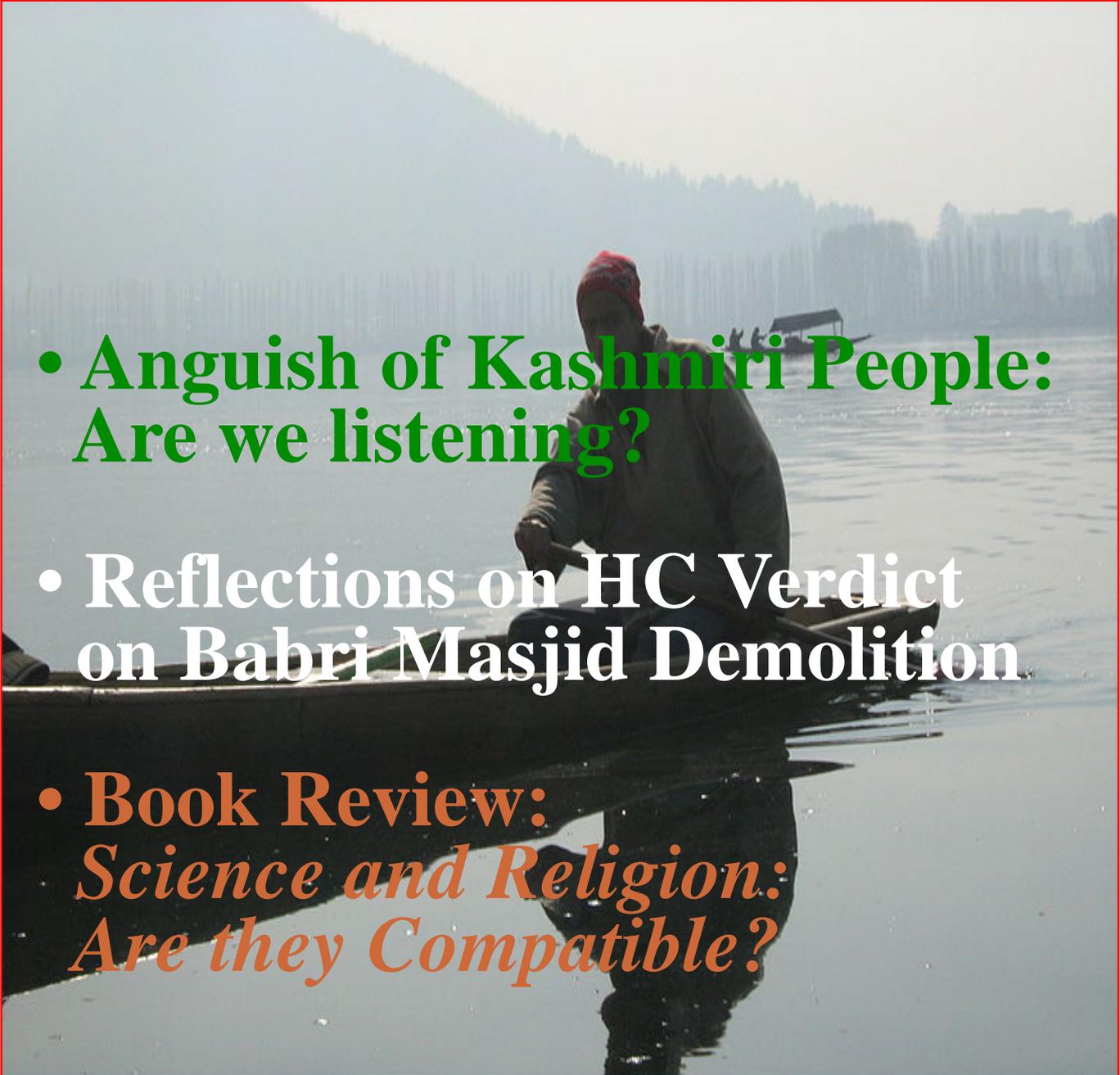


# INDIAN SKEPTIC

No. 01/12

December 2010

A photograph of a person in a boat on a lake, with mountains in the background. The person is wearing a red hat and a dark jacket. The water is calm, and the mountains are covered in trees. The scene is misty or hazy.

- **Anguish of Kashmiri People:  
Are we listening?**

- **Reflections on HC Verdict  
on Babri Masjid Demolition.**

- **Book Review:  
*Science and Religion:  
Are they Compatible?***

# INDIAN SKEPTIC

No. 01/12      December 2010

editor & publisher

manoj trichambaram

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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)*

## Anguish of Kashmiri People: Are We Listening?

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## From the President of FIRA

Narendra Nayak



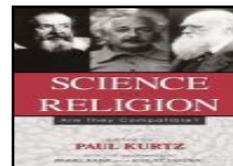
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# Anguish of Kashmiri People Are We Listening?

Ram Puniyani

Statement of Arundhati Roy (Nov 2010), that Kashmir is not a part of India, did raise more than storm in a tea cup. The BJP demanded that court case should be initiated against her, BJP affiliate Mahila Morcha vandalized her house in Delhi and BJP's storm troopers, Bajarang Dal, threatened her in various ways. This statement came as a shock to many and talk of arresting her under the charge of sedition was in the air for some time. One knows that Kashmir has become a raw nerve in the emotional make up of the large section of people for various reasons. There may be lot of differences with Roy on the solution of Kashmir problem, but two points need to be noted and conceded. Number one, Kashmir never merged with India as it only 'acceded' with the proviso of total autonomy except in the matters of defense, communication, currency and external affairs. And two that the statement of Roy and her other writings and speeches on the issue of Kashmir show the pain and anguish of Kashmiri people as a whole.

The attacks and criticism of Roy are based on the ignorance about the history of accession of Kashmir to India. The ultra nationalists groups, especially the one's who are followers of the ideology of Religion based nationalism, and a thinking of a section of people is guided by a sort of patriotism, blinded by emotion. This patriotism wants to put the problems of people under the carpet. How did Kashmir Accede to India? One does remember that there were many princely states at the time of Independence. Most of these states were merged into India barring



the ones of Junagadh, Hyderabad and Kashmir. The mandate to princes was that they are free to merge with either India or Pakistan but while taking such a decision they should keep the feelings of these subjects and consider their geographical location. The princes of these three states had their own calculations in not merging in to India.

