

# INDIAN SKEPTIC

No. 01/01

January 2010



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editor & publisher

manoj

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## ***Bangalore Skeptic turns Indian Skeptic!***

*This issue should have been the 25th issue of Bangalore Skeptic. Instead, our ezine will hence forth be known as Indian Skeptic.*

*Most of the readers of Bangalore Skeptic may be aware that Basava Premanad used to bring out a monthly magazine (in print format) titled Indian Skeptic. When Premanand fell seriously ill (he passed away on 4th October 2009), he discontinued its publication, thus snapping perhaps the only link connecting various rationalist groups and activists in our vast country.*

*During the 7th National Conference of Federation of Indian Rationalist Associations (FIRA), it was suggested (by Prof Narendra Nayak) that Bangalore Skeptic should hence forth be published as Indian Skeptic and this was supported by other delegates of the conference. It should however be noted that this ezine Indian Skeptic is not a continuation (in the legal sense) of the magazine published by Premanand, but a rebirth (!) or a new avatar (!) of Bangalore Skeptic, but surely upholding the spirit of Premanad's vision of a secular India.*

*Though this ezine is not an official organ of FIRA, it will work as an unofficial one! From the next issue onwards, there will be a column by Prof Narendra Nayak in his capacity as the President of FIRA. This will be in addition to his usual contributions that the readers of Bangalore Skeptic are familiar with.*

**Editor**

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# Am I a Hindu?

Narendra Nayak

While it is not very difficult to be theoretical about one being or not being a Hindu for us who are out in the field, sometimes faced by an audience of thousands, questions do get asked about what we are doing and/or whether we are the narrow end of the wedge being used by the missionaries to convert people to their religions. There are queries as to when we question the miracles and/or the articles of faith of Hindus which is not very difficult to do and make them lose their faith, there will be a spiritual vacuum into which the Christian missionaries would step into and convert the lot to their faith. While this would seem to be totally illogical to anyone who has an idea of what our movement is, it is also a fact that most of the audience does not know anything



about our movement except the programs which are conducted for the public, generally the miracle exposure programs. So, this most popular face of the movement gets projected as the only facet of the movement visible to the people.



**Dipping bare hand in "boiling oil" - Will exposing "*Hindu Miracles*" be exploited by Christian Missionaries?**

There are a number of limitations when one faces a large audience like the time available, the type of platform, the seating arrangements etc. keeping these in mind one has to modify the presentation accordingly. The miracles of other religions generally come after about 15 items, which can be said to be 'Hindu'. Many a time we have to stop before these. It is not possible to have a sort of 'balance' between these. In fact many years back when I had a interaction at St. John's Medical College, Bangalore I had said nothing about the miracles of Jesus Christ. When my program was over I was asked by the director of the Institution, a priest himself, as to why I had not said anything about them and whether it was due to any inhibition on my part. When I explained him to why it was so, he told me that I should make it a point to speak about them first when I go to any Christian institution! Next time he arranged a program for me I made it a point to do so! That apart, I make it compulsory to mention that I am a Humanist and for me man is more important than any non-existent god. But, all these points will be difficult to put forward when you have the rabble rousers of the Hindutva brigade waiting for an opportunity to create situations to show us in a bad light and try to make their points by presenting totally irrelevant questions like what came first the hen or the egg and things like that. They even make statements about "Christians" like Nostradamus to bolster their arguments!

They also ask us why we are talking about Hindu miracles when there are so many of them in other religions too. Being used to answering many of them, I am putting them in a list form and our answers too.

### 1. Why are you exposing 'Hindu' miracles only?

a. There is no such thing as a Hindu miracle. A miracle is a miracle that is all.

b. Since 80% of the population is Hindus, it is statistically possible that the miracles too follow the same percentage.



c. We have been exposing others too. Take the example of Alex Orbito, the Philippino faith healer, demos of Jesus Christ miracles like converting water into honey etc. We also mention claims of Aslam Baba, at the darga of Quamar Ali Darwesh etc. exposed by us.

### 2. Are you a Hindu?

a. Since there is no definition of Hindu and since I don't belong to any other religion the law considers me like that. But, I am an atheist, do not perform any religious rituals, eat what I want, do not follow the caste system etc. So, you can decide what you would like to call me, I call myself a Humanist and for me the most important thing is being a human being.

b. What do you call yourself? If the reply is Hindu ask the person whether the caste system is correct, whether Dalits are untouchables, whether he too supports the exploitation of his fellow Hindus by those claiming to have supernatural powers. That usually shuts them up.

3. *Why don't you reform the other religions?* person of all Hindus?

a. Since you call me a Hindu I am interested in preventing the exploitation of my fellow human beings by clever crooks and charlatans masquerading as god men with supernatural powers, if you are interested in those who follow other religions noting prevents you from doing that.

b. Since reforms to religions must come and do usually come from those who follow a particular faith why don't you convert to that and do that?

c. What would you do about the 'cross' religious miracle mongers e.g. the Puttaparthi guy who puts a cross and moon and stars with Hindu religious symbols to show that he is the chosen one of gods of all religions?

4. *We Hindus are a tolerant lot that is why we put up with what you say.*

a. Who gave you the right to be the spokes-

b. The way daliths and backward castes have been treated by the so-called upper castes is a very good example of your tolerance levels.

c. Why should I take your permission to say what I want? Ours is a secular democracy in which we have the right to express our views.

5. *You hurt the sentiments of Hindus when you criticize our god men*

a. What makes you think that these people are the representatives of Hindu religion? Most of them are caste based regional feudal elements using their following to exploit others.

b. If you have the right to proclaim from the roof tops about their so called powers and their miracles, we too have the right to question them, if you think what we say is defamatory you can take legal action under the laws of the land.



c. The best way to shut us up is by proving that they have really supernatural powers by letting us check them under fool proof, fraud proof conditions. You can let us do it and we shall join your god man/woman's followers.

6. *You deny the experiences of many of us who have witnessed the miracles.*

a. The demonstrations we have shown have much bigger miracles than what you have seen. What about them?

b. Why don't you let us also experience the same by asking your god man/woman to repeat them?

