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HUMANISM AND SPIRITUAL VALUES: MYSTICISM*

Human values have been classed as material, intellectual, aesthetic, moral and spiritual. Our Memorandum of Association refers only to moral values. This, of course, does not mean that we deny the existence of material, intellectual and aesthetic values, but only that the Union is not directly concerned with them. Some Humanists speak of spiritual values and spiritual needs. Others dislike the word "spiritual". To say that there are spiritual values does not imply an admission of the dualism of matter and spirit or, indeed, of any metaphysical or religious position at all. The conception of spiritual values varies greatly. We have no collective stand on this matter, except that moral values, for us, take precedence over, and are independent of, spiritual values. Which is the reverse of the usual religious position. We have referred specially to mysticism as it is supposed to satisfy man's spiritual need in the highest degree.

Individual Humanists may be inclined to dismiss mysticism as of no consequence, or even as a kind of hallucination, but this is not at all necessary. Dr. Corliss Lamont, who is a materialist and an atheist, says: "*Humanists do not doubt that famous mystics and prophets have had remarkable and soul-shaking subjective experiences, tremendous moments of exalted vision. What we doubt is the correctness of their interpretation of these experiences, the meaning that they give to them.*" Now, religious mystics have usually interpreted their experiences in the light of the theology which they had previously adopted. A Roman Catholic will have the vision of Virgin Mary, A Hindu will have a vision of Lord Krishna, and so on. There may be communion with a personal God or contact with a more abstract transcendental Reality. There are also two non-theistic religions, Jainism and Buddhism, with a strong mystic tradition. Prof. A. R. Wadia has pointed out that "*mysticism at its best can lay claim only to one great uniformity, the sense of oneness that the mystic feels with the whole universe.*"

But the religious mystic is usually indifferent to the reality around him. That is why Albert Schweitzer has remarked that "*of all the mysticism of the past it must be said that its ethical content is too slight.*" The emotionally felt sense of oneness has suffered a misdirection owing to the world-negating bias of the traditional religions. We have inherited the thought that man is born in sin, or to expiate past sins, that this earth is no place for the fruition of his highest and noblest aspirations. For us who do not share this outlook a deep emotional sense of unity with our fellow-beings can be just as satisfying and elevating as mystical ecstasy.

**Extract from the Explanatory Note issued by the Humanist Union in November 1960.*

EDITORIAL



Humanist Thinkers in India

The Humanist Movement is the child of the Enlightenment and of liberal Christianity. It was born soon after what was undoubtedly the bloodiest and most brutal decade in human history. World War II had just ended, and the full horrors of the Holocaust were just beginning to dawn on the world. Europe had almost been over-run by Nazism and Fascism. Half of Europe was still in the grip of a totalitarian ideology, and all of it was a smouldering ruin. Six million Jews had died, but anti-Semitism was very far from dead. The Atomic Bomb had just made its deadly debut; and it seemed that any future war could spell the extinction of life on earth. The founders of the International Humanist Movement, undoubtedly shaken by these events, realised that, if the horrors of recent history were not to be repeated, something had to be done to loosen the grip of ideological and religious dogma on the minds of ordinary people. When the International Humanist Movement came into being in 1952 its declared mission was to provide an alternative to *“traditional religions which claim to be based on revelation on the one hand and totalitarian systems on the other.”*

While the Humanist Movement took roots in the West - it cannot yet be claimed that it has flourished - elsewhere, especially in the sandy soil of theocratic nations, it has not even germinated. In other words: the presence of the Humanist Movement is weakest where it is needed the most. This has had significant unintended consequences which this may not be the place to discuss.

India, however, presents a different, and much more hopeful, picture. India gave birth to three of the world's most liberal and tolerant religions - Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. It has a rich, variegated and highly sophisticated philosophical tradition, and a pluralistic approach to matters of faith. For the average Indian, the transition to Humanism does not involve a total rupture from his traditional faith, as it does for those who have been brought up in the monotheistic, revelatory Abrahamic religions. In Islam the adoption of the humanistic, nontheistic, worldview would amount to apostasy, punishable by death. Even assertive atheism finds no hostile public reaction in India. The success of Gora's Atheist movement and the widespread adoption of the atheist label in South India show that the Indian environment is conducive to the growth of rationalism and humanism.

There is, however, hardly any reason for Indians to congratulate themselves on this score. Religion and society in India have been responsible for

some of the worst crimes against humanity - Sati and the practice of untouchability being perhaps the two worst examples.

Raja Rammohan Roy can justly be considered a precursor of modern Indian humanists. As Narsingh Narain wrote: *“Rammohan Roy played a significant part in almost every sphere of public life, but in the field of social reform he is a unique and almost solitary figure in Indian history. For hundreds of years Hindu leadership of all kinds had been completely indifferent to such social evils as infanticide, polygamy, child-marriages and Sati... Rammohan Roy succeeded in getting Sati abolished not because he was able to carry the majority of Hindus with him but because he was able to gather just enough following to strengthen the hands of the British rulers who had been wanting to put an end to the cruel custom for a long time but were afraid to do so for fear of being accused of interfering with religious freedom.”*

While the practice of Sati has been practically abolished, discrimination based on caste still plagues Indian society, despite comprehensive legislation against it, and despite strong affirmative action on the part of the state. In recent times a large number of reformers have devoted their lives to eradicating this evil: Jyotirba Phule, Mahatma Gandhi, BR Ambedkar and many others.

Manabendra Nath Roy, a prominent figure in the early years of International Communism, founded the Indian Radical Humanist Movement (IRHM), originally as a political party, but in 1948 he decided to convert it into a social movement. The Radical Humanist Association is one of the earliest members of the International Humanist and Ethical Union. The other prominent humanist thinkers in India have been: Periyar, Kovoov, Gora, AB Shah, Narsingh Narain, Ramswaroop Verma and Abraham Solomon. Dr Ramendra of the Buddhiwadi Foundation has done a great job in critically appraising the views of some of these prominent humanists - and we are serialising his work in this and the next two issues of our journal. Humanists, being freethinkers, can hardly be expected to agree with each other on all points, and there are many aspects of Dr Ramendra's analysis which some humanists may like to take issue with. But the important thing is to start a dialogue and debate in India on the basic ideas of humanism as seen from the Indian perspective. As Narsingh Narain wrote in the introduction to the August 1968 issue of this journal devoted to “Humanist Viewpoints”: *“Some of us are inclined to regard such debates as useless and distracting. What is the point, it is asked, of indulging in abstract talk when so many urgent practical problems are crying out for a solution. Humanism, we are told, is already too much of a drawing room affair, a mere pastime for intellectuals and semi-intellectuals. The argument sounds plausible, but will not stand examination.”* We are confident that Dr Ramendra's articles will bear this out.

CRITICAL COMMENTS ON THE VIEWS OF SOME LEADING HUMANIST THINKERS IN INDIA - I

Ramendra

In the Summer 2007 issue we published the first chapter of Dr Ramendra's e-book 'Rationalism and Atheism in India'. The last chapter of the book is now being serialised in three issues. It provides valuable material for discussion and debate among Humanists in India and abroad..

In this concluding chapter, I will be making some critical comments on the thinkers and topics discussed in this book. I am not attempting a comprehensive critical assessment of all the thinkers that I have discussed. I will only be discussing the topics that I consider of fundamental philosophical importance and on which I have something useful to say. In a way, I will be presenting my own ideas in the context of the ideas of these thinkers.

