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Why I am an Atheist
Why I am an Atheist

Bhagat Singh

Why I am an Atheist was written by Bhagat Singh (September 27, 1907 - March 23, 1931) while in jail a few weeks before he was hanged by the British rulers. The pamphlet had been smuggled out of jail to his father, who published it in June 1931 in The People, a weekly founded by Lala Lajpat Rai and edited by Lala Feroz Chand. In the context of the persistent attempts being made by the Hindu Right in India today to appropriate Bhagat Sing’s name, we publish here the full text of the essay.

A new question has cropped up. Is it due to vanity that I do not believe in the existence of an omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient God? I had never imagined that I would ever have to confront such a question. But conversation with some friends has given me a hint that certain of my friends - if I am do not claiming too much in thinking them to be so - are inclined to conclude from the brief contact they have had with me, that it was too much on my part to deny the existence of God and that there was a certain amount of vanity that actuated my disbelief. Well, the problem is a serious one. I do not boast to be quite above these human traits. I am a man and nothing more. None can claim to be more. I also have this weakness in me. Vanity does form a part of my nature. Amongst my comrades I was called an autocrat. Even my friend Mr. B.K. Dutt sometimes called me so. On certain occasions I was decried as a despot. Some friends do complain, and very seriously too, that involuntarily thrust my opinions upon others and get my proposals accepted. That this is true up to a certain extent, I do not deny. This may amount to egotism. There is vanity in me inasmuch as our cult as opposed to other popular creeds is concerned. But that is not personal. It may be, it is only legitimate pride in our cult and does not amount to vanity. Vanity, or to be more precise "Ahankar", is the excess of undue pride in one's self. Whether it is such an undue pride that has led me to atheism or whether it is after very careful study of the subject and after much consideration that I intend to discuss here. Let me first make it clear that egotism and vanity are two different things.

In the first place, I have altogether failed to comprehend as to how undue pride or vaingloriousness could ever stand in the way of a man in believing in God. I can refuse to recognise the greatness of a really great man, provided I have also achieved a certain amount of popularity without deserving it or without having possessed the qualities really essential or indispensable for the same purpose. That much is conceivable. But in what way can a man believing in God cease believing due to his personal vanity? There are only two ways. The man should either begin to think
himself a rival of God or he may begin to believe himself to be God. In neither case can he become a genuine atheist. In the first case he does not even deny the existence of his rival. In the second case as well, he admits the existence of a conscious being behind the screen guiding all the movements of nature. It is of no importance to us whether he thinks himself to be that supreme being or whether he thinks the supreme being or whether he thinks the supreme conscious being to be somebody apart from him means an atheist. Well, here I am. I neither belong to the first category nor to the second. I deny the very existence of that Almighty Supreme Being. Why I deny it, shall be dealt with later on. Here I want to clear one thing, that it is not vanity that has actuated me to adopt the doctrines of atheism. I am neither a rival nor an incarnation, nor the Supreme Being Himself. One point is decided, that it is not vanity that has led me to this mode of thinking. Let me examine the facts to disprove this allegation. According to these friends of mine I have grown vainglorious perhaps due to the undue popularity gained during the trials - both Delhi Bomb and Lahore Conspiracy Cases. Well, let us see if their premises are correct. My atheism is not of so recent origin. I had stopped believing in God when I was an obscure young man, of whose existence my above-mentioned friends were not even aware. At least a college student cannot cherish any short of undue pride which may lead him to atheism. Though a favourite with some professors and disliked by certain others. I was never an industrious or a studious boy. I could not get any chance of indulging in such feelings as vanity. I was rather a boy with a very shy nature, who had certain pessimistic dispositions about the future career. And in those days, I was not a perfect atheist. My grandfather under whose influence I was brought up is an orthodox Arya Samajist. An Arya Samajist is anything but an atheist. After finishing my primary education I joined the D.A.V. School of Lahore and stayed in its Boarding House for full one year. There, apart from morning and evening prayers, I used to recite "Gayatri Mantra" for hours and hours. I was a perfect devotee in those days. Later on I began to live with my father. He is a liberal as much as the orthodoxy of religions is concerned. It was through his teachings that I aspired to devote my life to the cause of freedom. But he is not an atheist. He is a firm believer. He used to encourage me for offering prayers daily. So this how I was brought up. In the Non-Cooperation days I joined the National College. It was there that I began to think liberally and discuss and criticise all the religious problem, even about God. But still I was a devout believer. By that time I had begun to preserve the unshorn and unclipped long hair but I could never believe in the mythology and doctrines of Sikhism or any other religion. But I had a firm faith in God's existence.