We also repeat our challenges to those with supernatural powers and ask the devotees to take them up and prove that our stand that miracles are nonexistent is wrong.

These arguments shut up most of our detractors and hence we get the upper hand. We also tell the audience that we are willing to be convinced if the claims of the supernatural can be demonstrated under fraud proof conditions and by that we have the support of the majority. As I have already mentioned elsewhere, a few years back I had made a statement about cows urine being like the urine of any other animal say a dog. That had infuriated the

Hindutva gang, particularly those who were making huge profits from selling concoctions of cow's urine as a cure for all diseases. They had planned legal action under both criminal and civil laws. A local newspaper had run a campaign against me. After nearly a month of the same, the same newspaper carried a long write up by a legal luminary who debated at length as to which sections of the criminal laws could be applied to me for having hurt the religious sentiments. After a long list of these and the punishment under each of them, his conclusion was that none of them could be applied to me as I was a Hindu and reform is an ongoing process of the religion! He also said that if I were a Muslim or a Christian I could have been prosecuted under all of them!

Thus a beef eating, atheist who had never undergone any religious ceremony in his life or subscribes to any of the rules of the so called Hindus, rejects the caste system came to be classified as a Hindu by a retired sessions judge who was proclaimed as a legal luminary in these parts. Alas, he is no more that I may seek some clarification from him!

**BS**

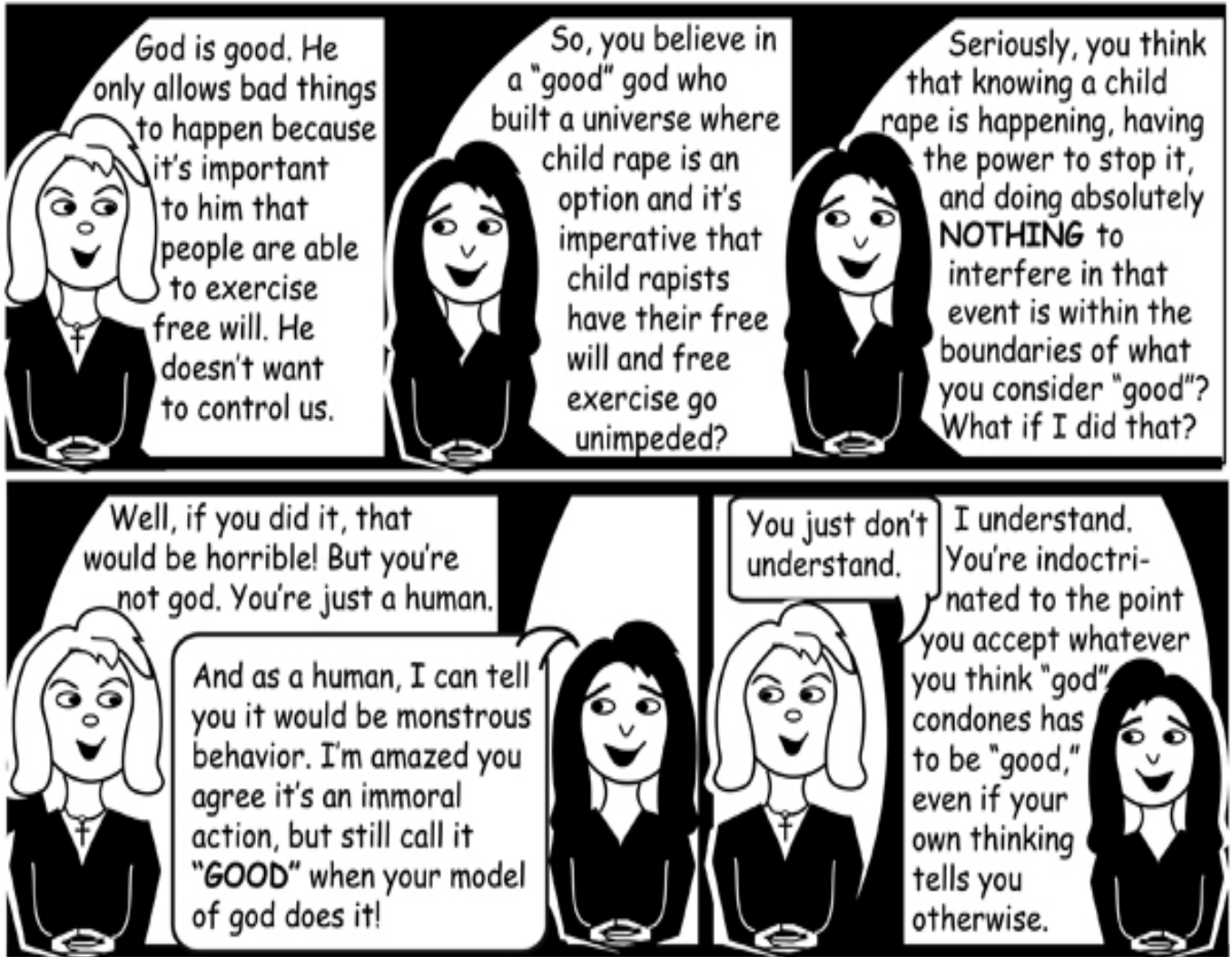
*Prof Narendra Nayak is the President of  
Federation of Indian Rationalist  
Associations*

**We hope for the emergence of an intellectual culture that would  
be rationalist but not dogmatic, scientifically minded but not  
scientistic, open-minded but not frivolous, and politically  
progressive but not sectarian.**

**Alan Sokal & Jean Bricmont**  
*(Intellectual Imposters)*

ATHEIST EVE

DESIGN ©2009



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

Tracie Harris has been publishing *Atheist Eve* since 1 October 2004 and all her earlier works are archived at: <http://www.atheist-community.org/atheisteve/>. *Atheist Eve* is reproduced by *Indian Skeptic* with the author's permission.

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# Ghettos in the Making

Ram Puniyani

As per the report in a section of media recently (November 2009) UK based Muslim charities have warned the Muslims living in the relief colonies set up in the wake of Gujarat carnage, that they must abide with a code of conduct, no TV, no music, education only in Madrassa, particular type of cap and beard for men, hijab for women, etc. If these are not adhered to the Charity threatened that they will stop supporting the relief work. At the same time the members of Tablighi Jamat insisted on the similar lines, 'Islamic Behavior' or else! The Muslims living in these colonies are living a wretched life, totally bereft of any support from state and boycotted by the society at large.

