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Yours Skeptically....

Last month, Indian space scientists took a great leap forward. On 22 October 2008 at 6.22am, India’s first ever moon mission — Chandrayaan-1 — was launched successfully from Sriharikotta in Andhra Pradesh. If everything goes as planned, Chandrayaan-1 will enter its lunar orbit on November 15. It is undoubtedly a venture every Indian should celebrate and be proud of.

October also brought to us the depressing news that the terrorist bombings, which killed more than 30 people, in Malegaon in Maharashtra in September 2006 were executed by rightwing Hindu extremists. This has exploded the myth Hindutva ideologues and even the ‘neutral’ media have assiduously built up over the years and made into a commonsense — that only the religion of Islam breeds terrorists. The most sinister aspect of the entire episode is the discovery of the involvement of retired and even serving army officers in the terror plot. This is an ill-omen for Indian secularism. The Indian political establishment should take an unequivocal stand against all shades of communal fascism in order to safeguard our fragile secularism.

Whenever a terrorist plot unravels itself in the most murderous fashion, the religious apologists come out with unconvincing statements as usual— that religion is love, that no religion advocates hatred, that extremists are misguided individuals. They also do not fail to quote a few stray verses from this or that ‘sacred’ book in support of their argument. But the truth is all organized ideologies and religions in particular are inherently intolerant towards ‘outsiders’ and also against ‘insiders’, who dare to question the authorities and their dogma.

- manoj
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Nadi Jyothidam (Nadi Astrology) is the name of an 'exact science' by which all details about a person can be told by consulting palm leaves supposedly made by Agastya Muni, a very famous ancient sage of the south. There is supposed to be one palm leaf for every human being on this earth, past present and future! Taking into account the population explosion the whole place should have been chock full of palm leaves but miraculously it is not so. That shows us two things- one is that the ancients had the foresight to know as to who would visit the place and hence only their bio data would be there or the leaves are preserved in some other format where in terabytes of data would be compressed and stored. The prints would be taken after the candidate arrives on the spot!

remarkable wisdom of our ancients! Any way, after one arrives there, the thumb impression is taken along with date of birth. Then the palm leaf pertaining to the individual is searched for. That is the source of the name Nadi- search. There are a number of write ups praising its accuracy and there are blogs testifying to the same. There have been numerous accounts
stating that the practitioners of Nadi have an accurate method of telling all about the past, present and future of any individual. All they need for identifying the right leaf is the thumb print of the person and the date of birth.

Since we were passing through the area where the 'original' Nadi leaves are supposed to exist, that is the Vaithishwara temple near Chidambaram in Tamil Nadu, we decided to check on the same. Three of us, Rajendran, Murugan from Tamil Nadu science forum and I decided to visit the most famous of them all. Rajendra had some contacts who told him that Shiva Swamy of station road was the best one and would charge only Rs.500 per consultation.

When we reached the place at the entrance of the village there were numerous signs inviting us to the 'original' Nadi Jyothidam, the one and only Nadi consultant, beware of touts (touts!) etc. After enquiries we came to know that the place was full of Shiva Swamis as it seemed to be the most popular name around. So, after coming to the conclusion that a rose would smell as sweet whatever name be it called, we went to the nearest Shiva Swami. This too was probably already entered in my leaf! However, when we made enquiries around, it was a toud, who took us to this place. On entry, we were told that we had come to the right place as it was the place where Agastya Muni had deposited his original collection of palm leaves. We were also told that it was holy place, madam - a hermitage-(not to be confused with
madam!) and not a commercial enterprise. On enquiry as to how much was to be paid, we were informed that it all depended on what we wanted. If the interpretations were to be made in Tamil then it would be Rs.200, if translations were to be made it would be more. If recording on an audio tape was needed fifty rupees had to be paid extra. Since we decided on a plain vanilla type of reading, two hundred was agreed upon. However, I put a condition that the payment would be made only if what was said was correct and that too was agreed upon.

I was told to write my date of birth on a paper and two thumb impressions of my right hand were taken. That was all that was needed to look for my palm leaf. However, that was subject to availability and I was told to sit down in a fixed place when the search was going on for it. We declined this invitation and told them that we would go around the place and come later. When we came back after ten minutes we were told that I was lucky, my leaf had been found and that it would be read. When I asked the permission of the person reading it for it to be photographed he declined. When I asked whether he would pose for a picture he was vehement in his refusal. But, before that I had managed to take a few pictures of the place and its fixtures. The standard disclaimer was put forth before the reading started. I was told that though all efforts had been made to get the script of my life there may be some errors. So, I had to answer yes or no to statements made about my life.

First I was asked the place where I came from. When I replied Udupi, he said that had been accurately mentioned in his leaf. The next question was whether I was a Brahmin or not. When I asked what the leaf said, I was told non-brahmin. When I said yes, he made the very earth shaking declaration that I was a non vegetarian. I asked him to go ahead and he said that both my parents were alive. Though, both of them are no more, this inference had been probably arrived at, by the presence of their souls on earth! I had made no attempts to send them to heaven by performing the required rituals. I was also informed that my father had been a government servant and had retired. That would have been news to him if had been alive. He had never worked for any one in his life time. Then I was told that I too had been in government service and retired (not a very difficult conclusion going by my age!) The Pais of Manipal who had been my employers at Manipal University would be glad to hear of this elevation in their status. The next statement was about the day of my birth and was told that I had been born on a Monday and under Makara rashi. When I replied I did not know whether either of them to be true or false, I was told that I am a Muslim! Then I was told the following:

1. I owned the house in which I am staying (true) and so did my father (false).

2. I had two wives (where is the second one?)

3. I had two children from my deceased first wife and for their sake married for the second time. My reply was that my first wife was not deceased, but I had divorced because she had no issues; that the children were of my second one. The interpreter of Nadi fell into the trap and said yes! He also agreed that there was a small error in his reading.

4. I had two brothers and one sister (true) but when I said it was wrong he said one brother and one sister.

5. My fathers name was starting with one of the dozen alphabets listed. When I said no, he followed with a dozen other alphabets when I replied in the negative for that too, he was flabbergasted.