Rationalism

All the thinkers discussed by me in this book have, broadly speaking, supported logical and scientific thinking as well as a rational morality. Therefore, in a manner of speaking, all of them are rationalists. Periyar and Kovoov have specifically given to themselves the label of "rationalist". M.N. Roy, too, has supported rationalism. Though Roy has primarily used the label of "humanist", he was also a rationalist and an atheist. He considered the promotion of rationalism and atheism as part of his humanist movement.

Ambedkar has tried to present Buddhism as rationalism. Gora, too, has supported the method of science, though he preferred the label of "atheist". According to him, "verification is the demarcating line" between truth and falsehood. A.B.Shah was a supporter of scientific method. In fact, he wrote a book dealing exclusively with scientific method. Narsingh Narain, while emphasizing "common sense", regarded scientific temper in the sense of loyalty to fact and readiness to revise opinions as one of the basic values of humanism. According to him, "the rejection of the doctrine of finality, and the extension of the scientific approach to religious problems" is "the most revolutionary aspect of Humanism". Ramswaroop Verma, too, has emphasized rationality and scientific thinking in his writings. According to him, reason alone distinguishes human beings from other animals. A human being devoid of rationality becomes worse than animals. Thus, as I said in the very beginning, all the thinkers discussed by me in this book are, broadly speaking, rationalists.

However, I have already discussed in the chapter on Ambedkar, why, strictly speaking, Ambedkar cannot be described as a rationalist. His attempt to equate Buddhism with rationalism is not acceptable. Narsingh Narain and Ramswaroop Verma, too, have marred the purity of their rationalism by bringing

in the concept of “religion” in one way or another. Though, I think, they have given up the substance of religion while only retaining the word “religion”.

I will discuss religion and Buddhism later in this chapter. As far as rationalism is concerned, I have already discussed it in the first chapter. I have given the formulation of “rationalism” as contained in my *Buddhiwadi Ghoshnapatra* (Rationalist Manifesto) or *Andhvishwas ke Virudh* (Against blind faith). I have also shown that this formulation is in consonance with the popular meaning of the word. I wish to quote it once again even at the risk of appearing repetitive:

Rationalism is not a closed set of conclusions, but a method of arriving at conclusions. As a mental attitude, rationalism gives supreme importance to reason for understanding and solving the problems of life. Rationalism rejects faith, intuition, authority and revelation as sources of knowledge. A rationalist uses reason for testing all conclusions, and accepts only those which are coherent and which correspond with the reality. A rationalist believes in the truth of a conclusion only to the extent of the evidence in support of its truth. If in any sphere of knowledge, sufficient evidence is not available for arriving at any conclusion, a rationalist suspends his or her judgment. In other words, a rationalist uses logic and scientific method for understanding this world.

Further, Similarly, a rationalist also rejects the rigid and divisive morality based on blind faith in religious scriptures and on unreasonable and unscientific beliefs like God, heaven, hell and rebirth. He or she uses reasoning in the sphere of ethics as well, and accepts a rational morality based on human desires and needs. In short, the rationalist philosophy of life is based on reason.

I have supported rationalism in all my major writings since I wrote *Andhvishwas ke Virudh*, though I have increasingly used the word “humanism” along with “rationalism”. According to me, there are two basic elements in rationalism: one, upholding logical and scientific method of thinking; and two, supporting a rational, secular and human ethics based on basic human needs and desires.

I am aware of the international advocacy of the exclusive use of the word “humanism” without any prefix in preference to terms like “rationalism” and “atheism”, etc. for describing “the distinctive naturalistic life stance”. Besides, as I have discussed in the first chapter, the word “humanism” is increasingly being used as a synonym of “rationalism”. I have nothing against the use of the word “humanism” in the international context or even in the Indian context. But, personally, I hesitate in using the term “humanism”, without qualifying it with “rationalism”, for describing my own basic philosophical position, because, in the Indian context, the word “humanism” has also been

used to describe the ideas of religious and semi-religious thinkers like Gandhi, Tagore and Aurobindo. Even in West, the word “religious humanism” is still in vogue. In contrast, my own thinking is totally secular or non-religious. I am in favor of discarding religion as well as the word “religion”. Therefore, I do not want my ideas to be confused with the religious variety of “humanism”. To avoid ambiguity and confusion, I prefer using “rationalism-humanism” or “rational humanism” instead of only “humanism”.

Another reason for retaining the word “rationalism” is that though the word “rationalism” and “humanism” have become synonyms; still there is a difference in the focus of the terms. In “rationalism” there is a clear emphasis on the rational method of thinking, which, according to me, is of central importance. For the same reason, I prefer the term “rationalism” to “atheism” for describing my basic philosophical position. As discussed in the first chapter, atheism is a logical consequence of rationalism. It is one of the conclusions we arrive at by using the rational method of thinking, though a very important one. I unhesitatingly use the label “atheist” for myself and I strongly advocate atheism, but for me rationalism is more basic than atheism. I am an atheist because I am a rationalist.

God

All the thinkers discussed in this book have rejected the belief in God. Therefore, all of them may be described as atheist. However, on taking a closer look, we find a difference in approach and emphasis. Gora used the word “positive atheism” for describing his ideas. Thus, Gora emphasized atheism much more than others. In fact, Gora actively worked for removing the prejudice against “atheism” and making it an acceptable and respectable term. However, apart from Gora, Periyar, too, was very explicit and emphatic about his atheism. In his later life, he used to start his public meetings by categorically asserting the non-

There is no god.

There is no god.

There is no god at all.

M. N. Roy regarded the belief in God and fate as the strongest link in the chain of the slavery of the Indian people. He envisaged the Radical Democratic Movement as “the school to teach the Indian people to revolt against fate and the God or gods who preside over it.” Roy has not mentioned God even once in his twenty-two theses in which he has presented his new humanism mainly as a political philosophy. Ambedkar, too, did not believe in the existence of God. This is obvious from the reasons he has given for embracing Buddhism as well as from his interpretation of Buddhism in Buddha and His Dhamma.

Similarly, Kovoov, too, was explicit about his atheism. But, in his campaigns he concentrated mainly on miracle busting. A. B. Shah clearly rejected the belief in the existence of God. So did Ramswaroop Verma. According to Verma, the superstition of God will die out with the growth of scientific thinking. However, in his fight against brahminism he concentrated his fire on the doctrine of rebirth and karma. Among all the thinkers discussed in this book, Narsingh Narain had the softest approach towards God, though he himself did not believe in the existence of God.

Many humanists, says Narsingh Narain, seem to think that “rejection of God is the first necessity for rational living.” But, according to Narain, “this is as untenable as the opposite view, which is constantly dinned into our ears from other quarters, that atheism must lead to moral decay.” Narsingh Narain maintains that belief in God, by itself, does no harm. It is some further beliefs, usually associated with it, which have a bearing on our ideas of right and wrong and our practical aims. These are (1) that the will of God is revealed in this or that sacred book or through this or that prophet or incarnation and (2) linking morality with the idea of reward and punishment in another world or another life. Narsingh Narain is of the view that “where beliefs or speculation about God are not associated with further beliefs of this kind, there is no reason to make their rejection part of our common ground.”[emphasis added] The theism of men like Albert Einstein, Arthur Keith and A. N. Whitehead is, according to Narain, just as acceptable as the atheism of men like Julian Huxley, Corliss Lamont and M.N.Roy.

