

Krishna, the Sneak Thief

Vijay Srinath Kanchi

The personality of Krishna has always been an enigma to his devotees and laypeople alike. Illustrious yogis have worshipped him as *Makhan Chor*, the butter thief, and *Ranchod*, or one who ran away from the battlefield. Such strange, seemingly pejorative connotations for a Supreme Lord are unusual. A God or a hero who is worshiped by his followers is always eulogized for the many positive attributes he possesses. Human history bears testimony to the fact that any failures and shortcomings belonging to such personalities are never pointed out or are conveniently buried and forgotten over time. Krishna, however, is an exception. He may be the only hero in human history described with epithets that would appear to make a mockery of him. It is understandable if his detractors and unbelievers raise these points. Yet, even saints and yogis immersed in deep meditation and worship of Krishna have composed *kirtans* (yogic chants) with these seeming denunciations. Why did the saints and yogis include such derogatory titles among Krishna's many names? The answer lies in the symbolic meaning of these titles.

Let us understand the nuances in the epithet *Makhan* (butter) *Chor* (thief). The process of extraction of butter from the milk by a milkmaid is akin to the process of accumulation of mental energies into a ball of focus by a practicing Yogi in his daily spiritual practice. The Yogi during the course of dhyana or meditation arduously musters all his mental faculties (which have the tendency to dissipate), into a ball of focus. Just as a tortoise draws its limbs into its shell, the practicing Yogi seeks to gather his drifting mind from the senses in order to stay focused on the object of his meditation. It is like churning milk and gathering the butterfat (knowledge and love) dispersed within it. However, as the Yogi endeavors to stay focused, he unknowingly slips into mental currents that sway him away from his object of meditation. And suddenly he realizes that the fruit of his laborious effort has been lost! Again, he resolves to detach himself

from diffusing thoughts and sensual perceptions to realize dhyana or perfect presence but again he finds himself lost in thought currents. Again, and again, he strives to achieve and maintain a unified consciousness.

Someone or something continues to steal his hard-earned possession! The cream of the mind that he so diligently sought is stolen or lost. His associative thinking faculty immediately reminds him of the story of naughty Krishna, who stole butter from the houses of Gopikas, the milkmaids. The Yogi's situation is no different from those Gopikas or milkmaids. In both cases, some thief enters the dwelling and steals the hard-earned prize! The Yogi is not disturbed by this; on the contrary, he realizes that Krishna is playing hide and seek. He realizes that the fruit of his labor has been stolen because his unrefined mind is unable to stay focused. His mind is still mischievously fickle, so he fixes his mind on the object of meditation only to find his hard earned cream of effort stolen again! The Yogi sings in praise of the sport of the naughty young thief that divests him of his earnings.

The Yogi is also reminded of Durga, the Supreme Lord's feminine equivalent, praised in the *Durga Saptashati* as the *mahamaya*, the illusory potency of God, which forcefully drags the minds of even the adept yogis into the mire

About the Author

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of fascination. Yes, a fascinating sport is unfolding in his mental arena; and the Yogi is ecstatic as he recalls that Durga is also the giver of liberation.

Such is the game played between the Krishna and the Yogi. In this tug of war, the Yogi

sometimes manages to achieve great focus. At other times, he is lost; his mind wavers, and he is pulled into the mire of mental currents. Thus, Krishna, the *Ranchod*, relinquishes the battlefield in this tug of war and vanishes from the sight of the Yogi! A beautiful game is on!

Book Review

Freemasonry: A Philosophical Investigation, by **Giuliano Di Bernardo**, Pittsburg, PA: Dorrance Publishing, 2020. Hardcover and Kindle editions 206 pages. List price \$27. Available from online booksellers. ISBN-978-1-6453-0624-5.

Filling a notable gap in the literature on Freemasonry in the English language (the only comparable publication being Leo Apostel's *Freemasonry: A Philosophical Essay* dating from 1985), this slim book (206 pages) is eminently approachable. Seemingly aimed at the general reader, it is concerned with Masonry of today and although it references Freemasonry of the past, it does so as a means to understand the current situation.

Giuliano Di Bernardo held the chair of Philosophy of Science and Logic at the University of Trento in Italy. An active Freemason, Di Bernardo has held several important Masonic roles including serving as Grand Master of the Grand Orient of Italy and Founder and Grand Master of the Regular Grand Lodge of Italy. He has also been a lifetime member of the Supreme Council of Italy of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite.

