that the modern West has accepted Jesus' non-reality, as Goel would wish it, is sheer ignorance of facts, if not purposeful lie and distortion of truth.

On page 2 Goel states his objection to the historicity of Jesus in the following words: "Under the reign of Tiberius, the whole earth or at least one celebrated province of the Roman empire was involved in a preternatural darkness for three hours. Even this miraculous event, which ought to have excited the wonder, the curiosity, and the devotion of mankind, passed without notice in an age of science and history." Against this we may point out that Julius Africanus, who lived in the beginning of the third century, had known a reference to the preternatural darkness made by a writer named Thallus who wrote about 52 A.D. a history of the Eastern Mediterranean world from the Trojan War down to his own day. But Thallus had explained the darkness as an eclipse of the sun. In refutation of this Julius Africanus

argues that Thallus's explanation is unacceptable, for Jesus was crucified at full moon, when no eclipse of the sun is possible.¹

The first footnote on page 2 mentions the book of E. Gibbon. Neither in the footnote nor in the bibliography, however, do we find the *year* of its publication! This omission reflects either the disinterest in historical details or/and the poor scientific quality of the quoted or/and of the quoting author. We should also remember here that the theme of the books is precisely the refutation of the *historicity* of Jesus, and these works are supposed to be of *academic* worth!

The author has also not consulted any recent scholarly works on the theme. Thus, for instance, the following works are simply ignored: Howard C. Kee, *Jesus in History. An Approach to the Study of the Gospels*, New York 1970 (2nd ed. 1977); F. F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*, Michigan: Grand Rapids, 1974; Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, Michigan: Grand Rapids, 1987 (2nd ed. 1993); John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew. Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Vol. One: The Roots of the Problem and the Person*, New York 1991; R. W. Funk and M. H. Smith, *The Gospel of Mark* (Red Letter Edition), California: Sonoma, 1991; Marinus de Jonge, *Jesus, the Servant-Messiah*, Yale, 1991; and J. Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, Edinburgh 1991. In this book Crossan has demonstrated that "Jesus is actually one of the best documented figures in ancient history; the challenge is the complexity of the sources." Presuming that he could not have access to very recent works, one would still expect that he consulted some of the above mentioned older works, for instance, that of H. C. Kee, *Jesus in History: An Approach to the Study of the Gospels*, 1970 and of F. F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*, 1974. Intellectual honesty demands that one seriously and sincerely evaluates also other opinions and findings different from one's own.

Goel refers, of course, on pages 51-52 to a very recent book of J. D. Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco, 1994), and quotes from it indirectly, basing himself on the American weekly magazine *Time* of January 10, 1994. He is, however, not at all treating the issue of Jesus' historicity; he *shifts* the issue and reports what Crossan says about Jesus in terms of what he was and was not. Thus, we find Goel accepting Crossan's findings in the following words: "Jesus never cured anyone. He was a wandering teacher for whom Roman imperialism was demonic possession." (p. 52)

How could a nonexistent Jesus be at the same time a wandering teacher? Is this not itself the greatest miracle ever performed? It is none other than Goel himself who makes "the nonexistent" Jesus become a real wandering teacher! In this sense Goel can be considered a wonder worker too! But

¹F. F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*, Michigan: Grand Rapids, 1974, p. 30. Cf. also J. McDowell & B. Wilson, *He Walked Among Us. Evidence for the Historical Jesus*, Bucks 1989, p. 35.

remember: the thesis of Goel's book is supposed to be the denial of any historicity to Jesus! Goel, who has set out to establish that Jesus never existed, sometimes accepts his reality, when it comes to throw mud at him or the faith of the Church. This is called opportunism and self-contradiction under the guise of scholarship. It is not that difficult to make out a true scholar from a swindler.