About thirty minutes had passed and getting tired of this, I told the Nadi reader that most of what he said was nonsense. At this he got angry and told me that I
should have told him that. I replied that it was his duty to know that because his own Nadi leaf would have contained the information that his powers would be tested on that day. When I asked him whether I had pay for all the rubbish that he had told, he flounced out of his own establishment with the Nadi leaves pertaining to my life under his arm and left us there. After waiting for a few minutes for him to come back we came out and by that time I had gathered how the so called Nadi fortune tellers manage to make 'accurate' predictions of the past and future.

The leaves are just a prop for them. They are covered with some scribbles which only the Nadi reader, it is claimed, can interpret. The information about the client is gathered by the following methods:

1. The client and those accompanying them are asked to wait until the proper leaves are found. During this time they are asked to wait in a room which is wired and the conversation is spied upon.

2. The interpreter is a clever 'cold' reader. He notes the reactions of the client and those who accompany them to check the accuracy of the predictions.

3. The pointed questions are asked to 'predict' the background of the client-like caste, religion etc.

4. Names and other specific details are rooted out by trying to get the first alphabet of the word followed by the second one and so on by a process of elimination.

5. Most of information is provided by the client by reactions to yes or no questions or by unconscious body signals. In my case since I am very experienced in providing wrong body signals and those accompanying me had no knowledge about my personal matters, the reader was not in a position to acquire any knowledge about me by this method and played into a trap.

However, once he realized that he was being misled, I was a hard nut to crack, he backed out. So much for the accurate science of Nadi Jyothidam and the numerous testimonials on internet and at a more personal level!

Narendra Nayak (former Professor of Biochemistry, Kastruba Medical College, Mangalore) is the president of Federation of Indian Rationalist Associations

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When I ask people if someone who doesn't believe a god exists is an "ATHEIST," they tell me "YES." And when I survey reliable sources, such as, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Webster's, Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Funk & Wagnalls, Oxford English Dictionary, Canadian Oxford Dictionary, and others, the collective definition is that an atheist can be either someone who DOESN'T BELIEVE a god exists OR someone who DENIES a god exists.

You say an atheist is ONLY a person who DENIES a god exists, and that a person who doesn't BELIEVE a god exists isn't an atheist? That sounds a bit odd. So, what is your rationale for rejecting so many definitions given by so many reliable sources and native English speakers?

THey're wrong! AND I'm right! That covers it, since I can't think of any way to argue with LOGIC LIKE THAT!

And I only use sources that agree with me.

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

Tracie Harris has been publishing Atheist Eve since 1 October 2004 and all her earlier works are archived at: http://www.atheist-community.org/atheisteve/. Atheist Eve is reproduced by Bangalore Skeptic with the author's permission.
Cow’s Excreta as Medicine: Insult to Humanity

Dr Srinivas Kakkilaya

The cow is, at the least, an animal domesticated by man for help in agricultural activities.[1] Although the mighty machines now used in farming have made these animals irrelevant in agriculture, valiant attempts are being made, at least in India, to preserve the exalted position of the so called ‘second mother’ [2] or even ‘mother of the world’ [3,4].

The stringent agitations to protect the ‘cow-mother’ [4,5] and even riots and murders of dalits for the sake of the cow,[6,7] suggest that the human life is far less important than a dead cow in this part of the world.[7] This extraordinary reverence for the cow has led to the development and marketing of many ‘products’ made from the secretions and excretions of the cow, with claims that these products may be more ‘lucrative’ than even the dairy.[8]

Cow Products

The list of ‘products’ developed from the agitations to protect the ‘cow-mother’ and even riots and murders of dalits for the sake of the cow, suggest that the human life is far less important than a cow in this part of the world.
milk and excreta of the cow is quite long. Panchagavya and cow urine distillate (gau arka) are the most quoted of these preparations.

Panchagavya is a blend of five (pancha) products obtained from the cow (gavya = from gau) - the dung, urine, milk, ghee and curd.[9,10] Three preparations of cow’s urine, namely gau-mutra asav (fermented preparation), gau-arka (or distillate) and Ganavati (or tablet) are also used as medicines.[8,11] Two US patents have also been obtained for the gau-arka [11] and this fact has been highlighted over and over again.

Various products from the cow have been suggested as a successful remedy against more than hundred diseases, from fever to cancer.[8,11,12] Panchagavya is most reverently used as a ‘body and soul cleanser’, following the birth or death of a family member. It has also been suggested as a medicine and more profusely as a pesticidal spray for plants and as a soil enriching manure.[10]

Very recently, panchagavya has been suggested as a remedy for chikungunya as well.[13] Cow’s urine has been used in the preparations of hair oil, shampoo, skin cream etc.[8] Preparations like soap, nasal powder, body powder, body cream, incense sticks, tooth powder etc. have been prepared from the cow dung and recommended for medical use[8]. Probably to add sanctity to the entire gamut of these ‘medications’, it has been claimed that Indian pure breed cows have ‘immunology power’ from 90% to 98% while the cows of mixed breed have less than 40%.[11]

Curious to know about Panchagavya, I asked an Ayurveda physician about its utility. She briefed me about all the virtues of the gau mutra (cow’s urine), gau maya (cow dung) and Panchagavya, quoting the Charaka Samhita. But how can we, living in the 21st century, rely on an ancient text to justify the use of these excreta, I wondered. All these have been well studied by Charaka, she told me. May be, but the concept of biochemical molecules (and the modern biochemical analysers) and of microbes (and the means of isolating them) were non-existent during Charaka’s time, I countered. But the cow’s urine hasn’t
changed since Charaka’s time, she averred. I was dumbstruck!

