

INDIAN SKEPTIC

No. 01/07

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 - *Kashmiriyat* Revisited
 - The ‘*Khap*’ Problem and a Scientific Solution
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 - Book Review: *Rationalist Speaks...*

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*It shall be the duty
of every citizen of
India -*

*to develop the
scientific temper,
humanism and the
spirit of inquiry and
reform*

*(Article 51A (h) Part IVA -
Fundamental Duties,
Constitution of India)*

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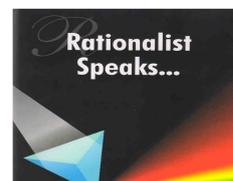
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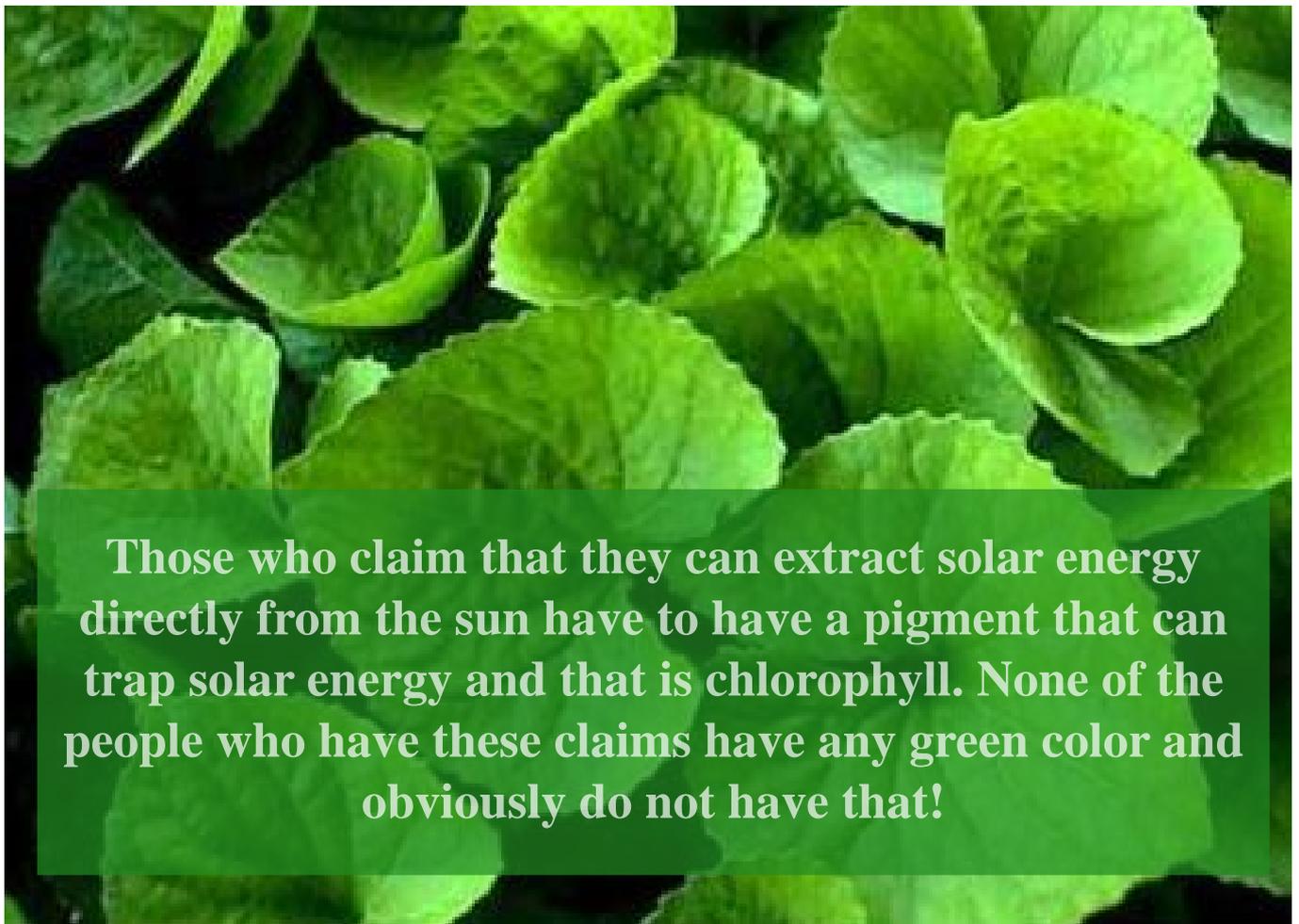
Beyond Bodily Needs

Narendra Nayak

Now with the recent claimants of people living without food and water it has become very necessary to examine the issues that have been raised and particularly the methods used to verify the claims of these people. There is this man from Kerala who claims to have extracted energy from the sun by staring at it and converting it for the energy needed to keep his bodily processes going on. There is this man from Gujarat who claims to have been blessed by a goddess who pours something down his throat and hence he does not need any food or water. He also claims to have lived for seven decades without these!

These recent reports have provided the

much needed threads to cling to the Hindutwavadi gang. Their illusions have been recently dashed by scandal after scandal and they had been in desperate search for new icons and they have been provided by these new idols proclaiming that they can live without food and water. It is not that these claims are new! We have been hearing of these since time immemorial like the ancient sages living on air for thousands of years and such. But, till today we have not seen one! Those who are around make desperate attempts to hide their age by dyeing their hirsute appendages and wearing wigs to hide their bald patches! We have the sterling examples of the contortionist, the pilot



Those who claim that they can extract solar energy directly from the sun have to have a pigment that can trap solar energy and that is chlorophyll. None of the people who have these claims have any green color and obviously do not have that!

much needed threads to cling to the Hindutwavadi gang. Their illusions have been recently dashed by scandal after scandal and they had been in desperate search for new icons and they have been provided by these new idols proclaiming that they can live without food and water. It is not that these claims are new! We have been hearing of these since time immemorial like the ancient sages living on air for thousands of years and such. But, till today we have not seen one! Those who are around make desperate attempts to hide their age by dyeing their hirsute appendages and wearing wigs to hide their bald patches! We have the sterling examples of the contortionist, the pilot turned Baba, the afro wigged Puttapparthi guy and innumerable such examples. The squeaky voiced who patented breathing has a few carefully preserved strands of gray in his mane and beard!

Let us take a look at why one cannot live without food or/and convert solar energy to meet the energy requirement of the body. There is no method by which solar energy can be converted into carbohydrate in animals and that is why we are dependent on the solar energy converted into carbohydrate by the plants and organisms which can do that. Those which do that have to have a pigment that can trap solar energy and that is chlorophyll. None of the people who have these claims have any green color and obviously do not have that! Even assuming that they have it they would have to spend all their day in the sunlight to conserve enough of the energy for the dark hours! How does one store that? The most efficient form for storage of energy is fat which can give energy of 9 kcals/gram. Assuming a minimum energy need of at least 50 kcals/hour, for the dark hours one needs 600 kilocalories of energy which would need the storage of at least 65 grams of fat between the sunlight and dark hours! There is no known metabolic process which can convert sunlight into that in any animal! Again, the process of converting sunlight into any form of energy containing compound is a very long

requires lot of surface area and exposure to sunlight. None of these people can show any prolonged exposure to sunlight.