Junagadh Nawab wanted to merge with Pakistan. Nizam Hyderabad wanted to remain independent or at worse merge with Pakistan. Pakistan offered more powers to the princes. Geographically also merger of Junagadh and Hyderabad was a bit out of the place their borders were not contiguous with border of Pakistan, and the composition of population of the percentage of Hindu population in these states was overwhelming. India closed the chapter in these states by military means.

Kashmir was uniquely located in an area which had proximity to Pakistan and India both, it had large communication with Pakistan and 80% of its population was Muslim, fitting well into the scheme of 'Two nation theory' of communalists.

Maharaja Harisingh refused to merge with either country. Pakistani army disguised as tribal invaded Kashmir. The difference in Kashmir was the presence of movement of National Conference which was very secular and its leader Sheikh Abdullah recognized the comparatively stronger presence of feudal sections in Pakistan ruling classes. Maharaja Harisingh when faced with the aggression left for Jammu for his safety and sent his emissary to Delhi to request India to send army to dispel the aggression from Pakistan soil. Indian Government wanted to have an agreement before sending the army. It's here that treaty of accession (not merger) was devised giving full autonomy to Kashmir except in the matters of defense, communication, currency and external affairs. By the time Indian army began its work, 1/3 Kashmir was already occupied by the Pakistan army. Ceasefire followed and later Indian part of Kashmir went on to have elections, Sheikh Abdullah becoming its first Prime Minister (not Chief Minister).

To understand the plight of Kashmiris, Pundits included, the issues one needs to focus are, as to how the US had designs to

dominate this area through the proxy of Pakistan, were operating all through. This was the major determining factor for things which happened in this region. Kashmir was Central to US anti Communist strategies- Russia on one side China on the other. US kept supporting Pakistan through and through to keep its presence in the area and to keep the issue on the boil. On this side of the border the communal elements were assertive and demanded for full merger of Kashmir into India. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, the founder of Bhartiya Jansangh, the previous avatar of BJP was very vociferous in demanding this total merger.

Shiekh Abdullah's trust in Indian republic's secular values was shaken with the murder of Mahatma Gandhi. Sheikh had great faith in the secularism of India, in Gandhi and Nehru. After Gandhi murder and the pressure built by communalists to forcibly merge Kashmir into India further disturbed Sheikh Abdullah. He started introspecting whether it was a mistake to accede to India. Nehru at this point of time was saying that what is important is to win over the hearts of Kashmiris, while ultra nationalists, pseudo nationalists, wanted to forcibly



merge Kashmir into India. Sheikh Abdullah started talking to US ambassador and also with China on the other. Under pressure of Nehru got Sheikh Abdullah arrested and put him behind bars, starting the process of alienation of Kashmiri people at large.

Later Pakistan backed by US played its own role in encouraging the dissident sections and by helping them in all the ways. The problem really got worse due to the entry of Al Qaeda in the decades of 1980s. With their warped training of distorted version of Jihad and Kafir, in the Madrassas set up by US, to train Al Qaeda, the situation got communalized. It worsened the situation by communalizing the issue and by playing politics in the name of Islam.

Indian army did the rest. Starting from trying to curb militancy, it entrenched itself in to the civilian life of Kashmir. So many incidents of killings of innocents at the hands of army have taken place. Brutality of army is disguised as defense of Nation. Army lives with the dictum that power flows through the barrel of the gun. This dictum is glaringly obvious when army stays there for long enough time in a civilian area. This army occupation acts as a trigger to further alienate the people of the region. Victims of army's highhandedness are the innocents of the region, women and children suffering the worst ignominies. The process of violation

of civic norms and disruption of civic life has led to a situation where the average helpless person vents his anger by throwing the stones.

Kashmir is a vexed issue defying easy solution due multiple interested parties. US backed Pakistan army, the intense pain and suffering of people of Kashmir at the hands of militants and army, both. There is a need to respect the expression of pain and anguish of Kashmiri people. Dialogue within and outside, reduction of army's presence, deepening democracy and understanding the complex logic of the area is what could sooth the wounded psyche of Kashmir. The aggressive reaction of the type manifested by politics wearing the clothes of religion will add salt to the wounds and worsen the problem rather than contributing anything to its resolution. Layers of democracy, within the state need to be strived for and people's voices of dissent need to be listened carefully rather than insulted and blindly opposed without understanding the logic of their statements and suffering of the people of Kashmir.

**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](http://www.pluralindia.com)

Take any country that has laws against hate crimes, inspiring hatred and genocide and so on. The first thing they would do is ban the Old Testament.

There's nothing like it in the literary canon that exalts genocide, to that extent. And it's not a joke either. Like where I live, New England, the people who liberated it from the native scourge were religious fundamentalist lunatics, who came waving the holy book, declaring themselves to be the children of Israel who are killing the Amalekites, like God told them.