One of the great strengths of this book is that complex arguments are broken down into logical, manageable sections, each of which is presented in a specific and well-considered order allowing the reader to follow the author's trains of thought clearly. In addition, the consistency with which terminology is explained and then applied aids the non-specialist in grasping the flow of the arguments.

The introductory chapter ("The Origin and Development of Esoteric Thought") serves two main purposes: The first part orients the reader to the philosophical underpinnings of much of what will follow, while the second establishes commonalities between esoteric societies in general and introduces some of the ideas about Freemasonry in particular that will be unpacked in later chapters. The second part also clearly

defines a set of terms that will be used extensively throughout the book, setting up and explaining the author's assertion that Freemasonry is a secular, non-exclusivist, partial anthropology.

It is rare to find a clearly written yet brief summary of the origin and development of Esotericism. Perhaps because this text seems aimed at the general reader, Di Bernardo felt the necessity to preface his discussion with this background. Those readers steeped in the history of Esotericism may find the broad strokes that Di Bernardo paints startling or may mourn the omission of a particular person of whom, or theory of which, they are especially fond, and yet Di Bernardo provides a succinct and logical account. His narrative has three main foci: The traditions of Orphism and the Pythagorean Academy that serves as a foundation to so much of what follows; the transition from the Medieval period (with its focus on faith and religion and dearth of esoteric teachings) to the Renaissance; and in a much more focused third section, the rise and fall of the Illuminati which Di Bernardo calls "the most important esoteric society of modern times."

Clarity of presentation, especially as it relates to a general reader, is clearly important to Di Bernardo, something evident throughout the book and illustrated by the following: When approaching the transition from the Medieval to Renaissance ways of thinking, Di Bernardo provides a brief and balanced summary of the standard historical view of that transition (by way of geographical discoveries, the new science based on the revolutions in thought brought about by Copernicus and Galileo, and the profound changes in religious thought brought about by the Protestant Reformation). Only then does he suggest that there may be other reasons that underpin this transition, introducing the work of Dame Frances Yeats (1899-1981), the English historian who wrote extensively about the influence of Hermeticism on the Renaissance, to support this assertion. This

opens the door for his discussion of Renaissance Neo-Platonism, with the incorporation of the Christian Kabbalah, the spread of Rosicrucianism, the work of John Dee and the movement to promote universal Christian reform.

There is no place in the book where the author makes clear his intended audience or his purpose in writing the text. I have surmised from the above that the audience is a general reader. I am further led to wonder if Di Bernardo expected his readers to be Masons. In the section of the first chapter that presents the rise and fall of the Illuminati, Di Bernardo notes the organization's founder's desire to keep the Illuminati separate from Freemasonry "which at the time was spreading throughout Europe" (p.13). This comment is the first time the author has mentioned Masonry in this survey of the underpinnings of esotericism, and I wondered why no mention had been made of the founding of modern Masonry (which we are told in passing a few pages later was in 1717). A general reader may well not be aware of the history of the society and find the gap in the chronological approach rather startling, whereas Masons are presumably well-aware of the history of the society and would not have needed a brief paragraph locating the historical origin of the organization.

After his broad-ranging introductory chapter, the author proceeds to narrow the focus, discussing Freemasonry itself (with chapters on its conception of man, symbols, morality and constitutions). Each chapter is carefully conceived to provide the background for later discussions and as such the book is not one to be dipped into randomly but rather read chronologically from cover to cover. This can be illustrated by looking at the author's treatment of transcendence. Introduced briefly toward the end of the first chapter, it then forms one of the five elements of the Masonic anthropology discussed in the second chapter and is central to chapter four's discussion of Freemasonry and Morality as well as several chapters in the second half of the book.

Any discussion of Freemasonry naturally comes up against material that may not be discussed outside Masonic circles and Di Bernardo makes no apology for this neither does he shy

away from including the Masonic initiatory secret (in principal) in his narrative as it forms an important component of much of his discussion. This can be seen in the chapter on "The Symbols of Freemasonry" where, after having established the purpose of symbolism (to denote conceptual abstractions or to function allegorically); having examined the erroneous public attitudes toward Freemasonry that are the result of a misunderstanding of the purpose of symbolism; and having suggesting that Masonic symbolism not only provides a common ground for the world-wide organization and a continuity of tradition, but that the content of the initiatory secret cannot be revealed without symbolism; Di Bernardo makes the important observation that revealing the initiatory secret and symbolism of Freemasonry would destroy its very foundation.