As far as my views are concerned, I have clearly rejected the idea of God and some other ideas associated with the concept of God in my *Andhaviswas ke Virudh*. However, the idea of God has been discussed more comprehensively in my first published book, *Kya Ishwar mar chuka hai?*

In 1998, I published *Is God Dead?* which is a short introduction in English to my Hindi book *Kya Ishwar mar chuka hai?* In my Hindi book, I have discussed and rejected the traditional arguments in favor of the existence of God. The central idea of my book, as mentioned in the introduction of the first edition, is as follows:

We do not have a single logical argument for believing in the existence of god, whereas we have logical arguments for believing in the non-existence of god. Therefore, god is the biggest superstition of humankind. And it is logically wrong and morally harmful to base our philosophy of life on a superstition.

I have used “the problem of evil” as the main argument for disproving the existence of God. In short, the argument is that the idea of an omniscient, omnipotent and benevolent god is logically inconsistent because of the presence

of the evil in this world. I have asserted that the idea of God is a big hurdle obstructing the growth of human knowledge and morality or, in other words, the growth of human society. Therefore, we must get rid of the God idea.

I do not agree with the view of some humanists, including those who themselves do not believe in the existence of God, that humanists should leave God alone and concentrate on their own “positive” beliefs and activities. The belief in idea of God has many harmful consequences. Apart from obstructing the growth of knowledge by encouraging a superstitious mentality, the idea of God is an obstacle in developing morality in the true sense of the term. Divine determinism knocks the bottom out of morality by denying free will. Human beings can be held morally responsible for their actions only if they have freedom of choice. Believers in God often conveniently run away from their responsibility by taking shelter behind god and fate. In fact, there is no room for ethics in a consistent theism. Thus, it is not my position that atheists, too, can be moral or that the idea of God is unnecessary for ethics. On the contrary, I maintain that only an atheist can be moral in the true sense of the term.

Besides, in the name of God and “revealed” scriptures, the religious fundamentalists oppose social reforms, including changes in the direction of social equality. Therefore, the idea of God, in my opinion, cannot be ignored as a harmless superstition. It is not possible for rationalists and humanists, or for rational humanists, working in a God-dominated cultural atmosphere, to ignore this idea. I maintain that in a country like India promoting atheism should form a prominent part of the humanist agenda. One need not be defensive and apologetic about it.

As far as Narsingh Narain’s view regarding the idea of God not being harmful in itself but only when associated with some further ideas is concerned, I respond to this by saying that the idea of a omnipotent, omniscient and benevolent, creator God, as found in the major theistic religions of the world, is harmful in itself, and, in fact, is also always associated with ideas which Narsingh Narain, too, considers harmful. If some one uses the word “God” in a sense far removed from the way the word has actually been used in the language, he or she is, I maintain, needlessly confusing others. Such persons will be well advised to drop the word “God” to avoid confusion. For example, pantheists who equate “God” with “nature” will be well advised to drop the word “God” and use the word “nature” itself, because by using the word “God” for “nature”, they needlessly confuse others. In any case, rationalists and humanists should not be unduly bothered about such deviant uses of the word “God” by some people. We must define our stance towards God on the basis of the main dictionary meaning of the word. In this sense, the idea of God is both untrue and harmful, and it must be rejected for rational living. I do not say that the rejection of God is the “first necessity for rational living” - obviously rational thinking is the first

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necessity for rational living - but nonetheless it is, I maintain, a very important necessity for rational living.

I also do not agree with the idea of linking “atheism” with beliefs, which may not have any logical connection with it. For sake of clarity and for avoiding confusion, I disfavor using a word arbitrarily in a sense, which is far removed from the way the word is actually used in the language. We have already discussed the meaning of “atheism” and “atheist” in the first chapter. A person who does not believe in the existence of god is an “atheist”, irrespective of her or his reasons for not believing in god. This does not imply any conclusions about his or her other beliefs. Gora radically departs from the established usage of the word “atheism” when he says, “in positive terms ‘atheism’ means man’s mastery over his world”. In fact, he has given a stipulative meaning of “atheism” from his side, which is very different from the lexical or reportive meaning of the term.

Because of his peculiar notion of “theism” and “atheism”, Gora has characterized materialism as “godless theism”, whereas, in fact, materialism is almost always atheistic. Keeping in mind the established usage of terms like “theism” and “atheism”, one may say that “godless theism” is a contradiction in terms.

Besides, in his “positive atheism” Gora has unnecessarily linked atheism with many ideas, such as partyless democracy, which do not have any logical connection with atheism. Consider, for instance, the following argument:

God does not exist.

Therefore, partyless democracy is desirable.

This is obviously an invalid argument, because it is quite possible for the premise to be true and the conclusion to be false. Whether partyless democracy is desirable or not is an independent question and it requires independent support. Its truth does not follow logically from atheism, nor the truth of atheism follows logically from the desirability of partyless democracy. Therefore, there is no point in designating “partyless democracy” as “atheistic politics” as Gora has done. The same is true about many other ideas, which Gora has linked with atheism in his “positive atheism”.

Let us take another example, which has somewhat closer link with atheism. Consider the following arguments:

(1) If God exists, human beings are not free. God exists. Therefore, human beings are not free.

(2) If God exists, human beings are not free. Human beings are free. Therefore, God does not exist.

(3) If God exists, human beings are not free. Human beings are not free. Therefore, God exists.

(4) If God exists, human beings are not free. God does not exist. Therefore human beings are free.

Out of these four arguments, the first and the second arguments are logically valid. In other words, in these arguments it is impossible for the premises to be true and the conclusion to be false. The second argument is also logically sound because both its premises as well as its conclusion are true. The conclusion of the first argument is false, in spite of its being a logically valid argument because one of its premises – God exists – is false.

However, the third and the fourth arguments are logically invalid. In other words, in these arguments it is possible for premises to be true and conclusion to be false. The third and the fourth argument commit respectively what are known in logic as the fallacy of affirming the consequent and the fallacy of denying the antecedent.

What all this technical discussion shows is that from the fact that human beings are free in the sense of having freedom of choice, we can validly infer that god does not exist (2). We can also show that there is no place for freedom of will in a consistent theism (1). But, from the fact that god does not exist we cannot validly infer the conclusion “human beings are free” (4). In other words, we cannot deduce the freedom of human will from the truth of atheism. I believe, like Gora, that human beings are free. It is also true that human beings cannot be treated as morally responsible for their actions if they do not have freedom of will. Nevertheless, we cannot equate belief in atheism with belief in freedom of will. A theist, as we have seen, cannot consistently believe in the freedom of will. As opposed to this, an atheist can consistently believe in freedom of will as Gora did. But, on the other hand, it is also logically possible for an atheist to deny freedom of will, as is the case with some materialists. Therefore, we cannot say that “atheism” means “freedom of will”. Thus, as I said earlier, there is no point in mixing up atheism with ideas which do not have any logical connection with it. I, for one, prefer atheism, pure and simple.

□

POEM: FAMILY SECRETS

Revathy Gopal

*"No one in this family has ever died of love.
No food for myth and nothing magisterial
Consumptive Romeos? Juliets Diphtherial?
A doddering second childhood was enough."*

- Wislawa Szymborska

City pavements throw up
the oddest treasures. This time
it's books of poetry bought second-hand
and I exult. Feinstein and Enwright,
Dickinson and Fuller and another
Welsh Thomas, not Dylan.
And Beloved Szymborska
of the unforgettable line:
"No one in this family has ever died of love."

Nor in mine, Wislawa, nor in mine.

We are women who deal with words
and their many meanings
but we never speak of the affliction
of love. We have lost
people we loved and their faces
may come to us in dreams
but we never miss a meal
nor let the milk boil over.

