

# Humanist Outlook

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*for the furtherance of human values  
through an ethics based on human  
perceptions and capabilities*

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## IS LIFE A FALL OR AN ADVENTURE ?

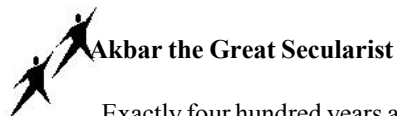
(From an article on the Religion of Mahatma Gandhi)

We are at a point in human history when what has been possible for only a few people in the past - the conquest of fear and pessimism without reliance upon dogmas - can be achieved by many. Religious beliefs have involved much speculation and wish projection. To some extent these are, and as far as I can see, will always be unavoidable. But it is no longer necessary to glorify our speculations into certainties, and we can squarely face the fact that our ideas must, to some extent, be based on wish projection. This is no small gain, for without it we cannot continue that adventure of ideas and experiments which the religions have signified. Gandhi, however adhered to the ancient philosophy that life is not an adventure but a "fall". The Gandhian formula cannot lead to that freedom of thought which life, conceived as an adventure, implies and requires. An explicit affirmation that the religious scriptures are no more divine than Plato's Republic or Shakespeare's Hamlet is necessary, and indeed merely the first step in this emancipation. The authoritarian habit of mind has become so ingrained in human nature that it cannot be rooted out by any mere affirmation, however unequivocal. Both past and recent history show that the repudiation of one set of dogmas is usually no more than a prelude to the adoption of another set of dogmas.

I have spoken above of moral and spiritual progress. But it is not progress alone which is in jeopardy. If we insist on linking spiritual values to a set of beliefs established under very different conditions (or, in the case of Gandhi, to a set of words shorn of their original meanings), a growing number of people who find such beliefs intellectually unacceptable, (or who cannot adopt the words merely for their emotional effect), will not be able to adjust themselves to the human situation. *It has to be recognised that there are other ways of overcoming fear and pessimism.* And if we similarly continue to link morality with a set of beliefs, the moral values are bound to suffer a decline when the beliefs have ceased to be convincing. Actually, as I have argued in previous articles, the association of morality with religion proper has already done much harm, because the religions have made good behaviour depend too much on rewards and punishment. This was perhaps an inevitable stage in the historical development of religions, but it has to be outgrown. We need a religion which will develop the natural human impulse of concern for the other fellow without any question of external reward or punishment. This reliance upon human potentiality is not arrogance. It implies no need to deny (or admit) any power within or without us which may make for righteousness, but if such a power exists it must be working in and through us all the time. Human potentiality does not function in a vacuum; it includes all that surrounds it and influences it - in fact all the rest of the universe, the nature of which we can only dimly surmise.

- Narsingh Narain

## EDITORIAL



Exactly four hundred years ago in the autumn of the year 1605 - on the night of Tuesday 26th October - the Mogul Emperor Jalaluddin Mohammad Akbar died at Agra. He was a wise and tolerant ruler, generations ahead of his times and - what would be unusual even today - a freethinker. The Portuguese Jesuit, Jeronimo Xavier, who was present in Agra in the last months of Akbar's life, records that the king died more or less alone, with only "*a few people who remained with him, and some of them took the name of Maffamede. He never responded to them, he only took the name of God a few times, nor did he die in keeping with the custom of the Gentiles. As one never knew under what religion he lived, nor did one know under which one he died, since he made place for all the religions and took none of them for the truth, though his usual habit was to worship God and the sun.*" Writing during Akbar's lifetime, Father Monserrate, another Jesuit contemporary, expresses surprise that he had not yet been killed for his freethinking. "*In spite of his very heterodox attitude towards the religion of Muhammad, and in spite also of the fact that Musalmans regard such an attitude as an unforgivable offence, Akbar has not yet been assassinated.*" The fact is that, with his firm rule but benevolent and informal ways, he was a much-loved monarch. Rafiuddin Shirazi, a Persian merchant, recounts: "*I saw him flying a kite on the roof of his own palace: his head was bare and he was wearing a lungi (loincloth). From this I was convinced that His Majesty was of an open bent of mind and extremely informal.*" Akbar had obviously transcended the love of pomp and glory so common in his age.

The remarkable thing about the boy who, barely in his 'teens, ascended the throne of the Moguls was the way in which he steadily transformed himself from a typical medieval despot into a wise and tolerant ruler who could set an example even today to some of the leaders of our liberal democracies. It is true that he built a pyramid of skulls after defeating Hemu; and had thousands of Hindus massacred after the battle of Haldighati. But it is astonishing how, as his power came closer to being absolute, he became more and more catholic and humane. By 1662, when he was barely twenty, the liberal phase of Akbar's reign had begun. There was a radical departure not only from his own early inclinations, but also from the traditions and practices established during the almost four centuries of Muslim rule in India before his reign. Discriminatory laws against non-Muslims, such as the *jizya* and Pilgrimage Tax, were repealed. Changes were brought about in Hindu as well as Muslim personal laws boldly introducing changes in marriage and divorce. The number of per

missible wives was reduced from four to one, a second wife being allowed only if the first was barren. Minimum marriageable age was fixed at 16 (for boys) and 14 (for girls) for Hindus as well as Muslims. Circumcision for boys below 12 was forbidden. Apart from the abolition of *jizya* and pilgrimage tax, other changes were brought about that would be anathema to most regimes even today. Hindus and non-Muslims were free to profess any religion, carry on legitimate propaganda and build churches, synagogues, idol-temples and fire-temples. Hindus, forcibly converted to Islam, and Hindu women forcibly married to Muslims could, if they chose, revert to their religion and families. The death penalty for criticism of Islam or of the conduct of the Prophet was repealed. Taking a step that would have been unthinkable in earlier regimes ( and perhaps also today in most Islamic countries) Akbar allowed conversions from Islam. Formerly this was treated as apostasy , to be punished by death. Akbar allowed Hindus the use of courts under Hindu judges. Under his patronage Hindu law digests were compiled by famous Hindu jurists.

An interesting case, recorded by Budauni, that has strong resonances in the context of the widespread violence being experienced in our day on the issue of blasphemy, was that of a certain Brahmin of Mathura. This person had, *“in the presence of witnesses, opened his foul mouth to curse the Prophet (on whom be peace!), and had shown his contempt for Muslims in various ways”*. Shaikh Abdu’n Nabi, a noted theologian and minister in charge of revenue grants, kept pressing Akbar for permission to execute the Brahmin and the king’s response was: *“Punishments for offences against the holy law are in the hands of you, the Ulama; what do you require of me?”* Clearly, the king was not in favour of such a drastic punishment. As Badauni records: *“At last, when the Shaikh’s importunity exceeded all bounds, the Emperor said “Our answer is that which we have already given you. You know of it.” No sooner had the Shaikh now reached his lodging that he issued orders for the execution of the Brahmin.”* Akbar was greatly agitated and called a meeting of eminent Muslim jurists to discuss the issue. The following advice seemed to have found favour with him, evidently much to the chagrin of hardliners like Budauni. *“The strange thing is that Shaikh Abdu’n Nabi should claim to be a descendant of Abu Hanifa (may God have mercy upon him!) according to whose school of theology the cursing of the Prophet by unbelievers who have submitted to the rule of Islam gives no ground for any breach of agreement by Muslims, and in no way absolves Muslims from their obligation to safeguard infidel subjects.”* One thinks of all the lives that have been lost recently in Pakistan on charges of blasphemy.