The body would also need to convert atmospheric nitrogen into protein for the build up and repair of the tissues which break down and nitrogen fixation is a very energy dependent process. That is why all animals depend on nitrogen containing compounds derived from dietary sources. Again minerals, vitamins and so many other compounds have to be from the diet and diet alone. To say that the human body can run without any of these is like a car can be run without any petrol, lubricants, coolant and engine oil. Any one who has a modicum of common sense will understand that it is not possible to do that! If one claims that the stored energy in the body can serve as the source of energy, the stored energy will have to come from fat and for a person who claims to have lived for several decades without any food it is impossible to have any stored fat which can meet their energy needs.

It is obvious that the people making these claims of living without food and water are charlatans and the investigators are either hand in glove with them or are so gullible that they are not making the proper efforts to investigate. There are many reports of investigating the claims of the breatharians. While we have the breatharians in the west, we have the solarrians and the yogarians here. While their western counterparts have claims of surviving on air, our home grown ones have the omnipresent sun god to fall back upon or the mysterious magical mental powers of the east- yoga! There are claims of yogis thousands of years old with mind over matter powers. But, the only thing is that they are not condescending to come out of their mysterious abodes in the remote regions of the Himalayas! A few of them who do come out get corrupted by the materialistic world and pass away like normal people like us!

Let us try to understand why the so called investigators are a gullible lot- firstly they

are overawed by the claims of these so called yogis and look upon them with reverence. They dare not question them or watch them closely. About 6 years back I was told about one such yogi who had lived for 60 days underground without food, water and air. When I proposed that we get him tested the informant told me that he could arrange for an interview with him. When I told him, I who had spent 90 days without food, air and water did not need to interview such a person. Then he told me that I should do that and prove it to him. I informed him that he could interview me! He was furious at that. Then I had to tell him that the same standards which are applied to his guru should be applicable to me too. Then I asked him whether his guru's heart was functioning. He said yes. Then I told him that I could stop mine at will. I told him the check my pulse and heart beat and assured me that they were normal. Then I went into a 'yogic trance' before which I asked him to check my heart beat and pulse after 30 seconds. He did that and announced that they had stopped! After that I opened my eyes and asked him to check them again. He said they were restored. He asked me how I did that and I told him that my yoga was greater than his gurus. He had no reply! A few years later I repeated the same trick for a serial called as medicine me filmed by BBC channel 4. This time I had to take off my shirt and was examined by two doctors who were specialists in tropical medicine and they too were surprised.

There was such a scam which happened in Karnataka many years back. There was a teenager who was supposedly living without consuming any food. That was reported in the press and a cutting was sent by some one to the then prime minister of India who asked the govt. of Karnataka to investigate the same. Those were the days of food shortages and Nehru wanted this technique to be studied. The girl was admitted to the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences at Bangalore and kept under close observation. For a fortnight she was observed and she was not

eating anything! She was drinking water only. There was no fall in her weight and it looked like she could live without affecting her health without consuming any food! Her mother was staying with her and bringing a container of food. When queried she said that it was her food and her daughter was not eating anything and she was under close observation. Those were the days when there were no CC TV cameras and only humans could keep watch! She was under observation 24 hours of the day. The doctors were amazed. There was no apparent explanation and for that! But, it was observed later that the girl's mother would hide food behind the ventilator in the toilet! The 'fasting' girl would go to the toilet eat fast and had not been caught as no one expects that some one would eat in the toilet of all the places! So, the secret was out. The secrets of all these people who claim to survive without food will be out if properly investigated.

How can people fast for long periods without suffering from problems? When one does not consume any food the nutritional needs of the body are met by the ketone bodies formed in the liver from the free fatty acids mobilized from the adipose tissue. These are also excreted in the urine and one loses salt along with them. So, the experienced fasters take measures to see that the depletion of salt does not take place. So, they take care to see that plenty of liquids are consumed and also salt. The seasoned veteran of fasts Gandhi used to do that. During his fasting he used to drink plenty of water with salt and lemon juice added. That could take care of the immediate problems that could arise for the first few days due to fasting. Longer fasts could cause more complications and failing health would ensure early negotiations to stop them.

So, what could be the reasons for such claim? - The obvious one would be name and fame for the claimant. What is more covert is the publicity for the alleged investigators and the secret agenda of the Hindutwa brigade- our ancients had

wonderful knowledge by which they could do things which the decadent west could not even dream of! The claims of NASA, the DRDO etc are all aimed at that. We don't need all these agencies to investigate these claims just hand over the claimant to us and give us the free hand to investigate and the truth will be out in a week's time. If

that is tried we can expect excuses like the atheists negative energy affecting the intervention by their gods etc. Here again care should be taken to search all belongings and access should be totally denied to all suspected of helping them and so on. Any takers?

BS

People go to church as they go to a tavern, in order to stupefy themselves, to forget their misery, to see themselves in their imagination, for a few minutes at least, free and happy, as happy as others, the well-to-do people. Give them a human existence, and they will never go into a tavern or a church. And it is only the social Revolution than can and will give them such an existence.

Michael Bakunin

A circular Letter to My Friends in Italy, (October 1871)

Kashmiriyat Revisited

Ram Puniyani

This 18th June, Friday (2010), nearly thousands of Kashmiri pandits, including women and children, visited the temple of Mata Kheer Bhavani in Tullamula, 20 Kilometers from Shrinagar. It was the sacred day of Zyeshtha Ashthami. Most of the Pandits were visiting the valley after nearly 20 years, since the time they left Kashmir due to various reasons like the separatist militancy and the way whole thing was handled by authorities. The spiritual zest to worship the Goddess Ragnya Devi, to whom this temple is dedicated, was in the air. There was a big congregation of local Muslims who greeted the visiting pandits with cold drinks and Kheer (a dessert made of milk and rice). The Kashmir CM Omar Abdullah and many other Kashmir Ministers also turned up



for this emotional occasion marked by reunion with many a pandits.

The local Muslims and the ministers said that all concerned should work for return of Pandits to the valley, as Kashmiiryat is incomplete without the pandits, who are integral part of the Kashmir's culture and life. Many a pandits also promised to work towards such a goal, to over come the divides created by the militant and political forces. The return of pandits to the valley has already begun, though it is a trickle at the moment.

Kashmir issue has been seen by the two neighbors, Pakistan and India, more as an issue of 'real estate' only. Kashmir has been treated as the territory which has to be won over by any means. The Government of Pakistan has regularly used 'Kashmir' issue to retain their hold on the political power in Kashmir, while in India, for far too long the central Government ignored the aspirations of the local population. In this whole scenario the real essence of Kashmir, Kashmiriyat got undermined and the issue started being presented as a communal one and as the site of dispute between two neighboring countries.



Kheer Bhavani Temple- a night view

The soul of Kashmir's culture has been a thick interaction between different religious traditions, teachings of Buddha, Vedanta, and Sufi tradition of Islam. Kashmir was the place where Buddhism spread far and wide and most of the population, except the upper caste embraced Buddhism. With attacks on Buddhism in 8th Century the tide turned. Later many Sufis came to Kashmir and preached their version of Islam. The most famous of them has been Nooruddin Noorani, popularly known as Nund Rishi. He was influenced by Lal Dedh, who herself was influenced by the earlier Sufis. Her mystical verses have a Shaivite form. Today both Hindus and Muslims regard her as their own. Like the great Bhakti saint, Kabir, there is a story that when she died her body turned into a heap of flowers, half of which were consigned to flames by Hindus, while the remaining half was buried by Muslims.

Nund Rishi wrote in appreciation of Lal Dedh, about her syncretic spiritual values which taught that one should not differentiate between a Hindu and a Muslim, one should realize one's own self and that's what God is. On similar lines Nund Rishi focused on purification of soul. He bitterly criticized Mullahs and Brahmins whose focus is more on rituals than on spirituality and morality of the religions. Nund Rishi's was a sort of mass movement in Kashmir, which affected many Kashmiris and they embraced Islam as taught by him.