There are cases where the residents of this 'lesser world' have opposed such dictates coming through local Maulanas, but they have been beaten to silence. The society at large is not permitting them to come out of the emotional and physical walls erected by the state and civil society around them. The orthodox elements, clerical etc., are not permitting them to live as they like, to endeavor for modern education and jobs, a life matching with our times. One recalls that in the aftermath of Godhra train burning and the riots engineered on the pretext of taking revenge of Godhra, took a heavy toll of the life of Muslim minorities. As the refugee camps were to be set up by the state, it reluctantly did part of the job and soon enough, even before the tears of trauma dried up and scars of the violence were healed, the state supported camps were wound up. The Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi said that there is no need to keep these 'Child producing factories to go on'.



Other charities enlarged their scope of work and stepped up their activities to fill the vacuum left by the action of heartless state administration and a largely hostile civic society. The mosques which gave them shelter also imposed a version of Islam, a type of life style on them, which was alien to most of the Gujarat Muslims. The compensation by the state did not come up to the necessary and mandatory level. Once the total rehabilitation fell under the control of orthodox Muslim charities, they started imposing the retrograde norms on the community. The most glaring example of this was manifest in the housing pattern which came up in due course. One noticed that the dwellings were comparatively smaller while the mosques were bigger. One also noticed that the presence of Maulanas became more dominant in these communities. The Madrassas were the only type of schools available for these 'children of the other God'.

One knows very well that prior to violence in Gujarat the Muslim community there was going more for trade, modern education and the like. The process has been reversed by the physical

insecurity created by carnage and this has been topped with the total neglect of the plight of Muslims by the state. One is witnessing a very interesting sociological phenomenon in Gujarat. On one side the planned carnage left the minority community helpless and gripped by insecurity. On the other, since the state controlled by right wing politics bypasses the legal, social and moral norms, it left the victims to fend for themselves.

The popular perceptions accuse the Muslim minority of being conservative etc., but it never goes beyond this level of perception to understand as to why it is so. One

trauma of the violence. As they began to recover, there was Gujarat baying at them.

A chicken and egg situation! The insecurity ghettoizes them and retards their path; the same is then used by the propaganda mills to demonize them. On one hand the myth is spread that Madrassas are a breeding ground for terrorists, on the other a situation is created where Madrassas remain the only option for Muslim children. While this Madrassa and terrorism is a total lie, barring of course those Madrassas which were set up with US-CIA link in Pakistan, where Muslim youth were indoctrinated to take the path of

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concedes that what is going on so intensely in Gujarat today vis a vis Muslim community has been a widespread phenomenon in different Muslim majority areas, more so those areas which have seen communal violence. One also knows that in communal violence the percentage of Muslim victims is over 80%, while their percentage in population is 13.4%. The insecurity this creates is the root of conservatism in this community. One also knows that Muslim community is no uniform monolith. There are types and types of pattern of living. Till 1990 large sections of Muslims girls and boys were trying to come up and take to Modern vocations, teachers, professionals of various types and what not. 1992-93 Mumbai carnage came as a big damper and the Muslim youth got a big setback, economic deprivation on the top of insecurity. For sometime the large section of community could not recover from the

violence against Russian army. One can confidently say that the Indian Madrassas are just teaching Koran and not terrorism.

The condition of large section of Muslims can only be compared to the Shudras in Ancient India, where the society treated them as slaves and codified their slavery as their Dharma, Shudra Dharma. They were also ghettoized. The other example is the African Americans of US, where the Whites committed atrocities on them and pushed them to the ghettos, depriving them of dignity and civic rights. The rise of Right wing communal politics in India from last three decades in particular, politics in the name of religion, which is seeping through different pores of state apparatus and social thinking, is achieving the same purpose, to create a set of second class beings at the mercy and service of the elites trying to impose retrograde politics on the society at large.

**BS**

# Notes of an Agnostic

Keshava Shet Revankar

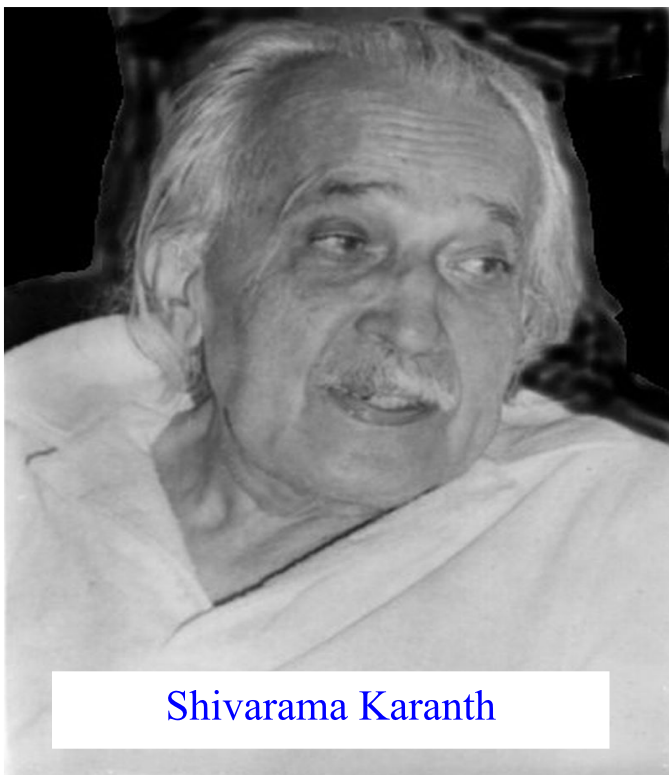
We have heard a million times the scriptural quote "*Tamaso Ma Jyothirgamaya*" (Lead us from darkness to light), from all types of people. But the "priest craft" of Hinduism has succeeded brilliantly in keeping the whole society in darkness through centuries of indoctrination. During last 5-6 decades they have succeeded in making Article 51 A (h) Part IV A of the Constitution of India (which enjoins every citizen of India "to develop the scientific temper, humanism, and the spirit of inquiry and reform") null and void. The state too failed in this duty. We have been witnessing, in the recent decades, the increasing frenzy of religiosity in our society with the revival of *vastu* etc. Dr. Prabhakar Kamath, a practicing Psychiatrist in USA, has clinically analyzed the Hindu-Psyche and diagnosed it as "Obsessive-Compulsive- Disorder" ("A Rational Approach to the Irrational



*Behaviour of Indians*" Bangalore Skeptic November 2009). We require thousands of Dr Kamaths to treat the whole society. Ms Meera Nanda has narrated in detail in her book *God Market* how the god-market is run by "State--Temple-Corporate-Complex", which is exactly the same as "*Kshatriya – Brahmin – Bania Nexus*".