In this connection it is also interesting to note that on pages 17 and 18 Goel argues that Jesus' crucifixion was only a fiction. The same J. D. Crossan, whom Goel has accepted as a scholar, however, speaks against him in the following words: "I take it absolutely for granted that Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate."² Already the Roman historian Tacitus (1st and 2nd Centuries) has written in his *Annals* 15, 44 that Christus had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate.

If Jesus and, consequently, his crucifixion were only an "invented history" as Goel claims, and if the four gospel writers wanted to put the blame on the Jews, they could have very well invented from the very start itself a different story in which it could have been stated that the Jews stoned him to death! Why at all the need of "inventing" the crucifixion by the Romans and then putting the blame on the Jews? Such a roundabout way of putting the blame on the Jews is not at all explainable and no special gain comes out of it for the Church.

If Jesus were an artifice for aggression, why at all should a Jesus be made to pray before his death for forgiveness for his persecutors, saying that they did not know what they were doing (*Lk 23:34*)?

Also Goel's selectivity is evident in the case of his above mentioned reference to Crossan's book as found in the *Time* magazine; for he (Goel) leaves out conveniently some other valid points that came in the magazine about the books. We read there also as follows:

Not surprisingly, the new books are controversial. Jacob Neusner, professor of religious studies at the University of South Florida, calls the Jesus Seminar "either the greatest scholarly hoax ... or the utter bankruptcy of New Testament studies – I hope the former..." Meanwhile, N. T. Wright, an Oxford University teacher ... says it is a "freshman mistake" to suppose that the Gospels do not refer to actual events simply because the writers of *Matthew, Mark, Luke* and *John* have clear points of view. Wright ... says the skeptical theories also fail to provide any credible explanation for how a faith founded by their pared-down Jesus could spread so rapidly after his Crucifixion. Wright's explanation: the resurrection.³

That Goel has simply omitted to quote these words or to refer to them, is evidence enough of his one-sidedness and selectivity.

²J. D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 1991, p. 372.

³*Time*, January 10, 1994, p. 35.

Whereas Goel, who makes the show of an authentic Indian by denouncing foreign culture, citing an American magazine and foreign authors, we would like to quote an Indian author writing in an Indian Newspaper *The Hindu*. Shri Prema Srinivasan writes in his article on Jerusalem under the title “Travel in an Antique Land”:

Neil Armstrong, the first man on the moon is reported to have confessed that he would rather have walked in the path of Jesus than walk on the moon surface. The blasé tourist as well as the pious one feels a similar sense of wonder while during down the narrow ‘via Dolorosa’ – the path in which Jesus walked burdened with the cross and the crown of thorns.⁴

Prema Srinivasan is firmly convinced of Jesus’ existence as also any other honest and sensible person, having no vested interest.

Selectivity is further shown in accepting certain type of arguments that do not actually conform to sound logic. For instance, Goel fully supports the conclusion of G. A. Wells that “the existence of strongly divergent Christologies in early Christian times is a strong argument against Jesus’ historicity”, and that “if he had really lived, early Christian literature would not ‘show nearly everywhere churchly and theological conflicts and fierce quarrels between opponents’ nor disagree so radically as to what kind of person he was.”⁵

Divergences, conflicts and quarrels about a person are for Wells and Goel valid arguments for the non-existence of that person! Nonsense at its climax! For, it means that the reality of a person is necessarily dependent on unanimity in the judgements and interpretations about that person. Not even about Mahatma Gandhiji do we have this unanimity among the Indians. Was it not a Hindu fanatic who killed him? Do we not still hear voices of protest and disappointment from the Dalits regarding Gandhiji’s policies? Is it not a folly to believe that Gandhian philosophy is interpreted in the same way by all his adherents? Should not and will not human originality and creativity play any role in an interpretation? Does Gandhi cease to be a historical person just because there is divergence in the interpretations about his personality and teachings? At any rate, the proof or evidence of the reality of somebody is not unanimity of opinions about him. Unanimity can be here even suspicious, for it is actually not difficult to form an artificial consensus about an artifice, if well planned.