Such a rich heritage has come under the threat from last three decades in particular. The vexed Kashmir issue got the communal slant due to the intrusion of Al Qaeda type elements, once their work of driving away Russian forces from Afghanistan was over. The Kashmiri militancy assumed different form during the decades of 1990s, it was communalized during this period. Amongst many factors contributing to worsening of Kashmir situation, one was the worsening communal scenario in India in the decade of 80's which added fuel to the fire of

terrorism in Kashmir. Meanwhile, a communal angle was being given to the harmony prevalent between Kashmiri pandits and the local Muslim population. Terrorists took advantage of that distortion.

Due to the local dissatisfaction of people, their feeling of alienation, the evil designs of the Pakistan Mullah-Military complex; totally backed by US imperialist goals, the militancy changed its tune and Kashmiri pandits started being targeted. The matters became worse off due to the policies of Jagmohan, who was Governor of the state. While the delegation of Kashmir people was preparing to call upon pandits to request them not to leave the valley, the state Governor provided them the transport to leave the valley. Most local leaders of Muslim community opposed the move of sending pandits away from Kashmir, but encouraged by Jagmohan, the Pandits left the valley. Essentially a problem between two neighboring countries assumed a communal color.

The condition of pandits, living in refugee camps has been quiet pitiable and barring few of them, most of them had to face immense suffering. Surely apart from pandits many a Kashmiri Muslims also had to leave the valley due to the twin attack from the terrorist groups and high handedness of the Indian military, which behaved more like an occupation army. Its heavy presence coupled with long years of stay in the valley totally distorted the civic life in Kashmir. The communal forces in India selectively harped on the plight of Kashmiri pandits while the other victims of Kashmir violence were totally left out of their scheme of propaganda. The tragedy is that while communal forces kept talking of the plight of pandits, during six years of BJP led NDA rule hardly anything different was done for the victims of militancy, and the lop sided policies of the leadership, dominated by the policies of central Government continued.

The present developments are very healthy one. While still some left over of militant's

actions and more of the imprint of army highhandedness are still visible, it seems with democratization process increasing, with local political leadership coming out to express the Kashmiri people's aspirations, and partly also due to the change in the policies of US, peace seems to be slowly retuning to Kashmir. This Kheer Temple congregation is a signal of revival of the spirit of Kashmiriyat, the heart and souls of Kashmir. One hopes and wishes this spirit will strengthen in times to come, aspirations of people of Kashmir will be expressed and implemented through the

democratically elected Governments of Kashmir and India-Pakistan are able to cultivate the friendly relations, which is the best guarantee for peace in the region.

BS

Dr Ram Puniyani was Professor of Biomedical Engineering at IIT Mumbai. Currently he is associated with various secular initiatives. His website - www.pluralindia.com

Political rights do not exist because they have been legally set down on a piece of paper, but only when they have become the ingrown habits of a people, and when any attempt to impair them will meet with the violent resistance of the populace. Where this is not the case, there is no help in any parliamentary opposition or any Platonic appeals to the constitution.

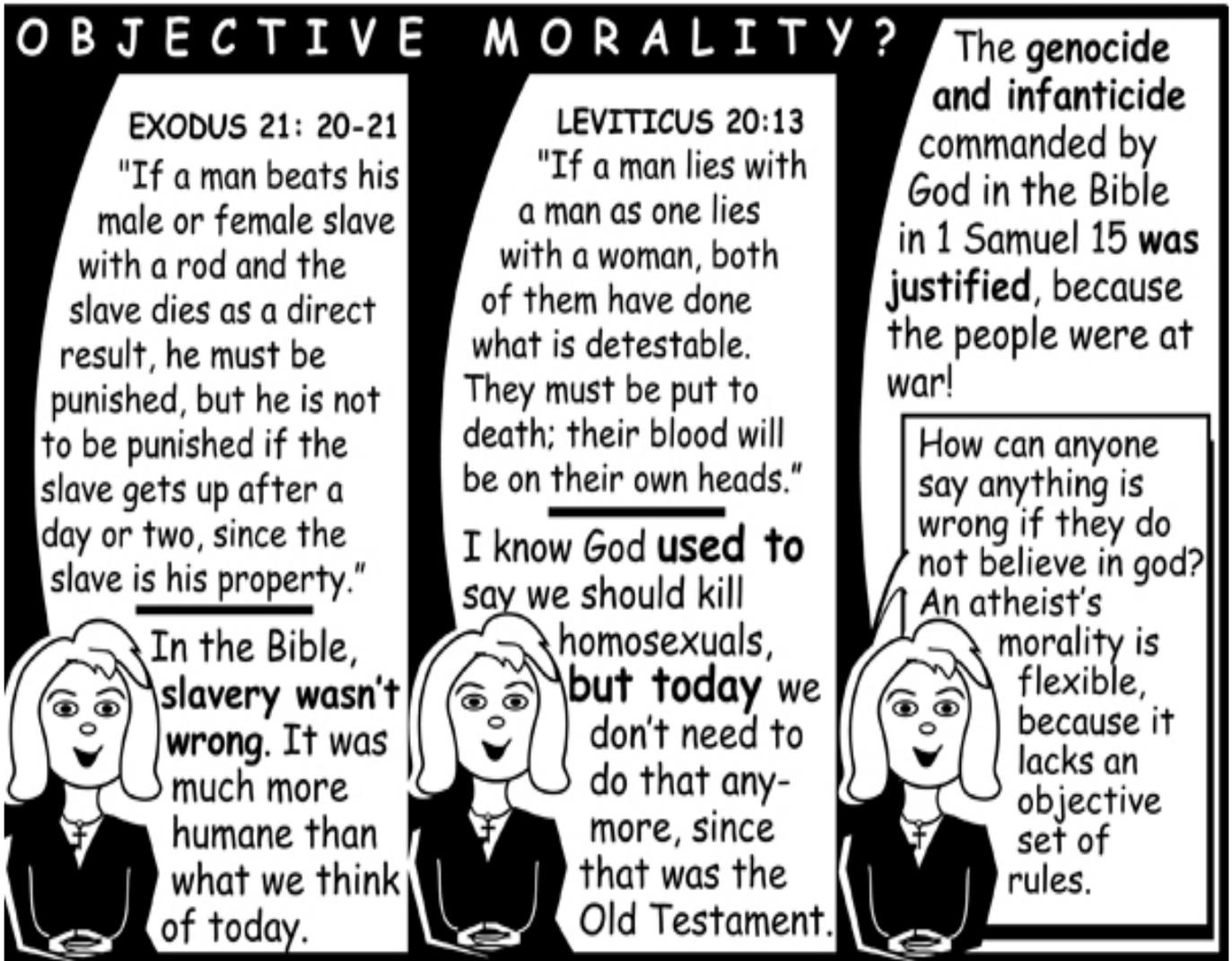
Rudolf Rucker

Anarcho-Syndicalism, (1929)

Objective Morality!

ATHEIST EVE

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Tracie Harris is a graphic designer in Austin, Texas, US. According to the website, <http://www.atheist-community.org/>, "her long, slow recovery from a rabid fundamentalist upbringing led her to the creation of *Atheist Eve*".

Tracie Harris has been publishing *Atheist Eve* since 1 October 2004 and all her earlier works are archived at: <http://www.atheist-community.org/atheisteve/>. *Atheist Eve* is reproduced by *Indian Skeptic* with the author's permission.