## Becoming an Agnostic

The seeds of skepticism germinated within me during my High School days after reading the novels by a Dr. Shivarama Karanth. After observing the behavior of 'Vipras' who wear holy-thread, I discarded my own at a later age. Then I felt free from the fetters of obscurantism. Many years later, a strange incident snapped my faith in temples and deities. During evening walk I used to step into a temple and mechanically take a couple of rounds and accept the spoonful of water (*thirtha*) from the priest. One day, an outside party had paid for a special *puja*, for their prosperity of course. The completion of *puja* coincided with my taking the rounds and as usual I stretched my hand for the '*thirtha*'. The priest too mechanically was about to pour out the spoonful water, but



Shivarama Karanth

then realized that I did not belong to that party. He suddenly withdrew it, because I should not take a share of the *puja* meant for that party. I too turned back and came out of the temple, never to enter a temple again.

### **Curious behaviour of moths!**

Same night I was thinking about the mean mindedness of the priest over just a spoonful of water and my own stupidity of taking rounds inside the temple. It brought to my mind the behavior of moths. After nightfall they circle artificial lights (such a candle flame) and fall dead in hundreds in the morning. When other lights are switched on, half of them rush towards those lights. If a pail of water is kept below, they rush towards the reflection of the light and get drowned.

No one knows for certain the reason for this curious behavior of moths. Richard Dawkins has a hypothesis. In his book, *God Delusion*, Prof Dawkins says that night-lights on view till recently were moon and stars. They are at optical infinity, so rays from them are parallel. Insects are known to use celestial objects to steer accurately in

straight line, and they use this compass, with reversed sign for returning home after foray. Their nervous system has adapted to steer a course such that light rays hit the eye at an angle of 30 degrees. As the artificial lights are not at optical infinity, the moths steering at that angle, steer in a spiral trajectory into the candle flame or lamps). Hindus too exhibit the same behavior of going in circles around deities. If a rich man kills millions of birds to produce export quality broilers, he becomes fabulously rich and builds a replica of a famous temple and people rush to that temple just like moths rushing to the reflection of the light.

### **On Buddhism & Caste System**

Buddhism gave an orientation to Indian society to establish a casteless, egalitarian & altruistically cooperative society. The 'eight-fold path' is for the whole humanity to be totally secular without the concepts of god or soul. Buddha preached all his life to erect two pillars of "*prjna*" (awareness) and "*karunya*" (compassion). These two pillars were demolished by *Vaidic Purohits* and erected, in their place, their pillars of *chaturvarna* and *karma-kanda*. These two



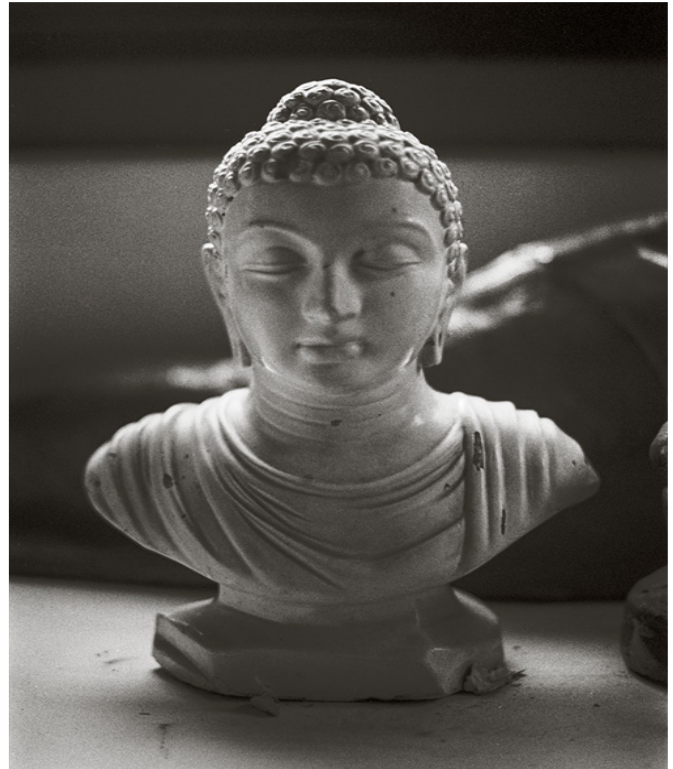
*Time exposure at floodlight showing moth flight paths*

pillars of evil enslaved dalits for generations after generations. This made the rulers' job easy and provided a life of ease and comfort for higher castes.

Chaturvarna created hundreds of closed systems (castes) that went on losing energy as they were deprived of their social and economic legitimacy. Over such a long period of 3000 years social-entropy increased to cause perpetual & abysmal poverty, as we are witnessing now. To support this system Shankaracharya set up four 'Mutts' - not to propagate his "adwaita" but to nip in the bud any attempt to revive Buddhism.

Besides, the high rate of increase of social & economic-entropy of lower castes, mental-entropy of higher castes also increased because of this pernicious caste system. Each caste became stereotyped due to lack of interaction and cultural assimilation over centuries and they cannot come out of the frame of the stereotyped mind. Thus they remained disgustingly mediocre, except being ruthless in area of making money. That is why we see today such a large crowd of mediocre politicians and bureaucrats who have amassed wealth through rampant corruption. Their only attempt to enter sphere of 'Brahminic-Elitism' is by copying silly rituals like "gana homa" and 'satyanarayana pooja' at every opportunity, rushing to astrologers for any flimsy reason, and avoiding, "rahukalam". State intelligentsia and so-called intellectuals should be ashamed of themselves for being passive on-lookers of such onslaught of mediocrity. This new disorientation has made Hindus mortgage their brains to 'purohits', astrologers, and new-age frauds called "godmen".