Most articles on the virtues of cow’s excreta extensively quote from scriptures and the Charaka Samhita. Here are some of these arguments:

- The cow is our mother and we are her children. Therefore cow urine is beneficial.[8,11]

- Diseases are caused by imbalance of elements bile, mucous and air and cow urine balances elements.[8]

- Amongst urines, cow urine is best.[8]

- Ganga resides in the cow urine and it contains copper and gold salts, which are elixirs. It does not decay, older the cow urine, the more useful it is.[8]

Recently a lot has been written about the patents for cow urine; one obtained on the basis of laboratory studies (on culture plates and cell lines) on the usefulness of cow urine distillate in enhancing the efficacy of antibiotics and anti cancer drugs, [14,15] and the other patent obtained for cow urine therapy.[16] There are reports of the use of cow’s urine therapy from Myanmar [17] and of a cow’s urine concoction used as a traditional remedy for convulsive seizures in Nigeria.[18] There have also been reports of studies on the cow’s urine distillate in gouty arthritis, lymphocyte and polymorphonuclear cells and carbon tetrachloride poisoning, all done on experimental animals in small numbers.[19-22] These results have been extrapolated freely and wild conclusions have been drawn about the ‘magical powers’ of the cow’s urine in treating almost all the diseases afflicting mankind today.[14,17] Even the Department of Animal Husbandry of the Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, has published reports that seek to promote the marketing of cow’s urine as a therapeutic agent.[23]

The facts:

Faced with this blitzkrieg of marketing of cow’s urine and the real danger that cow’s urine and other products of cow’s excreta may be pushed into the throats of hapless patients, with active support from the govt., agencies., it is time we look into the facts.

One need not go far to see the hypocrisy of the ‘cow urine promoters’ than have a look at the ayurveda texts themselves, extensively quoted as the primary source of support for the utility of cow’s urine as a therapeutic agent. All three major ancient texts of ayurveda, by Charaka (1st-2nd century), Susruta (3rd –4th century) and Vagbhata (7th century) mention of the therapeutic uses of beef[24,25] as well, but this fact is no where mentioned by the proponents of cow’s urine. Eating beef is a sin and drinking cow’s urine or eating its dung brings health, if these self-styled guardians of ancient Indian tradition are to be believed.

What about the much touted patents for cow’s urine? A patent is a set of exclusive
rights granted by a state to an inventor to prevent or exclude others from making, using, selling, offering to sell or importing the invention.[26] Nothing more, nothing less. A patent in itself cannot be the proof for the utility of any product. It is hardly surprising that while International patents have been registered for cow’s urine and its products, no such patent has been obtained from the Govt. of India. An Indian patent may not make enough and weighty news, but an international patent, on the other, helps to claim that even ‘foreigners’ have accepted the virtues of cow’s urine!

All the studies available in the literature about the therapeutic efficacy of cow’s excreta are small studies conducted in the labs and on animals or tissues. There are no reports of any controlled, double blind clinical studies in humans, other than some anecdotal reports and claims by the practitioners of ‘cow therapy’ and all these so-called claims of research appear dubious by any scientific standards.[27] Most of these papers contradict their own claims: the claims made about the gold and copper salts in urine, for example, are not supported by the data provided by the protagonists themselves.[8,28]

Urine is urine, the liquid waste that is filtered by the kidneys and excreted through the urinary system. It contains many solutes and biological products that are unnecessary for the living body and hence excreted and also some substances secreted by the urinary tract to facilitate this excretion. Chemical constituents of human and animal urine are almost alike.[28,29] For example, Urokinase is an enzyme secreted into the urine to prevent its clogging; today, it is extracted from human urine and used to dissolve clots in the coronary arteries in patients who suffer a heart attack.[30] Does this justify drinking one’s own urine in case of a heart attack? Far from it.

Is cow’s urine safe for mankind? There are reports of severe adverse effects, even fatal, of drinking cow urine concoctions, further supported by experimental evidence.[31] Cow’s urine can also be a source of infectious diseases, especially leptospirosis, [32] that can spread through oral mucosa. The claim that cow’s urine and cow dung have antiseptic properties is not only baseless, but also dangerously misleading. While cow dung (and all fecal matter) is teeming with bacteria excreted from the intestines, several bacteria have been isolated from Panchagavya too.[33,34] Application of these bacteria-rich excreta onto wounds may lead to life threatening sepsis. Only those who are absolutely ignorant about such facts can daringly market cow’s excreta as antiseptics, but the tragedy is that some practitioners of modern medicine, blinded by their faiths in their ‘spiritual heads’ or ‘Mathadhipathis’ also appear to support such nonsense.

Conclusions:

It is clear that cow’s urine and other excreta are only the waste products rejected by the animal’s body and are similar to the excreta of other animals and therefore, there is absolutely no reason why the cow’s urine or other excreta should be venerated over those of humans beings or other animals.

The claims of the efficacy of cow’s excreta (and their products) in the treatment of almost every disease are not supported by any evidence and there are no clinical trials reported on the use of these products in human beings. With reports available about the possible adverse effects of the use of cow’s excreta, it is shocking that such products are being allowed to be not only marketed but also trumpeted, even supported by the agencies of the govt. of India, as the ‘cure-for-all’ wonder drugs.

Propaganda regarding the utility of cow’s excreta largely emanates from the obscurantist and Hindu fundamentalist forces and appears to be designed to condemn the ordinary human beings into ingesting cow’s excreta under the alibi of
‘treatment’ and ‘long life’. This is not surprising at all, given the several instances of the down trodden dalits forced into eating even human excreta by the same fundamentalists.[35]

Eulogising the cow (and not buffalo and other cattle that are equally ‘useful’) as ‘second mother’, ‘God mother’, ‘mother of the world’ etc., largely because it provides milk,[11] (and hopefully not because of its excreta) raises a fundamental question about the concept of motherhood itself: Do we love and respect our own mothers solely because we have been breastfed and is motherhood only about milk?

This entire exercise of marketing the cow’s products and promising huge economic benefits (a claim not supported by any data) of keeping the cows even after they have passed the age of secreting milk is part of the grand design to prevent the slaughtering of the cows so as to deprive the poor sections of the society from quality meat as well as some economic benefits of marketing the beef. But sustaining the livestock is proving to be very costly for the environment, with a large share of global warming attributed to the livestock.[36,37] It is time we take a rational view of all the issues involved.