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The 'Khap' Problem and a Scientific Solution

M N Keshava Rao

The article by Dr. Punyani (Arrested Social Transformation – Khap Panchayats Asserting Caste-Gender Hierarchy – Indian Skeptic, May 2010) draws the attention of all rationalists to a serious problem of the caste-ridden societies in India, and elsewhere. Certain clarifications and deeper analyses are necessary to understand the seriousness of this huge malady, and to work towards a remedy. This 'caste+gothra' restriction is not merely a 'caste' malady, and it is not confined to Khaps. It has been making most people in India and some parts of Asia suffer for a very long time, but has not been seriously investigated. The so-called 'Honour Killings' prevalent in India, and even amongst Indian diasporas in Canada and UK, is also a closely related problem. The child- marriage atrocities, dowry crimes, and the severe stagnation of social progress of the huge Indian tribal populations also are due to the same causes.

I present here a few points, on the historical, biological, anthropological, and social aspects of this huge problem, gathered from a few of my kannada articles published elsewhere.

While the Caste system restricts marriages outside a caste group, the Gothra system restricts marriages inside the gothra group. The Gothra custom had its origin in discouraging marriages between boys and girls, who are very closely related to each other by genes, or the so-called 'blood



' relations, and in the extreme cases even amounting to incest. As a continuation of such a healthy trend, small clans of early human settlements initiated the earlier incest taboos. As the settlements grew into larger social groups (or societies), the possibility of further expansion of social, economic and political power circles of families may have encouraged marriages away from one's own small village.

Biologically, for millions of years, the evolution has been producing (in serial and branching patterns) better and better sociably organized species, with increasing intelligence necessary to manage that sociability. That is how, the most wonderful, beautiful, and efficient nature that we see all around has been built all along. For millions of years, evolution has

promoted genetic variety, the prime-mover of bio-diversity, as a progressive trend. The most important super strategy, for achieving this super task, has been the increasing of genetic variety in all reproductive processes by means of 'more and freer mate selection' behaviours. This strategy has given rise to: (1) stability and strength within the species and, (2) strangely enough to the origins of newer species also.

Primal behavioural characteristics of many species of birds and animals have been progressively strengthened to avoid mating within closer genetic circles. Homo sapiens, learning from and improving on their primate parents, adopted wider mobility and adapted to more population-wise expansive exchange of genes and, thereby achieved much higher stability of the species. This theory is substantiated by its population growth to more than thousands of times to that of the primates. Six billion humans to around one-quarter million chimpanzees are the present statistics. This unprecedented growth acceleration became possible by newer

'mobility' on the hardware side and, by higher 'sociability' on the software (behavioural) side.

Anthropologically, the natural trends developed towards monogamy, and towards preference for selecting mates away from the immediate family, or clan, or nearby regions. The early human settlements achieved not only healthier and more stable physiology through genetic variety, but also built the foundations of social stability to go towards the goal of free and open gregarious behaviour leading to the stages of (friendship or) fraternity, equality, and liberty, which we now have termed as democracy. Further, such adaptations were conducive to the prime biological goal of population increase of the newly emerging species. Almost all familial and societal behaviour patterns of present day humans can be traced back to the developments that took place in reaction to the inter-clan clash and cooperation struggles during that earlier era.

But this natural and social development was seriously attacked by the corruptive



conservatism due to religious and caste-based segregations. So the availability of eligible mates was very much curtailed. Thus, the religions and castes not only arrested the natural and beneficial processes by preventing free selection of socially optimum mates, but also forced very unhealthy practices like polygamy, child marriages, marriages amongst close relations, et cetera.

These feudalistic anti-social systems of caste and class divisions, for their own notorious reasons, reduced inter-marriage groups to fragments thus corrupting the older natural, and hence healthier, marriage tendencies. It is this fragmentation that gave rise to the present taboos that are really aberrations of the older Gothra origins.. Religions, blinded by their inherent male superiority dogmas, ignored the entire genetic contribution of the female, while defining the so called gothra system. This belief of the ancients is most probably based on the (then newly emergent) superficial knowledge of agriculture, (Bija-Vriksha-Nyaya', or 'Seed-to Tree Analogy'); that the female plays no role other than that of mother earth for the plants. The feudal concepts of 'Vamsha' also were based on this ignorance. Polygamy was practiced to extreme and senseless levels because of the same ignorance. Even when their knowledge of biology improved with the practice of rearing animals, the old stupid notion did not change, as it had been established as an irrevocable, sacred, religious truth.

Hindu religious traditions have played (and are still playing) havoc in the name of such corrupted Gothra customs, much more so in almost all castes of South India,. Here, marriages have been encouraged between close relatives, as long as Gothras are different. A boy can marry his sister's son. A brother allows his son or daughter to marry the children of his sister, though not of his brother. In Islam, even paternal 'first-cousin marriages' are approved. Such close marriages have been tolerated even by the so called educated persons, because



the prevalent caste and class systems have reduced heavily the availability of eligible grooms.

Science oriented rational solutions are the only remedies that can cut across such age-old, deep rooted maladies. Political, social, or economic solutions are merely reformatory and cannot root out any of the established unhealthy practices in religious societies.

Towards a solution, we must completely reject all caste, religious, and racial taboos and, of course, all the pseudo-scientific Gothra taboos, and encourage marriage between genetically unrelated man and woman having no genetic relations for at least three generations on either parental or maternal side. If we cannot achieve this essential target, our constitutional democracy is meaningless, and all our knowledge of science is useless.

BS

Dr M N Keshava Rao was a Computer Scientist with CSIR . A well-known writer in Kannada, he is the treasurer of Bangalore Vicharvadi Sangha (Bangalore Rationalist Association)

Do We Need God Or Religion To Be Good?

Prabhakar Kamath

1. The Original Intent Of Religion And God

The original intent of Hinduism (Brahmanism) was to bring Law and Order into the lawless and chaotic society. That is why religion was known as Dharma -that which holds. The original purpose of creating various gods was to fulfill one's desires and protect one from evils, both

some of which are contradictory to each other, could be found in Hinduism. Hindu religionists try to explain away this nebulous feature of Hinduism by uttering parrot-like, "Hinduism is a way of life." This mindless utterance seems to suggest that other religions are not a way of life. The fact is all religions are more or less a way of life.

I expect to pass through this world but once. Any good thing, therefore, that I can do or any kindness I can show to any fellow human being let me do it now. Let me not defer nor neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.

Stephen Grellet.

tangible (wicked people) and intangible (vagaries of nature). Gradually vested interests took over the religion, and it became a big business. This is consistent with Law of Solutions: All noble solutions for societal problems sooner or later become problems themselves.

2. All Religions Are A Way Of Life

Hinduism evolved into what it is today by incorporating a wide array of belief systems, while it maintained the elitism of Brahmins within that amorphous entity. So today a wide spectrum of belief systems,

3. Two Broad Aspects Of Hinduism: Mindful And Mindless

The Hindu way of life has two broad aspects: Mindful and mindless. The mindful part of Hinduism consists of moral values and noble virtues, which guide people's behavior towards others in the society. This is the true aspect of Hindu Dharma. These morals and virtues are timeless and relevant to all people in the world regardless of their beliefs. Since there is no money to be made by this aspect of Hinduism, it has become an orphan. Neglect of moral values and noble virtues

is evident in the antisocial and corrupt behavior of most Hindu leaders in power in India today.