Hinduism is a sexed-up polytheism and a huge subterfuge for self-glorification of the *Kshatriyas* and *Vaidic Brahmins*. Tribal deities, family deities of clans, vassals, feudal lords and mythological characters were cobbled up into a hierarchy of gods. Each group squandered their wealth for building hundreds of temples for their own



deities as status symbols. Temples were made attractive with hard porn in stone in almost all of them. Khajurao is the magnum opus. *Kamasutra* by Vatsayana titillated the sense-buds of rulers and aristocracy. Luxurious ceremonies were invented in temples. All this started by 2nd-3rd centuries, during Gupta period. Hereafter, this hedonistic life-style *kshatriyas* lost their valor. This made it easy after another 3-4 centuries, for Turks and later Moguls to come in and establish their rule without much resistance.

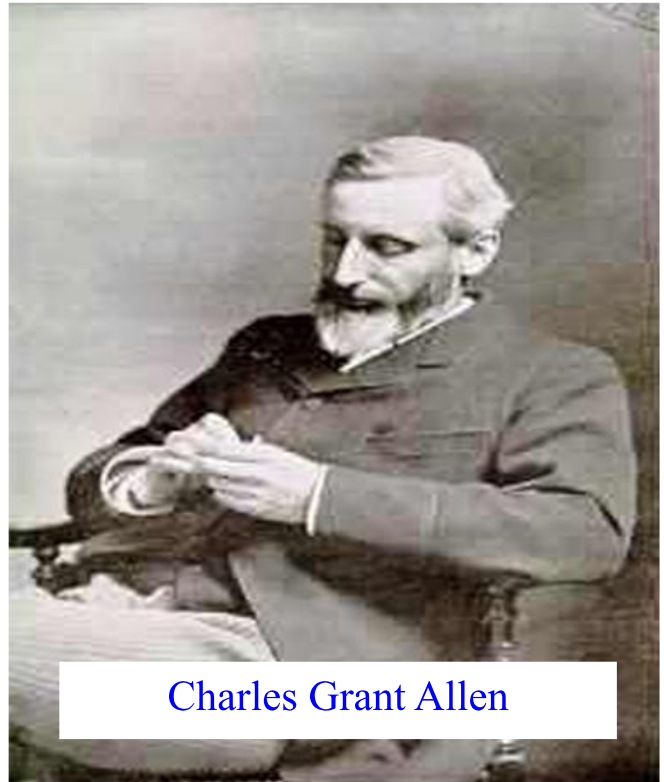
### State-Temple- Corporate-Complex

Regarding the now prevalent "State-Temple- Corporate-Complex" {Refer *God Market* by Meera Nanda}, let me give one example. N.R.Narayan Murthy, highly respected in the corporate world, writes in his book, *A Better India, A Better World* that "I am a Brahmin and I am minority". He should know that this 3 per cent minority perpetrated so much misery on the lower castes. In no other civilization so few have caused so much misery on such a large mass of humanity over such a long period. In another lecture he drops a hint "I was on my way from Bangalore to Mantralaya". Rational thinkers know that

these 'samadhis' of some ascetics are nothing but glorified versions of primitive tribals' "Corpse-Worship". Actually, IT Corporate Heads should visit Alan Turing's Tombstone if they could locate it in UK. It was he who advanced the notion of universal Computer. These celebrities advertise temples, mutts, and the godmen as though gods have a purpose to make only them rich and famous

Charles Grant Blairfindie Allen (1848–1899) writes in his book *The Evolution of the Idea of God*, "The cult of the dead is the earliest origin of all religions. In one word - that corpse worship is the protoplasm of religion, while admitting that folklore is the protoplasm of mythology, and it's modern and philosophical off shoot-theology".

**BS**



Charles Grant Allen

**Our age is a different one; it is an age of disillusion, of doubt and uncertainty and questioning. We can no longer accept many of the ancient beliefs and customs; we have no more faith in them, in Asia or in Europe or America. So we search for new ways, question each other and debate and quarrel and evolve any number of 'ism' and philosophies. As in the day of Socrates, we live in an age of questioning, but that questioning is not confined to a city like Athens; it is worldwide.**



**Jawaharlal Nehru**

# 7th National Conference of Federation of Indian Rationalist Associations

26th & 27th December 2009, Periyar Thidal, Chennai

The 7th National Conference of Federation of Indian Rationalist Associations (FIRA) was held at the auditorium of MR Radha Manram, Periyar Thidal, Chennai on 26th & 27th December 2009. Representatives from more than 70 affiliated Rationalist Associations from various parts of the country participated in the conference. Prof. Narendra Nayak, President of FIRA presided over the conference. The special guests attending the conference were honoured by presenting shawls. Mr V Nehru, President, Tamil Nadu Rationalists Forum welcomed the gathering. Mr V.Kumaresan, General Secretary of the

Tamil Nadu Rationalist Forum compered the conference.

On the morning of 26th Dr K Veeramani, Patron of Tamil Nadu Rationalists' Forum inaugurated the Conference and delivered his speech. He said that though it is a fundamental duty (under Article 51 A(h) Part IVA of the Constitution of India) of every citizen of India to “develop scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform”, this has rarely been practiced even by government servants. “It is regrettable”, he said, “to see that in the government service, persons from top to bottom, observe this duty more in breach

