

**Collected Works
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Rationalism

Rationalist Foundation

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Rationalism and Social Progress

Contrary to popular belief, rationalism is not a unified consolidated philosophy embracing within itself any set principles or tenets by which the rationalists swear. If rationalism were such a philosophy it would degenerate into a religion as other systems based upon such tenets and beliefs have done. The word 'rationalism' has different meanings and has also meant different things to different people. To some it has sounded sweet while to others it connotes an idea of horror. Some people pride themselves being rationalists without in fact and basically being rationalists; while several people look upon the rationalists as men of devil who have no regard for morality. Unfortunately for some of the misconceptions about rationalism, many of the people who call themselves rationalists are responsible.

I must make it clear that rationalism is not any philosophy which envisages fixed principles or ethics. Rationalism has been defined by the Rationalist Press Association of England as "a mental attitude which unreservedly accepts the supremacy of Reason and aims at establishing a system of philosophy and ethics verifiable by experience independent of arbitrary assumptions or authority". Some people have defined rationalism in a different manner but, in my opinion, the above definition of the Rationalist Press Association is the most satisfactory one. That rationalism is not a philosophy but an attitude of mind can be illustrated by a simple example. Many of you have seen an ant which is going around the wall. If you had seen that ant initially you would have noticed that it is going up to the wall and returning. This it has done several times before it realises that it is not possible for it to go through the wall. Then it reasons that another way must be found for going to the other side of the wall. The ant is one of the smallest animals in the animal kingdom. Still in its daily life it uses some sort of animal reasoning though it has been said that man alone has been endowed with the attribute of Reason and that is why Aristotle defined man as a rational animal. Man is a rational animal because he lives, questions, answers with the aid of Reason.

As I have mentioned above, there are different schools of rationalism. Some insist that Reason alone is sufficient for acquiring knowledge and no other aid is necessary. On the other extreme, there are people who insist that experience alone is the way of acquiring knowledge and Reason has a secondary role to play in the acquisition of knowledge, though they undoubtedly recognise that

Reason is necessary for acquiring knowledge. Take the case of Pythagoras who propounded the well-known theorem that the square on the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle is equal in area to the squares on the other two sides of the same triangle. Here was a case of Reason in its almost crystal purity. I say almost because even while arriving at this theorem, apart from using his power of reasoning Pythagoras did have to visualise what a right-angled triangle was and what a square was. This latter part of knowledge could have been acquired by him only by observation, if not by experience or experiment. On the other extreme, we have got the example of Charles Darwin, the father of the theory of evolution, who set out to collect data for days, months and years together. He painstakingly classified that data, re-classified the same and arranged them in some order. Darwin had traveled to different parts of the world, collected samples not only of plants but also from the animal kingdom. He applied his mind to the data and the samples which he had so painstakingly collected and classified and after nearly five years of detailed and systematic analyses aided by reasoning he arrived at the theory of evolution. However, even thereafter he did not announce the same for nearly 19 years.

The example of Darwin apart from illustrating the inductive method of science also illustrates the role Reason plays in all scientific investigation. It also illustrates the humility which is present in a genuine scientist as distinguished from the fanaticism which is displayed by people who claim to possess within themselves a treasure of revealed wisdom. Between these two extremes one may cite any number of other illustrations in which Reason has played a role of varying degrees of importance. But it cannot be denied that Reason is indispensable and is indeed the chief guide in arriving at the truth. One is tempted to give the example of Archimedes who discovered the principle known after his name. As most of you are aware, Archimedes was taking his bath when certain quantity of water spilled out due to his body being immersed in the bath. Here was a case where the scientist observed certain water spilling out of the bath; he also experienced that he became lighter in weight in the water than when he was outside the water. Thereafter in the comfortable position in the bath itself he started thinking about what this displacement of the water and the lightness of his body meant. Suddenly truth dawned upon him and straight from the bath he dashed to the streets of his city shouting "Eureka, Eureka". Probably he was the first staker in the history of mankind. The Archimedes principle was thus discovered as a result of the combination of

induction, deduction, experience and reasoning. Without reasoning the principle would not have been discovered at all. Without the other three ingredients the principle might have been discovered but not so quickly. So for all discovery and investigation of truth, Reason is indispensable and crucial, though it may not be regarded as the sole guide.