I deny the very existence of an Almighty Supreme Being. Here I want to clear one thing, that it is not vanity that has actuated me to adopt the doctrines of atheism.

Later on I joined the revolutionary party. The first leader with whom I came in contact, though not convinced, could not dare to deny the existence of God. On my persistent inquiries about God, he used to say: "Pray whenever you want to." Now this is atheism less courage required for the adoption of that creed. The second leader with whom I came in contact was a firm believer. Let me mention his name-respected Comrade Shachindra Nath Sanyal, now undergoing life transportation in connection with the Kakori Conspiracy Case. From the very first page of his famous and only book, Bandi Jivan (or Incarcerated Life), the Glory of God is sung vehemently. On the last page of the second part of that
beautiful book, his mystic—because of vedantism—praises showered upon God form a very conspicuous part of his thoughts. "The Revolutionary" distributed throughout India on January 28th, 1925, was according to the prosecution story the result of his intellectual labour. Now, as is inevitable in the secret work the prominent leader expresses his own views which are very dear to his person, and the rest of the workers have to acquiesce in them, in spite of differences which they might have. In that leaflet one full paragraph was devoted to praise the Almighty and His rejoicings and doing. That is all mysticism. What I wanted to point out was that the idea of disbelief had not even germinated in the revolutionary party. The famous Kakori martyrs—all four of them—passed their last days in prayers. Ram Prasad Bismil was an orthodox Arya Samajist. Despite his wide studies in the field of socialism and communism, Rajen Lahiri could not suppress his desire of reciting hymns of the Upanishads and the Gita. I saw only one man amongst them, who never prayed and used to say: "Philosophy is the outcome of human weakness or limitation of knowledge." He is also undergoing a sentence of transportation for life. But he also never dared to deny the existence of God.

Up to that period I was only a romantic idealist revolutionary. Up till then we were to follow. Now come the time to shoulder the whole responsibility. Due to the inevitable reaction for some time the very existence of the party seemed impossible. Enthusiastic comrades—nay, leaders—began to jeer at us. For some time I was afraid that some day I also might not be convinced of the futility of our own programme. That was a turning point in my revolutionary career. "Study" was the cry that reverberated in the corridors of my mind. Study to enable yourself with arguments in favour of your cult. I began to study. My previous faith and convictions underwent a remarkable modification. The romance of the violent methods alone which was so prominent amongst our predecessors, was replaced by serious ideas. No more mysticism, no more blind faith. Realism became our cult. Use of force justifiable when resorted to as a matter of terrible necessity; nonviolence as policy indispensable for all mass movements. So much about methods. The most important thing was the clear conception of the ideal for which we were to fight. As there were no important activities in the field of action I got ample opportunity to study various ideals of the world revolution. I studied Bakunin, the anarchist leader, something of Marx, the father of communism, and much of Lenin, Trotsky and others—the men who had successfully carried out a revolution in their country. They were all atheists. Bakunin's God and State, though only fragmentary, is an interesting study of the subject. Later still I came across a book entitled Common Sense by Niralamba Swami. It was only a sort of mystic atheism. This subject became of utmost interest to me. By the end of 1926 I had been convinced as to the baselessness of the theory of existence of an almighty supreme being who created, guided and controlled the universe. I had given out this disbelief of mine. I began discussion on the subjects with my friends. I had become a pronounced atheist. But what it meant will presently be discussed.