You look up at the sky and sometimes,
if you are lucky, you see
a star falling in a great arc
or else, the distant slipstream of a jet,
like the trajectory of desire.

Once you are through
with the body's urgencies, there's time
and more, to figure out what it
was all about ...
and death will come anyway,
perhaps raucously

like an inebriated guest, or quietly
like a burgler after midnight,
and perhaps he will find us ready
or perhaps not

You don't plan for love, Wislawa.



REFUGEE CAMP

They are safe, for now.
In their eyes, bright glaze of sickness
and a faint memory of a full stomach.
Mothers sit sidelined by events,
too stunned for speech,
stone faces carved in suffering

White man's medicines, antibiotics,
sedatives, glucose drip, clean water
come too late for what ails them.
Everything has been taken,
their men cut down where they stood,
homes burnt, children's bodies cleft in two.

In world capitals they whisper
an ugly word: genocide!
In the deserts of the Sudan, death comes
on horseback, dark men
with covered faces and flashing blades.
Now is the hour of Janjaweed.



Reprinted by permission from Revathy Gopal's collection of poems 'Last Possibilities of Light' published by Writers' Workshop

ATHEISM AND HUMANISM IN ANCIENT INDIA

D D Bandiste

This is an edited version of 2008 M.V Ramamurthy Memorial Humanist Lecture organised by the Malladi Subbamma Foundation in cooperation with IHEU's Babu Gogineni. It was held at the Telugu University in Andhra Pradesh. The lecture is an important contribution to the intellectual life of India. This lecture reflects on India's glorious humanist tradition of the past - however much it may be eclipsed by contemporary developments and trends. Reproduced from International Humanist News, May 2008.

There is a general impression that Indian tradition, and especially ancient tradition, is theistic. But when we examine our history we find that the reality is quite different.

Ancient Indian philosophy is broadly divided into the Orthodox and the Heterodox. Those who except the Vedas are the orthodox schools and those who reject the Vedas as the sacred and supreme authority are the heterodox.

There are three heterodox schools: The Charvakas, the Jains and the Bauddhas. They all reject God. Of the six orthodox schools, three - the Samkhya, the earlier Vaisheshikas and the Poorva - Meemama - reject God. Thus of the nine ancient Indian philosophical schools six reject God. And even the three which accepted God do not give him the hallowed place that he enjoys at present.

God is supposed to be a spiritual being, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, the creator-sustainer-destroyer of the world, and is a kindly person who supervises the doings of human beings, dispenses justice, forgives sins and is pleased by the devotions of his devotees. He normally lives in heaven in joy, pomp and luxury, is perfect, and runs to save his devotees in their need. His ways are mysterious and when annoyed he will also punish the defaulters.

Let us now see what the various schools say regarding God. We will note just one characteristic argument from each school, although all of them share many points in common.

We must keep in mind, however, that even some of the ancient atheist schools of philosophy were neither rationalist nor Humanist in the present sense of these terms.

Rationalism and Humanism, except for study, cannot be separated in reality. Rationalism is that attitude of mind which want to obtain true knowledge of reality while Humanism is concerned more with the bringing about of human society that would be harmonious, happy, egalitarian, just and progressive. It

tries to foster in society the various humanist values like democracy, knowledge, social justice, purity of means, affection, joy, and so on. There is a distinction between Humanism and Humanitarianism. Humanists reject everything supernatural, accepting only this world as real, consider man to be the measure of all things and the welfare of mankind as the central aim. Humanism is an august structure built upon the foundation provided by rationalism.

Rationalism is an empirical and scientific outlook. It is logical, is always open to correction, addition and improvement, and denies there being at any time any last word in human knowledge. Hence, it is in perpetual search for new Horizons, is critical in its approach, is considerate in its nature, is global in its outlook and is always ready to learn. The more rational the person, the more moral he automatically is. His concerns and objectives are of a mundane type, realisable and beneficial in nature. Rationalism gives man eyes and hence guides him continuously on his path through life. Rationalists' goals long lasting, enriching, joyful and liberating in spirit. The benefits are here in this world, in this life and also infinite in nature. The attempt is to learn from experience and try to make each day better than the previous one. Now let us evaluate the ancient Indian concept of atheism from this perspective.

We have already referred to the fact that the ancient schools either accepted or rejected the concept of God. The grounds offered for this are both quite interesting and intelligent.

Jains: Rejecting the Necessity of God

The Jains reject the necessity of God to attain self-purification and liberation - meaning that this is to be attained through self-effort. The twenty-four Tirthankars, whose idols are enthusiastically worshipped, are not the gods that we have referred to earlier. They are only ideal human beings whose guidance we may take. The Jains are vociferous deniers of God. They fail to understand the propriety of a perfect God creating the world at all. A perfect God can have no desires or motives, even good ones, to be fulfilled. Perfection and action cannot go together. The stalwart Jain scholar, Gunaratna, even ridicules God for creating the atheists - like the Jains - in their millions. The Jains do not accept the Vedas. Hence, the words of the Vedas are not for them proof of God's existence. Perception does not show God. And if God is inferred as the creator of the world, then surely, the Jains reason, not one but many Gods must have been necessary; a position the theists do not accept.

Poorva Meemamsakas: Rejecting the Divinity of the Vedas

The Poorva-meemamsakas are the most enthusiastic upholders of the Vedas. But they do not consider the Vedas to be the revealed words of God. The Vedas, according to them, are the creation of wise men of the past. The various

deities referred to in the Vedas are merely natural elements, not supernatural in nature. The Meemamaskas insist upon the literal carrying out of the various rituals prescribed by the Vedas. This will generate pleasure for oneself (*abhyudaya*) and also for society (*nihshreyasa*). The fate generated by the deeds of the individuals works on its own, not needing the supervision of God. The Meemamsakas also argue that the prescribed Vedic rituals can be performed daily, occasionally or to fulfil some specific individual need. All this is rigid, technical, costly and laborious. They fear that if God is granted, then devotion to God is far easier than observing the prescribed Vedic rituals. So to avoid this possibility they reject the very concept of God.

Vaisheshikas: God, Not Worthy of Knowledge

The Vaisheshikas also reject God and consider only seven types of objects as worthy of knowledge; substances, qualities, actions, universals, specialities, conjunction, inherence and non-existence. God has no place in the epistemology of the Vaisheshikas. If God is supposed to be beyond space and time and is also beyond all relations, it is then for the theists to explain to us how they have found such a God to exist and functioning in a useful way.

Naiyayikas: A Marginal Role for God

Paired with the Vaisheshikas are the Naiyayikas who accept God's existence but in many other matters their views are common with those of the Vaisheshikas. But even the Naiyayikas have given a marginal role to God. They argue that just as a weaver is necessary to produce cloth from the already existing yarn so also God is necessary to produce the world from the existing atoms of various elements. That is all. How very marginal is the role of God as far as man is concerned! While the Vaisheshikas explain the formation of the world on the basis of the various inherent tendencies existing in the atoms of the different elements, the Naiyayika God faces a very perplexing situation.

God is like soul, and is spiritual in nature, but the soul is not always conscious. It can be conscious through its sense organs when embodied. But during the condition of liberation the soul has no body and hence cannot be conscious of anything - it cannot even be self-conscious. (Devotional Vedantins ridicule such a poor concept of Naiyayika liberation). So much for the soul, but what about God? The soul has at least a body during its bondage and is at that time conscious of numerous objects and suffers and even enjoys life on various counts. But what about God? He never has a body and hence cannot be conscious at any time. Is not such a God more to be sympathised with than to be an ideal to be realised?