In ancient Greece, thought flourished and science, though in a small way, had made beginning. It is after the decline of the Greek civilisation that a dark age enveloped the mankind for a long period. It was only in the 14th century and later that there was awareness of the intellectual activity that had taken place in ancient Rome and Athens and that there was a revival of interest in learning - which revival was known as the Great Renewal or as the Renaissance. One of the greatest products of this renaissance was Francis Bacon. Though like modern rationalists he did not dispense with the existence of God, in his writings he pointed out the role Reason has to play in the acquisition of knowledge. I have already mentioned above that Aristotle had placed great stress upon deduction. Though he had occasionally recognised and preached induction, it is now recognised that the predominant framework of Aristotle's logic was deduction and his ideal was syllogism. Man is a rational animal; Aristotle is a man; therefore Aristotle is a rational animal. This was the mode of reasoning which Aristotle had adopted. But even in this type of reasoning the element of induction could not be totally absent. That man is an animal could only be known by the process of induction and not by pure process of deduction. One of the premises in a syllogism, therefore, had to be gathered by a process of induction or had to be a product of induction. It was Francis Bacon who thought that the Aristotelian system of predominant deduction hampered the progress of science. In his book called *Novum Organum* he proposed a new organic system of thought namely the inductive study of nature itself through experience and experiment. Will Durant has called this book as "the first clear call for an Age of Reason," though the book itself remained incomplete. It is unnecessary for me to dwell at length on the history of scientific investigation I have referred briefly to these developments for the purpose of underlining that Reason is the indispensable guide in the investigation of truth and it is also the safest guide. To say this is to be rationalist. To deny the role of Reason is to be irrationalist. If something cannot be understood by Reason assisted or otherwise by experience or experiment, then that thing cannot be understood or proved by any other method.

Since I am talking to you about rationalism and social progress, I must also define what progress is. First let me begin by pointing out what is progress. Any change is not necessarily progress. Every movement does not necessarily lead to progress. That movement may be backward or forward. Even if it is forward physically it may be culturally, socially, intellectually a backward movement. Unless there is significance in the change, that change cannot be called progress. In the year of 1982, when women have enjoyed equal rights - civil and political - a change which is being introduced in some of the countries, not excluding India, by certain communities imposing certain fresh restrictions upon the women forbidding them from going about openly, from attending cinema, from participating in other social and cultural activities, is a retrograde step and not a forward step. The result of such an attitude which is finding expression in several countries today will not be progress but a movement backwards. Human affairs are mixed in nature. They consist of not only physical needs but also mental attitudes and cultural events. One has to look at this composite personality of humankind and to see whether any change that takes place or is brought about is beneficial for this personality of mankind. If it is beneficial then that change is said to be progress; if it is not, it cannot be progress. In my opinion, any change that is for the benefit of mankind will be consistent with rationalism because ultimately it is the aim of rationalist to discover truth for the purpose of the benefit of the mankind.

At this stage I cannot refrain also from referring to the progress which is envisaged under the concept of teleology. Teleology is that philosophy which believes that all changes in the world and in the human history are taking place in such a way that they must lead to a particular end. In other words, there is an end towards which mankind is moving. That end is pre-determined and every activity of mankind, every acquisition of knowledge, all the efforts made by man - whether they know it or not - are leading towards that end. You will find this in the books of different religions. It may be called "Doomsday" or it may be called *Pralaya* or by any other name. The very basis of astrology is teleological because the movement of stars and planets is supposed to affect the destiny of mankind and also of the individuals constituting the mankind. If this is so, then it necessarily implies that there is an end which is already predetermined. That is how one comes to the concept of horoscope. Such irrational approach is not unfortunately confined to religion or