In May 1927 I was arrested at Lahore. The arrest was a surprise. I was quite unaware of the fact that the police wanted me. All of a sudden, while passing through a garden, I found myself surrounded by
police. To my own surprise, I was very clam at that time. I did not feel any sensation, nor did I experience any excitement. I was taken into police custody. Next day I was taken to the Railway Police lock-up where I was to pass full one month. After many day’s conversation with the police officials I guessed that they had some information regarding my connection with the Kakori party and my other activities in connection with the revolutionary movement. They told me that I had been to Lucknow while the trial was going on there, that I had negotiated a certain scheme about their rescue, that the after obtaining their approval, we had procured some bombs, demanded by them, they would be forced to send me up for trial for conspiracy to wage war in connection with Kakari Case and for brutal murders in connection with Dussehra bomb outrage. And he further informed me that they had evidence enough to get me convicted and hanged. In those day I believed - though I was quite innocent - the police could do it if they desired. That very day certain police officials began to persuade me to offer my prayers to God regularly, both the times. Now I was an atheist. I wanted to settle for myself whether it was in the days of peace and enjoyment alone that I could boast of being an atheist or whether during such hard times as well, I could stick to those principles of mine. After great consideration I decided that I could not lead myself to believe in and pray to God. No, I never did. That was the real test and I came out successful.

(The police officer) informed me that they had evidence enough to get me convicted and hanged. In those day I believed - though I was quite innocent - the police could do it if they desired. That very day certain police officials began to persuade me to offer my prayers to God regularly, both the times. Now I was an atheist. I wanted to settle for myself whether it was in the days of peace and enjoyment alone that I could boast of being an atheist or whether during such hard times as well, I could stick to those principles of mine. After great consideration I decided that I could not lead myself to believe in and pray to God. No, I never did. That was the real test and I came out successful. Never for a moment did I desire to save my neck at the cost of certain other things. So I was a staunch disbeliever; and have ever since been. It was not an easy job to stand that test. 'Belief' softens the hardships, even can make them pleasant. In God man can find very strong consolation and support. Without Him man has to depend upon himself. To stand upon one's own legs amid storms and hurricanes is not a child's play. At such testing moments, vanit-if-any-evaporates and man cannot dare to defy
the general beliefs. If he does, then we must conclude that he has got certain other strength than mere vanity. This is exactly the situation now. Judgement is already too well known. Within a week it is to be pronounced. What is the consolation with the exception of the idea that I am going to sacrifice my life for a cause? A God-believing Hindu might be expecting to be born as a king, a Muslim or a Christian might dream of the luxuries to be enjoyed in paradise and the reward he is to get for his suffering and sacrifices. But, what am I to expect? I know the moment the rope is fitted round my neck and rafters removed from under my feet, that will be the final moment—that will be the last moment. I, or to be more precise, my soul as interpreted in the metaphysical terminology shall all be finished there. Nothing further. A short life of struggle with no such magnificent end, shall in itself be the reward, if I have the courage to take it in that light. That is all. With no selfish motive or desire to be awarded here or hereafter, quite disinterestedly, have I devoted my life to the cause of independence, because I could not do otherwise. The day we find a great number of men and women with this psychology, who cannot devote themselves to anything else than the service of mankind and emancipation of the suffering humanity, that day shall inaugurate the era of liberty. Not to become a king, nor to gain any other rewards here, or in the next birth or after death in paradise, shall they be inspired to challenge the oppressors, exploiters, and tyrants, but to cast off the yoke of servitude from the neck of humanity and to establish liberty and peace shall they tread this—to their individual selves perilous and to their noble selves the only glorious imaginable-path. Is the pride in their noble cause to be misinterpreted as vanity? Who dares to utter such an abominable epithet? To him I say either he is a fool or a knave. Let us forgive him for he cannot realise the depth, the emotion, the sentiment and the noble feelings that surge in that heart. His heart is dead as a mere lump of flesh, his eyes are weak, the evils of other interests having been cast over them. Self-reliance is always liable to be interpreted as vanity. It is sad and miserable but there is no help.

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You go and oppose the prevailing faith, you go and criticise a hero, a great man who is generally believed to be above criticism because he is thought to be infallible, the strength of your argument shall force the multitude to decry you as vainglorious. This is due to the mental stagnation. Criticism and independent thinking are the two indispensable
qualities of a revolutionary. Because Mahatamaji is great, therefore none should criticise him. Because he has risen above, therefore everything he says—may be in the field of Politics or Religion, Economics or Ethics—is right. Whether you are convinced or not you must say: "Yes, that's true". This mentality does not lead towards progress. It is rather too obviously reactionary.