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Dr Srinivas Kakkilaya is a practicing physician and consultant based in Mangalore. He writes on Alternative Medicine and various forms of quackery. His writing can be found at the websites www.rationalmedicine.org as well as www.nirmukta.com, where this essay was first published.
Women, Islam and Human Rights

Dr Muhammad Younas Sheikh

PART ONE:  
WOMEN IN ISLAM

Before the advent of Islam, the pagan Arab women generally enjoyed a respectable status in society. Many of them, like Khadija, the first wife of the prophet of Islam, had the right to engage in business and choose or dismiss their husbands in a matrilineal fashion. They also took part in most activities of war and peace, including public worship. In female oriented Arab paganism, goddesses had special status; in Mecca, the female goddess Al-Uzza; in Taif, the goddess Al-Lat and in Medina the goddess Manat were the most popular deities, and their statues were most revered while the statue of the stern Allah was almost neglected.

Arab pagan poetry was mostly concerned with the beauty and grace of their women, and the glory of their tribal values in peace and war. And it was only in one predator tribe of Mecca that the evil custom of burying alive of the daughters prevailed. It was highly unusual for a man of pre-Islamic Arab society to have more than one wife in his house; and it is quite certain that polygamy was introduced and encouraged by the prophet after the revelation of Islam.

Women’s prime role was to produce as many Muslims as possible. This ultimately resulted in the degradation in the status of the married woman in the Islamic society. Whereas the pre-Islamic Arab custom allowed looser forms of marriage on the matrilineal and matriloclal tradition which gave women freedom and liberty as full human beings, the artificial rules of Islamic nikah reduced marriage to mere sexual and social slavery.

The prophet of Islam, before prophethood, opposed the burying alive of the newborn daughters; he was eager to work for a woman and gladly married a divorced woman. The early Islam continued with most of the pre-Islam tribal traditions; there were no veils for women of Medina; and at a later date only the nine wives of prophets were restricted in their social intercourse as their home was constantly full of visitors. However, the prophet’s female sex-slaves were not restricted in any such manners.

In fact, the semi-transparent half-face veil (hijab) was actually a very old custom originating in Assyrian times. It was a status symbol and a mark of social distinction for free women. The pre-Islamic pagan Arab woman of the cities often wore the fashionable semi-transparent half-face veil but the tribal women never did. Later, Islam added measures for ‘the preservation of modesty for women’, like casting down their eyes in public, concealing their breasts and jewellery and the like. However, these restrictions were later extended by the followers of the prophet far beyond his original intentions as expressed in Qur’an, and remained more or
The female hating instruments of the Islamic Empire, the mullahs and the Caliphs, continued to promote the degradation of women under the formal and sordid Islamic legal code of Shariyah, the final seal on the complete subjection of the female element. The modern history of Islam is merely the continuation of the Islamic tribal medievalism, only the technology, phraseology and the façade is modern.
less a permanent fixture of Muslim life thereafter.

Later on, however, the insecurity of early Islam gradually added to the exclusion of women, and a century later, by the reign of the Abbasid Caliph Haroon ur Rashid, women became merely sexual toys and breeding machines; and as married women they were merely maidservants – man’s social appendages. Moreover, as female sex-slaves, women were freely bought and sold in open markets of all Islamic countries, and loaned, rented or bestowed as gifts to friends. The prophet himself bestowed women sex-slaves to his favourites. There was no limit to the number of slaves one could own; for example, one of the companions of the prophet, Hazrat Zubair Ibn ul Arvan, had a thousand male slaves and a thousand female sex-slaves. Islam took the woman as the land tilled by the man where he spilled his seeds.

The prophet himself took part in or guided nearly a hundred wars, raids or attacks for plunder. After him, his followers continued the offence. The fierce Bedouins, with centuries of experience of ruthless and cruel tribal warfare, proved to be worthwhile shock troops of Islam. After Iraq, Syria fell to the Islamic Empire in 634 CE. Despite surrenders, great massacres took place at many places; thousands of men were slaughtered and women and children sold into slavery; monasteries were ransacked, monks and villagers were slain and nuns were raped. After the conquest of Egypt, many of its towns were put to sword and their entire population wiped out. Great massacres also occurred in Cyprus and North Africa. The conquered provinces brought hundreds of thousands of slaves, men and women; lands of once mighty and civilised countries where the women had been held in high respect e.g. the Manichean Iraq, the Pharaonic Egypt and North African civilisations.

As in Egypt and Iran, wherever the conquering Bedouin armies went, they destroyed the local cultures by imposing their Islamic tribal medievalism, recklessly murdering men and degrading women to perpetual sexual slavery. Meanwhile the Bedouin continued to raid and abduct European women for Islamic slave markets. The conquest of Syria forced the conversion of thousands of Christian priests to Islam, who changed their religion but not their profession: they became the stern anti-feminine Islamic mullahs and not only continued their religious magic and rituals, but also continued the essentially Christian medievalism under Islam.

As a result of Islamic conquests, & 

destructions and imposition of 

Islamic tribal medievalism, 

societies under the Islamic Empire 

went further than any other in 

their total exclusion of women 

from political power and social 

influence.

In short, as a result of these conquests, destructions and imposition of Islamic tribal medievalism, societies under the Islamic Empire went further than any other in their total exclusion of women from political power and social influence. Islamic legislation went far beyond anything the prophet had originally dreamed of in his tribal religiosity in cheating women of their rightful place in society and in matters of inheritance. Where originally the Qur’an gave women the right of inheritance, the Islamic mullah invented the legalised institution of Waqf – the religious foundation, to exclude the daughters and their descendents from inheritance. Though the Qur’an does give
the right of inheritance to women, she continued to be a minor; usually uneducated and needing a guardian in father, husband or the son. Indeed, while the status of women in Islam is theoretically exalted, it is utterly deplorable in practice.

The multiplying number of harems (residing place for the female sexslaves), finally institutionalised under Caliph Al-Walid II, emphasised the inevitable degradation of womanhood under Islam. Haroon ur Rashid, the Islamic Caliph (ruler) had 2000 female sex-slaves, Caliph Mutawakkal had 4000 female sex-slaves; and every mullah, official or soldier of Islamic state had some men-slaves and women sex-slaves belonging to the conquered nations.