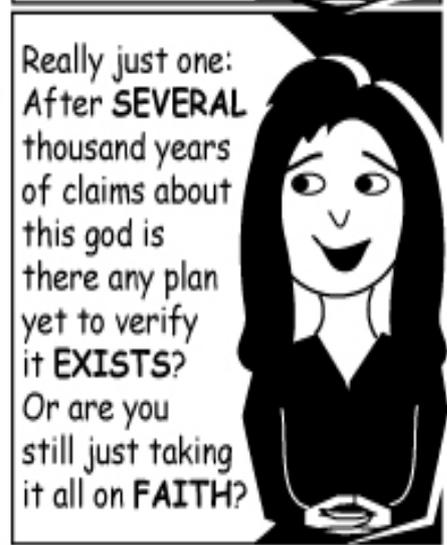
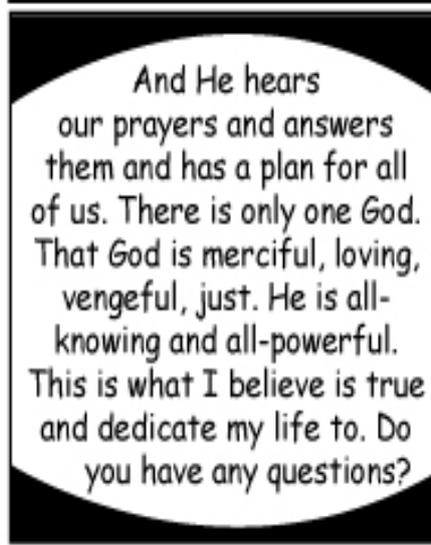
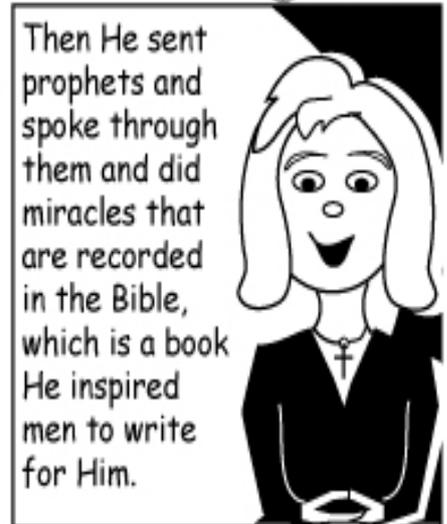
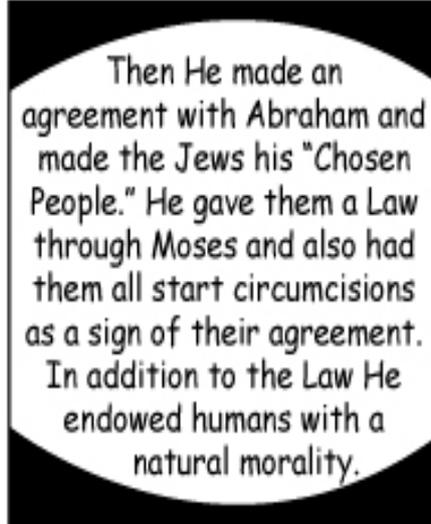
**Noam Chomsky**

*Talk at the University of Houston, Texas, October 18, 2002*

## What We Know About 'God'

TH DESIGN ©2010

ATHEIST EVE



**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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# Hey Ram!

## Reflections on HC Verdict on Babri Masjid Demolition

Keshava Sheth Revankar

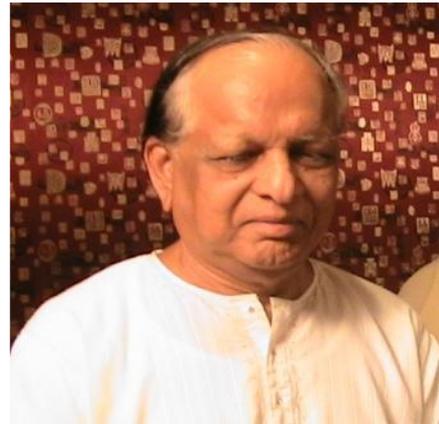
*"The tendency to turn human judgment into Devine command makes religion one of the most dangerous forces in the world."*

*Georgia Harkness*

After demolition of an old dilapidated building called " Babri- Masjid" in December 1992, a few leaders, belonging to saffron-outfits danced in glee, as though they have performed a most heroic deed in the history of this great civilization, just like the primitive tribes dance around the fire after a good game-hunt. There after hundreds of columnists in both English and other languages wrote hundreds of articles bringing to our notice many historical facts, which we laymen had not known earlier.

In the programme 'We The People' in NDTV on 26 the September 2010 many legal luminaries gave their opinions, but only one Panel member pointed out, that Hindus too demolished Jain & Buddhist - structures to convert them into Hindu temples. In coastal districts of Karnataka the local Brahmins forcibly took over Jain temples and converted them into Hindu temples. Many historians and archeologists have recorded that the Buddhist Enclave 'NAGARJUNAKONDA' was vandalized extensively by hordes of people on Shakaracharya's instigation.

Then came the verdict on 30th September 2010 which confounded many legal



luminaries. One prominent leader from a saffron-front declared authoritatively that the learned judge gave his verdict based on what he perceived as tradition.

Jiddu Krishna Murthy had repeatedly said that '*tradition clouds perception. Tradition betrays the present and those who follow tradition are trapped in the past.*' Another word widely used by Hindus is "*parampara*" meaning tradition. Most irrational acts are committed under *parampara* - even killing ones sister or daughter for violating *parampara* by men even from elite society. This word has become an evil bug planted in the minds of Hindus through indoctrination over centuries. Thus the verdict appears to be based on *parampara* and not on legal grounds of a Modern Secular Democracy.

I am reproducing below a few excerpts relevant to the context from an article "*The Lost Civilisations* " by SB Roy, Director of the Institute of Chronology, New Delhi [*Indian Express* 30 November 1991], in which the author reconstructs the Proto-History of the world (4000 years ago),

when dynasties like Devas, Rakshas, Vanaras and many others lived and fought in ARYANA.

1.The Astronomical material in the *Rigveda* reveals the following date.

Ravana was a Title, like Janaka,because one of the Ravanas was said to be a cotemporary and friend of Kartivirya Arjuna who lived thirty generations earlier than Dasarathi-Rama. Be that as it may, Ravana was a powerful king and the feild-

Observer	King	Dynasty-No.	Observation	Date
Vamadeva	Rama s/o Dasaratha	65	Helical rising of the Dog Star ten days after Equinox	C.2000 B.C.

2. Some of those dynasties were misrepresented as devils, beasts or aboriginals by Europeans and some Indian Indologists.

worker who will search for his bones [and gold] amidst the Neolithic graves of the Gond Tribal-Chiefs will be disappointed.