If Akbar was well ahead of his times in matters of religion, he was surprisingly more so in his attitude towards animals. Abu’l Faz’l records in ..... *“His Majesty cares very little for meat, and often expresses*

*himself to that effect. It is indeed from ignorance and cruelty that, although various kinds of food are obtainable for man, he is bent upon injuring living creatures, and does not draw back from killing and eating. He seems to have no eye for the beauty inherent in the prevention of cruelty, but makes himself a tomb for animals. If His Majesty had not the burden of the world on his shoulders, he would at once totally abstain from meat; and now it is his intention to quit it by degrees, for the time conforming a little to the spirit of the age.”* First, Akbar abstained from meat on Fridays, then also on Sundays. To this he added the first day of every solar month, solar and lunar eclipses, days between two fasts and some feast days and the month of *Aban* in which he was born. His adoption of certain Hindu practices was remarkable. Whether in the camp or on the march, he only drank Ganges water. He abolished cow-slaughter. When asked by his second son, Prince Murad to recommend one or two books that he should carry with him on his appointment as Governor of Malwa that “might promote the intellect and discourage traditionalism”, Akbar’s reply was: “*In the marshy land (shuristan) of tradition such a book is rarely to be found. But out of regard for him (Murad) the translation of Mahabharata, which is a strange tale, just now become available, has been sent.*” Akbar repeatedly expressed his scorn for tradition. Abu’l Fazl quotes him as saying: “*Commendation of the pursuit of reason and rejection of traditionalism shines far above this suppliant’s (ie Akbar’s) arguments. If following tradition was commendable, the prophets would have merely followed their predecessors.*”

Akbar’s successors, lacking his vision, gradually eroded his splendid heritage. Jahangir, born of a Rajput mother, did largely uphold Akbar’s secular policies, but was influenced by Muslim theologians to ensure conformity with Quranic Law. Basically his reign was a continuation of Akbar’s tolerant and catholic policies. Shahjahan largely abandoned Akbar’s tolerant religious policies. While the jizya was not reimposed, pilgrimage tax was revived, to be withdrawn later. Shahjahan forbade the construction of new temples, and the repair of old ones. The religious privileges of Christians were also curtailed. Hindus and Christians could no longer carry out conversions. Hindus marrying converted Muslim girls had to convert to Islam to escape punishment. One Dalpat of Sirhind, who was separated from his converted Muslim wife and children, was put to death on refusing to convert to Islam. Shahjahan resorted to widespread proselytisation. A criminal could get pardon on accepting Islam. Apostasy and blasphemy were made capital offences. Much worse was to come with Aurangzeb. His puritanical and intolerant policies hurt Muslims as well as Hindus - but the latter were, of course the prime targets. The destruction of temples, reimposition of the jizya and pilgrimage tax, discriminatory custom duties against Hindus ended the secular policies of Akbar., undoubtedly paving the way for the eventual dismemberment of Hindostan.

*Vir Narain*

*From the real world*

## **WHEN MEN MIGRATE**

*- Sabita Parida*

*Women face social abuse when men migrate to cities and are ill treated by their husbands when they come home on leave*

Recently, Prabhat Khabar, a daily newspaper published in Jharkhand, evoked the issue of increasing cases of AIDS in Barsot block of Hazaribagh district in Jharkhand. The increasing trend of migration at an early age was described as the cause of such plights. The newspaper only focused on one block but in many of the blocks of Hazaribagh and Koderma districts migration is one of the major earning sources.

The increase in migration in recent years makes the situation alarming. Increased number of AIDS patients is one facet of this malaise; it has several other impacts upon the lives of migrants and people who are close to them.

It is not too difficult to ascertain the rate of migration from villages. In this region one needs only to look at huge numbers travelling by general class by the Mumbai Mail or the Purusottam Express during festivals like Holi and just after sowing paddy. For young and middle aged men, and even young boys of 13 and 14, migration has become a lucrative option. In this area it is really difficult to find a young educated boy either as group accountants or service providers. They migrate to Mumbai, Delhi or Dehradun after studying 7th or 8th standard.

Migration cannot not be seen merely as an earning option because it has deeper impacts. There are several people who pay for this, mainly the wives and the children, who are brought up under the guidance of a single parent. The wife suffers the most, financially, mentally and physically.

### **Categories of Migrants**

The impact of the migration depends upon the categories of migrants that can be distinguished by age, place of migration, employment, etc. The first category consists of teenagers. They migrate to earn their bread and butter after studying up to 7th or 8th standard.

One of the main reasons behind such migration is often the influence of a next-door boy who has already migrated. The latter's lifestyle influences other boys to emulate him by migrating to cities and towns. The other main reason is the lure of cash income. There is also parental pressure to earn money.

The second category consists of men who migrate after marriage at 24 or 25 years. The need for a livelihood drives them. The migrants can also be distinguished by the places to which they migrate. Some migrate to metros like Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata. Others migrate to places like Dehra

-dun and Andhra Pradesh. I have found that people who migrate to metros wish to lead a life strongly influenced by the urban culture. I have also found that people who have migrated to southern India come back to try their hands at new and innovative ways of cultivation or are inclined to do some developmental work.

Migrants can also be distinguished by the nature of their employment. It has been my experience that people who work as waiters in hotels or as drivers have the most difficulty to adjust to rural life.

### **Impact on Women**

Chanchala Devi of Kandadag, mother of 5, is married to a migrant worker. Her husband sends no money home. She has to earn on her own at a brick kiln or a stone crusher. When her husband came back after a year of absence, he brought back a meagre sum of Rs 5,000, which was barely sufficient to meet his own demands of liquor and good food.

It is hard life for Chanchala. She is always working, at home or outside. She has no helping hand. Her in-laws live separately. Her routine was hectic with household work, going to the Padma market 2 km away, collecting firewood from jungles 4-5 km away, and then going to work at the stone crusher to earn daily wages.

She has a small piece of land, which her husband refuses to cultivate after being used to the city life of Dehradun. So she has to cultivate the land (except ploughing, which she might also have had to do if women were not restricted from ploughing).

She gets a little physical relief now that some of the children have grown up a bit. But mentally she has to cope alone. It was difficult for her to remember moments when her husband was beside her during a difficult period. Her husband could be present even during the times she gave birth (except for the fourth child). Her husband's role was to get her pregnant (she has 5 children) during his sojourns at home.

### **Unreasonable Demands**

When men come home on leave from city work, they bring an urban attitude with the bags and baggage. Sometimes they do not like the simple, homely looks of their wives and often demand that the poor woman (on top of her numerous duties) also dress up like film actresses. The men also often create fuss over the food that is served to them.

For the wives born and brought up in the rural environs, it is sometimes impossible to meet husband's unnecessary demands. The men never try to understand how difficult it is to beautify herself with doing household chores. She has to prepare and serve food, clean dishes, maintain the cattle, collect firewood and do agricultural work under the scorching sun. But the men would

always compare them with city girls. What is worse, these comparisons make them frustrated and angry. They would then beat up their wives. I came across several such cases in Dahuatola village of Jainagar. Every day 2-3 women would get beaten up by their husbands. It is such a regular thing that villagers just take it for granted.

Several years ago during my month long village stay as part of my apprenticeship, I found that Shanti Devi, newly wed daughter-in-law of Kalasari Devi, was beaten several times for different reasons by her husband. Sometimes she was left bloody and senseless for hours. He revealed to me that he was not happy with his wife and her look. He was working as a cook in a restaurant. According to him, his wife should be smart and beautiful like the girls who frequented the restaurant.

Radha Devi of Bhandra village of Padma has no financial problems as money arrives by draft at regular intervals. But the suspicious nature of her husband made her life miserable. He always doubted her character and fabricated stories of her extramarital affairs. He beat her like an animal when he found her talking with any man. According to Radha Devi, his suspicious nature aggravates after his visits to Mumbai. Whenever she tried to prove her innocence he narrates stories of betrayal in films and the city and remains adamant in his suspicions.

