

BOOK REVIEWS

compiled by Mary Plumb

In Search of Destiny: Biography, History & Culture as Told through Vedic Astrology

by **Edith Hathaway**, Vintage Vedic Press, San Diego, CA, 2012.

Softcover— \$29.95—544 pp. (ISBN 978-0615544472)

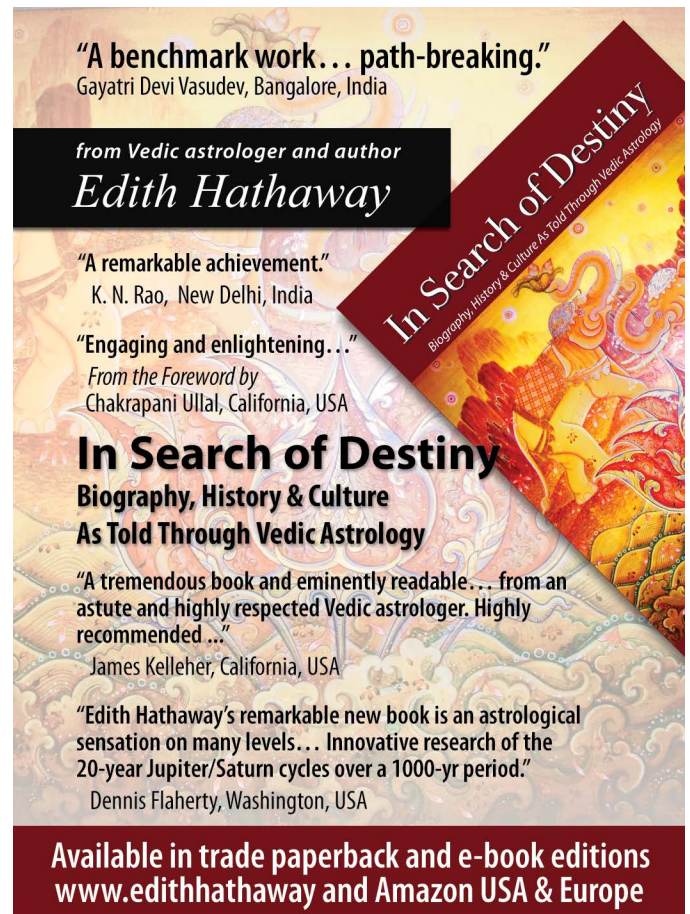
(Also available as a Kindle Amazon e-book, \$22.95, ISBN 978-1-62345-443-2).

Available from: www.edithhathaway.com or Amazon USA or Europe.

In Search of Destiny by Edith Hathaway is one of the most outstanding books on Vedic astrology to come out of the West in recent times. Biographies of notable figures, selected from all walks of life, are presented in their historical, political, and sociocultural grandeur. The author's inclusion of the larger collective destiny at work adds even greater clarity and depth to the individual biographies.

Full disclosure: I worked on this book in the last year before its publication in April 2012. As someone sitting across the continents, providing editorial assistance on astrological points and Sanskrit terms, this reviewer is a witness to the painstaking effort the author has put into preparing the manuscript. The same effort is visible in the book's clean and highly readable format. With North and South Indian charts side by side for each biography, this presentation has been able to remove the North–South divide, since most Vedic astrology books up to now have used either North or South Indian charts, but not both.

The author combines technical and nontechnical material quite deftly. A layperson would enjoy delving into this book, a novice would learn immensely from it, and an experienced astrologer would delight in the depth of its content. Who would not like to understand why great men like Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Einstein, John F. Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, Jr. did what they did under the influence of their stars? The author can take pride in presenting 12 notable women (and 19 men) as her biographical subjects. Most studies of Vedic astrology, at least among books published in India, include few women — probably because women authors on the subject are rare.



The book is of particular interest to global readers because it contains a clear introduction to and exposition of Vedic philosophy and astrology. Among the 31 biographies in an international spectrum, five are of the illustrious sons and daughters of India. Organized by Ascendant sign, there are four to five biographical subjects per Ascendant. The book covers only seven Ascendants, from Aries to Libra. This leaves you eager for the remaining five to be included in the second volume, which is expected to be published in a few years.

Anyone who is interested in learning about the outstanding characteristics of various Ascendants will find this book as powerful and instructive as the epochal book on Sun signs by Linda Goodman, minus the frivolities. With a full 12-page index (in the paperback version only) and an exhaustive glossary, the book becomes a very good reference tool, also including 12 review questions at the end of each chapter in the true *guru-shishya parampara*, i.e., teacher–student tradition.

Trained originally in Western tropical astrology, the author has a strong grasp of Vedic astrology as well. And while she is deeply respectful of the knowledge and traditions of Vedic astrology, with this book she brings a real freshness to the plethora of books on Vedic astrology written by Indians. Her treatment of planetary transits and eclipses at the time of specific events shows an uncanny eye for detail. Her use of stationary retrogression of planets at the time of crucial events is nothing short of brilliant. Her thought process is original, her approach unique, and her research scrupulous.

One of her most innovative ideas is contained in the opening chapter, where she presents 1,000 years of history and prognostication starting from 1405 C.E. Her research of the 20-year Jupiter–Saturn conjunction cycles in the various elements (fire, earth, air, and water) carries a good sampling of momentous events and inventions in human history, and provides a unique way to view both historical developments and the lives of individuals who are influenced by this conjunction.

Chapter 2, “Introduction to Vedic Astrology and Philosophy,” prepares a new student to savor the rich texture of the book’s narrative. This chapter has everything from significations of planets to signs, houses, navamshas, and nakshatras. In short, it is like a rapid primer for the basics of Vedic astrology, which are presented, however, in a style that is not overly simplified.

There are very few books dealing with biographies astrologically, at least in the realm of Vedic astrology, and this reviewer has not come across any other book, written by either an Indian or a Westerner, that comes anywhere close to this one in its breadth, depth, and sensitive and meticulous research.

Reviewed by Vinay Aditya (New Delhi, India), Vedic astrologer, author, teacher, and Sanskrit scholar

(Editor’s Note: This review appeared in a slightly shorter version in the November 2012 issue of Modern Astrology magazine, published in Bangalore, India. It is reprinted here with the kind permission of the reviewer.)