At an intellectual level, Islam is merely the continuation of the medieval Jahiliya (Ignorance) in the holy garb of Islam — the Islamic Jahiliya (the Islamic Medieval Ignorance). Modern Islam is, indeed, merely a continuation of that medieval tribal ignorance and mental backwardness

Not being allowed to learn, experience or think for herself, it is no wonder that there are very few outstanding women in 1600 years of Islamic history, and those who by chance or by the force of the ancient pre-Islamic customs came into light or in the corridors of power were sooner or later eliminated on the orders of some pious and religious Islamic mullah. Indeed, Islam’s violent anti-feminism have been as nefarious as Christianity’s burning of hundreds of thousands European women as witches in 15th, 16th and 17th centuries. The female hating instruments of the Islamic Empire, the mullahs and the Caliphs, continued to promote the degradation of women under the formal and sordid Islamic legal code of Shariah, some of whom had taken refuge under the Buddhist monarch Raja Dahir in Sindh), Mohammad Bin Qasim conquered the kingdom in 712 CE. His Islamic plunderers and looters demolished temples, shattered sculptures, plundered palaces and killed thousands. It took his Islamic army three days to slaughter the inhabitants of Debal, and their women and children were taken into slavery. Later on he pardoned many prisoners and tried to establish a just rule of law which enraged the very Islamic and murderous Governor Hijaj Bin Yousaf; therefore Qasim again reverted to the Islamic barbarity and massacred between six and sixteen thousand people in Brahminabad, and their women and children were sent to slave markets.

PART TWO: ISLAM IN HISTORY

Turning to India, we find a similar tale of depredation. The Indian subcontinent suffered the humiliation and destruction under Islam, as did Africa. The Islamic General Mohammad Bin Qasim decimated great Buddhist and Hindu civilisations. Acting on the orders of a representative of the Islamic Caliph, Governor Hijaj Bin Yousaf (who was a deadly enemy of the Hazrat Ali and Hazrat Hussein’s family,
This was the beginning of the destruction of the destruction of the classical ancient Indian civilisation, and start of the medieval age of Islamic darkness in India. The 11th century witnessed another Islamic murderer and plunderer, Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi an agent of Islamic Caliph, who utterly ruined the great Indian civilisation and looted and plundered most of its wealth. In one of his seventeen invasions of India Ghaznavi oversaw the massacre of fifty thousand Hindus at Somnath. Thousands of Hindu men and women were sent to the Afghani slave markets. The highly cultured and civilised daughters of the noble Hindu families were sold to the illiterate, un-cultured and barbaric Afghanis for equivalent of just one dollar each. After every Afghani Muslim had four wives each, there were lots of surplus women left; to that the evil Islamic mullahs responded with an ingenious translation of Qur’anic verses proving that Allah allowed each Muslim to marry eighteen women at a time, along with an unlimited number of women as concubines. Soon the new military instruments of the Islamic Caliph, the Turks and the Moguls followed, decimated captured Delhi and turned whole of India into a grand open-air slave camp. Sultan Firoze Shah Tughlaq, an Islamic Turk ruler had 100,000 men-slaves and thousands of female sex-slaves in his harem; the pious Islamic Mongol (Mogul) Emperor Shahjehan had 15,000 female sex-slaves and concubines for his personal harem. Indeed, the Islamic Turk invaders and rulers did the same in India as they did in Armenia, where whole races of peoples were exterminated.

Having noted all this, credit must be given here to the agnostic and secularminded, humanist Mogul Emperor Akbar the Great, who refused the title of ‘King of Muslims’ and preferred to be called ‘the shadow of God’ - for his God, he declared (in accordance with the mind and language of his age), is the beneficial deity and protector of all -Hindus, Muslims and other races of humans and creatures alike.

He gave up his faith in Islam and tried his genius in creating a pluralistic religion comprised of all the prevalent religions and ideologies of India. He even invited the Jesuit priests from Goa to his ideologydiscussion- palace but could not swallow their Jesus-son-of-God myth.

The medieval Islamic Empire of the Turkish Osmanli Caliphate disappeared after the defeat of the Central Powers in the First World War and with the rise of the Turkish secular hero Mustafa Kemal

**Since the advent of the Saudi oil, petrodollars started to support the Islamic extremist movements all over the world and continue to do so. The Saudi petrodollars have created thousands of Islamic centres for social and political control and propaganda – the Mosques – all over the world**

Pasha. However, it soon metamorphosed into the modern Saudi Islamic spiritual Empire. It is noteworthy that while the British Empire of the West required a standing army to control the bodies of men in all its colonies, the theocratic Saudi Islamic spiritual empire of the East depends on the standing army of clerics, mullahs and Imams stationed in mosques to control the minds of men.

It is true that Islam dismantled the old Arab tribal loyalties and some of its taboos and traditions; however it created a new tribe in the name of Islam with the prophet himself as its chieftain and his family and
tribe (Hashmis and Qureish acquiring an elevated and sacred status) a replacement of old medieval tribe with a new theocratic tribe. However, it essentially continued many of the ancient pagan rituals of worship as well as many of its old taboos and traditions. The tribal blood loyalties were replaced with the new tribal religious loyalties. At an intellectual level Islam is merely the continuation of the medieval Jahiliya (Ignorance) in the holy garb of Islam – the Islamic Jahiliya (the Islamic Medieval Ignorance). Modern Islam is, indeed, merely a continuation of that medieval tribal ignorance and mental backwardness.

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Since the advent of the Saudi oil, petrodollars started to support the Islamic extremist movements all over the world and continue to do so. The Saudi petrodollars have created thousands of Islamic centres for social and political control and propaganda – the Mosques – all over the world; about a thousand mosques have been built in the USA just in the last few years. Islamic brainwashing and political propaganda continue in these mosques and madrasas (the religious schools) as well as through the Islamic newspapers, magazines, radios and televisions.