Because our forefathers had set up a faith in some supreme being—the Almighty God—therefore, any man who dares to challenge the validity of that faith, or the very existence of that supreme being, he shall have to be called an apostate, a renegade. If his argument are too sound to be refuted by counter-arguments and spirit too strong to be cowed down by the threat of misfortunes that may befall him by the wrath of the Almighty, he shall be decried as vainglorious, his spirit to be denominated as vanity. Then, why do waste time in this vain discussion? Why try to argue out the whole thing? This question is coming before the public for the first time, and is being handled in this matter of fact way for the first time, hence this lengthy discussion.

As for the first question, I think I have cleared that it is not vanity that has led me to atheism. My way of argument has proved to be convincing or not, that is to be judged by my readers, not me. I know in the present circumstances my faith in God would have made my life easier, my burden lighter, and my disbelief in Him has turned all the circumstances too dry, and the situation may assume too harsh a shape. A little bit of mysticism can make it poetical. But I do not want the help of any intoxication to meet my fate. I am a realist. I have been trying to overpower the instinct in me by the help of reason. I have not always been successful in achieving this end. But man's duty is to try and endeavour, success depends upon chance and environments.

As for the second question that if it was not vanity, then there ought to be some reason to disbelieve the old and still prevailing faith of the existence of God. Yes, I come to that now. Reason there is. According to me, any man who has got some reasoning power at his command always tries to reason out his environments. Where direct proofs are lacking philosophy occupies the important place. As I have already stated, a certain revolutionary friend used to say that philosophy is the outcome of human weakness. When our ancestors had leisure enough to try to solve out the mystery of this world, its past, present and the future, its whys and wherefores, they having been terribly short of direct proofs, everybody tried to solve the problem in his own way.

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Hence we find the wide differences in the fundamentals of various religious creeds, which sometimes assume very antagonistic and conflicting shapes. Not only the Oriental and Occidental philosophies differ, there are differences even amongst various schools of thought in each hemisphere. Amongst Oriental religions, the Moslem faith is not at all compatible with Hindu faith. In India alone Buddhism and Jainism are sometimes quite separate from Brahanism, in which there are again conflicting faiths as Arya Samaj and Sanatan Dharma. Charwak is still another independent thinker of the past ages. He challenged the authority of God in the old times. All these creeds differ from each other on the fundamental question; and
everybody considers himself to be on the right. There lies the misfortune. Instead of using the experiments and expressions of the ancient Savants and thinkers as a basis for our future struggle against ignorance and to try to find out a solution to this mysterious problem, we lathyargical as we have proved to be, raise the hue and cry of faith, unflinching and unwavering faith to their versions and thus are guilty of stagnation in human progress.

Any man who stands for progress has to criticise, disbelieve and challenge every item of the old faith. Item by item he has to reason out every nook and corner of the prevailing faith. If after considerable reasoning one is led to believe in any theory or philosophy, his faith is welcomed. His reasoning can be mistaken, wrong, misled, and sometimes fallacious. But he is liable to correction because reason is the guiding star of his life. But mere faith and blind faith is dangerous: it dulls the brain, and makes a man reactionary. A man who claims to be a realist has to challenge the whole of the ancient faith. If it does not stand the onslaught of reason it crumbles down. Then the first thing for him is to shatter the whole down and clear a space for the erection of a new philosophy. This is the negative side. After it begins the positive work in which sometimes some material of the old faith may be used for the purpose of reconstruction. As far as I am concerned, let me admit at the very outset that I have not been able to study much on this point. I had a great desire to study the Oriental philosophy but I could not get any chance or opportunity to do the same. But so far as the negative study is under discussion, I think I am convinced to the extent of questioning the soundness of the old faith. I have been convinced as to non-existence of a conscious supreme being who is guiding and directing the movements of nature. We believe in nature and the whole progressive movement aims at the domination of man over nature for his service. There is no conscious power behind it to direct. This is what our philosophy is.

As for the negative side, we ask a few questions from the 'believers'.

(1) If, as you believe, there is an almighty, omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent God, who created the earth or world, please let me know why did he create it? This world of woes and miseries, a veritable, eternal combination of numberless tragedies: Not a single soul being perfectly satisfied.