3. For Example Rakshasas: Great injustice has been done to the rakshasas by the Indian Poets who showed only their evil traits. The Rigveda apparently took no notice of them because neither Rama nor Ravana appear in any Hymn. (...) Dasaratha was a junior contemporary of Divodasa and fought Timidhwahaja, an ally of Shambara, the Harappan. The synchronism is confirmed By Pargitar and Pradhana. Both pointed out that Divodasa's sister Ahalya was married to Sarantvanta Gautama,a priest of Siradhwaja Janaka [Siradhwaja's daughter Sita was married to Rama, son of Dasaratha] Where did Ravana live and Rule? It is certain he was a great and powerful king who was a terror to the Aryan kings. It is also possible that

4. It is possible to associate Sita and Janaka with the agricultural revolution in the northern India in C.2000 B.C.Sita was deified as the goddess of the earth [Vamadeva Gautama a contemporary Rishi C.2000.B.C] Sita was deified as the furrow or the goddess of agriculture. We do not know where Rama lived and ruled Rama was already deified in Mitanni by 1400 B.C as is shown by a letter from Tusrata [cf. Dasaratha] to Amenhotep 11 found in Tellai--Amarna archieves .The locale of the Rama-Ravana battle is yet to be found. There must be a great city of C.2000 B.C like Mohanjodaro still to be excavated.

In all other civilizations mythologies were consigned to the dust-bin of history. In

**In all other civilizations mythologies were consigned to the dust-bin of history. In India, mythologies are made up to masquerade as history and a few characters were made up to masquerade as gods & divinities, having been attributed with magical & supernatural traits. Rama is one of them.**

India, mythologies are made up to masquerade as history and a few characters were made up to masquerade as gods & divinities, having been attributed with magical & supernatural traits. Rama is one of them.

The whole of Ramayana the epic is based ironically on a bad verdict. It is a fact that the priests and rulers were liberally cosuming the heady-wine called 'Soma', King Dasaratha that night might have drunk a lot of wine and went to the queen Kaikayee. He was not sober and in a half-sleepy state when the queen got his promise for making her son, Bharat, the next King. When the time arrived for fulfilling the promise, Dashrath was in anguish and consulted the Raj-Purohith [Royal Priest]. This crafty priest, instead of going by "Dharma" and Tradition, sided with the queen. Thus Rama had to go to forest and the Epic was born. Had the Priest taken the path of 'Dharma' the present Lalla-Gulla and spilling of blood would not have occurred. As this is only a fiction no one took notice of this "faux-pas"

It is an irony that the modern judiciary went by Tradition and perception and the ancient "Raj-Purohith" went by the legality of a king's promise but not by "dharma" and tradition of crowning the eldest prince.

Here is a major question to saffron ideologues. By 7th or 8th century all were aware that there was the Holy Bible in practice in southern India, and Holy Koran was knocking at the doors of North-West India. In such a political situation a conclave of Vaidic-high-priests and rulers found it necessary to compile a Holy-Book for Hindus. Two Books were compiled: one was 'Yoga-Vashist', an imaginary dialogue between Rama and Sage Vashist; and the other "Gita" an imaginary dialogue between Arjun and Krisna. But the Vaidic priests rejected 'Yoga-Vashist' as that was a large document with profound thoughts & metaphysical world-views, giving them no scope for interpolations. But "Gita" was

short with a few hundred verses {Made up to 700 verses by interpolations}. In "Gita" they could surreptitiously put words into Krihna's mouth, out of context, to comply with their agenda of caste-based society, a legion of gods and senseless rituals. At that period they rejected Ram and now they use his name to create Hatred and bloodshed.

Can the media be courageous to address the youth of all faiths with the facts from history to raise their level of consciousness. A section of youth and the large middle-class are sucked into a 'black-hole' of saffron ideology, obscurantism originated in rituals, priests, highly-commercialized Temples, astrologers, fake godmen, intellectually barren TV soaps and consumerism. "

Youth is the Future. Therefore media should be futuristic. They should channelise the youth-energy to *"Ever-widening thoughts and actions and not allow their 'clear stream of reason to loose it's way into the dreary desert-sands of dead-habits'"* (Rabindranath Tagore)

The essence of Hinduism is defined by "Upanishadic verses - 'thou are that spirit', *"Aham Brhamasmi"*. Upanishads propounded that every living being is part of this 'Brahmma' - an ever moving, ever transforming, progressive force - a formless God (S.Radhakrishnan). Jiddu Krishna Murthy had beautifully said this *"You are rest of humanity, 'You are the observer and you are the observed"*. We are all part of the same consciousnesses.

**BS**

***Keshava Shet Revankar, is a retired engineer with HAL, Nashik and currently residing in Dubai***

**The most violent element in society is ignorance**

**Emma Goldman**

# From the President of FIRA

Narendra Nayak

## The Gender and Health Equity Program at Koppala.

On the 29th November we had a program for a group of activists at a place called Koppala in the North Eastern part of Karnataka. This area is the most backward part of Karnataka state and beset with superstitions like Bhanamathi which is allegedly a type of black magic and feared very much by all sections of the society. They are so scared of it that they dare not utter the word. When they suspect that some one has done it- they say- they have "done" madisyari is the Kannada word for it! Ms.Vani is the head of the team which is working there about issues of Gender, Health equity and safe motherhood. We had interactions with about a hundred volunteers from the town and

surrounding villages for a day. Some of them are paid workers while others are volunteers. As the very name of the organisation implies they work in villages for gender equality and safe motherhood.

It is to be noted that this particular district has the highest maternal mortality rate in Karnataka and lacks in medical facilities- superimposed on the population beset with superstitions. The interactions consisted of a lecture, video footage, some demonstrations but was hampered by the very limited time available. The educational qualifications of the participants were from just literate to those with degrees from universities. The



majority were women with a rural background. There was a long felt need from them that some one should clarify their doubts on various issues about superstitions. Since I was on a tour of North Western parts of Karnataka to build up the movement there, I took the opportunity to visit the place and spend a day with them. The meeting was organised on the terrace of the office of the organisation. After an introduction by Ms.Vani Periodi the leader of the team, I spoke to them on various issues concerning equal rights of women and gender justice. I clarified their doubts through demonstrations, verbal explanations and also video footage. The first few hours were reserved for their volunteers only. After some time, the others too arrived. There were live demonstrations with volunteers about mental suggestibility of children and adults too. After we left the organisers had discussions with the participants and their reactions are given below each with a \*. (My clarifications are given in italics)

On 29th of November, Gender and Health Equity project team along with the representatives of Thaythana Rakshana Vedike from the local villages have

superstition. ' This was the need expressed by the team long back. After the daylong session the responses given by the participants are as follows.

\* We always felt that we should ask the 'quacks' about anything happening to us. But now we feel we should be observant of such things.