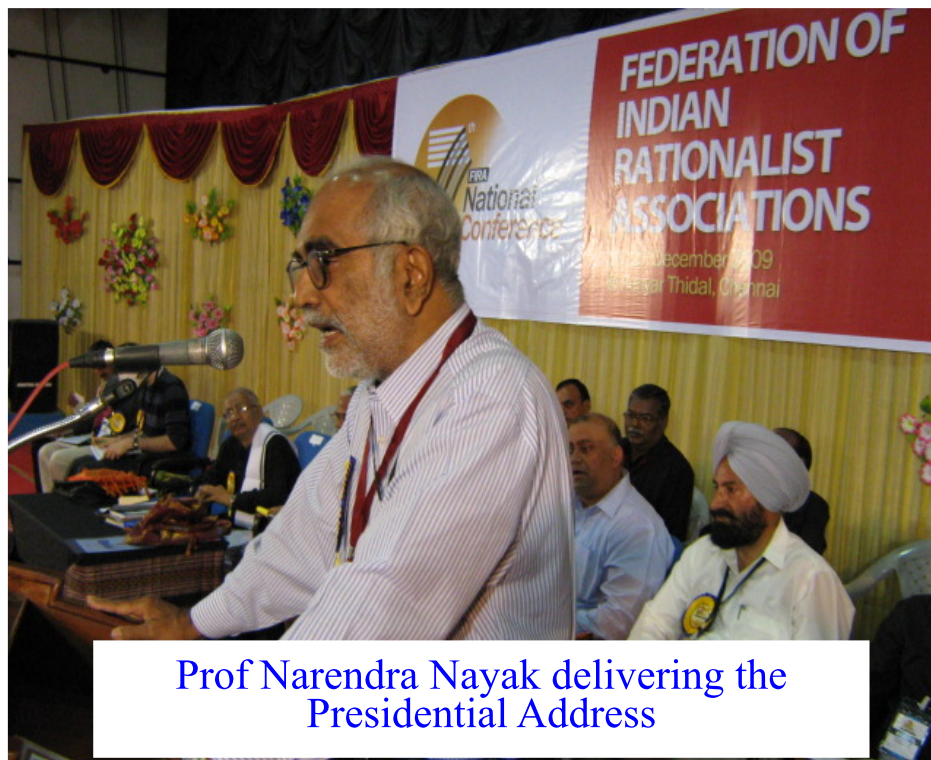


*Dr K Veeramani, President, Dravida Kazhagam,  
inaugurating the Conference*

than in practice. It is ridiculous to find that our scientists and administrators look for an auspicious time to begin a work, including sending rockets and satellites! It is unbelievable that they do 'pujas', sacrificing goats in police stations to ward off the evil influence of malevolent spirits! They look for some invisible outside agency to set things right! Do you think that this kind of people will properly analyze a problem, find the cause and effect and give a correct solution?" Dr

Dr Veeramani then talk on the vision of Periyar EV Ramaswamy, the father of Dravidian Movement in Tamil Nadu. "Periyar and his followers do not consider rationalism as a theory to be analyzed and discussed among an enlightened audience. It is not a mere analysis of the existence of god and soul, and of the origin and development of religious beliefs. It is also getting involved in practical human affairs with sympathy or empathy, and removing the obstacles to unity and progress with a rationalist outlook. It is fighting the causes of human suffering, thinking about the issues in a rational way. Periyar appealed to people to "forget god and think of humans". The second part of this maxim clearly brings out the positive approach of the rationalist. It indicates a constructive way of living which he called the self-respect way of living. It is a humanist and rational way of living that Periyar has shown to people".

In his presidential address, Prof Narendra Nayak remembered the services of late B.Premanand. "The aim of FIRA, having 70 affiliated rationalist associations, is to promote rationalism, secularism, and scientific outlook. Late Abraham Kovoov had spread the rationalist thinking through his demonstrations exposing



Prof Narendra Nayak delivering the Presidential Address

the hollowness of godmen. Rationalism has developed in Tamil Nadu as a mass movement. No political party which has no respect for Periyar can come to power in Tamil Nadu. Let us forget the differences between us and serve in the matters that unite us. It saddens us that the scientific inventions of TV and other media are used to propagate superstitions among people. We should promote scientific temper among people and prove that all the miracles are farce and deceit. It pains us that the Government of Karnataka is encouraging and supporting the cheats like Ravishankar. We are exposing the hollowness of godmen by conducting events like magic or miracle", he said.

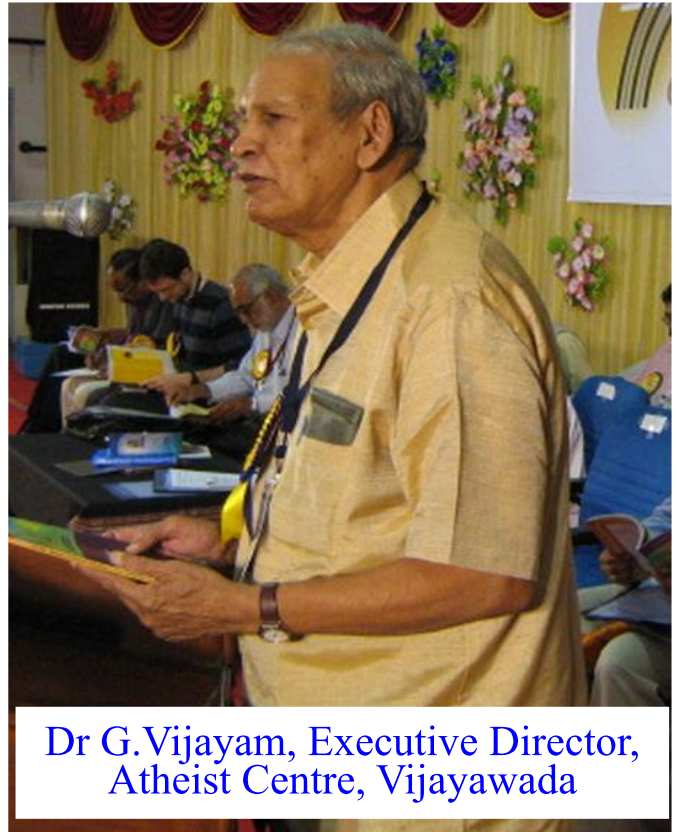
Dr G.Vijayam, Executive Director of the Atheist Centre, Vijayawada released the Souvenir of the conference. Dr K Veeramani and Mr B.Chandar of New Delhi received the first copy of the souvenir.

Periyar Lecturer Mr GVK Aasaan and Dr.G.Vijayam chaired consecutively two afternoon sessions. Delegates presented papers and spoke on topics, "Roles of rationalism in eradicating communalism" and "Role of media in propagating secularism".