The second main section of the book expands upon relationships mentioned briefly in the former chapters: relationships between Freemasonry and religion, between Freemasonry and mysticism, between Freemasonry, positivism and science, and between Freemasonry and the Roman Catholic Church.

Throughout the book, Di Bernardo grounds his discussion in historical fact, often referencing policy documents as a starting point for his exploration. In the chapter on Freemasonry and religion, for example, the discussion is based on the 1985 Declaration issued by the United Grand Lodge of England and entitled *Freemasonry and Religion*, while the chapter on Freemasonry and the Roman Catholic Church examines the position revealed in several documents, including the 1884 encyclical of Pope Leo XII - *Humanum Genus*, the 1983 *Declaration on Masonic Associations* of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (the then Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith), the 1980 *Declaration of the German Episcopal Conference on the Membership of Catholics in Freemasonry*. Not only does this provide a grounding for the philosophical investigation, it also provides the reader with valuable historical context for the discussions.

The wide-ranging scope of Di Bernardo's investigation can be seen in the chapter on

Freemasonry and religion. The grounding in historical discussion allows him to clarify that historically, Freemasonry has been a religion (in that it began by sharing and accepting the Christian God) and that it has also been a syncretism of several religions (inspired by Deism). The latter caused a rift between reactionary (Christian-based) and deist-inspired Masons in England that was resolved with the 1813 *Act of Union*—a document that established the modern position that Freemasonry should not be confused with any substitute for religion. A thorough philosophical investigation of what constitutes a religion and how Masonry is not a religion then begs the question that if Masonry is not a religion, what is Masonic sacredness? This part of the discussion includes an examination of the role of Masonic ritual. An important element of this is the discussion on the Royal Arch ritual—a ritual based on aspects of Christianity that was incorporated into the third-degree ritual by the 1813 *Act of Union*. Di Bernardo asks: do the aspects of Christianity in the Royal Arch ritual function purely symbolically or as expressions of a true Christian ritual?

This book should prove informative and engaging to any reader with an interest in Freemasonry. I am only sorry that the author aimed this at a general reader only and did not apply the standard academic apparatus more rigorously. In a time when inter-disciplinary/cross-disciplinary studies are touted in academia as the way forward, and bearing in mind the important contribution Freemasons have made to all branches of society, I could imagine scholars in any number of fields finding this text useful and the addition of academic apparatus would not have made the text any less approachable for the

general reader. A few examples of the challenges presented will suffice: There is a nice bibliography, but not all the works mentioned in the text appear in the bibliography (for example neither Locke's *Epistola de Tolerantia* nor Montaigne's *De le Liberté de Conscience* both mentioned pp. 27-8, appear in the bibliography). In addition, differentiation between the authorial voice and standard views is not always clear. For example, at the beginning of the second chapter ("The Masonic Conception of Man") the author, having distinguished between esoteric and profane concepts of Freemasonry, declares:

The quintessential esoteric concept in Freemasonry is that of the 'Initiatory Secret.' The fundamental profane concepts are those of Freedom," "Tolerance," "Brotherhood," and "Transcendence." From these are derived all other concepts, such as love, benevolence, charity, respect, solidarity, improvement, oath and the like. (p 23).

This appears to be a standard view which the author proceeds to unpack; however, a few pages later while exploring the differences between brotherhood and equality, the author comments: "This is why I have included brotherhood and not equality among the fundamental concepts of Freemasonry." In saying this he makes clear that what had initially appeared to be a standard view was in fact the author's own idea. However, these sentiments are probably only of concern to academics and should not discourage anyone from reading this important and engaging book.

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Book Review

The Initiate of the Aquarian Age, by Dr. Joseph B. Majdalani, published by the Society of Friends of the White Knowledge, under the Esoteric Science Series, Beirut 2010. Paperback, 112 pages. Available at www.esoteric-lebanon.org and as an e-book from Amazon.com.

The Aquarian Age is the forthcoming epoch in humanity's evolutionary development—following the present age of Pisces, which began with the coming of Christ. Preparation for the dawning of this Golden Age has been popularized in various stereotypes and clichés, along with randomly coined terms related to the “real man,” “free thought,” and “channeling” as “New Age” prerequisites for development. Therefore, a book was needed to end the confusion and expose the higher realities of the esoteric science, which had been previously restricted to the adepts.