All kind of extremist Islamic terrorism and fundamentalism emanates and fl ows from the ‘Kernel of Evil – the Epicentre of the ugly Islamism – the Saudis.’ In the Saudis’ minds, Allah makes submission to Islam obligatory for all humans. Those who refuse their submission to Allah or differ from the Saudi version of Islam are called Satan’s party, and must be eliminated by Saudis or their paid and brainwashed zombies – the Muslims – called Allah’s party. Saudi Arabia is in fact the worst example of Islamic medievalism, and mental, social backwardness. Slavery was legal in Saudi until the 1960s when it was offi cially abolished on the personal request of the US President J F Kennedy! However, it continues in new names: the foreign female domestic servants, the private property of their owners. Saudi petrodollars continue to support the extremist and fundamentalist mullahs, and continue to lure the Islamic states into the barbarity of the Islamic medieval Shariah laws, and the Saudis continue to spread Islamic mullah terrorism and Islamic theocratic totalitarianism all over the world.

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**Dr. Younus Shaikh** is a Pakistani medical doctor, human rights activist, rationalist and free-thinker. In October 2000, following a lecture, he was charged with blasphemy and ultimately after 11 months in jail sentenced to death. The verdict was later turned over in November 2003, after some further years in jail, following a high degree of international campaign. (This article is reproduced from The Open Society, Journal of the New Zealand Association of Rationalists and Humanists - Volume 78, Number 2, Winter 2005. The second part of this essay will be carried in our December 2008 issue)
"Naanu Hindu, Naanu Brahmana"

Letter from a Well-wisher!

(In response to Bangalore Skeptic October 2008 issue)

J. Sreenivasa Murthy

Dear Comrades;

I am amused at the 'Poems'(!)

No one is left to speak for the one who did not speak for others. Very true. How can I speak for the old comrades who ridiculed me because I was born a Hindu (though I did not know what it meant) and forced meat and wine to prove my secularism, for they also knew that I was born a Brahmin. To prove my secularism I was asked to cry out anti-Brahmin slogans. With all that I was denied my position in the pretext of reservation. What do you want a person like me to be? Just speak up only for you? And keep quiet and suffer your ridicule when my brethren in Kashmir are rotting as a refugee in my own country? Tell me if you spoke a word for him. Even your friends who tried to show pity did put so many tags of buts, ifs and of courses. Of course, you want me to be a good Samaritan. I can not ask you to be a good Brahmin for by your definition Brahmin must be de-brahminised to be good and secular. But a Christian or a Muslim or a Zionist is naturally good and just and so secular. I know not the red-(ink) poetry composition. Nor do I care for it now.

Conversion is a continuous process for me; also a non-linear movement. So I choose to stand up and claim with Gopala Krishna Adiga, 'Naanu Hindu Naanu Brahmana" If you have a right to speak for 'Christian' I have a right to speak for Hindu. If your sarcasm continues I am afraid you lose a friend.

J. Sreenivasa Murthy

Head, Department of Sanskrit,
MES College, Bengalooru- 560 003
Well friends,

Since I have been given the task of reacting to what a Brahmin comrade has written, I have to do that at the risk of losing friends. Born in a family of Gowd Saraswath Brahmins of Mangalore, I may be one. Though the caste in which I was born, regard themselves as Brahmins, many of the 'purer' Brahmins do not agree with that. In dining they are permitted to Brahminical, Islamic, Christian or belonging to any religion so far which could make me just a human being! But under the laws of the land, people like us are considered as Hindus since we are not Muslims, Christians or Parsis.

I was brought up in a community where eating fish was a normal thing and hence probably graduating to larger, more evolved forms of flesh eating was no big deal. No

Get out of the temples, churches, and mosques

Let us pluck out poverty from its very roots

Push out the evils of superstitions

Hold the torch of science, brothers come quickly for the task.

- Kuvempu

sit under the same roof, but not in the same row- they sit at right angles to those qualified to sit in the same row- not sahapankthi but adda pankthi. In some of the mathas and temples, they are not allowed to eat with the Brahmins at all and have to be content to sit with the large mass of non-Brahmins whose contributions are the major part of the income of these institutions! But, since a Brahmin or dwija is twice born I may not qualify for one at all, as I have not submitted myself to any of those rituals which make me one. However, I have not submitted myself to any religious rituals- one forced me to eat anything. The only period in my life when I was forced by circumstances to have beef twice a day was at Manipal, where the Shivalli Brahmin hotel was charging a rupee for a fistful of rice, watery sambar and rasam. When I discovered that for the same price I could get a plate of beef, good quantity of rice and vegetables, it was natural that I switch over to that for survival. Many of my friends and relatives were shocked that I was eating beef every day and suggested that I should eat animals other than the mother cow. I did agree with them, but since a plate of mutton with rice was

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costing twice as much, I asked them to subsidize me to that extent, but none was coming forth- all that I got was a lecture on what a sin eating beef was! It was during those days I really saw the shocking conditions under which daliths lived there which made me align with them, not in hope of any reservation but so that I could join them in their struggles for justice. We did not raise any anti Brahmin slogans, for that was not needed. The daliths figured nowhere in the schemes of the Brahmins. However, in Kasturba Medical College where I did my post graduation in biochemistry, I found that there were reservations- the seats were reserved for the moneyed, the clerical jobs and such were for the upper castes. One category of jobs was fully reserved for daliths- they were the tasks associated with putting cadavers on the dissection tables and then cleaning them up. No Brahmin or any other member of the upper castes objected to that or demanded for reservation there! I was never forced to drink wine, though I have consumed other forms of alcohol without any problems- wine was too sweet, particularly the Goan made port wine and I did not quite like the taste it tasted like draksharishta- a famous Ayurvedic medicine. As for the present I am consuming only beer or vodka, the latter due to my loyalty to the country of its origin- as we are always accused of. But, let all be reminded that when a Brahmin consumes meat or alcohol he is only going back to the good old ancestral traditions, which were rejected after the advent of Jainism and Buddhism. Perhaps those who forced our comrade to do that were religious revivalists who wanted him to go back to his roots. I do hope that having discovered the error of his ways he has gone back to bisi bele bhath, curd rice and such satwik food befitting a Brahmin!