Mr GVK Aasaan explained how the word ‘communal’, which denotes living of people in a common society, was wrongly used for the hatred between the communities. He has also spoken in detail about the awareness that prevailed in Tamil Nadu about the concept of social justice, and how the upper caste people instigated violence, when Mr VP Singh, as Prime Minister, introduced reservation to OBCs in government appointments. He has also cited the demolition of Babri Masjid and the consequent communal riots that erupted. He condemned the post-Godhra genocide of Muslims in Gujarat. He said that the vested interests are trying to divert the attention of the ignorant people from the problems faced by them by immersing them in religious devotion and developing religious fanaticism. It is the duty of rationalist to educate the people to give up superstitious beliefs by inculcating scientific temper.

Ms. A Arulmozhi, advocate of Madras High Court condemned the stories propagated in the name of Hindu religion and said that people were made to forget about the teaching of Buddha. She pointed out that the provision of communal reservation was introduced by Government Order for the first time in the then Madras Presidency by the Justice Party Government. She wondered how the people still believe that practicing untouchability is not a crime.



**Dr G.Vijayam, Executive Director,  
Atheist Centre, Vijayawada**

Mr RG Rao, President of Goa Science Forum, insisted that humanism should be respected, and scientific temper should be developed.

Mr Vidya Bhushan Rawat, Directory of Delhi Social Development Foundation said that the ideals of Periyar should be translated in to many languages and be made to reach all parts of the world. “Periyar thought will help to defeat the religious fanaticism. The secularism preached by Gandhi is the Varnasrama Dharma concept of Brahminism. But true



**Releasing of Conference Souvenir**

secularism should denounce the Varnasrama Dharma”, he said.

Mr BS Barnala of Tarkasheel Society of Punjab said that the religious heads are propagating superstitions among people and rationalist have to undertake much more propaganda meeting to more number of people.

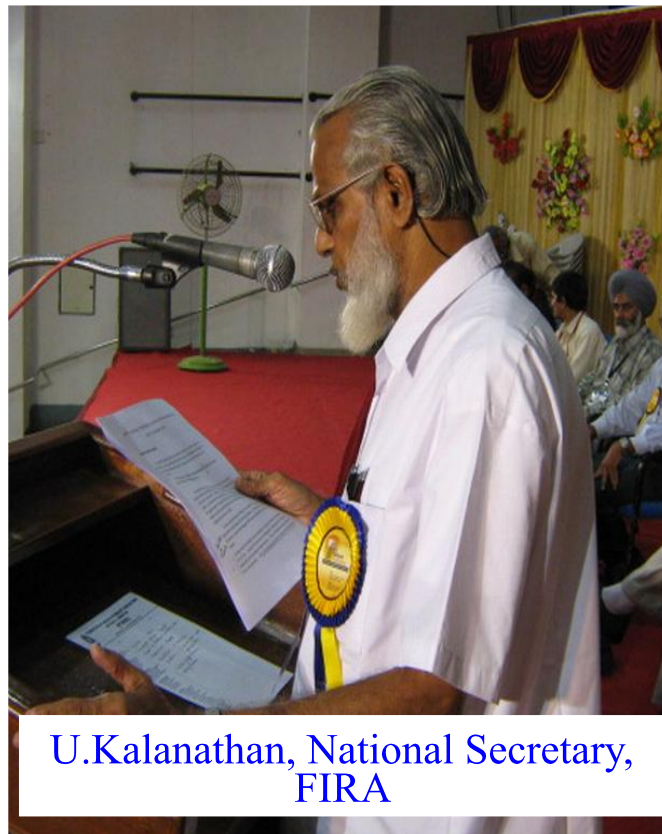
Mr Prince Ennares Periyar, Creative Head of Periyar Web Vision, Chennai, and Mr TV Manoj of Bangalore Vicharavadi Sangha explained how the print and electronic media are uncooperative in combating fundamentalism and communalism.

A short file “Thira” (Open It) produced by Mr Prince Ennares Periyar was screened. It was widely appreciated as movingly portraying the cruelty done to Muslim woman by Hindutva elements.

In the evening a documentary film on late B Premanad, “Mystery Hunter” was screened. It shows how courageously and consistently Mr Premand took steps to expose the claims of performing miracles. Then the feature film, “Periyar”, on the life of Periyar EVR, was screened.



V.Kumaresan, Treasurer, FIRA



U.Kalanathan, National Secretary, FIRA

On the morning of 27th, Mr. U Kalanathan, National Secretary of FIRA presented the performance report. Mr. V Kumaresan, Treasurer submitted the accounts of FIRA, which was approved by the General Body. The General Body also discussed about the part activities and proposed the activities to be undertaken in future.

Dr. RT Sabapathy Mohan, Vice-Chancellor of Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli delivered the valedictory address. He told that Periyar’s Self-respect Movement had made Tamil Nadu a land of rationalist and humanist outlook. After Periyar, Dr K Veeramani continues to spread his ideal, inspiring thousands of youth. The Chief Minister Dr M Karunanidhi, following Arignar Anna’s democratic footsteps, has created a conducive atmosphere for the spread of rationalist, humanist, and secular ideals and values.

## Resolutions

In the afternoon session, resolutions were proposed by members and after discussion the following resolutions were unanimously passed by the General Body.

The General Body of FIRA requested the Government of India and concerned state governments to fulfill the following demands:

1. To enact a bill for the separation of religion from politics, judiciary, education, and the administration.

2. To take necessary steps to eradicate superstitions and evil customs, along with advertisements based thereon by media.

3. To implement a Uniform Civil Code as per Article 44 of Indian Constitution and as per the two verdicts of the Supreme Court.

4. To take necessary steps on any type of terrorism, foreign financial assistance to terrorists and illegal importing of weapons by them.

5. To stop all religious subsidies such as Hajj subsidy, Temple subsidy, Madrasa Worker's Pension, etc, as they are against the spirit of Article 28 of the Indian Constitution.



Dr Jacob Copeman releasing the first issue of FIRA Quarterly Bulletin

6. To make necessary changes in the Special Marriage Act, so as to make the registration of all types of marriages compulsory as per law.