Moreover, even R. Bultmann whom Goel presents as “the greatest New Testament theologian of the twentieth century” (p. 32) did not deny Jesus’ historical existence or his crucifixion. It is true that he was pessimistic about the possibility of reconstructing a biography of Jesus from the gospels or to extract the exact, precise words of Jesus. This did *not* mean for him that Jesus never existed. To create the

⁴*The Hindu (Sunday Weekly Magazine)*, December 10, 1995, XIII.

⁵Quoted in Goel, *Jesus Christ*, p. 34, footnote 63.

impression that even Bultmann denies historical existence to Jesus is a misrepresentation and lie. The studies undertaken afterwards have sufficiently shown that the gospel accounts are based on a historical core, although they are not chronicles or journalistic reports. No one was accompanying Jesus with a notebook to write down whatever he said and did. Yet his disciples registered many things in their hearts and minds. After some years, after his death and resurrection, these things that were orally handed over were put into writing. Naturally, therefore, there would be accidental and peripheral differences in the accounts as in any other case.

We should remember that the Evangelists (the gospel writers) looked at Jesus and his deeds with different concerns and from different viewpoints. A simple test with a group of people will shed light on such phenomena. The unity in diversity among all the four gospels is an evidence for the genuineness of the experiences. Uniformity is not the sole norm of truth. If there were such uniformity in the gospels, one should rather suspect them as artificial creations. The argument of Wells and Goel does not hold water, but is based on false assumptions and presuppositions.

On page 3 the author points out that Philo who wrote a history of the Jews does not know Jesus Christ and Christians; so also Justus of Tiberias. Simply because Jesus is not mentioned by them, for whatever reasons it might be, one cannot logically conclude that he did not exist. If Goel wants to conclude so, it betrays only his lack of logic.

All historical narratives need not be mentioning *everything*; the authors can very well omit certain things according to their discretion, especially if the items would have some negative bearing upon their interests. Another important and especially relevant point here is that Philo's lifetime was till 54 A. D. as Goel himself notes. That means his work should have been composed still a little bit earlier. The Christian movement was only under way then; it had not yet gained momentum and mass following to attract wide notice. The reason why Philo and Justus, a contemporary of Philo, did not mention Jesus Christ and Christians can be thus explained as either purposeful omission or lack of information. To argue that non-reality of Jesus was the *only* reason for that would be bad reasoning.

On the same page 3 it is mentioned that the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (who lived in the first century) "completed two monumental works – *The Jewish War* in 77 AD and the *Antiquities of the Jews* fifteen years later." Then we have the following assertion:

These histories mention no Jesus Christ. His first work relates to AD 66-74... The work has not a word about Jesus or his followers. Christian apologists point to two passages, one long and the other very short, which mention Jesus as a wise man and also as Christ. But scholars have proved quite convincingly that both of them are either clumsy Christian interpolations or have been tempered [*sic*] with by Christian scribes. It has to be

remembered that none of the manuscripts of Josephus' *Antiquities* is older than the eleventh century, so that Christian scribes have had ample opportunities for tempering with the text.⁶

Let us now closely observe the above passage. The statement that there is no mention about Jesus Christ in the first work is true, but this does not mean anything at all regarding the historicity of Jesus, as we have pointed out above regarding Goel's argument based on a mere *non-mentioning* by Philo and Justus. Another thing to be noted here is the lack of clarity in the passage itself. Immediately after stating that the first work [i.e., *The Jewish War*] has not a word about Jesus or his followers, Goel continues: "Christian apologists point to two passages, one long and the other very short, which mention Jesus as a wise man and also as Christ" (pp. 3-4).

The impression created in the readers is that the above passages are from the just mentioned first work *The Jewish War*. But, in fact, the "two passages" are from the second work *Antiquities of the Jews*. Another confusion is regarding the expression "Jesus as a wise man and also as Christ" (p. 4). Goel does not distinguish between the two expressions found in the said two quotes. Whereas the longer quote does speak of Jesus as "a wise man" and "the Christ," the shorter quote says about him as one "who was called the Christ." This will be clearer when we shall see the two quotes below.