I do quote what Niemöller wrote not out of fondness for Jews or Islamists or Christians but only as an example of what is happening in our country as of now. The fate of Kashmiri Pandiths does come up in my mind. What a sad state for a community whose members have occupied the highest position in this country for many decades-the Kashmiri Pandith founder of the ruling dynasty, his daughter, his grandson, his grand-daughter in law ruling by proxy and probably the great grandson waiting to occupy the chair. Even when the dynasty was not ruling, there were Brahmins in the same chair for most of the time! A very sad thing indeed, that the caste was never helped by their own people occupying high positions. Perhaps the in waiting prime ministerial candidate who himself is a displaced person from Pakistan will come to their aid if he manages to grab power!

Well, a Brahmin has to speak up for his kith and kin. Since, he is supposed to be the salt of the earth, the force which causes rotation of the earth, rains on time etc. etc. (to quote Manu, the law giver). The others should consider it their bounden duty to work hard and keep them in good humor so they can carry out the yagas and yagnas which cause these things to happen (again Manu).

A Brahmin has to speak up for his kith and kin. Since, he is supposed to be the salt of the earth, the force which causes rotation of the earth, rains on time etc. etc. (to quote Manu, the law giver). The others should consider it their bounden duty to work hard and keep them in good humor so they can carry out the yagas and yagnas which cause these things to happen (again Manu).
offered whatever one wants to give to Brahma (Manu). One could go on ad nauseum. I am sorry that I cannot quote the shlokas verbatim as I have been too busy learning languages of man and to pay attention to that of the gods. I do not know Sanskrit, Arabic, Latin or any other languages in which the gods have directly expressed their thoughts. Lest I be accused of extra territorial loyalties I do not know either Russian or Cantonese or Mandarin. But, the daliths need not be spoken for by the Brahmin as they do not count anywhere in the chatur varna system. They are not Hindus except when they get converted to other religions. When they do a big hullabaloo is made and they are converted back into the matra dharma! The spokes persons of Hindus or those who wish to be so could try and make them Brahmins. As said by Gopalakrishna Adiga, ‘Naanu Hindu Naanu brahmana’ we could say ‘naanu matra dharmakke maralida hindu naanu brahmana’. Let us see how many Brahmanas are willing to accept that. Last week in Kerala some youth who were trained to utter shlokas, examined by Brahmins and were then awarded certificates to conduct rituals according to Hindu rites. There was an agitation by Brahmins who objected to the violations of traditions! Well, so much for merit. When competitive examinations for all castes will be conducted and the best candidate made heads of the mathas then we could accept the rights of the Brahmin to be the spokes person of Hindus! When all the priestly positions are reserved for the twice born how can one speak up against caste based reservations and talk of merit?

Finally friends, it is not the color of the ink that matters or the color of the flag or its shape. It could be red, green or saffron. It is the attitude of the mind that is the most important and the willingness to concede equality. Quoting Kuvempu:

‘Gudi churchu masidigala bittu hora banni
Badatanava buda mutta keela banni
Maudhyatheya maariyannu hora dudalai tanni
Vigyana divigeya hideya banni, o banni sodarare bega banni’

Loosely translated:

Get out of the temples, churches mosques
Let us pluck out poverty from its very roots
Push out the evils of superstitions
Hold the torch of science, brothers come quickly for the task.

Finally quoting Edmund Burke the eminent parliamentarian and M.K. Gandhi, the former said all that is needed for the dark forces of evil to take over this world is enough number of good people who want to nothing. The latter has said that bowing to the forces of injustice and violence is cowardice. Whether we are Hindu, Muslim, Christian or human does not matter. We have been guilty of bowing to such forces. Let us get over that. Vandemataram!

The growth of one humanity requires the rejection of communal labels. Perhaps even the rejection of the labels of religion would involve a change of the belief in god, for every denominational label is associated with faith in a particular form of god. But, though every religion talked only of one god, in practice, however, belief in god always deteriorated into sectarianism and fanaticism, because god is a falsehood. So atheism is the most suitable attitude for the establishment of one humanity.

- **Gora**

*(An Atheist With Gandhi, Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad)*
The Questions Unasked
Another response to Prof Murthy

Dr Srinivas Kakkilaya

'Where there is doubt, there is freedom'. - Latin proverb

The problem these days in our societies is that either we are not allowed to ask questions (dictatorial attitudes) or we do not want to ask questions (disinterested, too scared, do not know what and how to ask). In the former case, our freedom has been denied and in the latter, we have lost it ourselves. If only we ask questions, these confusions can be avoided.

• Is secularism about ridiculing anyone's eating taboos? Is it about eating meat? Is it about placing one religion above another? Or is it about our ability to think beyond religion?

• What is our primary position in the living world? Are we human beings first or Hindus, Muslims, Christians etc.? Are we prepared to even think as human beings, an integral part of this wonderful universe, made only of carbon, nitrogen, oxygen and other elements? What is the issue of a Brahmin: Of millions of galaxies in the universe, our milky way is rather a small one and among its millions of stars, our sun is one of the faintest and of the planets and other bodies that go around the sun, earth is one of the smallest and of the millions of life forms on earth, man is physically one of the weakest and of more than 6 billion human beings, what is a Brahmin? Who cares and why should anyone care?

• What is anyone's position in the pretext of reservation? Is merit reserved for the upper castes?

• Why not abolish reservation inside the temples? Why should only a handful of people be allowed inside the sanctum sanctorum and thousands keep peeping from outside the temple? Can't we remove the four walls of the sanctum and open the deity for everyone to see and pray? Were there temples during the Vedic times and will it be alike in the Vedic Kingdom that the Hindutva Brigade wants to recreate here and now?

• While no one supports violence against the Pandits, have anyone so worried about the plight of the Kashmiri Pandits ever given a thought to the promises made to the Kashmiri people during the accession, how many of them have been kept and how many unkept, about the excesses of our armed forces and encounter deaths and mass graves? And how a state that had almost returned to normal has once again slipped away just on account of the belligerent agitation for a small piece of land for the Amarnath shrine, knowing very well that the yatra would be almost impossible without the help and cooperation of the Muslims in the valley, land or no land?