*It is common in our country to visit quacks, many times promoted by proponents of the supernatural and sometimes even by qualified people who are themselves confused or have vested interests. In these areas one more problem is the lack of medical facilities and poverty.*

\*It was amazing to see the way we could lift the person with our fingers. This shows how much powerful we are.

*That was in response to a query on a so called miracle happening in a nearby village where a heavy stone would be lifted by a 'possessed' devotee. We showed how a heavy person can be lifted with fingers by an appropriate command.*

\* Knowingly we were getting cheated many a times. But we felt helpless.





*Perhaps after a training program they could learn the modus operandi of these quacks and be ready to expose them.*

\* I think we all were totally immersed in superstitious beliefs.

*The poor villagers do not understand the situation is the same in many other places too, including cities!*

\* First time in my life I am hearing something like this. (Quite a few people shared this feeling.)

I could make that out by their reactions. In fact I had told them so. I started my talk with a disclaimer that it could be shocking to them as they have not heard this side of the issues at all.

\*We understood the concept of 'equality' in a much broader way.

*It was news to many of them that men and women now have equal property rights in India as the women have been declared as co-parcenaries in HUF property with the rider that they should have been unmarried on 25th November,1995. I also repeated the main points of my presentation to the*

*Nepal Women's commission done on the 21st November as to how religions are the main cause of violence against women.*

\*(In) Equality is the cause of the destruction of human kind. - I liked this statement.

*The statement was a mistake it should have been inequality I have inserted the in in brackets. Many women particularly the young girls reacted very strongly to my examples of how unequal treatment starts at home and at a very young age. It realised upon them only then that they were being discriminated against. What they had thought to be natural turned out to be discrimination when they realised gender equality.*

\* Got to know about special marriage act.

*I informed them as to how I got married spending only 25 rupees and that was a surprise to all of them! They had never realised that a legally valid marriage could be registered that that cheaply! Of course I told them now it is more expensive perhaps around 500 rupees!*

\* Strongly felt that we should never believe

'swamijis'. If well educated people fall for such beliefs what about we ordinary people.

*This was the reaction to the Sheshan footage of Gurubusters -how he praises the Puttaparthi thug and endorses him. I also showed the DD footage in which he is caught 'materialising' a gold chain in the presence of VIPs including the then Prime Minister and Home minister of India and various others.*

\* It was interesting to note how he took out the lucky number and forecasted his story. (Jathaka).

*That was the response to a spell of cold reading which I did on a young man of around 22 who was totally convinced about my powers and was pestering me to 'improve' his life. I explained how I did it but looks like I succeeded in convincing the audience too about my powers to forecast! Now I have mde this a part of each training program and in each case convinced the victim that I was 100% right and made them cough up money too!*

\*But he could say so correctly. How is it possible? How he calculated that number. We should have learnt it.

*I had started my 'fortune telling' by calculating his 'lucky number' by writing his name and assigning random numbers to the alphabets. The audience thought that it was a secret formula by which past can be told!*

\*We should observe the 'kai chalaka' more closely. We never think in that line.

*I had demonstrated a few sleight of the hand tricks and had told them that most of those who 'materialise' things from thin air use the technique(kai chalaka-means slieght of hand in Kannada). They were very much impressed by that.I also told them all those who claim to 'materialise' objects from thin air use this technique and mentioned the salient features to them.*

\* It is true about what he said about making the people vomit. They do it several times till the person is exhausted. We have done it recently in our family.

*The process of 'removing black magic' of some types is done by administering an emetic to the person and making him/her vomit it out. It is also alleged that the 'medicine' administered remains as such in the stomach without getting digested for years until it is removed. Usually a piece of gelatinous matter is shown and some times a hairy ball. That is done by making the patient vomit repeatedly until weak and then surreptitiously slip something into the vomit and claim that it was from the stomach.*

\* If we happen to see lime with some colors around our house we take it so seriously and start bothering about it. What will happen if we ignore it?

*lemons are commonly said to be the medium through which black magic is done. Throw one with a bit of vermilion rubbed over it and the victim will collapse from sheer fright!*

\* I always believed such things. Somebody said that there was a lime in the roof of our house and it was there. Then we had to do some ritual.

*See the reaction to the above.*

\* He had examples for everything. But it was too much of talking only. There should have been some activities for us.

*Tried had to balance 'doing' and talking but was overwhelmed by the questions! people being exposed to the other side of what they had unquestioningly believed in all these years started clarifying their doubts and it was a flood! We can make up that in our 5 day training program by giving lots of opportunities to see, learn and do also!*

\* To understand properly we would need 5

days' training.

*I fully agree on that. How about resources for it?*

\*We can challenge people with asking the number on the currency. That will be interesting.

*I told them that the most fool proof way to test any ones esp/clairvoyant/mind reading powers would to ask them to read the serial number of a sealed currency note. To demonstrate that I pulled out a currency note from my pocket and challenged them to read the number! No one could get anywhere near that. That convinced them that it is impossible to do that or even find it by any means.*

\* Look how that young girl said that her finger was sweet after going through the exercise. But to some extent it is true also. There was one girl who could tell the exact place of the missing child. Then they got the child.

*I did an exercise involving mental suggestion to a little girl making her taste a picture of a sweet. We have made little girls fall by mental suggestions telling them to close their eyes and listen to me. That was to show them how they exploit the gullibilities of young girls and make them 'see' things.*

\* I still feel that there is something in 'maata – manthra'. This cannot be untrue. Devva could be superstition or psychological.

*maat -manthra is what they call black magic in certain areas of Karnataka. Devva is for spirits(of the supernatural variety!)*

\* When he said that he has given freedom to his wife, all of us applauded thinking that it was great. But how he himself made us aware of the other face of it.

*I start my lectures on gender equality by making a statement that I am a believer in it. I tell people that I have all freedom to my wife and they applaud! I ask them why they did that? they say it is because I am great. I tell them that they should have asked me who am I to grant equality to my wife. I state that all human beings are equal and it is every ones birthright. Then they understand the implications of humanism.*

\* The poojari when falls sick go to the proper medical treatment. – This is quite revealing. We should be observant of such things.