There is actually a big difference between "Jesus as the Christ" and "Jesus who was *called* Christ." The former reflects faith in Jesus as the Christ, whereas the latter, agnosticism or non-commitment. Goel's statement is, thus, misleading, when he presents the two quotes as of the same level. He does neither quote the two passages nor speak about them with precision, but makes a sweeping assertion. What value should one give to such assertions in his book, which claims to be scientific and open to facts? Let us remember once more, a thing is better understood in its causes. The hasty and false assertions and *conclusions* of the book tell us again and again that it is born out of animosity and hatred against Christianity or/and Christian missionary work. Intellectual honesty and academic openness to truth are hardly to be expected and found here.

Again, the statement that "scholars have proved quite convincingly that both of them are either clumsy Christian interpolations or have been tempered with by Christian scribes," is *itself* wrong! There are three important facts to be noted here. 1) The said interpolations are found *only* in the long quote, but *not* in the shorter one. 2) The interpolations are made with regard to the *interpretation* about Jesus, and *not* about his *historical* existence itself. 3) The shorter quote is beyond doubt without any such interpolation. Let us now scrutinize both the quotes in question.

⁶Goel, *Jesus Christ*, pp. 3-4.

First we shall see the shorter quote. Describing the trial of James, who was executed in the year 62, during the interregnum between the prefects Festus and Albinus, Flavius Josephus writes as follows: “And so he [Ananus, the high priest] convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and brought before them a man named James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ, and certain others.”⁷ In order to identify James the author mentions his relation to Jesus. This implies that Jesus was well known and his existence taken for granted. The text also indicates that it is devoid of any Christian interpolation. This is poignantly shown by the phrase “who was called the Christ.” Since Flavius Josephus did not believe in Jesus as the Christ, he refers to him here not as the Christ but as the one “who was *called* the Christ,” whereas in the longer quote given below it would read: “He was the Messiah.”

The second quote, the longer one, is as follows:

About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Messiah. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing amongst us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. On the third day he appeared to them restored to life, for the prophets of God had prophesied these and countless other marvellous things about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.⁸

The Church historian Eusebius, who was bishop of Caesarea in the beginning of the 4th century, cites the above text of Flavius Josephus in his works *Ecclesiastical History* (*Hist. Eccl.*, i. II. 7f.), written about 325 AD and in his *Demonstration of the Gospel* (*Demonstratio evangelica*, iii. 5. 105). Origen who had known a century before Eusebius the works and mentality of Flavius, however, asserts that Flavius did not believe in Jesus as the Christ (*Contra Celsum*, i. 47). That means, the passage in the long quote that speaks of Jesus as the Christ could not have been from Flavius. So, too, the other details that see him in the light of Christian faith could not stem from him. This can be due either to some *interpretations* made by a Christian scribe in the manuscript in the time between Origen and Eusebius, or to the simple fact of Flavius as a historian merely *reporting* or mentioning the beliefs of the time. Thus, the clauses “if indeed one ought to call him a man,” “He was the Messiah,” “On the third day he appeared to them restored to life, ... other marvellous things about him” can be the result of either of them. They are, however, not his own beliefs, for at the most he could have only said about Jesus as the one *called* the Messiah, as we noted above in the shorter quote.

On page 5 Goel writes: “the word ‘Christian’ does not appear in the Christian literature itself before 140 AD.” What ignorance! This is one of the examples of the wrong and unstudied assertions of

⁷Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XX, 200, cited in J. D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 373.

⁸Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVIII, 63; As cited by J. D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 373.

Goel in his book. The New Testament book *The Acts of the Apostles* which was composed between 70 and 90 AD – and at any rate before 100 AD – mentions the term “Christians” in 11:26 as follows: “... and in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians.” Here we have another example of Goel’s way of simply daring to assert things as he likes.