Most of today's Hinduism consists of mindless rituals and traditions, which have absolutely no relevance to the modern times. These rituals evolved over the centuries, often due to misinterpretation of scriptures, and were propagated for financial gains. Yajnas, Poojas, Abhishekas, astrological predictions and a thousand other profit-motivated superstitions have become hallmarks of today's Hinduism. This aspect of Hinduism is thriving today, as there is a lot of money to be made by means of these shenanigans. To the vast majority of Hindus, this is Hindu Dharma.

4. Moral Values

The moral values prevent us from harming others in the society. These values arise from our conscience, which represents the values our parents put in us. These values basically tell us: You shall not be a bad person! Here is a short list:

1. Do not steal.
2. Do not lie.
3. Do not hurt.
4. Do not betray.

How do we feel when we violate our own moral values? We feel guilty. Guilt is the function of conscience. Readers could add their own pet moral values to this list.

5. Noble Virtues

Noble virtues consist of those behaviors that encourage us to be helpful to others in the society. These values basically tell us: You shall be a good person !

1. Empathy
2. Generosity
3. Forgiveness
4. Humility
5. Kindness
6. Gracefulness
7. Fearlessness

Every single reader of this article is smart enough to know what these virtues stand for. How do we feel when we practice these virtues? Well, we feel good about ourselves.

6. We Don't Need God Or Religion To Be Good

If one makes a list of these moral values and noble virtues and practices them in his daily life, s/he does not need religion, god, tradition, rituals, fasting, meditation, praying, Swamis, Babas, Gurus, magic, ash, lingam and other nonsensical stuff 99% of Hindu religion is made up of.

One simple way of inculcating noble virtues is to post writings related to them where one could read them often. For example I have the following statement on the wall where I can see it when I talk on phone. This has helped me to make conscious decision to help those who call me asking for my help:

I expect to pass through this world but once. Any good thing, therefore, that I can do or any kindness I can show to any fellow human being let me do it now. Let me not defer nor neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again. - Stephen Grellet.

Now give me one valid reason why any moral and virtuous man or woman might need a religion or god? Now let us review a few facts why we should reject the mindless part of religion.

7. Temple-Casino Complexes

Today, thousands of glittering temples in India and abroad have become like Las Vegas casinos attracting millions of mindless devotees seeking fulfillment of their desires and protection from evil. The temple of Tirupati is the best-known temple-casino complex in India. Every year new temple-casino complexes are rising all over India. The ostentatious Swami Narayan Temple in New Delhi is a prime example. Bewildered by Brahmanic charm and trappings, Hindus throng to these temple-

-casinos and keep gambling away their wealth in mindless rituals hoping against hope that they would someday hit a jackpot, but getting nothing in return. The donation box you see in front of the sanctum sanctorum of every temple is like a slot machine.

There are all kinds of Entertainment Shows in this Las Vegas-like landscape: Babas perform magic shows; Swamis perform sex shows; Yogis perform 70-year starvation shows; freaks perform hanging-by-skin-on-chariot shows, charlatans perform walk-on-fire shows, prostitutes perform dance shows, and the like. In fact the list of freak shows, such as Kumbh Mela, Amar Nath Yatras, bathing in Ganga, procession of ash-smeared naked Sadhus and the like, is very long indeed. Who are the 'enforcers' of this wonderland of religion? Well, you guessed it right: RSS, Sri Ram Sene, Shiv Sena, Bajrang Dal, and other assorted hire-for-riot

men whose only 'virtue' is hate-mongering of other religions. Really, there is absolutely no difference between today's Hinduism and Las Vegas of bygone days when the Mafia controlled the casinos. Now Las Vegas is absolutely honest about the whole shenanigan and Hinduism is still run by hypocritical Brahmanic Mafia, often supported by the government itself, as is the case in Karnataka.

Tell me, why would anyone want to be part of this part of Hindu religion?



Dr Prabhakar Kamath has been a psychiatrist in the U. S. since 1974. Graduated from Bangalore Medical College in 1969, he came to the U. S. in 1970 and obtained his training in psychiatry at Yale University

When man tries to stand on his own legs, and become a realist he shall have to throw the faith aside, and to face manfully all the distress, trouble, in which the circumstances may throw him. That is exactly my state of affairs. It is not my vanity, my friends. It is my mode of thinking that has made me an atheist.

Bhagat Singh

Why I am an Atheist (1931)

From the President of FIRA

Narendra Nayak

Rationalist Movement in Bihar

As a part of building up the movement all over the country we have been encouraging and catalysing the formation of rationalist humanist organisations all over the country as well as elsewhere. A part of this is the effort to build up the movement in Bihar. The same is going to be tried in Uttar Pradesh next.

Bihar is one of the largest states in India and one of the most backward too. This state is well known for its intellectual achievements right from the time of Buddha. Mohandas Karmachand Gandhi started his freedom struggle from Motihari in this state. One of the most well known movements of the post independent India against the authoritarianism of Indira Gandhi was started by Jaya Prakash Narayan who was a Bihari. Despite this progressive history, Bihar has become a state riddled with superstitions and obscurantism.

For the past five years we have been associated with running a campaign in Bihar to inculcate scientific temper among people. It all started with a Minister of State for Science and Technology of the Central Government and the MP from Navada, Sanjay Paswan honoring tantriks at a public ceremony. His claim was that these people have extraordinary powers and they can do things like walking on embers, catching snakes with bare hands etc and so need to be honored for those achievements. The director of the Patna planetarium had invited Premanand to his



institution to conduct a training program to debunk these claims. During this program he had met Prof. S.P.Verma of the Science for Society, Bihar and he had invited Premanand to conduct this program for his organisation. This was for the Year of Science Awareness program. The next June, Premanand wanted me to come with him for that. That was a training program in which people from each of the districts of Bihar had participated. Prof. Verma wanted to follow that up with a tour of Bihar to visit each of the districts and conduct programs there. By that time Premanand was not very well and he wanted me to do that by myself and that was the beginning of this relationship with this organisation. They have a presence in each of the districts of this state and a well knit network of workers, sympathisers and good organisers. They are also members of the NCSTC network and conduct the children's science congress each year at the state and district levels. This organisation, Network for Science and Technology

Communication, a section of the Department of science and Technology under the Ministry of Human Resource Development has been a major catalyst for the development of our movement in the country by sponsoring a number of miracle exposure training workshops which have been conducted by Premanand and now by me during which we have had the opportunity of meeting and training hundreds of activists many of who have later on joined the movement.

Though the year of Scientific Awareness was over, the relationship continued and the movement grew. We had a number of programs going on with funding from various sources and some times even from personal funds. That led to the identification of a number of activists, organisers and those interested in the movement. We all felt the need for an organisation which can and should take up issues related to scientific temper without fear or favour. The existing organisational set up had a few problems with projecting very vehement stands on many issues as it conducts a variety of activities of various

types involving a large number of people. Taking radical stands on issues would alienate some of them and result in affectint these activities. The proposal to start such an organisation had been always discussed by us. This April we had a round of training programs covering almost all the districts of Bihar and we have identified some of the activists who could be involved in building up this movement. To organise them, a meeting was needed and the date for that was fixed as the 20th June.

On this date a meeting was held at the department of Chemistry at the Patna University. There were about 35 members from about 12 districts. Though the distribution was not uniform, the fact that this number attended was quite encouraging. The meeting was initiated by a discussion on the need for such an association and the ways to go about it. There was good participation from the members present who presented their view points and ideas. In the morning session it was decided that the formation of such an organisation was very much needed.