Samkhya: The world can be explained better without a God

The Samkhya school is one of the most ancient schools of Indian philosophy and the sage Kapila is believed to have sponsored it. It is a dualist

philosophy positing matter (*Parkriti*) and the spiritual souls (*Purusha*) as the primordial substances constituting the whole world. The Samkhyas do not accept God and explain that the unconscious matter produces the various bodily organs and worldly objects for the benefit of the conscious but ignorant soul. When the soul achieves enlightenment *Prakriti* withdraws into its primordial condition setting the soul free from all material entanglements. God has no role to play in this show.

The sage Kapila found the concept of God to be self-contradictory: God is considered to be infinite, and yet a person; he is supposed to be just and yet can be placated by devotions; God is everywhere and yet lives in Heaven; God is perfect and yet created this world for we know not what purpose! God is omnipotent and kind and yet we find more evil in this world; naturally this is all inexplicable. Moreover, there is no proof establishing the existence of God. Perception does not show God. From natural premises we cannot establish a supernatural entity called God. Proving God on the basis of scriptural testimony involves a circular argument. We are asked to accept God because what the scriptures say is trustworthy and the scriptures are trustworthy because they are the words of God. Quite apart from these difficulties the Samkhya scholars feel that the world can be explained better without God than with the help of God.

But there is one difficulty that the Samkhya scholars cannot explain. *Prakriti*, matter, being unconscious, cannot know when the *Purusha* is ignorant and so entice him through evolution, and when the *Purusha* is enlightened and thus to withdraw the evolution. Here, the sage Patanjali of Yoga steps in and argues that all this happens on the orders of God. But God has no other role to play in the rest of the world's doings. What a pity that God has nothing to do!

Uttara Meemamsa or Advaita Vedanta: Infallibility of Vedas

Lastly, we come to the Uttara Meemamsa or the Advaita Vedanta of Shankaracharya. But God gets no permanent and satisfactory patronage even here. Shankaracharya is a firm believer in the infallibility of the Vedic tradition interpreted in his own fashion. Nevertheless, the entire world seems to believe that Indian philosophy is mainly an Advaita Vedanta philosophy.

Unfortunately, the world does not scrutinize this philosophy minutely. It would be bitterly disappointed if it did so because this philosophy believes that the ultimate reality is *Brahman*, absolutely real, impersonal consciousness: eternal, pure and free. *Brahman* is one without a second, and has no divisions internal or external. But due to primordial ignorance it comes to wrongly believe itself to be many, finite, ignorant, mortal and miserable. This is only a temporary and empirical state. This delusion must be removed. Knowledge of one's own real nature must be realised. The soul must realise that it is the very *Brahman* and nothing else. For the realisation of this self-knowledge, the impersonal *Bra-*

-hmin may be taken to be God as a person and be worshipped and so on. But ultimately speaking, God must be transcended. God is the temporary creation of human ignorance. I do not know how far the devotees of God accept this concept of a temporarily existing God, a creation of ignorant human beings.

From the above overview of the various schools of philosophy, whether theists or atheists, heterodox or orthodox, we find that they are neither completely rationalist nor Humanist. They all accept the scriptures as the final authority, while the Jains have Agamas as their scriptures. Secondly, all the above schools accept the existence of a spiritual soul in us, immortal and so on. Evidently they all accept rebirth of the persons, fate, heaven and hell and so on. They all wish to transcend this world considered only as a temporary abode of the souls. There are moral injunctions but there is no socialisation of the individual. Spiritual liberation is given the top priority. Society and the world are to be discarded as evil.

The Charvakas and the Bauddhas

The two remaining schools of ancient Indian philosophy are the Charvakas and the Bauddhas. Unfortunately the Charvakas, also called the Lokayatas, do not exist anymore in India, while Buddhism has also almost vanished from India. Both these schools received varying treatments from the then orthodox society.

While the Buddha (and even his heterodoxy) was revered and accepted by society, the Charvakas were condemned and hounded out as heretics and immoral devils. Their literature was destroyed. Whatever we learn about them is just their caricature by the orthodox schools: that it is a philosophy teaching materialism, selfishness and pursuit of sexual pleasure at any cost, i.e., by fair means or foul. All this is a misrepresentation of their case. Let us first see the Charvakas and their own genuine case.

Charvakas, the Wise Atheists

The Charvakas were so called because of their pleasant talk. They advocated pursuit of pleasure as a philosophy of life. They accepted only perception as a source of true knowledge. Perception finds only four natural elements and their products as existing: earth, water, air and fire. Sky or the empty space cannot be perceived. The Charvakas accept only that type of inference which is limited to this world and consider that inference to be illegitimate which tries to establish supernatural entities like God, the soul, immortality, heaven and hell, rebirth and fate. They insist upon the perceptual verification of the conclusions of every inference. As a result, they are materialists, naturalists, pragmatists and hedonists. Obviously, they do not accept the existence of a God, or that of a spiritual type of immortal unchanging soul, nor rebirth, fate, heaven-hell and so on. Consciousness for them is a temporary product of a peculiar mixture of initially unconscious elements. We

have only the present life to make the best use of it. Why not enjoy to the best one can!! The religious rituals, including the sacrifices, are a waste of time, money, material and human efforts. They are a clever trap by the wily priests to do nothing worthwhile but continue to be paid and fed by the wealth-producers and all this is to go for all time and for the whole priestly caste.

Very often the priests would sacrifice an animal, to great rejoicing. It was argued that no cruelty was involved because the animal thus killed was done a favour since it went straight to heaven. But the Charvakas ask: why then not sacrifice one's own dear relative so that he attains heaven instantly? But the selfish priests will not do it.

Vilification of the Charvakas

Much vilification has been heaped upon the hedonism of the Charvakas. It is alleged that they would borrow money with no intention to repay; that one need not return a debt, that one could keep borrowing and if people in one village start demanding their money, they could go to some other village and start fooling the people there. But did they really say that?

Not much is known about what the Charvakas themselves said about such a philosophy of life based upon fraud; all that is known is the caricatures of the orthodox. Can any sane person and of all the persons, the wise ancient sage Brihaspati, preach a philosophy of life based purely upon everyone trying to fool everyone else? Since everyone then is aware that the others are fooling them, no-one will trust anyone and the fooling would cease. A more convincing interpretation of borrowing and enjoying could be the following: surely one should avoid borrowing. But some times it becomes unavoidable as, for example, for manure for one's farm, for medical treatment for a dear relative, or for repairing one's own house and so on. And then it is better to return the debt. There is a positive interpretation of borrowing. During the time of Brihaspati, the sponsoring sage of this philosophy, people used to perform sacrifices on every conceivable occasion; life itself was considered a great sacrifice. People borrowed money and performed sacrifices to earn merit. Brihaspati, wanted to stop this colossal waste: literally throwing costly and nutritious material in the sacrificial fire. Hence he asked people as far as possible not to borrow. But he considered it wiser to even have a hearty meal but not throw into a sacrificial fire the nutritious material purchased with the borrowed money. Brihaspati's good intention is evident here since he did not exhort people to drink alcoholic intoxicants. He very correctly advised the people to better eat sumptuous meals rather than throwing edibles into fire.