### **Sexual Abuse**

On top of being tortured by migrant husbands, women also have to cope with social abuse. Often close relatives sexually abuse them in the absence of their husbands. Marriage at an early age is common in this area. Teenage newlywed girls are the prime victims of such cases. After her husband leaves, every other man in the family (father-in-law, brother-in-law, etc.) harass her sexually.

One such case came to light in Manjhlitarn village of Padma block when the daughter-in-law tried to raise her voice. Her husband left for his workplace after the marriage. When her mother-in-law was absent, her father-in-law forced her into a sexual relationship. When she resisted, her father-in-law beat her head severely. The lady tried to get justice from the panchayat. But her own parents, husband and community pacified her in the name of home prestige and social status.

Daughter-in-law of Khemni Devi is another such victim. After 2-3 months of marriage her son, who is working as a driver, returned back to Mumbai for 10-12 months. In that meantime the young girl was sexually abused several times by a close relative of her in-laws. She hesitated to complain in the new environment. Things came out in the open when she gave birth to a child. Although her in-laws accepted her due to the intervention of the village women's groups, she was compelled to commit suicide



due the behaviour of people around her. In both the cases, the main culprit went scot-free. They were beyond the clutches of any societal rule and regulation. In most of the cases, it is the women who are victimised. Most family members are aware of such incidences, but family prestige and social status make them blind, deaf and dumb. The woman has to bear the harassment like a plastic doll.

It is not the end of her story; it has another cruel aspect. Different types of sexually transmitted diseases also came to them as a 'gift'. Recently during a credit appraisal of a women's group, I was astonished at the amount of loan taken by a member for medication. After asking her several times she revealed that her son was suffering from a deadly disease. With very difficulty she spelled the name of the disease, AIDS, which made me speechless.

After that incident, I found 4 such cases in the same village within a year. According to doctors of different blocks of Hazaribagh and Koderma districts, such cases are increasing day by day at an alarming rate though till now we do not have exact data.

### **People's Indifference**

The main area of concern is the indifference of the people towards the problems women face when their men migrate. Instead of seeing the other side of the coin, which is really ugly, people view it only as a good earning option. Parents encourage their teenaged male children to migrate and earn money. The scarcity of working opportunities in the village is not always the only reason.

Migration ensures ready cash in hand in a chunk, which cannot be had by people who are engaged in agriculture or daily wage labourers. According to the people over here, the opportunities to save or constructing a pucca (brick and mortar) house, which is an obsession here, are more for migrants as they get the money in a lump sum. People who work in the fields get their returns either in terms of food grains or very little amount of cash, which is generally spent on a daily basis on food, clothing, etc.

Also, besides the money, the migrants are getting special social status as a knowledgeable person having good knowledge regarding the 'outside'. When they come after 6 or 8-month stay 'outside', they get a royal treatment that attracts the next-door boy to follow the same path.

The migrants' social worth can be guessed from their demand in the marriage market. Generally, dowry given to a person working in Mumbai, Delhi even as a driver ranges from Rs 1-2 lakh whereas for a person doing agricultural work, it ranges from Rs 10,000 to Rs 60,000 according to landholding and house status. The bride's parents also feel proud to get their daughter married to a person working 'outside'. they get a royal treatment that attracts the next-door boy to follow the same path.

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### **How to Address the Problem?**

The first roadblock is that the victim herself often does not realise the problem. Wife beating is taken for granted. It is taken as the right of the husband. They generally do not value this as a problem. How could one sort out this out without making them realise that this is wrong? Social acceptance is also an obstacle that covers its negative sides.

As Pradan professionals engaged in livelihood promotion, we rarely attend to these social issues. We are engaged so much in promoting dairy, poultry and agriculture that we forgetting the real life of the people we work with. We are more concerned about the lives of cattle and poultry birds.

It is really a cause for concern that the self-help groups (SHGs) that we promote is not providing a platform to our SHG members to share their problems. They hesitate to discuss their family issues, though they discuss agricultural development or the urge for reeling yarn. If a member does discuss her problems, other members try to avoid, dismissing them as a personal matter instead of solving the issues.

When I tried to highlight such issues in general body meetings, I met with a very cold response. But the members discussed late fines, absent fines, credit linkages, etc. very vibrantly. There must be some problem in our grooming process, otherwise how can our members be blind to such sensitive issues? They may able to earn money, but without the awareness of their own rights, they will not be able to own the money. We have to re-look whether we are merely promoting enterprises to be run by rural women or are we really interested in changing their lives for the better.

*Sabita is based in Barhi in Jharkhand.  
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## VICTIMS OF JIHAD: A REPORT

### *The Slow Death of European Democracy*

*On 18th April, in collaboration with the Association of World Citizens and the Association for World Education, IHEU hosted a one-day conference at the Palais des Nations, Geneva in conjunction with the 61st Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights. This report is based on the on-line report © 2005 by Yali Noriega Curtis, Maria Lazarte and Nicolas Jaquier, of International Conference Volunteers.*

Abuses of human rights cannot be justified even if it is carried out in the name of religion. With this statement Mr. Roy Brown opened the conference on Victims of Jihad. The victims of this movement are not simply Christians, Jews and other minorities, but also Muslims. Human rights abuses committed in the name of Islam are a serious problem in the Muslim World. Mr. Brown called on Islamic leaders in the region to address this issue.

### **Muslims**

Professor Johannes Jansen, from the University of Utrecht explained how Jihad has been used by Muslims against both Muslims and other groups since the 9th century. Small but strong extremist sects, who do not tolerate any deviations from their interpretation of Islam, have disseminated this ideology. Any “apostate” who refuses to pray five times a day, to fight the infidels or introduce innovations, among other “crimes”, must be severely punished. It is all based on the principle that you cannot express an opinion that opens a debate on the interpretation of Islam – which makes reform extremely difficult.

Dr. Hamouda F. Bella, a victim of torture, spoke of his own experiences and his personal view of Islam. For Dr. Bella, jihad is a religious ordinance directed towards oneself. This interpretation aims to purify the self rather than combat others. Dr. Bella was tortured by the Sudanese authorities and still does not know why. He stressed the importance of bringing the perpetrators of jihadi violence to justice and argued that the International Criminal Court could play a key role. The Sudanese government, he claimed, uses jihad as a political justification for abuses committed throughout the country. Sudan used to be a country where Christians and Muslims lived together in peace, until the coup d’etat. When confronted on the issue, the president of this new regime stated “how can we introduce equality, if inequality is the will of God”.

### **Dhimmis**

Mr. David Littman talked about the role of schoolbooks in Egypt and Saudi Arabia in promoting jihad and martyrdom among the new generation. These books speak about the obligation to fight the infidels and subject them to rule of Islam, or else behead them. The books provide a justification for jihad through examples of heroic martyrdom and the promises of rewards in paradise.

*Source : International Humanist News, May, 2005*

A growing number of Muslim intellectuals are condemning these textbooks and advocating educational reform. Mr. Littman urged UNESCO to play a stronger role in the review of textbooks worldwide. Apostates and women were the subject of the second part of the parallel conference. All of the speakers strongly condemned the massacres taking place in Sudan. David Littman expressed the view that if the Commission did not pass a resolution condemning what was happening in Sudan, this would justify its demise.

### **Apostates**

Ms. Azam Kamguian from Iran was the first speaker in the session on 'Infidels and Apostates'. She started by describing her own experience; growing up with a powerful father and pious mother. The temptation to subordinate her being to God was very strong but when she was an adolescent she decided that she did not need religion to tell her who she was. "Even though I left Islam, I had to live with it", she stated. According to an extremist interpretation of the Sharia Law, the greatest sin is disbelief. Non-believers and Atheists do not have the right to life and apostasy is punishable by death. In one case in Iran, a man was executed for having converted his wife. Even in the academic community, discussions of the Koran are considered to be taboo. For Ms. Kamguian, Islam should be subject to criticism. Currently, if someone criticizes Islam in Iran they face death. One of the most important points is to "win the right to criticize religion" and "if a belief is sound, it stands on its own merit". Ms. Kamguian believes that any change in Iran will also have a significant impact everywhere else in the Islamic world. If there is any hope in the Middle East, it comes from Iran.