other superstition such as astrology. There are certain political and economic philosophies also which believe that the history of mankind is a history of changes and every change that followed the previous one is for the better and therefore must make progress. By an analysis of the history of mankind and its social and economic factors it is predicted that the present sum total of the relations will lead to a particular future arrangement. Can you say that the new arrangement that will come about will necessarily be progress? To answer this question in the affirmative is to take a teleological view and to deny the free will and free choice of mankind and this would be irrational. Rationalism must be used not only to analyse and understand the past and present but also to create a new world. True rationalism will not accept or acquiesce in a social change based upon a teleological approach. Mere change, therefore, should not be accepted as progress unless that change is significant from the view point of the welfare of the mankind.

The importance of rationalism can be understood better by its comparison with what can be called superstition which is, for the lack of better word, called the embodiment of irrationalism. Superstitions are beliefs which are not provable at all and are based upon no known facts or factors. In the dictionary, superstition has been defined as an ignorant and irrational belief in supernatural agency, omens, divination, sorcery or practice of such belief. It is the product of fear of the unknown and is resorted to as a means of escaping from that fear. Superstitions are of infinite varieties. Broadly speaking you can classify them into three categories.

There are in the first place religious superstitions which find place among different religions. Different religions have different sets of superstitions. If one religious scripture is the product of revealed wisdom, revealed by God himself, how is it that another religious scripture has got different sets of superstitions, though the latter one is also said to have been revealed by God? The inconsistency and the variety in the superstitions of different religions is a guarantee of the utter futility of these superstitions and their great danger.

There is a second class of superstitions which may be called cultural superstitions and they are unlimited in number and variety. The third class of superstitions is peculiar to individuals and these superstitions vary from individual to individual. As Will Durant has mentioned: 'To the poor in body and mind superstition is a treasured element in the poetry of life, gilding dull days with exciting marvels,

and redeeming misery with magic powers and mystic hopes". Superstitions have been handed down from generation to generation and instead of being reduced in numbers with the march of science and knowledge, the superstitions have multiplied many-fold. The old superstitions never die and there is no control over the birth of new superstitions. The result is unfortunately the unlimited multiplication of superstition. Superstitions are worse than religions because in religions there is some sort of systematic organisation of superstitions and they normally tend to confine within the four-corners of a particular religion. Religions are only few; superstitions are many. A religion may die or at least may decline in its importance but superstition is immortal and is always growing in strength. It is interesting to find out and list the superstitions prevalent especially the cultural and individual superstitions in India or at least in Maharashtra. It would then be possible to test some of them at random and convince at least some people about the baselessness of the superstitions. Sir Thomas Browne had prepared a list of the superstitions prevalent in the days of Queen Elizabeth and the early Stuarts and that list occupied 652 pages. The superstitions must have, therefore, run into thousands.

Though religion itself is an organised superstition, initially it was the product of the reasoning resorted to by the primitive man. In other words, religion itself was initially a rational activity because it sought to understand and explain the phenomena which man observed around him. Take the case of Aryans when arrived in this country. They found a country full of green pastures, flowing waters, snow-clad mountains, and the regular cycle of days and nights and of the seasons. When they looked at this universe with awe, there was naturally an eagerness in their mind to understand the phenomena of the universe. Early contemplation necessarily led to the concept of God without which concept the creation of universe could not be understood.

An attempt to understand the origin of the universe is to be found in the chapter of Genesis in the Old Testament. Concept of God was thus inevitable even in the Bible. Once man created God for the purpose of explaining and understanding the universe, the rest was easy for him. Everything that happened in the universe was necessarily related to God. This in itself was not totally irrational because within the limited knowledge available at that time the concept of God was inevitable, and the explanation of the natural phenomena in terms of the will of God was also inevitable. Religion