On page 8 Goel argues that the story of Jesus’ birth does not make sense because “neither Nazareth nor Bethlehem were (*sic*) under Roman jurisdiction in 1 AD.” But who told Goel that Jesus was born in 1 AD? We hold that, remaining within the framework of the present way of the calendar, Jesus was born in 4 or 6/7 BC. This is because the one who made this calculation (the monk Exiguus) miscalculated the year of Jesus’ birth by a few years.

On page 10 Goel, again, asserts simply: “Mary did not remain a virgin after the birth of Jesus.” As argument for this ill-based conclusion he writes on page 11 that the evangelist “Matthew ... himself mentions Mary as having conjugal relations with Joseph.” This is another piece of deliberate distortion of truth, for nowhere does Matthew say so. He only says that Joseph did not know Mary “until she had borne a son” (*Mt* 1:25). The word “until” does not necessarily mean that he had known her after the birth of the son. There is a parallel case in the Old Testament book *2 Sam.* 6:23; there we read that Michael had no child to the day of her death. This does not mean that she had borne children *after* her death. Goel’s reasoning betrays poor logic. If someone says about somebody that he remained a patriot until his death, does it mean that after his death he was not a patriot? On the same page Goel makes, again, a false assertion that “Elsewhere in the gospels we find Mary being mentioned as the mother of several children besides Jesus.”

Goel, however, does not say where this is mentioned. By simply saying “elsewhere” Goel creates the impression that it is really mentioned somewhere. If Goel sincerely considers the alleged accounts in the gospels mentioning Mary as the mother of several children besides Jesus as really historical, how can he then deny the historicity of Jesus consistently? The mention of the brothers and sisters of Jesus is to be understood against the Oriental practice of calling one’s cousins so. If she had several children, Jesus could have entrusted her to one of them, instead of entrusting his mother to his beloved disciple (see *Jn* 19:27).

Another nonsense on the same page is a betrayal and manipulation of Christian theological and dogmatic assertions. He writes:” “The Catholic Church, however, has extended the dogma of Mary’s virginity to her and her female ancestors’ immaculate conception *ad infinitum*.” Goel simply exhibits his sheer ignorance of the dogma of Immaculate Conception. It has actually *nothing at all* to do with virginity!

On page 12 he finds an explanation for “floating the myth of virgin birth,” namely, to overcome the acute embarrassment caused by Mary’s sexual immorality. Here arises the question, why at all should the disciples have first created an embarrassment and caused an unnecessary burden to overcome it later, if Jesus did not really exist? If it were simply a legend, they could have very well presented Jesus in ordinary terms without causing any such embarrassment! Goel’s point would make sense only if Jesus really lived, and if he were the son of an immoral woman. In that case Goel contradicts his basic thesis of the non-existence of Jesus. If Goel accepts that there was a problem of embarrassment, he should also accept that Jesus was historically *real*.

Further, if Jesus were not a historical figure why at all does Goel refer to and accept the Jewish tradition, that too a “long-standing tradition,” that he was “the fruit of an adulterous union between Mary and a Roman soldier named Panthera”? (p. 12). One thing to be noted here is that Goel who has set out to disprove Jesus’ historicity is actually attacking the morality of his mother Mary, thereby indirectly affirming his real existence!

On the same page 12 Goel continues with his argument of the “unfortunate circumstance of Jesus’ birth” and puts it as a possible explanation of Jesus’ “hostility to his mother and lack of enthusiasm for his brothers.” To substantiate this Goel refers to the following Gospel passages: John 2:3-4; Luke 8:19-21, 11:27-28; Matthew 12:46-50 and Mark 3:31-35. There are two points to be made here.

First, if Goel accepts the texts as showing Jesus’ hostility to Mary, he is also at the same time accepting the reality of Jesus, which he actually wants to deny. At this stage of Goel’s discussion, one may wonder what really the theme of his book is: the reality of Jesus or the morality of his mother.