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides for the "freedom to change religion or belief". Mr. Ibn Warraq observed the discrepancy between this standard and the situation in Muslim countries. He first described the evolution of Islam in regard to its position on apostates. The Koran prescribes condemnation for apostates only in the next world, but this has evolved to mean those who change religion must be killed. In some countries, such as Sudan and Mauritania, the penal code provides the death penalty for apostasy. Also, Muslim theologians are aware that apostasy can tempt Muslim women to free themselves from Sharia law and they have taken measures to prevent this from happening.

In fighting causes of apostasy and bringing changes to the Muslim world, Mr. Warraq sees one solution: "without any post-colonial guilt, we must defend our values. We still have freedom of expression and the right to criticize Islam". In this sense, publications in the West are very important in helping populations in Islamic countries.

### **Slavery**

"Jihad is the worst evil facing the world and the people of Sudan

have experienced its cruelty more than any other group on earth”, began Mr. Simon Deng, a former Sudanese slave. He continued by denouncing the Islamization, Arabization and enslavement of the Southern Sudanese. These are accompanied by atrocities such as mass murders, slavery, systematic rape, religious persecution, enforced starvation and exile. The perpetrators of these crimes are “the radical jihadist regime in Khartoum”. According to Mr. Deng, the only reason for these attacks is their faithfulness to their religion, and the African culture of the Southern Sudanese. “I was a slave. I am not ashamed to say it”, Mr. Deng continued. When he was nine years old, his village was raided, children shot dead, disabled or burned in their huts. He was abducted and given to an Arab family as a gift, but “when you look at me, do you see a gift? Do I look like an object?” He was forced to sleep next to the animals and eat his “masters” leftovers. However, “there is no shame in being a slave. It is not a choice. There is only shame in being a master”, he stated. Overcome by emotion, he was unable to continue and the remainder of his speech was read for him. Mr. Deng strongly criticized the international community and especially the UN, for being indifferent when “millions of African blacks were being slaughtered”. After the Holocaust, after Pol Pot’s massacre in Cambodia and even after Rwanda, despite its inaction, the international community said “never again”. In the case of Sudan, “nobody said anything at all. Our fate seems largely invisible to the world”. He saw two reasons for this silence. First, because the victims are black, the Southern Sudanese are victims of a global racism; second, they are victims of the Arabs. Indeed, “when it comes to the ideology of Jihad, the Commission on Human Rights is muted, no one wishes to be seen as anti-Islamic”, he explained. Finally Mr. Deng called on all Muslims to speak up in order to condemn these crimes. Otherwise it would be assumed that their religion condones them. Since “to be silent is to condone, the international community must accept responsibility for every evil that it could end, yet chooses not to”, he concluded.

### **Radical Islam**

Caroline Fourest, a French writer, talked about the specific characteristics of radical Islamism that make it so dangerous. “Why does it take Taslima Nasreen, Bangladeshi exiled humanist activist, and Ayaan Hirsi Ali, member of Dutch Parliament, more courage to fight Islamic extremism than it took me to fight Christian extremism for ten years?”. Ms. Fourest does not think that the explanation is to be found in differences between religions themselves, since extremists of all kind share the same obsession: the oppression of women. For example, resolutions on planned parenthood and HIV/AIDS prevention have always been blocked at the UN by a coalition of the Holy See, American Pro-life delegates and the Islamic countries, she argued. Ms. Fourest listed three main reasons why Muslim extremism is more threatening today. First, Muslim move

ments compete by rejecting and resisting western modernization. This, in turn, encourages them to add extreme elements to their religion, such as the veil or genital mutilation. These used not to be commonplace, but now “the veil has become almost the sixth pillar of Islam”, she stated. Second, the degree of secularization in Muslim states is non-existent. On that point, Ms. Fourest drew a comparison. Jewish women in Mea Shearim may face the same oppression as those of Tehran, but the former have access to justice, whereas the latter will be put in jail by the state itself. The third factor, mostly playing in places where Islam is a minority religion, is cultural relativism. The minority is expected to continue its “cultural” practices, including wearing the veil, genital mutilations or stoning, for reasons of “folklore”. Indeed, cultural relativism is a real danger and must be addressed first, since it deprives those who are fighting extremism of the support that progressive Humanists should grant them. The fight for human rights should not be based on texts, but on facts. “I will not support the worst acts, whatsoever their origin”, Ms. Fourest said. “If we take the debate to the Koran, we prove them right. The debate is at the human rights level”. Moreover, if the debate is about texts, the fundamentalists will win because they are always closer to Allah than modernists who are supposedly influenced by the West and therefore are deemed “fake Muslims”.

### **Women**

Taslima Nasreen who had planned to attend the conference was unable to leave India because of visa problems and her statement was read for her. She described the plight of women and young girls in her own country, Bangladesh, and called for an end to oppression in the name of religion. She described the looming conflict as not between different religions, between Christianity and Islam, or between East and West, but between rational, logical thinking and irrational, blind faith.

Finally, Ms. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, member of the Dutch Parliament and women’s rights activist, recalled all the discriminations and atrocities suffered by Muslim women in the world. These include the need to be granted permission by a man in order to leave the house; the right of men to divorce their wives by repeating ‘I divorce you’ three times; wearing the veil; inheriting less than men and feminine genital mutilations. “The only way out is education. We must stop financing faith based schools in Europe”, Ms. Hirsi Ali said. The film she wrote on that subject, directed by Theo Van Gogh, aimed at denouncing these crimes. Congratulated by a participant for “putting her life in danger to make this kind of necessary criticism”, Ms. Ayaan Hirsi Ali was warmly applauded.

## THE LINEAGE

- Paul Rattenbury

Our gods are born within us as  
Projections of the mind,  
They sleep deep in subconsciousness,  
Arch guardians of Mankind

Lie dormant till we need them for  
Protection, help or care,  
Then instinct cries to conscious mind  
To rouse them with a prayer

With pleas for their assistance  
To save from harm or pain,  
With promise, if they'll intervene  
We'll never doubt again.

The easiest prayers are hymns we sing,  
Poetic roundelays,  
Since seeking no response ensures  
No trust can be betrayed.

All gods reflect the temperaments  
Of those they oversee,  
They're vengeful, helpful, punishing,  
Forgiving or carefree.

The ancient Greeks had inklings of  
This lineage from Man's mind,  
Imputing virtues, strengths and faults  
Which they with gods entwined.

Thus codes and laws ascribed to gods  
Evince a human plan,  
Since though they're worshipped, praised, revered,  
They were begat by Man.

*Source: NSS Newsline 2 Sep 2005*

***Humanist Perspectives:***

**HINDUTVA, SECULARISM AND THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION \***

- Prakash Narain

The word “*Secularism*” was coined in the year 1846 by G.J. Holyoake, a British social reformer and founder of the National Secular Society, London His concept of Secularism could be described as a “*philosophy of life independent of the existence of God or an after-life*” [Source: “*Secularism -A and B*” by Narsingh Narain, Humanist Outlook Vol No 8, May 1971] However, after Holyoake, the word “*Secularism*” has been defined or described in various different ways in different countries. In India, the position has been more complex because the word “*Secularism*” or “*Secular*” was not used anywhere in the original Constitution, except that the phrase “*secular activity*” was used in Article 25(2) for “*non-religious activity*” in a general sense, which does not help in indicating any meaning of “*secularism*” as an ideology. In 1976, vide the 42<sup>nd</sup> Amendment, the word “*Secular*” was added in the opening paragraph of the Preamble itself but without any further elaboration. In this situation, it became necessary to interpret the concept of “*secularism*” implied in the Constitution of India by taking into account the other existing provisions in the Constitution which had a bearing on religion.