How are you going to justify your almighty, eternal Nero, who has been, and is still causing numberless tragedies every day, every hour and every minute? How do you think to support his misdoings which surpass those of Changez every single moment? I say why did he create this world - a veritable hell, a place of constant and bitter unrest?

Pray, don't say that it is His Law. If he is bound by any law, he is not omnipotent. He is another slave like ourselves. Please don't say that it is his enjoyment. Nero burnt one Rome. He killed a very limited number of people. He created very few tragedies, all to his perfect enjoyment. And, what is his place in History? By what names do the historians mention him? All the venomous epithets are showered upon him. Pages are blackened with invective diatribes condemning Nero, the tyrant, the heartless, the wicked. One Changexkhan sacrificed a few thousand lives to seek pleasure in it and we hate the very name. Then, how are you going to justify your almighty, eternal Nero, who has been, and is still causing numberless tragedies every day, every hour and every minute? How do you think to support his misdoings which surpass those of Changez every single moment? I say why
did he create this world - a veritable hell, a
place of constant and bitter unrest? Why
did the Almighty create man when he had
the power not to do it? What is the
justification for all this? Do you say, to
award the innocent sufferers hereafter and
to punish the wrongdoers as well? Well,
well: How far shall you justify a man who
may dare to inflict wounds upon your
body to apply a very soft and soothing
ointment upon it afterwards? How far the
supporters and organisers of the Gladiator
institution were justified in throwing men
before the half-starved furious lions to be
cared for and well locked after if they
could survive and could manage to escape
death by the wild beasts? That is why I
ask: Why did the conscious supreme being
create this world and man in it? To seek
pleasure? Where, then, is the difference
between him and Nero?

You Mohammadans and Christians: Hindu
philosophy shall still linger on to offer
another argument. I ask you, what is your
answer to the above-mentioned question?
You don't believe in previous birth. Like
Hindus, you cannot advance the argument of
previous misdoings of the apparently
quite innocent sufferers. I ask you, why did
the omnipotent labour for six days to
create the world though word and each
day to say that all was well? Call him
today. Show him the past history. Make
him study the present situation. Let us see
if he dares to say: "All is well."

From the dungeons of prisons, from the
stores of starvation consuming millions
upon millions of human beings in slums
and huts, from the exploited labourers,
patiently or say apathetically watching the
procedure of their blood being sucked by
the capitalist vampires, and the wastage of
human energy that will make a man with
the least common sense shiver with
horror, and from the preference of
throwing the surplus of production in
oceans rather than to distribute amongst
the needy producers - to the palaces of
kings built upon the foundation laid with
human bones. . . . let him see all this and
let him say: "All is well." Why and
wherefore? That is my question. You are
silent. Alright then, I proceed. Well, you
Hindus, you say all the present sufferers
belong to the class of sinners of the
previous births. Good. You say the present
oppressors were saintly people in their
previous births, hence they enjoy power.
Let me admit that your ancestors were
very shrewd people, they tried to find out
theories strong enough to hammer down
all the efforts of reason and disbelief. But
let us analyse how far this argument can
really stand.

Just make a man a
believer in immortality
and then rob him of all
his riches and
possessions. He shall help
you even in that
ungrudgingly. The
coalition among the
religious preachers and
possessors of power
brought forth jails,
gallows, knouts and these theories