Questions are many, if only we care to ask. Can we be humans first and last? Can we all be only the living creatures made of carbon, nitrogen, oxygen and other elements?
Is Bangalore Skeptic 'junk'?

Manoj TV

So thinks a literary giant!

The gentleman not only emailed us telling us not to send the 'junk' (that is, Bangalore Skeptic) to him, he also took pain to forward copy of his letter to a number of persons in our mailing list.

We mail Bangalore Skeptic to a number of known individuals who we think are sympathetic to the cause we espouse. The email addresses are provided to us by the individuals themselves, who either attended the meetings of Bangalore Vicharavadi Sangha or who are known to some of us personally. We also get in touch with individuals who we have reasons to believe are not opposed to the ideological stand we take on various issues, even though they may not know us. We also mail our e-magazine to email addresses we receive through some known contacts and in such cases, we may not know for sure who in fact the end receivers are. When we mail our magazine to these addresses, the idea is not to spam them; we are not selling any product to make money. We mail our magazine to them as part of our networking. We are conscious that some of them may not like to receive our magazine and hence we have a permanent notice in the second page of our magazine requesting those readers not interested in receiving our magazine to inform us.

In October 2008, we happened to receive a group of email addresses when we received a mail from one of our friends. Since the focus of our October issue happened to be the very same topic the said mail was concerned with, we decided to send our magazine to those email addresses. We did not make any effort, before or after sending the mail, to identify the persons who owned the email addresses. To us, sending the magazine itself was a method of getting in touch with, to know, these individuals. In the past too, we used this method to get in touch with a number of individuals, not only in Bangalore but in other parts of the country too. Our experience was extremely pleasant.

That is, until we sent our October 2008 issue! One of the owners of the email addresses referred to in the preceding paragraph happened to be, unfortunately, a
literary giant! Had we known who the person was behind the email ID, we perhaps would not have sent our magazine to him because we at Bangalore Skeptic have a policy to stay away from such giants!

The moment we received his mail, we deleted his address from our mailing list. We would have liked to stop at that, but for the fact that he had sent copy of his letter to a number of other recipients of our magazine. That single act of this literary titan made this present response necessary.

Now we come back to our original question: Is Bangalore Skeptic junk? We of course don’t think so. Sure, these writings will not fetch us a Jnanapeeth or even a citation from Nicolas Sarkozy’s government. But that alone is not the criteria to judge whether a writing is ‘junk’ or not. Since our own verdict does not have any meaning, we sent the following email not only to every one of the email addressees to whom the literary giant had addressed his email, but also to a few more persons.

Dear friends

We have received a few mails from some of our recipients expressing their anger against us and asked us not to send these sorts of stuffs/junks. We understand their anger and have deleted their addresses from our mailing list.

If you do not like our e-magazine, please send us a mail. We will no more be sending it to you. We are also sorry for mailing this magazine unsolicited.

Thank you

Yours sincerely
Bangalore Skeptic

It is 1st November 2008 today. To our delight, except for one person, nobody in that group has so far asked us to stop mailing Bangalore Skeptic to them. (We don’t think that our readers are absolutely lethargic not to reply to our email). On the contrary, we have received two very encouraging mails in response to our email. Mr. Indudhara Honnapura, one of our first-time readers and a recipient of the email from the eminent writer, wrote us, we quote, "Please continue sending your e-magazine. It is very informative and useful”.

The answer to our original question, thus, is in the negative, despite the verdict of our literary giant!
Bangalore Vicharavadi Sangha
(Bangalore Rationalist Association)

Bangalore Vicharavadi Sangha conducts monthly lectures and discussions on various topics. Some of the well-known personalities who spoke at the association's meetings are: Narendra Nayak (President, Federation of Indian Rationalist Associations), V.T.Rajashekar (Editor, *Dalit Voice*), and G.K.Govinda Rao (Author & Cine Actor)

Those who are interested in attending the programmes conducted by the association may contact:

Dr. M.N.Keshava Rao (Phone: 26690269. Email: keshava_rao@hotmail.com)
A.S.Nataraj (Phone: 26696553. Email: rajsri@bgl.vsnl.net.in)
Tools for Skeptical Thinking

Carl Sagan

Carl Sagan's famous essay, *The Fine Art of Baloney Detection*, more or less encapsulates the basic tenets of Skeptical Thinking. The present article is an extract from the essay. The full text can be found in one of Sagan's best-sellers *The Demonhaunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark*.

- Wherever possible there must be independent confirmation of the "facts."
- Encourage substantive debate on the evidence by knowledgeable proponents of all points of view.
- Arguments from authority carry little weight—"authorities" have made mistakes in the past. They will do so again in the future. Perhaps a better way to say it is that in science there are no authorities; at most, there are experts.
- Spin more than one hypothesis. If there's something to be explained, think of all the different ways in which it could be explained. Then think of tests by which you might systematically disprove each of the alternatives. What survives, the hypothesis that resists disproof in this Darwinian selection among "multiple working hypotheses," has a much better chance of being the right answer than if you had simply run with the first idea that caught your fancy.
- Quantify. If whatever it is you're explaining has some measure, some numerical quantity attached to it, you'll be much better able to discriminate among competing hypotheses. What is vague and qualitative is open to many explanations. Of course there are truths to be sought in the many qualitative issues we are obliged to confront, but finding them is more challenging.
- If there's a chain of argument, every link in the chain must work (including the premise) — not just most of them.
- Occam's Razor. This convenient rule-of-thumb urges us when faced with two hypotheses that explain the data equally well to choose the simpler.
- Always ask whether the hypothesis can be, at least in principle, falsified. Propositions that are untestable, unfalsifiable are not worth much. You must be able to check assertions out. Inveterate skeptics must be given the chance to follow your reasoning, to duplicate your experiments and see if they get the same result.
Believe nothing
Merely because you have been told it
Or because it is traditional
Or because you yourself have imagined it
Do not believe what your teacher tells you merely out of respect for the teacher
But whatever, after due examination and analysis
You find to be conducive to the good, the benefit,
The welfare of all beings
that doctrine believe and cling to
and take it as your guide.

- Buddha