7. To take necessary steps to abolish religious symbols, cults, cash collection centres, etc in public places and to avoid all attempts to build new religious places of worship at public places by encroachment. This has been directed by the Supreme Court of India. Hence speedy steps may be taken courageously.

8. To undertake speedy and necessary measures to help more than a lakh of internally displaced Tamils to settle permanently and comfortably in their respective native places in Sri Lanka. Government of India and the international community should put pressure on Sri Lankan Government to act justly in this respect on humanitarian grounds.

9. To take steps to undertake the responsibility of educating the next Indian generation, to get rid of superstitions, pseudoscience, and religious ideologies through general education.

**BS**

*Courtesy: The Modern Rationalist, January 2010*



Dr. RT Sabapathy Mohan, Vice-Chancellor of Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli delivers the valedictory address.





Release of Tamil Translation of “God Delusion” –Rationalist Forum, Chennai

# Bangalore Vicharavadi Sangha

(Bangalore Rationalist Association)

**Bangalore Vicharavadi Sangha** conducts monthly lectures and discussions on various topics. Those who are interested in attending the programmes conducted by the association may contact:

**Dr. M.N.Keshava Rao** (Phone: 26690269. Email: keshava\_rao@hotmail.com)

**A.S.Nataraj** (Phone: 26696553. Email: rajsri@bgl.vsnl.net.in)

**BVV Subba Rao** (Phone: 09886679088)

# Tools for Skeptical Thinking

## Carl Sagan

Carl Sagan's famous essay, *The Fine Art of Baloney Detection*, more or less encapsulates the basic tenets of Skeptical Thinking. The present article is an extract from the essay.

The full text can be found in one of Sagan's best-sellers *The Demonhaunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark*.

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

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

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

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

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

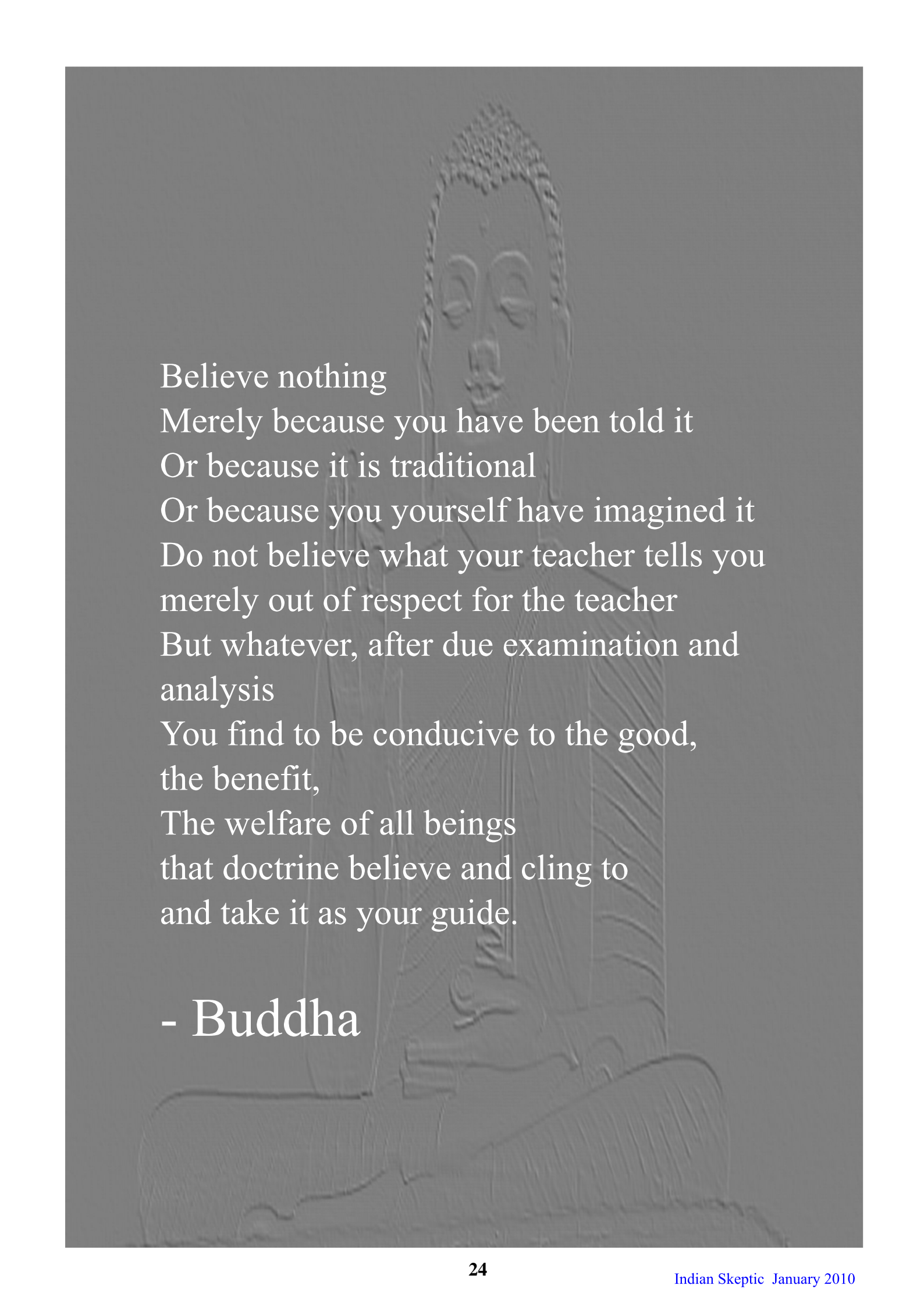


- Quantify. If whatever it is you're explaining has some measure, some numerical quantity attached to it, you'll be much better able to discriminate among competing hypotheses. What is vague and qualitative is open to many explanations. Of course there are truths to be sought in the many qualitative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

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

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

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



Believe nothing  
Merely because you have been told it  
Or because it is traditional  
Or because you yourself have imagined it  
Do not believe what your teacher tells you  
merely out of respect for the teacher  
But whatever, after due examination and  
analysis  
You find to be conducive to the good,  
the benefit,  
The welfare of all beings  
that doctrine believe and cling to  
and take it as your guide.

- Buddha