From the point of view of the most
famous jurists, punishment can be
justified only from three or four ends, to
meet which it is inflicted upon the
wrongdoer. They are retributive,
reformative and deterrent. The retributive
theory is now being condemned by all the
advanced thinkers. Deterrent theory is also
following the same fate. Reformative
theory is the only one which is essential
and indispensable for human progress. It
aims at returning the offender as a most
competent and a peace-loving citizen to
the society. But, what is the nature of
punishment inflicted by God upon men,
even if we suppose them to be offenders?
You say he sends them to be born as a
punishments to be 84 lakhs. I ask you:
what is its reformatory effect upon man?
How many men have met you who say
that they were born as a donkey in
previous birth for having committed any
sin? None. Don't quote your Puranas. I
have noscope to touch your mythologies. Moreover, do you know that the greatest sin in this world is to be poor? Poverty is a sin, it is a punishment. I ask you how far would you appreciate a criminologist, a jurist or a legislator who proposes such measures of punishment which shall inevitably force men to commit more offences? Had not your God thought of this, or he also had to learn these things by experience, but at the cost of untold sufferings to be borne by humanity? What do you think shall be the fate of a man who has been born in a poor and illiterate family of, say, a chamar or a sweeper? He is poor hence he cannot study. He is heated and shunned by his fellow human beings who think themselves to be his superiors having been born in, say, a higher caste. His ignorance, his heart towards society. Suppose he commits a sin, who shall bear the consequences? God, he or the learned ones of the society? What about the punishment of those people who were deliberately kept ignorant by the haughty and egotist Brahmins, and who had to pay the penalty by bearing the stream of being let (not lead) in their ears for having heard a few sentences of your Sacred Books of learning - the Vedas? If they committed any offence, who was to be responsible for them and who was to inventions of the privileged ones; they justify their usurped power, riches and superiority by the help of these theories. Yes, it was perhaps Upton Sinclair that wrote at some place that just make a man a believer in immortality and then rob him of all his riches and possessions. He shall help you even in that ungrudgingly. The coalition among the religious preachers and possessors of power brought forth jails, gallows, knouts and these theories.

I ask why your omnipotent God does not stop every man when he is committing any sin or offence? He can do it quite easily. Why did he not kill warlords or kill the fury of war in them and thus avoid the catastrophe hurled down on the head of humanity by the Great War? Why does he not just produce a certain sentiment in the mind of the British people to liberate India? Why does he not infuse the altruistic enthusiasm in the hearts of all capitalists to forego their rights of personal possessions of means of production and thus redeem the whole labouring community, nay, the whole human society, from the bondage of capitalism? You want to reason out the practicability of socialist theory, I leave it for your almighty to enforce it. People recognise the merits of socialism inasmuch as the general welfare is concerned. They oppose it under the pretext of its being impracticable. Let the Almighty

**Why does the God not infuse the altruistic enthusiasm in the hearts of all capitalists to forego their rights of personal possessions of means of production and thus redeem the whole labouring community, nay, the whole human society, from the bondage of capitalism?**

step in and arrange everything in an orderly fashion. Now don't try to advance round about arguments, they are out of order. Let me tell you, British rule is here not because God wills it, but because they possess power and we do not dare to oppose them. Not that it is with the help of God that they are keeping us under their subjection, but it is with the help of guns and rifles, bomb and bullets, police and militia, and our apathy, that they are successfully committing the most deplorable sin against society - the outrageous exploitation of one nation by another. Where is God? What is he doing? Is he enjoying all these woes of human race? A Nero, a Changez: Down with him.

Do you ask me how I explain the origin of this world and origin of man? Alright, I tell you, Charles Darwin has tried to
throw some light on the subject. Study him. Read Soham Swami’s Common Sense. It shall answer your question to some extent. This is a phenomenon of nature. The accidental mixture of different substances in the shape of nebulae produced this earth. When? Consult history. The same process produced animals and, in the long run, man. Read Darwin’s Origin of Species. And all telater progress is due to man’s constant conflict with nature and his efforts to override it. This is the briefest possible explanation of the phenomenon.

You other argument may be just to ask why a child is born blind or lame if not due to his deeds committed in the previous birth? This problem has been explained away by biologists as a mere biological phenomenon. According to them the whole burden rests upon the shoulders of the parents who may be conscious or ignorant of their own deeds which led to mutilation of the child previous to its birth.

Naturally, you may ask another question, though it is quite childish in essence. If no god existed, how did the people come to believe in him? My answer is clear and brief. As they came to believe in ghosts and evil spirits; the only difference is that belief in God is almost universal and the philosophy well developed. Unlike certain of the radicals I would not attribute its origin to the ingenuity of the exploiters who wanted to keep the people under their subjection by preying the existence of a supreme being and then claiming an authority and sanction from him for their privileged positions, though I do not differ with them on the essential point that all faiths, religions, creeds and such other institutions became in turn the mere supporters of the tyrannical and exploiting institutions, men and classes. Rebellion against king is always a sin, according to every religion.