*I gave them examples of so called healers themselves going in for treatment from properly qualified persons when they have health problems. That made them retrospect about the behaviour of their local healers who should be doing that under the pretext that one's healing power cannot work on self!*

\* My husband walks on the 'kenda' near the temple. Nothing happens to him. I still feel he is protected by the god at that time.

*Kenda means embers in Kannada. There was no time show firewalking either live or through video. It will be performed when the training program is done.*

\* We are very much impressed to see his commitment to the cause. He throws challenges fearlessly.

*That is because it is the first time that they are seeing some one like me! That is understandable.*

\* Instead of crushing the lime we too can make juice and drink.

*I told them not to crush lemons under wheels of new vehicles as it is a waste. better take them home and have lemon juice. I gave them examples of when I purchased a new car and also went to bring home my wife's new car.*

\* But how can he say that there is no god. Some of the villagers were getting uncomfortable to hear this.

That is the usual reaction we soft pedal the issue and also tell them that we are more bothered about what goes on in the name of god and agents of these gods. We also say that mankind is more important to us than any god to prevent them from closing their minds to what we have to say. This is because the people have been brain washed in the name of these god(s) since childhood. Any direct attack on that makes them totally close their mind to what we say and the whole program would be a waste of time.

\* *Recently whenever I went home I was looking bit depressed. My parents observed that and felt like showing me to the people who can remove MAATA. I was bit puzzled. I was not sure whether to go for it or not. But now there is no dilemma. I have*

*decided not to go for that. (One of the young women shared this.)*

Maata, Bhanamathi, mantra are the names to describe various types of so called 'black magic'. Some sections believe that everything bad and all diseases are caused by these.

*Now the next logical step is to have a 5 day training program at this place. The organisers feel that this activity has not been taken into account in planning their annual budget. We would welcome sponsors for this training program. Any takers?*

**BS**

***Narendra Nayak , is the president of  
Federation of Indian Rationalist  
Associations***

**You can find things in the traditional religions which are very benign and decent and wonderful and so on, but I mean, the Bible is probably the most genocidal book in the literary canon. The God of the Bible - not only did He order His chosen people to carry out literal genocide - I mean, wipe out every Amalekite to the last man, woman, child, and, you know, donkey and so on, because hundreds of years ago they got in your way when you were trying to cross the desert - not only did He do things like that, but, after all, the God of the Bible was ready to destroy every living creature on earth because some humans irritated Him. That's the story of Noah. I mean, that's beyond genocide - you don't know how to describe this creature. Somebody offended Him, and He was going to destroy every living being on earth? And then He was talked into allowing two of each species to stay alive - that's supposed to be gentle and wonderful.**

**Noam Chomsky**

*Interview by Wallace Shawn, October 19, 2004*

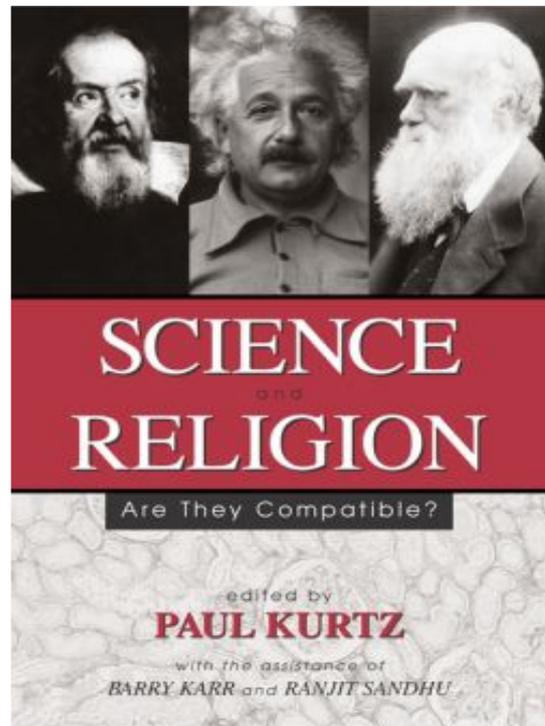


# Compatibility of Science and Religion

Prabhakar Nanawaty

In the Western academic world it has become a regular feature to debate about the compatibility of science and (orthodox) religion. In our Hindu dominated country, we all the while think that such a discussion on science and Hindu religion is a futile exercise since our Hindu religion imbibes science and scientific values right from its inception. But this is not true. It is downright self deception. In fact, religion (even our Hindu religion) and science operate from fundamentally different methodologies and will inevitably have to face the confrontation. According to Paul Kurtz, the editor of the book, *Science and Religion: Are they compatible?* there is a profound difference between science and religion in its conception of truth. Science requires an open mind, free inquiry, critical thinking and willingness to question assumptions whereas religions rely on the acceptance of faith in specific revelation and their introspections by different prophets or 'priests' of religions.

This book is basically an outcome of the discussions held during a symposium organised by **Centre for Inquiry** in US in 2001. The book is a compilation of the articles based on the views expressed by the experts in the field who attended and/or sent material during the symposium proceedings. Contributors include the names like Sir Arthur C Clerk, Richard



Dawkins, Richard Feynman, Kendrick Frazier, Marin Gardner, Stephan J Gould, Steven Pinker, Daniel Dennett, Matt Young, Steven Weinberg etc.

While explaining about the genesis of the symposium, the editor explains that the Templeton Foundation of US, which is sympathetic to religious – spiritual perspective, had funded many such conferences in the past. Most of the participants attending such conferences had inclination towards spiritualism and argued that religion and science are mutually

compatible, reinforcing each other. This contention had impressed many. However, **Centre For Inquiry** thought that such an impression undermines the progress of the society, state and economy. Perhaps the proponents of religions must be feeling threatened due to the tremendous progress made by science and technology (S&T). No doubt S&T has made tremendous progress in the last couple of centuries and materialistically human beings are fully dependent upon S&T. The theologians may be afraid that it may happen that science may totally destabilize religion one day.

The contributors of this book had taken a new approach. Most of them are of the opinion that the knowledge should be

(and reason) must not yield any of its own ground. Science is based foremost on evidence, not authority or revelation. In science nothing is taken on faith, while in religion, faith is the heart of belief. In science all knowledge is tentative, continually subject to revision when better explanation and evidence (always aggressively sought) are acquired; religion asserts the presence of unchanging and unchallengeable external truths... Many religions discourage skepticism or critical examination of cherished percepts. This commitment to test the validity of ideas and claims separates science from religion."