But because the orthodox opposed to the Charvakas burnt their literature, not much that is constructive in their philosophy is available to us today. This deficiency is made good by the Buddha. Although the Buddha too

denied the Vedas and the Upanishads, rejected God, soul, rebirth, heaven and hell and fate, and opposed animal sacrifices as cruel, opposed the caste-system and so on, yet his ways were so gentle, humble, rational and appealing that he did not incur any opposition even from the Vedic scholars. He also supplied a scholarly and Humanistic base to what he said. Because of his renunciation and personal charm he was welcomed everywhere.

Buddha's Exhortation to Be Rational

He exhorted people to be rational, to be sensible and reasonable. He advised people to not waste time over distant matters like the origin and the end of the world, existence of God and an unchanging soul and so on, but to first attend to the immediate task of removing human misery. The Buddha found every existing thing to be changing and connected causally to its cause and with its surroundings. There is no unrelated entity existing in the world. The causal chain is without beginning and is without end. This chain of natural events cannot prove a supernatural God. Apart from the other arguments against God's existence, his peculiar argument was the following. The usual experience is that the result is like its cause. Hence, he questions the theists as to how and why the products or creation of a perfect God are imperfect. The Buddha wanted the causal law to prevail and not the factious God's questionable law. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan has even said that the Buddha wanted to save the people from the frightening moods of whimsical Gods.

The Buddha preached *Dhamma*, a rational morality, and did not start a new *Dharma*, a religion. The *Dhamma* is a rational morality preached by an enlightened human being to other human beings. As a rational person he did not claim himself to be the sole prophet giving the last word in wisdom. He himself declared that many Buddhas (enlightened persons) had been there before him and many more would be there in the future. The *Dhamma* preached by the Buddha, again, could be amended by the enlightened persons of future as and when found necessary.

Buddha's nirvana, a state of no misery but full of joy is to be attained here in this world and while alive. His diagnosis of human misery was that it was a product of greed caused by ignorance. When the ignorance and greed will go, the misery too will disappear.

The Buddha was probably the first great Humanist. He rejected caste hierarchy. In his philosophy, there was no place for miracles. The enlightened person must be moral and work for the benefit of the whole of humanity. He must be a friend of every living being and must have compassion for them. No one can be happy in unhappy surroundings because every existent is related with its surroundings. As a result, the only realistic way for anyone to be happy is to make the others happy. Enlightenment, morality and joy are always only a social phenomenon.

The Present and the Future

Unfortunately for the rationalists and the Humanists, after the Buddha Buddhism became a religion, and it also lost the political patronage it enjoyed in the beginning. From the Middle Ages onward, Indian religion ceased to be the religion of the rulers. The Indian psyche became withdrawn and escapist in nature. Its focus became the golden past or liberation after death, somewhere else. Doubting and questioning the scriptures became a taboo. And this continues to be the case even to-day. The devotional schools have made the whole scene theistic through and through. This world is being neglected under the pretext that it is not really real. But we do find some bright spots for Humanism here and there.

Gora has said that every independent thinking is a sure sign of atheism. If we keep this scale to measure the presence of atheism existing any where we will find atheism to be increasing slowly although imperceptibly. The medieval saints like Kabir and others asked people to keep their eyes open and think critically. Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Jyotiba Phule and Narayana Guru carried the reformist zeal further. But what we actually need is not a submissive type of reformation but a bold intellectual revolution and renaissance. This we find coming up in the twentieth century in the form of persons like the Devatma, M.N. Roy, Periyar E.V., Ramasamay, Gora, Dr. Ambedkar, Jawahar Lal Nehru, the socialists and the Marxists and a host of others. People are yet to realize the advantages of atheism. If atheism reigns over the whole world, most of the tensions and wars and terrorism going on at present in the name of God and religion will vanish and a positivist breeze will start blowing. With the help of the present technology the unification of humanity as one family is likely to emerge.

We have to keep in mind M.N. Roy's declaration that liberation from God is the beginning of all other liberations. Atheism does not simply mean denying God. It means rather the realization by man of his freedom, self-confidence and responsibility for whatever is in the world. With the help of God ancient men fought against the forces of nature. But that battle is now over. Yet God is continuing. Today, in the name of God, humans fight each other. This must stop. We must devote ourselves to minimizing the human misery caused by want, illiteracy, over-population, pollution, inequalities, dictatorships, religious terrorism, ignorance and mistaken philosophies based upon social delusions of glory. We must also promote the Humanist values of freedom, equality, brotherhood, wealth, joy, enlightenment, moral involvement, social harmony, and compassion and love for all. Our resolve should be to make each day better than the last. With such efforts, maybe after a few thousand years, our life here will be even better than the fictitious heavens profusely described in the scriptures.

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RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY IN INDIA*

Narsingh Narain

In discussing the philosophy of our most eminent contemporary philosopher, Dr. Radhakrishnan, Prof. D.M Dutta says: "Metaphysics is to him, as to the ancient Indian Philosophers, only a rational preparation for the solution of life's problems." This practical bias of Indian Philosophy is claimed to be its main distinguishing feature. In the West, we are told, philosophy is merely an intellectual pursuit, having no necessary moral or spiritual implications. In India the philosophical quest is a means of the attainment of the highest spiritual aims. We are further told that Indian thinkers emphasise the need for physical, mental and moral discipline on which the vision of philosophical truth and the achievement of spiritual poise and progress alike depend. For this reason the different traditional schools of Indian philosophy were at the same time the bases of different religious sects - they constituted the religions of the intellectual elite. Philosophy arose out of religion and never detached itself from it. While it is true that one could be religious without being philosophical, there was no philosophy unconnected with religion.

To the above general statement two exceptions must be made. In one case we have philosophy without religion and in the other religion without philosophy. The first is Charvaka school (materialists). Unfortunately no exposition of the Charvaka philosophy by a follower of that school has survived, and we have to depend for a knowledge of their views on the works of their opponents who have set forth the materialist position for purposes of refutation. But it is clear that materialism, with its rejection of future life and ideal of salvation, could not have formed the basis of religion in the sense in which religion was then and is still understood. In ancient India, as in the West until quite recently, and in several quarters even today, materialism has generally been regarded as synonymous with wickedness. The virtuous materialists presented a problem to the ancient Indians, as even now they do to many religious people. We are told nowadays that people who call themselves materialists but live a virtuous life are materialists only in theory, as we are told also that atheists who lead a good life accept God in practice, despite their verbal assertions. On the other hand, we find professed followers of religion, and even the Church, being sometime accused of implicit materialism, the basis of accusation being their concentration on humanistic this-worldly ideals and their loss of active interest in the religious ideal of salvation. Materialism was given the status of philosophy in ancient India because it was an argumentative and outspoken rejection of religion and had to be answered. We can also ignore Indian materialism because, unlike most other schools of Indian philosophy, it ceased to be a living force long ago. In so far as materialism is to be found in India today its inspiration is purely Western.