Constitutional experts, jurists, social philosophers, political leaders and others have expressed many opinions on the meaning and nature of Secularism in the Indian Constitution. These bring out a cross section of interpretations some of which are quite different to each other, some are the same and some are similar but with distinct and important shades of differences. My own conclusions are as follows:

(1) The concept of Secularism in the Indian Constitution simply stands for “*impartiality*” of the State as between different religions and belief systems.

(2) “*Secularism*” in the West, in its emphasis on the “*independence*” of the State from “*religion*”, has by implication envisaged not only the “*impartiality principle*” but the view that not only the State but morality and philosophy of life should also be independent of religion, particularly theistic religion. [For example, entry for Secularism in Encyclopedia Britannica as a “*utilitarian ethic designed for the physical, spritual and moral improvement of mankind, which niether affirms nor denies the theistic premesis of religion*”, quoted by Subhash Kashyap in “*Our Constitution*”, page 60]. This is, actually, in a broad

*\*This article is an abridged version of a paper presented by the author at the “International Convention on What is Secularism” arranged by the International Humanist and Ethical Union, at Hyderabad, India, on January 14<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> 2005. The author is a former civil servant, and is Chairman of the Indian Humanist Union.*



sense what is usually meant by “*Humanism*” [To be precise, this covers the “*human self-reliance*” part of it, the other part being “*human values*”. Most humanist organizations in the West tend to emphasize the “*human self-reliance*” part more]. This is specially clear when the term used is “*Secular Humanism*” or “*Freethought Humanism*” which I have recently liked to use. I have felt that it is not wise or correct to blur the distinction between “*Secularism*” and “*Humanism*” In Indian usage there is a clear distinction between Secularism and Humanism. Both include religious impartiality of the State. But humanism implies an additional element of “*freethought*” which is against “*blind faith*” in a supra-human, unquestionable divinity. If a person or book is “*divine*”, it can not be questioned and this rules out “*free enquiry*”. However, this is something all secularists do not and need not agree with so long as they do believe in religious impartiality. For example, Gandhi, Rajendra Prasad, Maulana Azad and many others, past and present. In short, all humanists would be secularists but all secularists may not and need not be humanists.

(3) In the Indian Constitution, separation of religion and State does not find place perhaps because it is a more modern Constitution, framed at a time when religious institutions did not have any authority as such in relation to public affairs. The question of separation of religion and State now comes up in India mostly in the context of the efforts being made by some sections of the people to introduce a certain over-riding imbalance in favour of the majority religion as compared to the others. That effort, however, is also a gross violation of the impartiality principle and that should be enough reason for its being treated as a complete departure from Secularism, whether in terms of the Western or the Indian usage of the term.

(4) It is, perhaps, just as well that the Indian Constitution does not incorporate the principle of “*separation of religion and State*” as such. This has enabled the Constitution to provide for the direct intervention of the State in the territory of religion in the interest of social reform or human values. For example, the provision in Article 44 under the Directive Principles of State Policy that the “*State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India*”. The promulgation of the Hindu Marriage Act is another example. It may be desirable from some angles to incorporate in some future amendments to the Indian Constitution, the “*Separation Principle*” i.e the principle of “*Separation of Religion from Politics*” or “*Separation of Religion from State*” but while doing so it would, perhaps, be necessary to provide for the right of the State to intervene in the territory of religion in the interest of human rights, human values or social reform [see Note 1] But that is another question. What is to be emphasized in the present context is that the Indian Constitution, even as it exists, clearly provides for the “*Impartiality Principle*” which itself goes very far.

(5) It would not be correct to translate “*Indian Secularism*” as

*Dharm Nirapekshata*” in Hindi, as is often being done. The correct translation would be “*Sarva Dharm Sambhav*” which is already one of the widely used phrases .

(6) For the sake of clarity, a fairly important question would be as to what would be the English version or equivalent of the phrase “*Sarva Dharm Sambhav*”? Many persons, mostly non-humanists, like to call it “*Equal Respect for All Religions*”. On the other hand, some, mostly strong rationalists, insist that it should be “*Equal Indifference to All Religions*”. My own view is that the former interpretation would not be correct as “*Bhava*” does not mean “*respect*”; it means “*attitude*”. Moreover, one can not impose “*respect*” on any individual or institution. “*Respect*”, and even more so “*equal respect*”, is an inner matter of one’s opinions, mental perceptions and intellectual integrity. One can only impose “*impartiality*” in a person or institution’s behaviour and action, irrespective of their own views.

3. The question now arises: how does the concept of “*Hindutva*” stand vis a vis our “*Secularism*” interpreted as “*Sarva Dharm Sambhav*” or “*Impartiality as Between Different Religions and Belief Systems*”. The question is important as it is crucial for the present and the future of the country. The question is whether or not India is to be or should be a country where “*Hindutva*” with all its implications, would be a “***national***” slogan.

4. The word “*Hindutva*” was coined by VD Savarkar in his essay entitled “*Hindutva : Who is a Hindu?*”, written in 1923. Let us first consider the very semantics of this word. It is clear that, semantically, the word “*Hindutva*” is linked to the word “*Hindu*”. The word “*Hindu*” no longer means as, strangely, some people have argued, any one living east of the Indus River! This might be how the word “*Hindu*” originated some centuries ago. But it is not so now. The ground reality is that it now means a person whose religion is Hinduism and this does not include those who believe in other religions like Islam or Christianity, even though they may be living to the east of the Indus river! The word “*Hindutva*”, in its most straightforward interpretation, means “*Hinduness*”. In fact, SS Savarkar, the publisher of VD Savarkar’s essay of 1923, specifically stated that this was the intention of VD Savarkar [“*Savarkar and Hindutva*” by AG Noorani pg 66]. How does the declaration of this “*Hindutva*” as a national slogan, i.e. to be necessarily adopted by Hindus and non- Hindu alike, fit in with the concept of “*Secularism*” as embodied in the Indian Constitution enjoining, as we have discussed before, complete impartiality of the State as between different religions? Obviously, it clashes head-on with the principle of impartiality and non –discrimination, as the slogan gives pre-eminence to one religion in India over the others.

5. Apart from its discriminatory semantics, the history of the word “*Hindutva*” also can not be ignored. While this word was coined by VD Savarkar, it was further propagated by Golwalkar and was specifically linked to

a rejection of the traditional concept of “*territorial*” nationhood and adoption of a religion based concept of nationhood that is “*Hindu Rashtra*”. This specifically laid down the consequential exclusion from the Indian Nation of communities like Muslims and Christians whose “*Punya Bhumi*” (holy-land) was outside India. There is thus a historical linkage of the concept of Hindutva with the theory of a Hindu Rashtra, the replacement of the normal principle of “*territorial nationhood*” by “*religion based nationhood*”, the consequent denationalization of Muslims and Christians. Historically, therefore, it can perhaps be aptly described as “*Savarkar Hindutva*” or “*Godse Hindutva*” as Godse was a great admirer of Savarkar and was closely associated with him just before Gandhi’s assassination. [“*Savarkar and Hindutva*” by AG Noorani. Chapter 4].