As regards the origin of God, my own idea is that having realised the limitation of man, his weaknesses and shortcoming having been taken into consideration, God was brought into imaginary existence to encourage man to face boldly all the trying circumstances, to meet all dangers manfully and to check and restrain his outbursts in prosperity and affluence. God, both will his private laws and parental generosity, was imagined and painted in greater details. He was to serve as a deterrent factor when his fury and private laws were discussed, so that man may not become a danger to society. He was to serve as a father, mother, sister and brother, friend and helper, when his parental qualifications were to be explained. So that when man be in great distress, having been betrayed and deserted by all friends, he may find consolation in the idea that an ever-true friend, was still there to help him, to support him and that he was almighty and could do anything. Really that was useful to the society in the primitive age. The idea of God is helpful to main in distress.

**If no god existed, how did the people come to believe in him? My answer is clear and brief. As they came to believe in ghosts and evil spirits; the only difference is that belief in God is almost universal and the philosophy well developed.**

Society has to fight out this belief as well as was fought the idol worship and the narrow conception of religion. Similarly, when man tries to stand on his own legs and become a realist, he shall have to throw the faith aside, and to face manfully all the distress, trouble, in which the circumstances may throw him. That is exactly my state of affairs. It is not my vanity, my friends. It is my mode of thinking that has made me an atheist. I don’t know whether in my case belief in God and offering of daily prayers which I consider to be most selfish and degraded act on the part of man, whether these
prayers can prove to be helpful or they shall make my case worse still. I have read of atheists facing all troubles quite boldly; so am I trying to stand like a man with an erect head to the last, even on the gallows.

Let us see how I carry on. One friend asked me to pray. When informed of my atheism, he said: "During your last days you will begin to believe." I said: "No, dear Sir, it shall not be. I will think that to be an act of degradation and demoralisation on my part. For selfish motives I am not going to pray." Readers and friends: Is this "vanity"? If it is, I stand for it.

Courtesy: Austin Skeptic
Why I am a Secular Humanist
Taslima Nasrin

I was born in a Muslim family. I was forced by my mother to read the Koran every morning, to pray namaz, and to fast during Ramadan.

While I was growing up, I was taken by my mother to a *pir*, a religious cult leader respected by Muslims. He had his own group, who believed in a genie and superstitions. The *pir* declared that women who laughed in front of men and went out of the house had been taken over by the genie and they were brutally beaten by the *pir* so that the genie would leave. He gave a scary description of hell. Whoever visited him gave money.

The *pir* was surrounded by young women who massaged his body and served him whatever he needed. One day, in my presence, he declared that keyamout, the destruction day of the earth, was coming soon, and that there was no need for women to marry. They should sacrifice their lives for Allah.

I was horrified to see all the torture he did to get rid of the genie and to listen to the description of hell and waiting for keyamout. But it did not come.

The *pir* used to treat sick people by uttering *sura* and beating them. Water was declared holy and said to cure sick people. The sick became sicker after drinking the water. I was also treated by a pit, but I was not cured until my physician father treated me with scientific medicine.

I was encouraged by my father to get a secular education. I learned about the big bang, evolution, and the solar system and became suspicious about Allah’s six-day adventure to make the whole universe, the Adam and Eve story, and stories of suns moving around the Earth and mountain-like nails to balance the Earth so that the Earth would not fall down. My mother asked me not to ask any questions about Allah and to have blind faith in Allah. I could not be blind.

Then I studied the Koran, instead of reading it without knowing the meaning. I found it total bull-shit. The Koran, believed by millions, supported slavery and inequalities among people – in other countries the equality of women had been established as a human right and the moon had already been won my men. Men had the right to marry four times, divorce, have sex with female slaves, and beat their wives. Women were to hide their bodies because the female body is simply a sexual object. Women were not allowed to divorce their husbands, enjoy inheritance, or have their testimony in court considered as seriously as men’s. I found that Allah prescribed Muslims to hate non-Muslims and kill apostates.

With my own conscience I found religion ridiculous because it stops free thought, reason, and rationality. My father taught me to believe nothing without reason. I did that. I could not believe religion and I became an atheist. I started writing against
religion and all the religious superstitions. I was attacked, verbally, physically. The outrage of the religious people was so big that I had to leave my country.