The post lunch session started with the discussions about the type of organisation to be started. It was decided to defer the decision of the type of legal entity to be formed until a larger and more representative body could be formed. So, it was decided to form an ad hoc committee and name it as Bihar Rationalist Forum. This organisation would work to strengthen the rationalist movement in Bihar by its various activities. The following were the resolutions discussed and passed:

1. To affiliate the organisation to FIRA.
2. To constitute committees for the following:
 - a. a panel of those who would demonstrate so called miracles and explain superstitions.
 - b. a panel of experts who would investigate and explain paranormal phenomena.
 - c. an academic panel of experts in various fields who could answer queries of the members about the paranormal.
3. It was also decided to conduct seminars, workshops, discussions to expand the horizons of knowledge of the members and also of those interested.
4. To bring more interested, committed and dedicated people into the movement and also to create a state wide network with

members in all the districts.

A managing committee was elected from among the members present. The ad hoc office bearers were also elected. The following is the list:

Ms. Seema Singh- president.
Mr. B.Suman- General Secretary
Mr. Umesh and mr. Munindra Jha Raushan-Secretaries.
Ms. Kirti- Vice president.
Ms.Poonam- treasurer
Prof.S.P.Verma was requested to the mentor and he readily agreed. The president of FIRA was invited to be the patron and that too was agreed upon.

The number of young people, women and activists gives us the hope that the movement will go forward in the right direction and address the target membership.

It was also decided that the next meeting of the ad hoc committee would be held at Hajipur in September and hosted by the president Ms.Seem Singh. The members present also contributed to the funds of this forum and the president also handed over the contribution on behalf of FIRA.

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**Love, not hope, is what helps us live. Truth, not faith,
is what sets us free.**

Andre Comte-Sponville

The Book of Atheist Spirituality (2008)



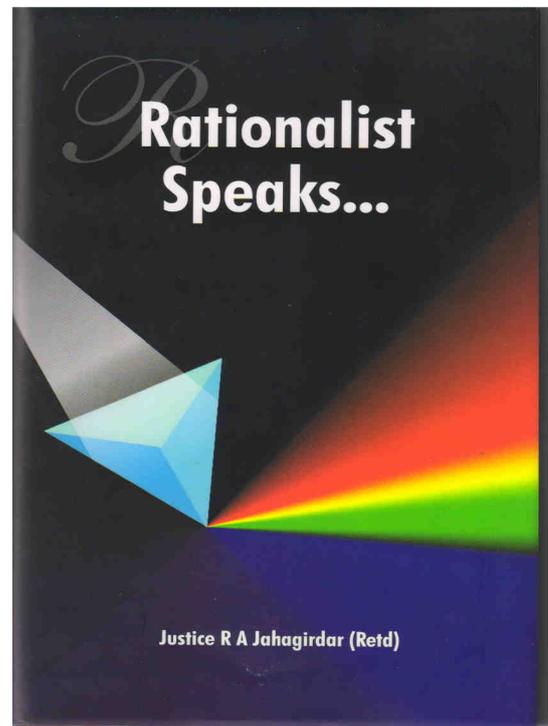
Sane Voice in the Maddening Crowd

Prabhakar Nanawaty

As brought out in the introduction to the book by Dr. Narendra Dabholkar, humanity is inundated by religiosity and the sane voice is almost unheard within the maddening din and clamour generated by irrationalism, fundamentalism, and religiosity. However the author Justice RA Jahagirdar (Retd) is not discouraged by the polity of government, media and social environment which are contributing to this madness at times verging towards fanaticism.

Rationalist Speaks... is an anthology of articles written by Justice RA Jahagirdar (Retd) on subjects like social progress, right to know, death sentence, controversial topics like Burkha, Talaq, polygamy, uniform civil code, biographies of eminent rationalists like RD Karve, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, H Narasimhaiah and many others. As a rationalist, the author takes us into threadbare details of the issues and makes us to realize that the issues under discussion have multifaceted dimensions. There are no straight answers to the issues involved. But considering the present circumstances, the solution suggested by the author appears to be rational and reasonable.

The author explains in lucid terms what rationalism means while addressing a



gathering of public school students. He refers to the definition by Rationalist Association of UK which defines Rationalism as ‘a mental attitude which unreservedly accepts the supremacy of Reason and aims at establishing a system of philosophy and ethics verifiable by experience independent of arbitrary assumptions or authority.’ According to him rationalism also aims at establishing a system of ethics verifiable by experience. So a scientist, being (almost) a rationalist discovers the truth for the benefit of humankind. Most of the articles in the

book have an undercurrent explaining various aspects of rationalism and scientific philosophy.

The very first article 'Rationalism and Social Progress' takes us to the various schools of thought about rationalism, tracing the historical aspects right from ancient Greek philosopher like Aristotle to Charles Darwin of 19th century. He emphasizes that how religion and superstitions went hand in hand suppressing the Reason throughout the known history. He illustrates the role played by Reason taking examples of Galileo, Copernicus, Edward Jenner, Charles Darwin etc. He refutes claims made by astrologers. He describes in nutshell about the charges made against rationalism like rationalism alone cannot solve all the material problems, rationalists lack imagination, lack morality, lack emotions etc. He argues against each charge. This article is an eye opener to any one who has the false image of rationalism.

The anthology contains the biographies of Buddha, Socrates, Galileo, Ingersoll, Annie Besant, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, James Stewart Mill, RD Karve, H Narasimhaiah, etc. The author is not interested in giving mundane biographical details; what he is interested in is their rationalist views, their courage to swim against the current of inequality, orthodoxy, inhuman treatment of women and downtrodden, opposition to basic social reforms and a negative attitude towards search for truth.

While describing Buddhism, the author mentions that 'Buddhism in one sense is not a religion. Every religion in the world has god or gods and believes in some super being. But Buddhism has none... Basically or essentially Buddhism is a guide to an individual though it encourages Sanghas.' Finally the author comments that different countries have different kinds of Buddhism. Why not one for India based upon Ambedkar's book on Buddhism?

The author quotes Will Durant while

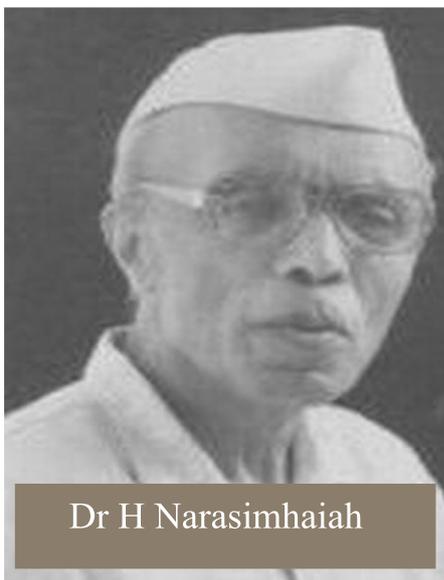
Rationalism is a mental attitude which unreservedly accepts the supremacy of Reason and aims at establishing a system of philosophy and ethics verifiable by experience independent of arbitrary assumptions or authority.

Rationalist Association,
United Kingdom

describing Socrates; "All in all he (Socrates) was fortunate; he lived without working; read without writing, taught without routine; drank without dizziness and dies before serenity without pain." Justice Jahagirdar tells us that Vidyasagar, in great mental agony once cried and said "Oh Hindu woman, why were you born in this wretched country?" On the wall of the office of H Narasimhaiah one could see these words of Einstein "Great spirits have always encountered violent opposition from mediocre minds". While commenting in the article 'Mill on Liberty' author advises the present generation of students, professors and politicians to read and remember the teachings and quotations of Mill in their daily personal and public life.