6. Thus, taking both the semantics and the history of Hindutva into account, it implies a frontal conflict not only with Secularism but also with two other important constitutional values. One: Democracy, which along with Secularism, is mentioned in the opening sentence of the Preamble itself. Democracy implies not only decision making broadly on the basis of majority vote but also protection of the basic rights of the minority. Hindutva virtually tramples minority rights under its feet when it denies even nationality and citizenship rights to those communities, like Muslims and Christians, because their ‘*holy-land*’ happens to be outside India.

7. The second constitutional value which “*Hindutva*” contradicts is “*Pluralism*” provided, through Article 51 A (f) of the Fundamental Duties, which says: “*It shall be the duty of every citizen of India - ... to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture*”. Hindutva’s ruthless advocacy of a mono-chromatic culture goes completely contrary to the preservation of the “*composite culture*” enjoined in the Indian Constitution...

8. Apart from the direct confrontation of Hindutva with three important constitutional values viz. Secularism, Democracy and Pluralism, there are four other important constitutional values mentioned in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution with which the concept of Hindutva also clashes. The Preamble refers, inter-alia, to “*JUSTICE, social, economic and political; LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; EQUALITY of status and opportunity.... FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual....*” If some of the minority communities are denied even the nationality of the country, where is any “*justice*” left? If an individual can not profess his or her religious belief without losing citizenship and nationality, where is the “*liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship*”? If someone loses his or her citizenship on grounds of religion, where is the “*equality of status and oppo*

9. It seems clear to me that we must, as a society, take note of the serious implications of the concept of Hindutva and its effect on the mind-sets of people – both, of the majority community and of the minority communities. We must also take heed of the inevitable effect that mind - sets have on the behaviour and action on the ground from both sides. There is need to frankly and clearly analyze what Hindutva stands for. I am afraid the criticism of Hindutva by most of the secular sections of the society is generally muted and soft and does not bring out much of what has been argued above. Often it borders on what has been called “*soft Hindutva*”. It would appear that there is some kind of a political fear that a strident criticism of Hindutva will have an adverse electoral repercussion. This fear in my view is misplaced and harmful. Because of this “*fear*”, the ordinary people - the “*silent majority*” of people - have been allowed to forget both the discriminatory semantics and the dangerous history of this word. They have to be reminded of these through sustained argument and logic. The silent majority in India, which has a long tradition of tolerance and catholicism, will respond to any firm but reasonable advocacy against the clear dangers of Hindutva. And, if I may finally add, even if a critical campaign against Hindutva does have an adverse electoral repercussion, it will be in the short run. In the long run, as Gandhi proved, no society, organization, movement or cause – whether for freedom, for secularism or for political appeal - can achieve real progress if it compromises on principles of morality, justice and fair play.

**Note 1 (Ref Pg. 478):** Subsequent to the writing of this paper, the Indian Humanist Union incorporated this aspect in the *Resolution on Comprehensive Secularism* proposed by them for consideration at the 16<sup>th</sup> World Humanist Congress and the IHEU General Assembly Meeting held at Paris during July 2005. Kindly refer to the article on “*Comprehensive Secularism at IHEU*” by Prakash Narain, which appeared in the last issue of this journal, i.e Vol. 10 no.12 Summer 2005.

## INTELLIGENT DESIGN LEADS RELIGIOUS RENAISSANCE

- Peter Hearty

Religion is enjoying a world-wide Renaissance, but while the demise of the medieval world heralded an upsurge in art, literature and science, this latter day Renaissance is a very different beast. To it, science is a mortal enemy. Science offers an alternative path to truth, to fill in the gaps once occupied by an almighty god. It shows contempt for authority, demanding evidence and argument to back its assertions. There is no room for blind faith in a world of experts and peer reviews.

For four hundred years the European god has been in retreat in the face of this onslaught. Now the faithful are fighting back, and in the vanguard is the theory of Intelligent Design. Intelligent Design, or I.D., postulates that there are aspects of nature, particularly in biochemistry, which have so many interdependent parts, that they could not have evolved gradually. The only possible alternative is the intervention of an anonymous, benevolent, designer.

Except of course that the designer is not anonymous. We all know exactly who he's meant to be. The theory, and its chief protagonists, the Seattle based Discovery Institute<sup>1</sup>, exist for one reason and one reason alone: to get the god of Abraham back into American schools, thus subverting the ruling of the Supreme Court and the American constitution<sup>2</sup>. They failed with simple creationism, now they're trying a more subtle approach.

I.D. pretends to be a scientific theory. With typical religious dishonesty, there is no mention of their god. It uses the language of science, christening itself a "theory". It employs otherwise eminent biologists to find intricate mechanisms in nature whose evolution is poorly understood. It vilifies its detractors, portraying itself as a victim for daring to utter scientific heresy – the champion of the unorthodox. Then it demands equal billing in school science classes: "All we ask is that children be allowed to hear both sides of the argument".

Perhaps I.D. should be taught in science classes? As one commentator on the Newslines discussion forum said, it would take about five minutes to dismiss; to show that, once you abandon investigation and cause, you abandon science. The rest of the semester can then be spent on real science. But the I.D. zealots will not stop there. Give them a wedge in the science curriculum and

*Source: NSS Newslines 28 June 2005*

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*Source: NSS Newslines 28 June 2005*

and it won't be long before they demand more. In a country where the science curriculum is decided by popular vote, there is everything to play for. In a democracy, it is not only human institutions which must be governed by the will of the majority, but the very universe itself.

Religions in the U.K. have no such fiddly little problems to contend with. Here, old fashioned creationism can be taught with government blessing and state funding. Politicians have realised that most voters have little concern for the niceties of the science curriculum. Faith groups, on the other hand, can be persuaded to vote en-masse. All of a sudden, it has become respectable to wear a belief in magic on your sleeve. From Bush to Blair to Putin, leaders of every political colour are realising that believers have votes.

It is said that in the U.S. it is possible to have a black president, a woman president, even a gay president, but if you are an atheist then forget it. Surely such a state of affairs could never happen here? Yet we learn only this week that Robin Cook, one of the most intellectually admired and principled members of Tony Blair's ex-ministers, felt himself unable to join the National Secular Society for fear that it would damage his political career.

And therein lies the danger. Our religious leaders no longer wear vestments and mitres, instead they sit around the cabinet table. They do not preach damnation or proscription for those who fail to conform - those who do not share their enthusiasm for blind faith, any faith, are quietly sidelined. What use are voters who do not believe what they are told - who do not accept the authority of their religious superiors? And for that last bastion of rationality, science, they have the Theory of Intelligent Design.

## CELEBRATING THE ORDINARY: A COUNTERVIEW

- Vishwa Mohan Tiwari \*

*In this response to the Editorial 'Celebrating the Ordinary', which appeared in our Summer 2005 issue, Vishwa Mohan Tiwari contrasts the position of Hinduism with that of Humanism.*

Having examined life, perhaps prompted by Socrates' proposition - "The unexamined life is not worth living" - Hobbes, C P Snow and Bertrand Russel respectively found life brutish, tragic and dark. And if I may deduce, they found it 'not worth living.'!! Gautam Buddha also examined the life, found suffering and death, and then, to avoid the misery thereof, he asked the humanity to follow the middle path in life, probably a more profound way of saying 'celebrate the ordinary'. The same advice had been given earlier in Geetaa, Upanishad etc. And, "Without love, life is not worth living", could be a complementary proposition to that of Socrates. Indeed, after examining the life one may discover that only love can make life worth living, or that, "an unexamined life can be virtuous and the fact that love is a central concept in morals."