The Initiate of the Aquarian Age explains that the Initiates are now teaching the science of the future in private circles. However, they will establish public institutions for the teachings of the invisible aspects in man as delineated in the esoteric science. These teachings will include the tenets of the sacred truth and the Universal Laws governing the life of man as the center of existence. Afterward, they will appear openly amongst the general public for the promulgation and demonstration of proven realities revealing that the Initiates are the scientists of the future “par excellence.”

This book provides unprecedented access to the traits that define the ideal man—the Initiate—as the axis of the Aquarian Age. Though intended for the elect and confirmed aspirants, this book will prove of absorbing interest to various seekers on the inner path of development who seek to improve their lives through the advanced ways of self-progression. However, for those engaged on a mystical or spiritual journey with a group or a guide, *The Initiate of the Aquarian Age* will speak loudly, helping them to develop spiritual discernment and reevaluate

the authenticity and efficacy of the path and guides they follow.

It is worth mentioning in this respect that *The Initiate of the Aquarian Age* addresses “Meditation” as a tool for the Initiate-to-be to tune to the higher levels for the receipt of subtle vibrations, and the taking in of Prana, to nourish both the gross and subtle sheaths. The aspirant may then unfold and awaken the various levels of consciousness and their relative vehicles or subtle components. The book also sheds light on Mantras, another essential tool that varies according to the level and purpose of the meditation practiced. The correct intonation of a Mantra helps the Initiate to attune to the higher planes and illuminated beings in the divine sphere, which propels him towards achieving his mission. All this complements the detailed methodologies provided in the precedent book *Meditation and Contemplation*, by the same author.

The book elucidates how “*the Aquarian Age will prepare the aspirant to quicken his unfoldment and development, since the evolution of the mind, in esoteric affairs, is fully connected with the evolution of the self.*” It stresses that “*self-reliance is mandatory, and self-confidence is imperative, and self-knowledge is one's provision.*” In line with his other publications, Dr. Joseph B. Majdalani directs seekers to the fact that inner change at the level of the individual is the “magical” way to bring about real social and global change by dissolving the negative elements latent within the psyche and attuning with the inner virtues of “the Initiate of the Aquarian Age.” Seekers shall be working towards creating an “Aquarian Age” within themselves, and thus consciously realizing the future “now.”

Neither pedantic nor religious, *The Initiate of the Aquarian Age* humbly depicts a complete (inner and outer) way of life that became necessary with the advent of the Aquarian Age. It delivers to humanity a compelling insight into much that is unknown today, revealing the inner

meanings of the New Age mission, and illustrating the architecture of the “Pyramids of Development.” These “pyramids” are not meant for fanatics or traditionalists, but for the sole purpose of helping prepare seekers for a wider understanding of the past and future, together with the lifetime mission which they may undertake.

The book is charged with needed facts guiding seekers and Initiates-to-be. But it emphasizes that the attainment remains the seeker’s responsibility on the path of self-reliance, self-confidence, and self-development. It emphasizes that *“the more we open our minds and practise right thoughts, the higher we elevate and expand our consciousness. This affirms that mind is consciousness in experimentation, and that the unfoldment of mind consequently leads to the development of consciousness.”*

The author dedicates the book to the Initiate-to-be in the coming Age of Initiation. While previous esoteric publications by Dr. Majdalani delineated the road of self-development, this book is about the road to mastery or the hidden tenets of “Raja Yoga.” As such, the book is foundational for those who would realize their true potential and seek to fulfill it to its greatest extent.

The Initiate of the Aquarian Age was translated from English into Bulgarian. It was also published in English and Arabic by the same author, along with more than seventy other esoteric books (in eight languages) published by the Society of Friends of the White Knowledge. This futuristic masterpiece consists of instructive speeches and illuminating teachings that reveal the inner truths of the Aquarian Age and its Initiates, together with the prerequisites for effective advancement in self-development and self-realization.

The author has applied and verified the far-reaching messages in this book to his own life, for only those who have consistently applied the qualities of the Initiate to themselves can attune to the heartstrings of humanity.

While higher esoteric revelations continue to be transmitted by word of mouth to the worthy, readers should attempt to attune their understanding with the heartthrobs of *The Initiate of the Aquarian Age* and meditate on the unspoken words concealed between the lines to be at one with the Great Masters of Wisdom, ever striving to elevate humanity as their only mission on Earth.

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