Raghunath Dhondo Karve, a pioneer in sex education in India and a hard core rationalist is a son of the legendary Dhondo Keshav Karve, the activist fighting for women education, widow marriage etc. It is surprising that this father and son duo is not much known outside Maharashtra. RD Karve was prosecuted number of times for the articles appeared in his Marathi magazine Samaj Swasthya where he used to write on topics like family planning, sex education, necessity of abortion, prostitution, sexual hygiene etc. RD Karve was also the editor of English magazine Reason, (from 1934 -1941) an official journal of Rationalist Association of India based in Mumbai. Author feels that it is unfortunate that no serious and in depth study of RD Karve 's writings has been made. RD Karve had left behind a wealth of writings and correspondence which display a keen interest in rationalism while handling the innumerable subjects dealt by him. In fact author feels that RD Karve is the only true heir to Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, a contemporary of Lokmanya Tilak and an editor of Marathi magazine 'Sudharak'.

Dr Hosur Narasimhaiah - a scientist, educationist and a rationalist – was good friend of the author. Author regrets that 'HN' confined his activities to Karnataka. If he had moved on the national scene, it would have benefited the cause of rationalism and scientific attitude throughout the country.



Dr H Narasimhaiah

As a studious scholar of Muslim religion and society, author has certain comments upon the issues like polygamy among Muslims, the tradition of Burkha, the method of divorce Talaq, Talaq.....There are several misconceptions about many marriages of Prophet Muhammad. If one goes strictly through the verses of Quran and interprets properly, one may find the verses are in fact pro monogamy. Prophet was famous for his honesty and fairness. Muhammad did not marry because of carnal desire. On the contrary he was very faithful to his first wife Khadija who supported him when he was mentally disturbed. Muhammad was grieved by her death. Author gives explanation of all his later marriages, many with war widows after death of Khadija with proper references. According to author the Burkha for Muslim women is not a religious mandate as claimed by the fundamentalist Mullas and Moulvis. Author refers to the social practices of all the Muslim countries and finds nowhere there is uniform practice of wearing Burkhas. Author then traces what Quran says about the dress code which Sura (Stanza) mentions what and other pro and anti writings on Burkha.

There are many qualms about the method of divorce followed by Muslim community; Talaq uttered even in one sitting acts as an irrevocable divorce; Talaq may be said on telephone, may be on computer internet chat too. This confusion has arisen because it is believed that in Islam marriage is a civil contract though it is regarded as sacred. Author emphasizes that the Quran is clear that triple Talaq in the same sitting is not permissible. Sura IV verse 35 clearly mentions that "if you fear a breach between them, appoint two arbiters, one from his family and the other from hers; if they wish for peace, God will cause their reconciliation. The author describes in detail the pros and cons of the Talaq and educates the reader about the facts.

The subjects like human rights, minority rights, are very dear to the author. His

articles on Minority Rights, Uniform civil Code and Article 370 are very thought provoking. He in fact says ‘the ultimate question whether civilization of earth have the moral maturity to accept the human person as the unit and measure of all things.’”

While discussing the corruption in India author comments that how this ancient India of Rishis and saints has become the most corrupt nation of the world. According to author “Right to know” in the broader sense is the right to acquire knowledge and no impediments should be placed in the way of that right. Censorship, banning the books, religious commands, Phatwas etc are some of the impediments. He deals in detail about the law relating to official secrets which has become regular feature of Government officials not to entertain information seekers and not to give any bit of information. Though the media manage to obtain information of their interest by some way or the other, the right to information as a statutory right is, however, important for the general public.

The author has a very high regard for Amnesty International, an organization fighting for justice to the innocent victims

at the international level. The author traces the history of this noble organization and praises the founder Peter Benson for the task he has accomplished.

As a retired Judge, the author is fully aware of the mindset of judges and as such he comments on fraudulent behaviour of some of the judges in the article “Judging the Judges”. Commission of inquiry is one more area where judges are once again questioned by the author about their fair deal and integrity.

Every article in this collection is informative, readable and reveals the mind of the true rationalist that the author is.

Rationalist Speaks

- Justice RA Jahagirdar (Retd)

Rationalist foundation; 2010; pp 208;

Not for sale.

Prabhakar Nanawaty is the editor of *Thought & Action*, the ezine published by Maharashtra Andhashradha Nirmoolan Samiti.
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We will not, therefore, lose our time praying to our imaginary god for things which our own exertions alone can procure.

Francisco Ferrer

The Origins and Ideals of the Modern School (1913)

Skeptic News

8th World Atheist Conference January 7-9, 2011 (Friday-Sunday) at Tiruchirapalli , Tamilnad

Theme: “Atheism - An Alternative Culture”

We are happy to inform that VIII World Atheist Conference is jointly convened by Dravidar Kazhagam , Atheist Centre and The Rationalists' Forum on 7,8 & 9 January 2011, in Tiruchirapalli, (Trichy), a city centrally located in Tamil Nadu which is well connected by road, railway and air. The conference is being conducted by the movements founded by great atheists, social reformers and humanists - Periyar E.V.Ramasami (1879 - 1973) and Gora (1902-1975).

The Registration Fee for a delegate is Rs. 400. It may be remitted through a Crossed Demand Draft on any bank favouring "Dravidar Kazhagam " payable at Chennai. For details:

Co-ordinator, VIII World Atheist Conference
84/1 (50), E.V.K.Sam path Road, Vepery, Chennai - 600 007
e-mail - atheistconference2011@gmail.com
Fax: 044 26618866

Conveners of the Conference:
Dr. K. Veeramani, President, Dravidar Kazhagam , Periyar Thidal, 50
E.V.K.Sam path Road,
Vepery, Chennai - 600 007 &

Dr. G. Vijayam , Executive Director, Atheist Centre,
Benz Circle, Vijayawada 520010 em ail: atheistcentre@yahoo.com

Remembering Abraham Kovoov

ASIAN RATIONALIST SOCIETY (BRITAIN) organised a public meeting on the 110th birth anniversary of late Dr. Abraham Thomas Kovoov. He was the founder and organiser of rationalist movement in India and Sri Lanka which has now entered the international arena.

Sach Dev Virdee, secretary of the organisation while speaking on the life and mission of Dr A.T Kovoov, shared his life long commitment to the rationalist movement and explanation of spiritual frauds in the Indian sub-continent in the name of divine power. Advocate Harinder Lalli who is the head of the legal department of Tarksheel Society Punjab, came from India especially to attend this public meeting, highlighted the importance of Rational thinking in daily life, he explained to the audience the need for logical thinking, and how it extends our scientific knowledge and allows one to become free from psychological fears, such as, prevailing blind faith, superstitions, and misperceptions.

Mr Chris Neville head of Bham Trading Standards informed the meeting that if it is proved in a court of law that any faith healer had taken money to carry out some magical remedy to resolve problems, and has failed to do so, then he may be punished as per law. He quoted the current case of a faith healer known as Peer Syed Sahib (Niem Mohammed) who was sentenced to imprisonment for a period of 18 months by the Wolverhampton Crown Court in a case of faith healing.

Mrs Janice Bayliss a nurse from NHS explained, how important is the need for organ and blood donation in the Asian community and asked people to come forward to save those who are dying without the availability of organs in the community, Dr Harish Malhotra said, that the acceptance of rational thinking in the Asian community will lead to the building a caste-less society. Mr Sheera Johal president of IWA strongly emphasised on the need of rational thinking in the Asian community to safeguard themselves from fraudulent faith healers.