Media makes an ordinary man feel his life to be trivial, and then cleverly goes on to make him celebrate the celebrities, which mostly may be sub-ordinary, and make him buy the advertised goods to avoid his angst and alienation. It keeps the ordinary man captive to exploit him. It is a happy phenomenon that a growing child provides meaning to the lives of his family members etc., thereby securing emotional health and an integrated personality of himself, and thus the society. Education is essential in this evolution. On the kind of education, Vir Narain recommends 'Humanist' education – ***since the comforting myths of traditional religions will not do the prime features of which will have to do with freedom of thought, humility, tolerance, the scientific spirit, acceptance of uncertainty and of death...but the radical departure from religions is in the acceptance of uncertainty and the finality of death. He quotes Iris Murdoch, "The acceptance of death is an acceptance of our nothingness...The good man is humble...in whom one apprehends with amazement the absence of the anxious, avaricious tentacles of the self."***

Myths can express great ideas, indeed, they may remain meaningful over rather long periods of time under different conditions of a society. Yet, a people from different times or cultural back-ground may find the same myth merely comforting or even meaningless. Let us see what the traditional religion Hinduism has to say about the prime features, meaning of life and education. Hinduism, being the oldest of religions, has a heavy baggage of historical development. It has dealt with beliefs and behaviour of very different peoples over a long period. It therefore has become very complex in structure and contents, and statements in it appear or even may be contradictory. There are

*\*Vishwa Mohan Tiwari is a retired Air Vice-Marshal of the Indian Air Force*

several paths to spiritual knowledge or realization, Paths of Knowledge, Action, Devotion, Paatanjali's Yoga etc. Then there are contradictory bases to spirituality, Dualism, Nondualism etc. And a seeker has to choose one path, and then follow it faithfully. Meanings of the same statement for persons of different capabilities, learning, faiths, ideology, paths may differ, therefore it is important to understand the meaning of any statement in proper perspective

Freedom of thought is a vital necessity of a human being, any system of thought or religion not giving this freedom is inhuman. In RigVeda it is said, "There is one truth, however different scholars may express it differently." There is freedom to express your understanding or realization of the truth. This also entails 'tolerance' as one knows that one's view need not be the only view; others have as much right in following their paths as he has to follow his. One of the longest lessons ever given is that given by Lord Krishna to Arjun, known as Geeta. Having explained many paths to resolve his dilemma, at the end, Krishna tells Arjun (18, 63), "Thus I have given you the esoteric of the esoteric knowledge; now you ponder over it comprehensively, and then decide to act as you please." In Taittareeya Upanishad: The student is told to treat the teacher as a god; and then the teacher instructs them to emulate only the noble behaviour of theirs and not other. There is no single authority, a person or a book, in Hinduism giving Commandments; but there are several sources of knowledge or paths to spirituality. It is an oft quoted aphorism, 'There is not one Muni, a thinker, whose words are the ultimate or the final authority'. The name Vaydaanta indicates the end of quest of knowledge, but Vaydaanta does not describe the knowledge! It is the culmination of the Vaidic quest leading to the source of knowledge, where one is further guided on his quest to 'realize' the knowledge himself, and not merely repeat the words of another realized person. No book, no authority will do, knowledge has to be realized by the seeker himself; a revelation will not do either.

Scientific spirit is deeply rooted in Hinduism. Mundak Upanishad begins with a question like, "O Guru, what is it by knowing which all this becomes known?" This is like the quest for 'Unified Field Theory' of Einstein. Like most religions, Hinduism also begins with belief in God, the Ultimate Reality, but unlike other religions, faith is ultimately transformed to a Realization of That. Of course only highly devout seekers can attain 'Realization'. If a religion has one or two fundamental faiths or axioms, but then it remains logical, then that religion is scientific, just as science has a few axioms. 'Nyaaya Shaastra', one out of the ancient six, comprises logic, which begins with, 'The truth can be accepted only after a proper proof.' Like physical experiments, truth, in this case being experienced as 'realization', is questioned and counter questioned, as is indicated by another popular aphorism. The law of causality is fundamental to scientific enquiry. And it is respected as such in Hinduism. Three Sutras of the



ancient Patanjali's Yog Sutra state - 'All events follow the laws of nature, we only facilitate the cause to take effect, just as a gardener when he transfers water from one bed to another, he merely shifts the obstruction from one to the other channel.' Arya Bhat presented the Solar Centric theory, 1000 years before Copernicus, and as a result was appointed the Vice Chancellor of Paataliputra University; whereas on propagating the Solar Centric Scientific fact, Bruno was burnt at stakes, Brahe was exiled, and the famous Galileo was lucky in that his death sentence was commuted to house arrest on confession of his mistake. Humility is another humane attribute, uncommon in these days of 'Individualism'. Vir Narain quotes Iris Murdoch, "The acceptance of death is an acceptance of our nothingness." This is true, but according to Vaidic thought it is also possible to be humble without considering oneself to be nothing, but by realizing that 'all is That'. The quotation continues, "The good man is humble. . . . *humble is to be free from the anxious, avaricious tentacles of the self.*" It is a great exposition to come out of the West. For in India, it is part of age old wisdom to the road to realization of 'Self' or ultimate happiness. Greed and ego or pride are two of the six enemies of a human being. These two are responsible for the 'the anxious, avaricious tentacles of the self'. Anger, the third enemy, though sometimes justifiable, is an indication of lack of humility. The six enemies are the main obstacles in the path of Self Realization. A Realized person sees the fundamental unity in the entire cosmos, and so has no pride, jealousy, hatred, greed etc. He is full of love for all, as he loves his-self, because he sees his-self in all.

Uncertainty in life generally does not allow any remedial action, and one has to suffer its unpredictable and often undesirable consequences. Therefore to accept them, people commonly believe that uncertainties are either part of their destiny or God given, but not random. Krishna in Geetaa tells Arjun to accept the war which has come randomly on his way, for he has neither worked for it nor desired it, and win heaven through it. Again Krishna explains, "There are five causes to complete an action – the place, the doer, the instruments, the methods and 'daiva'." Daiva means pertaining to gods, fate etc., but also 'chance', which is appropriate here. Krishna had made all the efforts to avoid the war, and has never said that the war was fated, although knowing Duryodhan's nature he did tell Gaandhaaree that it was inevitable; he did not mean fated.

Accepting death and its finality is again a difficult proposition to practice. 'What is the greatest wonder?', is known as one of the 'Yaksha Prashna', in the answer of which Yudhisthir says that despite seeing deaths everyday people still think that they will not die, is the greatest wonder. Krishna tells Arjun that whatever takes birth has to die, and whatever dies has to take birth. Arjun should neither be afraid of death nor of causing death, and accept the war

in the cause of justice. Here inevitability of death has been stressed in a positive way, as death is not to be feared but accepted, and life's work has to go on. However finality of death remains in doubt here.

Finality of the death of physical body is accepted in Hinduism, only subtle body and the Soul survive the death. The subject of rebirth is a very complex subject, even Dr. Ian Stevenson after a life long thorough research on the subject, all over the world, could not deny the existence of rebirth. Finality of death cannot be taken as final yet. In the presence of so many examples of 'rebirth', the phenomenon cannot be denied. Non occurrence of rebirth is as much a faith as is belief in its existence. If faith in finality of death is comforting to a humanist, then rebirth or the concept of 'Last Judgement' is comforting to the believers. In any case this question of rebirth does not come in the way of celebrating the ordinary. Indeed one of the consequence of belief in rebirth is that it encourages one to become a moral or a 'good' person, just as the concept of final death or 'Last Judgement' also does.

One point in favour of the concept of rebirth, though, is that a man is not punished with eternal hell for mistakes made in one life. Without morality, no one can celebrate the ordinary. Morality is again an extremely complex subject. Neither science nor philosophy can logically establish the acceptability of moral values. Kant had to believe in the 'Categorical Imperative'. Science and many philosophers say that morality is a question of emotional choice of a person. However in Vedic 'Non-Dualism' morality<sup>14</sup> is firmly based on the 'Realization' of the 'Oneness' of not only humanity but also of the cosmos. After 'Realization' one behaves with others as he behaves with himself !! He celebrates the life, both ordinary and extra ordinary.