Second, the texts in question do not at all express or imply Jesus’ hostility to his mother or lack of enthusiasm for his brothers. In John 2 the whole episode of the wedding feast at Cana proves just the opposite. Even though his time (of glorification) was not yet come, Jesus performs a miracle precisely because of Mary’s request and, thus, honours her! A person’s action is the best clue to interpret his words and attitudes. That Mary is addressed as “woman” has to be assessed against the background of the Aramaic language where the term does not in itself express disrespect, rather respect. It has also a deep biblical meaning against the Old Testament background of the first woman Eve. Mary is the new or second Eve who cooperates with Jesus, the second Adam. This is very well reflected in the context of the death of Jesus when he calls her again “Woman” (*Jn* 19:26). The context in Luke 8:19-21 is Jesus’ love for those who hear the word of God and do it. They are so dear to him that he considers them as his mother and brethren. This does not mean that he was hostile to his mother and brethren.

The same is the message in the other two parallel texts of Mark and Matthew and also in Luke 11:27-28. Goel's way of using biblical texts betrays only his lack of proper knowledge and his unwillingness to know the true sense of the texts. Distorting the meaning of texts and reading *into* them one's own pre-conceived interpretations in order to serve one's vested interests is unscholarly.

On page 16 Goel writes that "all through nearly two thousand years of Christian history, Jews have been accused of deicide and subjected ... to cruel pogroms which culminated in the Nazi Holocaust." Does Goel sincerely and seriously think that Adolf Hitler was an ardent Christian believer who loved Jesus so much that he retaliated the Jewish conspiracy against Jesus? No serious and open-minded student of history can think so.

Contradictions are different from *self*-contradictions. An event experienced by different persons can be differently narrated. The murder of the American President John F. Kennedy is a historical fact; still there are divergent versions about it. No sensible person would argue that because there is divergence, the murder did not take place. Objectivity is not necessarily dependent on absolute harmony of witnesses. An artificially fabricated story has all the more chances of such congruence, precisely because it is well planned and thought out. If the early church wanted to propagate a fabricated legend about Jesus, it would not have produced more than one gospel. Nor would have the later church approved more than one gospel as official and orthodox.

An example of self-contradiction is Sita Ram Goel's book itself! The book argues for the non-historicity of Jesus, on the one hand, and affirms Jesus to be born of Mary illegitimately, on the other hand. How can a person who is born, although illegitimately, be at the same time nonexistent and non-historical? But this is what Goel says. According to him, Jesus is an illegitimate child of Mary and at the same time a nonexistent person, a mere artifice! That too, an artifice for aggression!

The teaching of Jesus as is summarized in the Sermon on the Mount (*Mt* 5 and 6) is a glaring contradiction to this allegation of Jesus being an artifice for aggression. His advice is not at all the same as the instruction to kill others in the pursuit of performing one's *karma* as *nishkāmakarma*, but rather to give one's own life for others. Jesus' advice to love the enemies, not to resist evil with evil, and his example of washing the feet of the disciples, rebuking Peter for cutting the ear of a servant who came to catch him and healing the ear, praying for forgiveness for his executioners, do not at all give us a picture of an aggressive man, nor do they promote aggression in any way.

If Christians wanted aggression as their motto, they should have either destroyed the New Testament or created a different Jesus. With the Jesus of the New Testament, however, there is no scope and support for any kind of aggression. It makes no sense at all to allege that the Christians have fabricated

a non-violent and humble Jesus as artifice for *aggression*! It would have some sense if the allegation were that the Christians made the Jesus of the New Testament into a warrior figure for the sake of aggression. To invent a meek Jesus who instructs the disciples not to resist one who is evil, but to love the enemies (*Mt 5:39-44*) would never suit the purpose of aggression.