The section 'Cosmology and God ' contains

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submitted to the tests of scientific enquiry and there should not be any dogmatic bias in this regard. The book includes articles by physicists, astronomers, mathematicians, biologists, zoologists, anthropologists, historians of science and philosophers. The book has been divided into various sections for ease of reading and reference. The sections include cosmology and God, intelligent design, religion and science conflict, science and ethics, paranormal claims etc.

The introductory notes have been written by Paul Kurtz and Kendrick Frazier, a noted skeptic. Kendrick Frazier in his article, *Are science and religion conflicting or complimentary?* mentions that "Science

articles by Steven Weinberg, David Shotwell, Owen Gingerich etc, who vehemently refute the idea that universe is *fine tuned* to the emergence of human beings. This section discusses the implications of the new scientific cosmologies for religion. In fact Steven Weinberg concludes that there can't be any constructive dialogue between science and religion. One of the great achievements of science has been, if not to make it impossible for intelligent people to be religious, and then at least make it possible for them not to be religious. Victor Stenger is a proponent of existence of many universes in spite of this concept did not withstand the test of Occam's razor. David Shotwell dismisses the idea of supernatural

phenomena which is beyond human comprehension. Quentin Smith, a philosopher of science, fervently disagrees with the theistic theories on cosmology and disputes the view that Big Bang cosmological outlook provides evidence for existence of God.

The 'Intelligent Design' section brings out one of the most controversial issues discussed in the Western intellectual world. The evolution theory proposed by Charles Darwin is still disputed by many intellectuals and most of them believe that the origin of Universe, life or human beings can be explained by intellectual design model. Creationists and their sympathizers would expunge from our schools even any mention of evolution. They do so because they mistakenly fear that evolution somehow undermines human values and dignity. Taner Edis, a physicist, shows how creationism has become a serious force in undermining science in Islamic world. Though William Dembski, a philosopher, defends the traditional design argument, Massimo Pigliucci, a geneticist, disagrees since intellectual design has no experimental significance for current evolutionary theory. In fact, the concept of design itself is of recent genre.

A few of the contributors of section 'Religion and Science in conflict' trace the historical aspects of science and religion and are hopeful that accommodation can be easily reached between science and religion. Jacob Pandian argues that the quest for cooperation between religion and science can be dangerous insofar as it weakens the scientific Endeavour. Timothy Moy reexamines Galileo's affair and defends the freedom of scientific enquiry against religious suppression as in the case of Galileo. However he is of the opinion that conflict between science and religion is far more complex than most people realize.

According to Sir Hermann Bondi the true contrast between science and religion is that science unites the world and makes it

possible for people of widely differing backgrounds to work together and to cooperate. Religion, on the other hand, by its very claim to know, "the truth" through revelation, is inherently divisive and creator of separation and hostility. Barry Palevitz advises his troubled students who think that there must be room for religion somewhere in science – surely a little religion here and there wouldn't hurt - that there is no such thing as just a little religion in science. He rules out the compromise since there is no objective evidence to ignore in favour of the subjective and untenable.

The defenders of religions always show the trump card of ethics and morality as though the religions have patented these concepts. In the section dealing with 'Science and Ethics' this aspect has been discussed in detail by eminent scientists like Stephen Jay Gould, Richard Dawkins and Richard Feynman. What is the relationship between ethics, science and religion? Stephen Jay Gould put forth the idea of *Non Overlapping Magisteria*, (NOMA) of science and religion. He feels that there is a constant input from both magisterial towards the common goal of wisdom. Richard Dawkins, however, disputes Gould and argues that there are irreconcilable differences between science and religion which cannot be glossed over. He criticizes the efforts by religionists to interpose "the soul" in the evolutionary process. He argues that the question "What is right and what is wrong?" is a genuinely difficult question which science cannot answer. According to Richard Feynman science indeed makes an impact on many ideas associated with religion, but he personally do not believe it affects, in any very strong way, the moral conduct and ethical views. It takes more than the right conscience to produce good behaviour. Religion gives inspiration to act well and it also gives inspiration to the arts and to many other activities of human beings.

Section 5 and 6 contains articles on paranormal claims and religious belief.

While discussing on the scientific investigation of paranormal claims, Paul Kurtz coins the word *paranatural* and is confident that some of the so called paranormal claims like life after death, weeping statues, stigmata, exorcism and possession, faith healing etc can be investigated in detail. In fact 'para' in the word like *paranormal* suggest our ignorance. Most of these phenomena are based on eye witness testimonies which itself is notoriously unreliable. Unless carefully controlled studies and standards are applied, people can deceive themselves and others into believing that almost anything is true and real. Para-natural

theme among many proponents of alternative medicine. Whatever tests have been conducted in this regard and concluded the efficacy of prayers appear to have failed the rigours of scientific tests. As such no one can claim that he/she had done a 'landmark study'.

Paul Kurtz goes into details of human nature and tries to answer the question 'Why do people believe or disbelieve?' He feels that there are deep socio-biological forces responsible for religiosity. He then questions that if religiosity will most likely be with us in one form or another in foreseeable future, can secular substitutes

This book is a treasure for those readers who are interested in topics like intellectual design, creationism, sociobiology, the nature of the soul, near death experience etc. The articles contain a wealth of information without being dense and without being dry. After going through these entire discussions one will feel that whether religion and science are compatible depends upon religious believers and not upon scientists. If they submit their beliefs to scientific standards of inquiry then compatibility will exist; otherwise it cannot.

illustrates how empirical tests can be applied by science to the religious claim that there is life after death. Richard Wiseman, a psychologist, goes into details of after death communication studies and concludes that present research fails in many areas. Antony Flew, a philosopher, is doubtful of the concept of a "separable soul" and raises the question whether the soul has left the body. Jerome Elbert tries to answer the question "Does the soul exist?" He concludes that the scientific perspective does not support the view that humans have a partly immortal or spiritual nature. There is nothing like human or divine. Irwin Tressman dismisses the therapeutic power of prayer, a recurring

or moral equivalents be developed? Morton Hunt traces the biological roots of religion. He is wondering why nearly all human beings in every known culture believed in god or gods and accepted the customs, dogmas and institutional apparatus of an immense array of different religions? Steven Pinker points out that in culture after culture, people believe that the soul lives after death, that rituals can change physical world and divine the truth, and that illness and misfortune are caused by alleviated by spirits, ghosts, saints, fairies, angels, demons, devils and gods. David Noelle feels that modern science is beginning to understand the neurological mechanisms that give rise to the religious

experiences of the believer. It may be a simple trick of the brain – the unfolding of a perfectly natural temporal lobe transient.