The second and far more important exception is Buddhism, as propounded by Buddha himself. The anti-metaphysical attitude of Buddha is well-known and has been a subject of much and varied comment. Among the questions he refused to answer or discuss were the existence of God or Brahman, whether the soul and the body are identical or different, and personal immortality. His silence has been interpreted differently by different scholars. Several scholars hold, for instance, that Buddha's silence about God does not mean denial. They may be right, but that would not alter the fact that the things about which he chose to remain silent were no part of his religion. Whether Buddha was at heart a theist, an atheist or an agnostic, it is clear that his religion was indifferent to those 'isms.' It is true that Buddha accepted certain propositions which may be regarded as metaphysical, such as the doctrines of karma and re-incarnation, though in a somewhat different form from that prevalent in his time. If that makes him a philosopher, everyone is a philosopher, for every one accepts, or forms, some ideas about the nature of the world in which we live. But it really serves no useful purpose to use the word philosophy in this extended sense. The early Vedic religion was unphilosophical (not entirely, for no religion can be entirely so) because philosophy had not yet developed. Buddha eschewed philosophy deliberately, or reduced it to a minimum because, to quote his own words in the famous dialogue with Malukyaputta, "this profits not, nor has to do with the fundamentals of religion, nor tends to aversion, absence of passion, cessation, quiescence, the supernatural faculties, supreme wisdom, and Nirvana." He neither discussed the nature of ultimate reality, nor its relation to the world of common experience, nor the origin of world - questions which loom so large in the various schools of Indian Philosophy, particularly in the Vedanta, the most influential of them all, so influential indeed that it may almost be called *the* philosophy of India at the present time.

It may be mentioned here that even in the West the growth of philosophy as an independent study, untrammelled by religious needs and considerations, is a recent thing. Prof. A.N. Whitehead has observed that Aristotle was "the last European metaphysician of first rate importance" who can be said to have been "entirely dispassionate" in his consideration of the question of God. After him "ethical and religious interests began to influence metaphysical conclusions." Mr. Bertrand Russell would not exempt even Aristotle and Plato. "Philosophers from Plato to William James," he says, "have allowed their opinions as to the constitution of the universe to be influenced by the desire for edification: knowing, as they supposed what beliefs would make men virtuous, they have invented arguments, often very sophistical, to prove that these beliefs are true." The alliance between philosophy and religion in India may or may not merit such a description, but the point is that the fusion of the two is not altogether a peculiarly Indian problem. The question is whether such fusion is a satisfactory arrangement.

In posing this question it is not assumed that either philosophy or religion can function in water-tight compartments. We are not thinking in terms of a complete separation of the two pursuits but only inquiring whether the sort of union that exists between them in the Indian schools is generally sound and feasible. Some other possible misapprehensions must be cleared up. We do not propose to discuss here the materialist position that the religious goal of salvation is a mirage, for if that position were accepted religion, as generally understood, would have to be dropped altogether and there would be no question of it and philosophy being a joint or separate pursuit. We shall also not question the proposition that the pursuit of the religious ideal possesses a higher value than any merely intellectual quest. And if that ideal can best be furthered by the kind of intimate alliance between philosophy and religion which we are here examining, let that alliance continue by all means. And as regards, philosophy itself, if it is said that the purely intellectual inquiry cannot lead to the highest goal, I would say that there is no such thing as a purely intellectual philosophy anywhere. There is a great deal of truth in F. H Bradley's famous epigram: "Metaphysics is the finding of bad reasons for what we believe upon instinct." Our views were shaped and influenced by all kind of factors which never find a place in our conscious cognitions. Perhaps even such things as the state of our organs, the character and the quantity of our internal secretions and our long-forgotten childhood experiences play a part in shaping our philosophy of life. And for philosophy the philosopher himself is apart of the data, because the philosopher is concerned with the total reality, not with certain partial aspects of it. Suppose there is a man who has never loved anyone, whose heart has never gone out to another in distress, he has missed an aspect of reality which no amount of intellectual acumen can supply.

On the other hand, the approach to philosophy is not through faith, as in the case of religion, but through free inquiry born out of curiosity, as in science. The subject-matters of science and philosophy may be different in character, requiring therefore different techniques for dealing with them, but there is a great deal more in common between philosophy and science than between philosophy and religion. The attitude in which science and philosophy have to be approached is the same, namely, a readiness to accept facts without being influenced by our wishes and goals and preconceived notions. As Prof Julian Huxley has put it "One of the main achievements of science has been to reveal that the facts of nature frequently fail to accord either with the wishes or with the apparently logical preconceptions of human beings." Science may be dealing with the outside of things and not with their "inner soul", as poet Tagore observed, but in the process of doing so it has revealed something about ourselves which cannot be dismissed as lightly as philosopher are often inclined to dismiss scientific facts and theories as of no real significance. It has drawn attentions to the limitations of human faculties even at their best. It may

be objected that this comment cannot apply to the intuitions of the saints. The answer is that, without questioning the reality or value of these intuitions, there is ample evidence to show that they are no more infallible than the powers of perception and comprehension possessed by ordinary human beings. For instance, the rigid atheistic pluralism of the Jain saints stands in sharp contrast with the Vedanta monism in its several forms, all of which have been propounded by saints. Logic and intuition are both good instruments for unravelling the mysteries of existence, but mankind, both in the East and in the West, came to place an excessive reliance on them, thus retarding the progress of science and philosophy. Whether we proceed by reasoning or by intuition we come up against brute facts which disturb our neat theories.

Religious initiation everywhere starts with the assumptions that one or more persons have reached the vision of highest truth beyond which there is nothing left to be known or realized. All we have to do is to follow the path blazed by them. That is first article of faith to which the aspirants are expected to subscribe. The metaphysical propositions placed before them are not merely the results of reasoning applied to the experiences of life but the deliverances of prophets and saints who have had direct perception of the highest truth. If you have doubts about these, logic will not help you - sit down and meditate until conviction is achieved. Since there is no question of independent verification, everyone eventually becomes convinced of metaphysical tenets of his own particular sect. While there is a remarkable similarity both in the conception of goal of the life and in the discipline prescribed for attaining it, among the different schools of Indian philosophy, their metaphysical positions are substantially at variance with one another. But every one gets drilled into acceptance of the metaphysics of his own school. Such regimentation of thought, even if salutary in intent when associated with religion, should be entirely foreign to the spirit of philosophy. It frowns about doubt and disbelief, and in the religious traditions everywhere unbelievers are threatened with dire punishment. Since we here concerned with Indian philosophy, we need refer only to the Gita verse which runs as follows: "But the man who is ignorant, who is of a doubting nature, perishes. For the doubting soul, there is neither this world nor the world beyond nor any happiness."

Dr. Radhakrishnan explains that "faith (Sradha) is not blind belief. It is the aspiration of the soul to gain wisdom. It is the reflection in the empirical self of the wisdom that dwells in the deepest levels of our being." But this is not the sense in which one hears the word "sradha" used in religious discourses and elsewhere. In the Viveka Chudamani, for instance, Shankara says that sradha consist in accepting the words of the Shastras and the guru as true. Another commentator, Sri SK Prem, a yogi, says that "the doubt referred to here is no more intellectual doubt, which is the precursor of any advance in know-

ledge. It is doubt of the reality of what has once been perceived. ” Whatever one may think of these explanations, it is obvious that the approach by faith is not the right approach for philosophy. When philosophy and religion are lumped together, whether in India and elsewhere, the former tends to become sacrosanct like divine revelation and to degenerate into a barren exercise in the interpretation of texts. It loses its freshness and virility and lives too much in the past. We in India have been concerned too much with proving, to ourselves and the outside world (what is quite true) that the intellectual quality, the breadth of vision and the flights of speculation displayed by our ancestors can compare favourably with anything to be found in the rest of the world. In a country awakening after a long night of political subjection and intellectual stagnation, such self-assertion is natural and necessary, but it can be overdone, and continued too long.