Goel should have also known that there were Christians in India even before the arrival of the western missionaries in the 16th century. These Christians known as the Thomas Christians had no policy of aggression; rather they lived in peace and harmony with the Hindus and Moslems of the locality. The Hindu rulers even gave many privileges to the Christians and considered them equal to the respected groups of the Nairs. Jesus of the Christian faith was the same then as he is today. To think that Christianity is an import from the West is due to lack of historical knowledge. It is true that some of the western missionaries who had worked in India to spread the Christian faith, unfortunately launched into a polemic against Hinduism.

Besides the living Christian tradition, we have Jewish as well as Islamic traditions accepting the reality of Jesus of Nazareth. The mainstream of the Jews only disagreed with the Christians in the interpretation of Jesus as the Christ or Messiah. Among the contemporary Jewish scholars we have many renowned thinkers and authors of international reputation who have accepted Jesus as a historical personality and written about him. Some of them are the following (the titles of their English books are given within brackets): Schalom Ben-Chorin, (*Bruder Jesus*, Munich 1967), Martin Buber, Pinchas E. Lapide (*Jesus in Israel*, Gladbeck 1970), Franz Werfel, Robert Eisler, Joachim Schoeps, Morris Goldstein (*Jesus in the Jewish Tradition*, New York 1950), Joseph Klausner, (*Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Herbert Danby, New York 1926), Jacob Neusner (*From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism*, Prentice-Hall 1973), Ascher Finkel (*The Teacher of Nazareth*, Leiden 1964), David Flusser, Frank Andermann, Haim Cohen (*Trial and Death of Jesus*, Tel Aviv 1968), Aharon Kabak (*The Narrow Path*, Jerusalem 1968). Martin Büber and Schalom Ben-Chorin respect Jesus as their Jewish brother.

According to Islamic teachings, Jesus is one of the five great prophets. The *Quran (Koran)* refers to Jesus in many *suras*, say, in more than 25 passages.

Even contemporary atheistic and Marxist philosophers like Kolakowski, Gardavsky, Machovec, Roger Garaudy, and Ernst Bloch have accepted Jesus and the values for which he lived and had to die (see especially E. Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* [The Principle Hope], Frankfurt 1973, pages 1489f., and 1494f.).

In addition to all this, there are several serious studies on the historicity of Jesus which have conclusively demonstrated his real existence. It is worthwhile to compare the real scholarly quality of such

works with the shallow arguments and emotive conclusions of the books that have been written to deny his historicity. Sita Ram Goel has selected some of them in order to serve his purposes and to arrive at his pre-conceived conclusions!

Jesus Christ does not need a birth/life-certificate from Goel. The violent opposition to him in manifold forms is itself a powerful testimony *for* the continued presence and influence of Jesus in the world. His opponents managed to get him crucified. His glorious resurrection, however, proved to be a fatal blow to their plans and hopes. This happens again and again. The one who was once killed cannot be any more killed by the arrows of words. The more you attempt to eliminate him, the more powerful he will resurge, and it will only hurt anyone to kick against the goads (*Acts 26:14*).

Perhaps Sita Ram Goel was not aware of his passion that blinded his vision. Hatred can make people blind and lead them to rash judgements. He might have been disillusioned by the scandalous behaviour of certain Christians in India or/and other parts of the world. As has been pointed out at the outset, a thing is better understood in its causes. The causes behind Goel's book seem to be animosity against Christians and Christianity. The book is highly selective, and it abounds in distortions, self-contradictions, half-truths and suppressed truths.

If, however, Goel's motivation and implied concern were to restore and promote the age-old noble values of the Indian and Asian culture and tradition, we have to highly appreciate it, especially in the present context of an undue and exaggerated Westernization. For this he need not have attacked Jesus Christ who was thoroughly an Asian! K. C. Sen, a great Bengali Hindu wrote: "Behold Christ cometh to us as an Asiatic in race."⁹

⁹As cited from his Lectures I, pp. 388f. by R. Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, p. 37.