Martin Gardner, one of the leading skeptical critics of paranormal and religious cults, maintains that the range of the unknowable is so vast that this inspires in him awe, wonder, mystery and sense of piety. Matt Young proposes a religious humanism that is human centered not god centered. In this view our lives have meaning that we and our communities have to develop our own ethics and are not derived from a supernatural source. We need not be afraid of God looking over our shoulders after. Paul Kurtz, in his conclusive article mentions that religious systems of belief, thought, emotion and attitude are products of the creative human imagination. They traffic fantasy and fiction. The role of creative imagination, fantasy and fiction can't be dismissed so easily. These are among the most powerful expressions of human dreams and hopes, ideals and longings.

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### ***Science and Religion: Are they Compatible?***

**Edited by Paul Kurtz with the assistance of Barry Karr and Ranjit Sandhu**

**Prometheus Books, 2003, pp 368**

**BS**

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**The philosophy of Atheism represents a concept of life without any metaphysical Beyond or Divine Regulator. It is the concept of an actual, real world with its liberating, expanding and beautifying possibilities, as against an unreal world, which, with its spirits, oracles, and mean contentment has kept humanity in helpless degradation**

**Emma Goldman**  
***Anarchism and Other Essays***

# Skeptic News

## 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)

District Level meetings of Karnataka State Federation of Rationalist Associations are being convened across the state. Those who would like to be part of the organization are requested to contact the State

Convener of KSFRA

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.

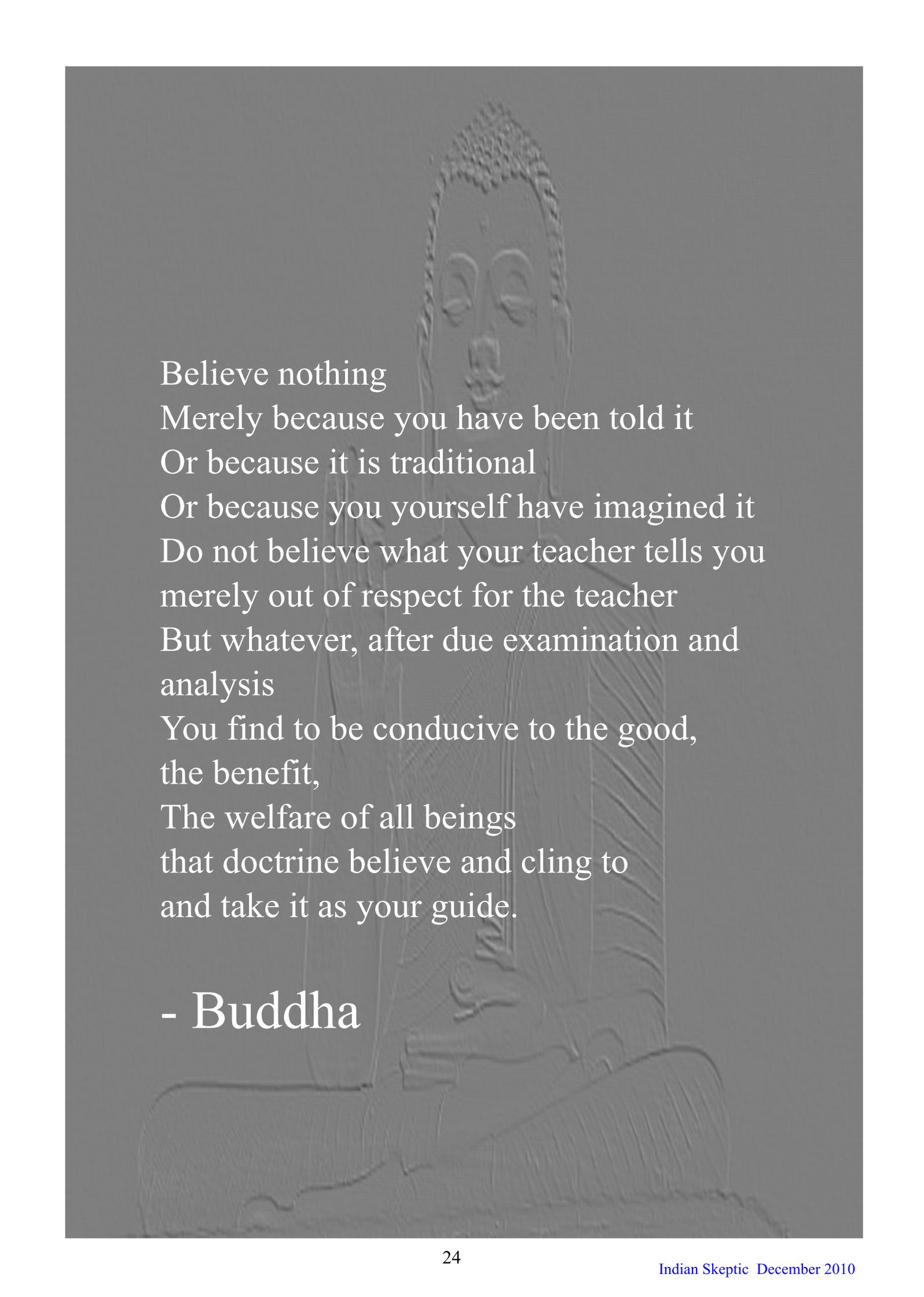


- Quantify. If whatever it is you're explaining has some measure, some numerical quantity attached to it, you'll be much better able to discriminate among competing hypotheses. What is vague and qualitative is open to many explanations. Of course there are truths to be sought in the many qualitative 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