I lived in one of the poorest counties in the world. I saw how poverty was glorified by religion and how the poor are exploited. It is said the poor are sent to the Earth to prove, their strong faith for Allah in their miserable life. I have not seen any religions teaching that call for a cure for poverty. Instead the rich are supposed to make Allah happy by giving some help (Mother Teresa’s type of help). The poor should remain poor in society, and opportunists can use them to buy a ticket for heaven.

So I don’t accept Allah, his cruel unh holiness. I have my own conscience, which inspired me to support a society based on equality and rationality. Religion is the cause of fanaticism, bloodshed, hatred, racism, conflict. Humanism can only make people humane and make the world livable.

Taslima Nasrin, the Bengali writer, physician, feminist and secular humanist, became the target of Islamists first in 1993 when she published Lajja, a fictional account of the communal frenzy that unleashed in Bangladesh as an after-effect of the demolition of Babri Masjid in India on December 6, 1992 by Hindu fanatics. Heeding to the demands of Muslim fanatics, the Bangladesh government banned the novel. With several fatwas (to execute) issued against her by Muslim Clerics, Taslima Nasrin left Bangladesh in 1994 and has been in exile in various countries, mainly in Europe. In 2004 she came to India. Being a Bengali writer, she decided to settle in Kolkata, which she calls her home.

On August 9, 2007, when she was at a meeting (hosted by Center for Inquiry - India) in Hyderabad to release a Telugu translation of her book, Shodh, she was attacked by Muslim fundamentalists led by three members of the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly belonging to Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (MIM). "We are proud of our MLAs a Taslima Nasrin needs the harshest punishment for her writings against Islam. The next time she come to Hyderabad, we will implement the fatwa (of death) against her", said Akbaruddin Owaisi, the MIM floor leader in the Andhra Pradesh Assembly.

On September 21, 2007, “All India Minority Forum”, a group of militant Islamists, organized a violent protest (resulting in the deployment of army) in the streets of Kolkata against granting Indian visa to Taslima Nasrin. Pressurized by the authorities (the CPM state secretary demanded that Taslima Nasrin should leave Kolkata if her stay resulted in violence), Taslima left for Jaipur. She was later shifted to Delhi and the Intelligence Bureau kept her in a 'safe house' within a National Security Guards complex. Under constant pressure from the Government of India and because of her deteriorating health, Taslima left for London on 18 March 2008.
Tools for Skeptical Thinking

Carl Sagan

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

• Wherever possible there must be independent confirmation of the "facts."

• Encourage substantive debate on the evidence by knowledgeable proponents of all points of view.

• Arguments from authority carry little weight—"authorities" have made mistakes in the past. They will do so again in the future. Perhaps a better way to say it is that in science there are no authorities; at most, there are experts.

• Spin more than one hypothesis. If there's something to be explained, think of all the different ways in which it could be explained. Then think of tests by which you might systematically disprove each of the alternatives. What survives, the hypothesis that resists disproof in this Darwinian selection among "multiple working hypotheses," has a much better chance of being the right answer than if you had simply run with the first idea that caught your fancy.

• Try not to get overly attached to a hypothesis just because it's yours. It's only a way station in the pursuit of knowledge. Ask yourself why you like the idea. Compare it fairly with the alternatives. See if you can find reasons for rejecting it. If you don't, others will.

• Quantify. If whatever it is you're explaining has some measure, some numerical quantity attached to it, you'll be much better able to discriminate among competing hypotheses. What is vague and qualitative is open to many explanations. Of course there are truths to be sought in the many qualitative issues we are obliged to confront, but finding them is more challenging.

• If there's a chain of argument, every link in the chain must work (including the premise)—not just most of them.

• Occam's Razor. This convenient rule-of-thumb urges us when faced with two hypotheses that explain the data equally well to choose the simpler.

• Always ask whether the hypothesis can be, at least in principle, falsified. Propositions that are untestable, unfalsifiable are not worth much. You must be able to check assertions out. Inveterate skeptics must be given the chance to follow your reasoning, to duplicate your experiments and see if they get the same result.

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