

interpretation of the issue is itself mistaken, and indeed doubly so. It is mistaken, or perhaps it would be better to say unimaginative or off-key, to think of religious frames of mind primarily in terms of belief. ... The religious practice is a kind of social yoga that cements and fortifies our aesthetic and moral stances toward our lives and the world we live in (138–40).

It is this fortifying of our aesthetic and moral stances that will protect us in the coming days, when during future winters, at least in the global north, COVID-19 will force us to rethink life once again, since vaccines take time to be discovered and developed. Thus, Blackburn's solution to the ontology of fear and, by extrapolation of the epistemology newly, though forcibly fashioned by this pandemic, which was non-existent when Blackburn wrote this gem of a book, is worth studying:

We can now notice that the term 'atheist', so carefully avoided by [David] Hume himself, is no longer appropriate (whether we put the word 'new' in front of it or not). It implies that there is a definite ontological belief that some people have and others do not, but this mislocates the issue. The term 'agnostic' is no better, since it has the same implication of a definite ontological question, only one to which we do not know the answer.

Instead of waving theistic or atheistic banners, we should pick up Hume's *Natural History of Religion*, or its successors in the works of Kant, Feuerbach, Marx, or Durkheim. And if we want to wean people away from their myths, or the particular coloration their myths have taken at particular times and places, then we must do what Nietzsche did at the end of the nineteenth century, which was to recognize moral corruption when we find it, and then to rail, preach, inveigh, fulminate, or thunder against it (141–2).

This should be our clarion call for the dogs, hawks, and the vultures of war are let loose again. P Sainath's (b. 1957) *Everybody Loves a Good Drought* (1996) along with Simon Blackburn's book should alert us to the Eichmanns among us. For understanding Eichmann, read Hannah Arendt's (1906–75) *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963).

This is a rollercoaster of a book: Blackburn forces us to rethink everyone from Shakespeare to Lewis Carroll to James Joyce to Iris Murdoch, to name a few authors only. And obviously classical literature leading to Milton's presentation of Narcissus in his *Paradise Lost*. Maybe, this book will help us see anew our socially distant selves.

For comfort in solipsism, Blackburn is best when he comments on that taciturn of all men, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951 CE).

Subhasis Chattopadhyay



The Life and Struggles of Our Mother Walatta Petros: A Seventeenth-Century African Biography of an Ethiopian Woman

Galawdewos

Edited and translated by
Wendy Laura Belcher and
Michael Kleiner


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Wendy Laura Belcher's 'Introduction' to this biography of the Ethiopian nun, Mother Walatta Petros is an eye-opener to anyone remotely interested either in Christianity or in monasticism. Belcher's remarks on Mother Walatta Petros are enough to highlight this meticulously researched book. Belcher writes that the book under review is a translation of 'the *Gädlä Wälättä Petros*. It was written in 1672 in an African language by Africans for Africans about Africans—in particular, about a revered African religious leader who led a successful nonviolent movement against European protocolonialism in Ethiopia. This is the first time this remarkable text has appeared in English' (1). Generally, authors tend to overstate their achievements. Still, after reading this book, one is convinced that Belcher has been successfully able to present to the world the nuanced life of Mother Walatta Petros and her struggles through this

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10 December. (j) **Ichapur**: 500 blankets and 500 sweaters from 22 November to 11 January. (k) **Jammu**: 300 blankets from 25 November to 12 March. (l) **Jayrambati**: 5,700 sweaters from 4 December to 9 January. (m) **Kathamrita Bhavan, Kolkata**: 350 blankets from 28 to 30 December. (n) **Koalpara** (sub-centre of Jayrambati): 300 sweaters from 17 to 24 December. (o) **Naora**: 1,000 sweaters from 10 to 27 February. (p) **Narainpur**: 6,000 sweaters from 8 December to 17 February. (q) **Narendrapur**: 500 blankets on 26 December. (r) **Patna**: 550 blankets from 23 September to 12 January. (s) **Prayagraj**: 300 blankets and 800 sweaters from 3 February to 8 March. (t) **Pune**: 500 sweaters from 26 July to 6 February. (u) **Puri Math**: 777 blankets from 27 December to 5 February. (v) **Puri Mission**: 693 blankets and 380 sweaters from 15 December to 29 January. (w) **Vadodara**: 413 jackets, 69 sweatshirts, and 18 sweaters from 21 September to 1 February. (x) **Varanasi Home of Service**: 905 blankets and 615 shawls from 9 November to 27 February. **Zambia: Lusaka**: 20 blankets in March.

Cyclone Rehabilitation: Manasadwip centre provided 836 asbestos sheets, 272 GI (galvanised iron) pipes, 51 tin sheets, 235 concrete pillars, 800 tiles, 44 kg ridge covers, 292 bamboo sticks, 18 tarpaulins, 2,497 bags of red sand, 343 bags of white sand, 471 bags of cement, 26,710 bricks, 15 litres coal tar, 12 cubic feet wood, 1,007 cubic feet stone chips, 348 iron rods, and 80 kg polythene sheets from 28 December to 26 February under 'build your own house' scheme to 111 families at Sagar Islands in South 24 Parganas district, whose houses had been damaged by Cyclone Bulbul in November.

Economic Rehabilitation: Under self-employment programme, **Guwahati** centre distributed 10 sewing machines and 9 weaving instruments on 8 March to poor and needy people. 

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gädl, which is used to tell the inspirational story of a saint's life, often called a hagiography or hagiobiography ... This genre represents a vital archive of African literature that has gone almost entirely unexplored, even though it contains fascinating narratives about folk heroes and is a rich repository of indigenous thought. More than two hundred Ethiopian saints have a *gädl*, including at least six women. One of them was Walatta Petros, a noblewoman who lived from 1592 to 1642, and whose composite name means Spiritual Daughter of Saint Peter (and should never be shortened to Petros) (1).

Yet this daughter of St Peter would not be accepted as the heir to anyone remotely connected to the Petrine Ministry exercised from the Vatican.

The striking feature of this book is not its inclusion of black and white photos of the Ḥabäša monks and nuns who have kept the life of Mother Walatta Petros alive till date. Nor is this book special because it uniquely opens up Ethiopian non-Catholic Christianity. But by going beyond the *gädl*, precisely, in its representation of repressed desire turning queer in monasteries, shoved under the carpet by the likes of Cardinal Robert Sarah (b. 1945) that Wendy Laura Belcher and Michael Kleiner earn their credentials as experts in Ḥabäša studies.

What Simone de Beauvoir did for European feminism; what Betty Friedan did for American feminism; Wendy Laura Belcher does through her translation of the *Gädlä Wälättä Petros* by Galawdewos, for African feminism. More accurately, Mother Walatta Petros did the actual feminist spadework in the Ethiopia of her times, but without this book, that cultural work would have gone unnoticed. Now, in late April 2020 amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in India, I am moved by this biography, and I am convinced that no matter how tough our external lives be; God journeys with us forevermore. Thank you, Wendy Laura Belcher, for your hard academic work in introducing to us, Mother Walatta Petros.

Mother Walatta Petros, while fending off the Jesuits; ironically appears to be more of a Jesuit than any member of the Society of Jesus.

Subhasis Chattopadhyay