Representative of Birmingham Humanist Group Mr Bill Green shared his views about how important human rights are and must be honoured.

Surinder Pal Virdee, Ashwani Kumar and Devinder Naura all sang their progressive poems and songs and magical tricks were performed by Harinder Lalli and National president of ARSB Mr Bhagwant Singh. Mr Tari Athwal, Lavkesh Prashar, Balbir Rattu, Rajinder Claire, Jagtar Sahota, Bill Green, Eddy Roberts, Advocate Mohinder Uppal and a few new members from the audience took part during the question & answers session and also helped to raise funds for the venue.

Mr Raj Balwinder and Vijay Virdee took the responsibility to sell literature at the book stall. Voluntary photography and video service was offered by Navmeet. The whole programme lasted for 3 hours and left valuable information with the audience.

Sach Dev Virdee
General Secretary
Asian Rationalist Society Britain

Bangalore Vicharavadi Sangha

(Bangalore Rationalist Association)

Bangalore Vicharavadi Sangha conducts monthly lectures and discussions on various topics. Those who are interested in attending the programmes conducted by the association may contact:

Dr. M.N.Keshava Rao (Phone: 26690269. Email: keshava_rao@hotmail.com)

A.S.Nataraj (Phone: 26696553. Email: rajsri@bgl.vsnl.net.in)

BVV Subba Rao (Phone: 09886679088. Email: babukadur44@gmail.com)

Tools for Skeptical Thinking

Carl Sagan

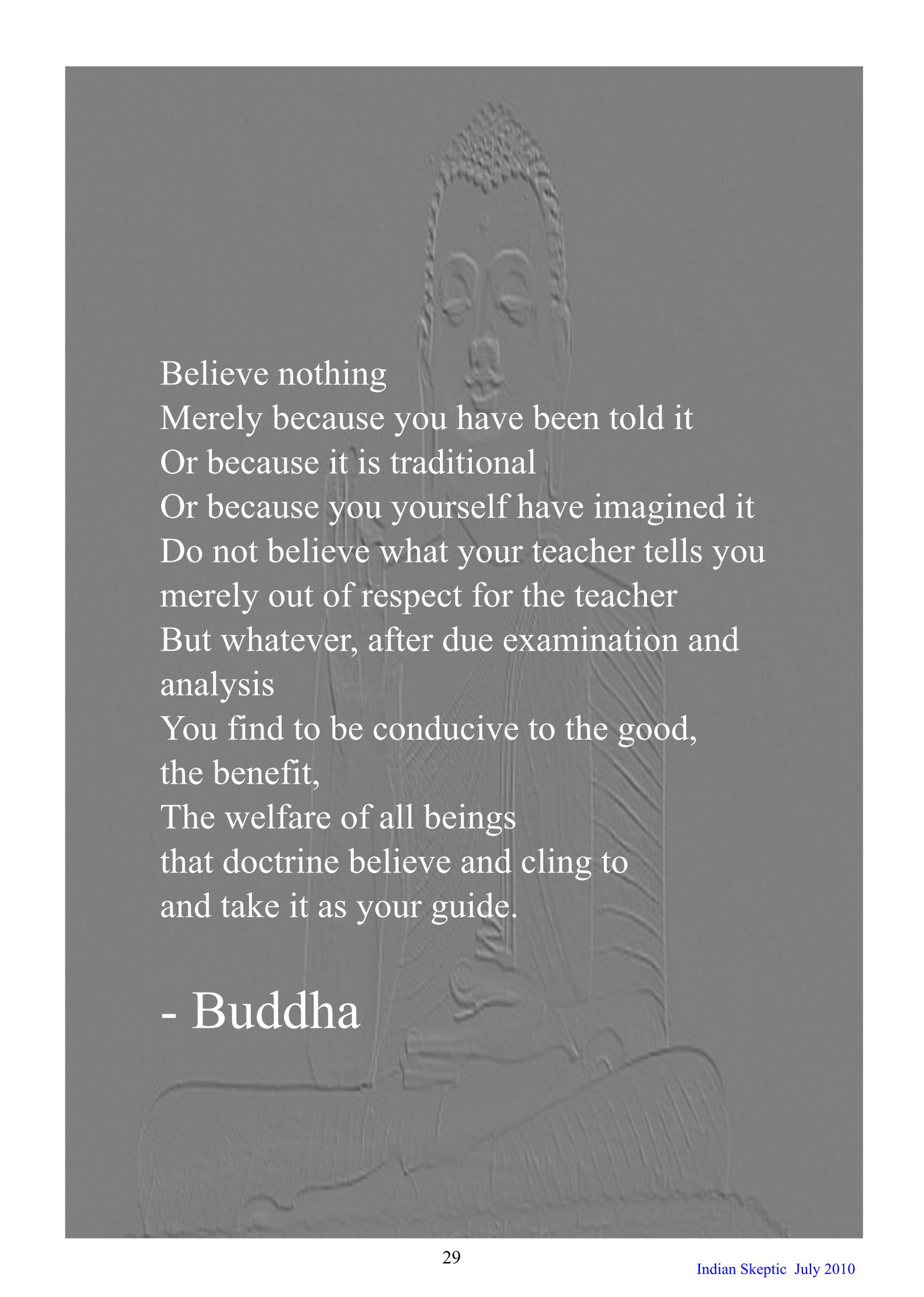
Carl Sagan's famous essay, *The Fine Art of Baloney Detection*, more or less encapsulates the basic tenets of Skeptical Thinking. The present article is an extract from the essay.

The full text can be found in one of Sagan's best-sellers *The Demonhaunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark*.

- Wherever possible there must be independent confirmation of the "facts."
- Encourage substantive debate on the evidence by knowledgeable proponents of all points of view.
- Arguments from authority carry little weight—"authorities" have made mistakes in the past. They will do so again in the future. Perhaps a better way to say it is that in science there are no authorities; at most, there are experts.
- Spin more than one hypothesis. If there's something to be explained, think of all the different ways in which it could be explained. Then think of tests by which you might systematically disprove each of the alternatives. What survives, the hypothesis that resists disproof in this Darwinian selection among "multiple working hypotheses," has a much better chance of being the right answer than if you had simply run with the first idea that caught your fancy.
- Try not to get overly attached to a hypothesis just because it's yours. It's only a way station in the pursuit of knowledge. Ask yourself why you like the idea. Compare it fairly with the alternatives. See if you can find reasons for rejecting it. If you don't, others will.



- Quantify. If whatever it is you're explaining has some measure, some numerical quantity attached to it, you'll be much better able to discriminate among competing hypotheses. What is vague and qualitative is open to many explanations. Of course there are truths to be sought in the many qualitative issues we are obliged to confront, but finding them is more challenging.
- If there's a chain of argument, every link in the chain must work (including the premise) —not just most of them.
- Occam's Razor. This convenient rule-of-thumb urges us when faced with two hypotheses that explain the data equally well to choose the simpler.
- Always ask whether the hypothesis can be, at least in principle, falsified. Propositions that are untestable, unfalsifiable are not worth much. You must be able to check assertions out. Inveterate skeptics must be given the chance to follow your reasoning, to duplicate your experiments and see if they get the same result.



Believe nothing
Merely because you have been told it
Or because it is traditional
Or because you yourself have imagined it
Do not believe what your teacher tells you
merely out of respect for the teacher
But whatever, after due examination and
analysis
You find to be conducive to the good,
the benefit,
The welfare of all beings
that doctrine believe and cling to
and take it as your guide.

- Buddha