## NEWS AND NOTES

### **IHEU responds to accusation of Islamophobia by the OIC**

In the latest step in an long-running campaign, IHEU has condemned as “gratuitously insulting” an oral statement made by Pakistan’s Ambassador to the UN on behalf of the Organisation of Islamic States (OIC), and issued a detailed rebuttal.

IHEU and two other NGOs have campaigned for the Commission on Human Rights to “unequivocally condemn any call to kill, to terrorise, or to use violence in the name of God or religion.” But in an unprecedented ad hominem attack on our spokesman on 26 July, three members of the Sub-Commission attempted to censor his oral joint statement to the Sub-Commission. Following this incident, a formal letter of complaint was delivered on 2 August to the chairman of the Sub-Commission, who circulated it to all 26 members. But in an 8 August oral statement Pakistan’s ambassador, speaking on behalf of the OIC, accused the concerned NGOs of: “packaging their crass propaganda as scholarly research in their bid to spread hatred against Muslims”.

Commenting on the OIC statement, Roy Brown, president of IHEU said: “This gratuitous insult has no basis in fact. Instead of providing leadership to the Islamic world on this important issue, the OIC has again chosen to demonise the messenger. This is part of a continuing campaign of misrepresentation by the OIC against NGOs and their representatives at the Commission and Sub-Commission. The OIC statement hides behind accusations of ‘Islamophobia’ in order to block any discussion of those extremist clerics who call to kill in the name of Islam.”

We are deeply concerned at the failure of the OIC and the Islamic States even to recognise that those who call for these terror attacks are Muslim clerics. It creates an obstacle to discussion of this important issue, and will make any solution to the problem of terrorism harder to achieve.

The full press release is available at  
<http://www.iheu.org/uncampaign/iheuresponse>.

Full details of IHEU’s campaign at the UN are available at  
<http://www.iheu.org/uncampaign>.

### **Protecting Muslim Women: Statement by Roy Brown**

Resolution 2004/69 on the Status of the International Covenants adopted without a vote by the Commission last year, emphasizes the importance of the strictest compliance by States parties with their obligation under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and, where applicable, the Optional Protocols to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

However, we wish to bring to the attention of the Commission the existence of two major obstacles to the full implementation of these rights that exists even in many western democracies. The first is an undue concern for multiculturalism amounting to moral relativism.

Western society tends to turn a blind eye to the plight of European Muslim women and girls because “Muslim culture is different”. Yet in Europe many women find themselves subject to domestic violence, undergo forced marriages or are even killed by family members because of some belief that they have tarnished the family honour.

Throughout the Muslim world, and it is equally true in many Muslim communities in the West, few women are able to participate fully in society without the permission of their menfolk, permission that is frequently denied.

The second obstacle is exemplified by Resolution 2005/L.12 “Combating Defamation of religion” accepted by the Commission by 31 votes to 16 on 12th April. We note with extreme disquiet paragraph 8, which: “Stresses the need to effectively combat defamation of all religions, Islam and Muslims in particular especially in human rights forums”. [my emphasis].

Mr Chairman, it is no defamation of religion, it is rather the duty of this Commission, “the conscience of the world”, to expose and condemn the abuse of human rights even when it is sanctified by religious belief or custom. Many states in the West are currently considering permitting Muslim communities to settle family disputes by means of arbitration based on Sharia law. Many Muslim women will thereby be condemned through social pressure - in nominally egalitarian western society - to accept unequal treatment before the law. The idea of one law for them, another for us, is anathema and precisely the kind of moral relativism that will deny these people the full enjoyment of their human rights, and will inhibit their full integration into western society.

Would this Commission, we wonder, have remained silent when millions of European Jews were being shipped off to the gas chambers because this was “part of German culture”?

Mr Chairman, undue concern for religious or cultural differences, or fear of being labelled Islamophobic, must not be permitted to stand in the way of the universal application of Human Rights.

*\*Statement by Main Representative Roy Brown, Monday 18 April 2005. A joint statement with the Association for World Education and Association of World Citizens Commission on Human Rights: 61st Session. (14 March - 22 April 2005) Status of International Covenants on Human Rights (item 17a)*

### **From Superstition to Savagery: Women Accused of Witchcraft Face Violence in Rural India**

At sundown, Pusanidevi Manjhi recalled, nine village men stormed into her house shouting, "Witch, witch!" and dragged her out by her hair as her six small children watched helplessly. "This woman is a witch!" the men announced to the villagers, said Manjhi, 36. She said they tied her ankles together and locked her in a dark room Pusanidevi Manjhi, pictured with husband Gooda and their six children, was accused of being a witch by a landowner whose paddy crop was destroyed by fire. She was tortured and held captive for four days.

"They beat me with bamboo sticks and metal rods and tried to pull my nails out. 'You are a witch, admit it,' they screamed at me again and again," Manjhi said, tearfully recalling her four days of captivity in June. "They accused me of casting an evil spell on their paddy crop that was destroyed in a fire. I begged them and told them I was not a witch," she said, showing wounds on her legs, thighs, hips and shoulders one recent morning in this village in the eastern Indian state of Jharkhand.

After a police investigation, the men who attacked Manjhi were arrested. An official said that the attack was spurred by a powerful landowner who owned rice paddies in the village and used local superstition to mask his attempts to maintain control.

Threats and charges of witchcraft occur in a number of Indian states that have large tribal populations with traditional beliefs about witches. Indian newspapers periodically publish reports about women who, after being accused of being witches, have been beaten, had their heads shaved or had strings of shoes hung around their necks.

Some have been killed.

*Source: RGHR E-Newsletter Aug 29, 2005. Report by Rama Lakshmi.*

### **Council Housing Built so as not to Offend Muslims**

A new block of flats has opened in Bristol with bathrooms that are specially designed not to offend Muslims. The toilets have been built so they do not face south east, which means tenants of the housing association-run flats are not facing Mecca when they use them. The 16 flats in Wilson Street, St Paul's, which have been built at a cost of £1.7 million, have a number of design features to make them user-friendly for Asian tenants.

*Newsline 7th October 2005*

### **Hindu School to get Public Money**

Harrow council has approved plans to create one of Britain's first voluntary aided Hindu schools. The I-Foundation, a non-profit group of Hindu community leaders, bid to establish the primary school in northwest London. The council says 20 per cent of its residents are Hindu. The foundation will apply for partial state funding from the local education authority. The rest of the money will be raised privately.

*NSS Newsline 10 June 2005*

### **Taslima Driven from Indian Arts Festival by Fanatics**

The writer and NSS honorary associate Taslima Nasreen faced hysterical protests from Islamic fundamentalists when she tried to visit India recently to attend an arts festival. In the face of protests by the Muslim group Jamat-e-Ulema-e-Hind, the district administration has cancelled the programme where Taslima was to recite her poems. "I am hurt," she said. "But why should we buckle under pressure of the fundamentalists who even threatened to blow up Mumbai airport when they heard that I was coming there?"

District Superintendent of Police Ajay Nanda said though she had been assured security, the situation could have got out of hand after her visit. The entire area was cordoned off by police after protestors placed roadblocks to prevent her arrival.

After fanatics accused her of publishing blasphemy in her book *Lajja* and issued death threats against her, Taslima has fled Bangladesh and has lived in Europe, the US and India since then. She has applied for an Indian citizenship amidst widespread protests from fundamentalists. "I know that various groups are opposed to granting citizenship to me. I can say that these Muslim organisations are not representative of the larger Muslim community in India," she commented.

*NSS Newsline 06 May 2005*

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