It has been said that Indian thinkers, by reason of their intimate acquaintance with both Indian and Western philosophy, are specially fitted to evolve a synthetic world-view which combines and takes account of the best features of both. But this role can only be fulfilled if philosophy becomes an independent pursuit, unfettered by any practical considerations and unhampered by any feelings of loyalty to ancient thought, however great. For philosophy, as for science, anything in the nature of a regional patriotism should be quite out of place. It may be a good postulate for religion that the highest truth and the way to its realization are already known, that the destination and the road to it are fixed for all time to come and we have only to muster up our courage to embark upon the arduous journey and persist in our exertions. For philosophy this is a fatal presupposition.

The bulk of contemporary Indian philosophy, where it is philosophy proper and not simply a handmaid to religion, is concerned with history and interpretation. The rest is mostly occupied with the pleasant task of reconciling divergent ways of thought which, it is claimed, is calculated to advance the spiritual solidarity of mankind. There is, however, a careful avoidance of anything which may be construed as a criticism of deeply cherished religious beliefs. The desire not to hurt the feelings of others is no doubt most admirable, but unfortunately philosophy cannot afford to be other than completely frank without stultifying itself. The sense of unity of all mankind and indeed of all existence, has been felt by many individuals in all parts of the world, and more specifically by mystics. But the effort to build up a metaphysics on the basis of it has taken different forms which have their points of agreement as well as differences; no purpose is served by emphasizing the former and glossing over the latter. The conviction of such unity is not derived from metaphysics, nor does its value depend upon the kind of metaphysics we erect on it. Moreover, the function of religion is not to give a metaphysical formulation of that unity but to help us conduct our living in accordance with it.

Similarly there seems to be unborn optimism in the human breast which makes us feel that in the end all must be well, that there is a moral order at the back of the world of common experience. Some hold that this is only wishful thinking and has no correspondence with reality. However that may be, we are here concerned with the fact that this human optimism (or wishful thinking, if you will) has assumed many concrete shapes in the hands of theologians and philosophers. Religion springs from this optimism but is not wedded to any of the particular systems of beliefs in which that optimism finds concrete expression. Even our conception of the goal of life cannot be regarded as sacrosanct. We are witnessing at present, for instance, a conflict between two concepts of the goal of life, which is perhaps best expressed by the antithesis between what Dr. Schweitzer has called "world-and life-negation" and "world-and-life-affirmation". They are not mutually exclusive, but the conflict is real; Dr. Radhakrishnan has described it as a conflict between religion and self-sufficient humanism.

When religion and philosophy are lumped together, philosophers are prone to define philosophy in the light of their own religious inclinations and convictions. In the beginning of this essay we referred to the standpoint of Dr. Radhakrishnan. Here is a definition of philosophy by an Indian philosopher belonging to a later generation, Prof. T.R.V Murti: "*That philosophy is not an affair of intellectual curiosity or analysis but a serious spiritual discipline (Sadhana) directed towards the attainment of freedom is basic to Indian Philosophy and I subscribe to it without reservation.*"

This definition completely identifies philosophy with religion, or rather with that path of religion which in the Vedanta system is known as Jnana Yoga. For if philosophy is a spiritual discipline for the attainment of freedom, there is no function left for religion to perform, and the two words become synonymous. If the line of reasoning adopted in this essay is correct, philosophy should be nothing more than a systematic effort at the formulation of a world-view by taking into account all the available data in the shape of our knowledge of the external world and of our inner experiences. And so great are our ignorance and our limitations that even when one feels absolutely convinced of one particular world-view, one must recognize that it is liable to undergo revision with the growth of knowledge and understanding. The pursuit of the highest practical ideals is, of course, open to philosophers and non-philosophers alike. Philosophy can best play its part in the shaping of these ideals and in the furthering of humanity's practical interests in the highest sense by confining itself to its own proper objective, namely, the search for as comprehensive a vision of truth as our present faculties and the knowledge at our disposal will permit.

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WHAT INDIAN SCIENTISTS BELIEVE

In a survey carried out by the Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture of Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut and Hyderabad-based Centre for Inquiry, 1100 Indian scientist across 130 universities and research institutes were asked to record their views on a range of issues. Given below are some results of the survey. Full details are available at www.trincoll.edu/secularisminstitute.

What do you believe about God?

I don't believe in God	12%
I don't know whether there is a God and I don't believe there is any way to find out	13%
I don't believe in a personal God but I do believe in a higher power	30%
I find myself believing in God some of the time but not at others	6%
While I have doubts, I feel that I do believe in God	9%
I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it	26%
No answer	4%

n = 1,100 100%

Secularism.

Secularism has a unique meaning in India. We can classify the first two responses below as describing "public secularism." The vast majority of the scientists perceives this term as tolerance and a large majority recognizes it as it appears in the Indian constitution as religion-government separation. When it comes to "private secularism" or secularity, a majority regards it as meaning the absence of religious affiliation. Only a minority of scientists conceives of secularity as meaning atheism

The scientists are most likely to regard their personal outlook as "secular" or "somewhat secular" (75%). When asked; "What does secularism mean to you?" the percentage responding with a 'yes' to the following descriptions of secularism are given below:-

Tolerance of various religions and philosophies	93 %
Separation of Religion from State	83 %
No identification or affiliation with any religious tradition	53 %
Absence of supernatural or religious beliefs	40 %
Atheism	20 %

Blessings of Lord Venkateswara before rocket and satellite launch.

The Indian scientific community is split on the issue of seeking a religious endorsement of a space research project which occurred in 2005. Approval of this ritual has the support of 41% of the scientists while 46% disapprove. However, the level of disapproval is more intense with a plurality (33%) "disapproving strongly."

NEWSAND NOTES

Sibnarayan Ray passes away

Sibnarayan Ray died on 26 February 2008 in Santiniketan, India at the age of 85. He served on the executive committee of IHEU from 1952 to 1962.

He edited Jignasa, a Bengali literary quarterly; was former editor of Radical Humanist weekly; taught Indian studies at Melbourne University, Australia; taught at South Indian Education Society (SIES) college, Bombay; and was president of the Raja Ram Mohan Roy foundation library.

His works include: Gandhi, India, and the World: An International Symposium (1970); Selected Works of M. N. Roy, in three volumes (1991 -2000, with M. N. Roy); Selected Writings of M N Roy (1988, 2000); The Universality of Man: The Message of Romain Rolland : addresses and papers of international seminar organised jointly by the Sahitya Akademi and Festival of France in India, 15-17 January 1990 In Freedom's Quest: Life of M. N. Roy (1998)

Danish judges banned from wearing religious symbols in court

The Danish Justice Ministry has announced that judges will not be permitted to wear religious symbols in court – and that includes the Christian cross, the Jewish skullcap, the turban or the Muslim headscarf. "We have decided to prohibit the wearing of (all) religious or political symbols while exercising the function of a magistrate, because a judge must be neutral and impartial," Minister of Justice Lene Espersen told reporters.

Her announcement comes after Denmark's far-right People's Party launched a newspaper campaign at the end of April against judges wearing Muslim headscarves in court. The wearing of Muslim headscarves in courtrooms was authorised in December, although the country has no Muslim judges at present. The decision was only revealed by the media recently, causing a public outcry. New legislation is required to overturn the December ruling, but the support of the People's Party means the government will carry a comfortable majority. Espersen is due to present draft legislation to parliament in the autumn. Source: NSS Newsletter, 23May, 2008

Punjab Bans Rationalist Literature Punjab Bans Rationalist Literature

In a shocking affront to freedom of expression, the Government of Punjab, India, has banned four rationalist books and threatened legal action against the authors and translators, Tarksheel Society of Punjab reports. The supposed grounds for the ban is that the books are "incorrect literature" about Hindu deities.

Source: IHEU update 20 Apr 2008

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