was thus initially a rationalist approach. But there is a basic and fundamental difference between rationalism and religion because rationalism tests every phenomenon with the progress of knowledge on the basis of the knowledge that is acquired and discards any rule, regulation or concept which is inconsistent with the knowledge that becomes available. In this sense religion is stagnant and rationalism is progressive. Mankind in its earlier days undoubtedly knew the law about the planetary movements. That is why we notice that even in earlier days, calendars and *Panchangas* had been prepared. But the earlier man did not know the nature of those planets and in fact even did not know about the solar system. That is why in the religions it was insisted that earth was the centre of the universe and man was made after the image of God. When these propositions were originally propounded they might have looked quite plausible because in the light of the then extant knowledge they sounded rational. But with the unraveling of the solar system and the subsequent progress in the knowledge of astronomy which has been made possible by the adoption of rational approach to the acquisition of knowledge, it is now clearly established that we are a part of the solar system and the earth is no longer the center of the universe. This revolution in knowledge started with Copernicus and was carried forward by Kepler and Galileo. In the present state of knowledge, therefore, one must accept the insignificant position occupied by a man in the entire universe and also the subordinate position occupied by the earth in the universe. Earth is only a planet not the centre of the universe. This may sound repulsive to our sense of self-respect. That is why despite this state of knowledge which is now incontrovertible the religious leaders still insist upon the earth being the centre of universe and man having been made in the image of God. The difference between religion and rationalism is thus clear. Though religion started as a rational activity, all its doctrines became dogmas whereas the doctrines evolved by rationalism are theories. The dogmas are unshakable and unchangeable whereas the theories are testable and changeable. Indeed the very definition of a theory is that it is always open to correction with the acquisition of additional knowledge.

At this stage it would not be out of place to mention that rationalism and science are inseparably connected. Indeed the words rationalism and scientific method can be used synonymously. What is a scientific method? I have earlier given some broad outline of the manner in which acquisition of knowledge is made. It is acquired by the process of reasoning. It is also by observation, experience and

experiment. The scientific method involves in the first place the formulation of a hypothesis as a tentative solution to a problem which is to be solved or as a tentative explanation of a phenomenon which is to be explained. This hypothesis is formulated on the basis of the knowledge which a scientist possesses before approaching that problem or the phenomenon. On the basis of that knowledge that hypothesis seems satisfactory or almost true solution or explanation; but a true rationalist or scientist is not satisfied with hypothesis only unless he is able to test it and to see whether the tentative solution or the explanation is correct or not. In order to do this he proceeds to collect additional facts. The amount of additional facts that is to be collected will vary with the nature of the problem to be solved or the phenomenon to be explained. After the additional facts are so collected the scientist will then proceed to examine whether the hypothesis can be developed into a theory. If these additional facts or the additional knowledge supports the hypothesis, then he formulates it in the form of a theory. Even the theory is not final because it is to be tested. That testing may be either in the laboratory in certain cases or on the anvil of actual events that may take place. It is only after the tentative solution or the tentative explanation has gone through these various tests that the scientist will come to what he regards as a theory.

In the history of science no name shines as brightly as the name of Galileo. This is so, in my opinion, because Galileo fought the obscurantism of his days and was sometimes imprisoned for confirming the theory of Copernicus that it was the earth that moved around the sun and not vice-versa. He possessed the best of the rational outlook. He also illustrated the use of the different methods that can successfully be adopted by a scientist. He used the method of observation to learn about the planetary movements. He made use of the personal experience that he gained in his quest for knowledge; he also conducted experiments to arrive at truth. Galileo no doubt had the advantage of having Copernicus and Kepler as his predecessors, but it is in him that the scientific method reached its perfect form. Formerly science had got tied itself to what was then regarded as philosophy but with Galileo “science now began to liberate itself from the placenta of its mother, philosophy. It shrugged Aristotle from its back, turned its face from metaphysics to Nature, developed its own distinctive methods, and looked to improve the life of man on the earth. This movement belonged to the heart of the Age of Reason, but it did not put its faith in “pure reason”- Reason independent of experience and experiment. Too

often such reasoning had woven mythical webs. Reason, as well as tradition and authority, was now to be checked by the study and record of lowly facts; and whatever “logic” might say, science would aspire to accept only what could be quantitatively measured, mathematically expressed, and experimentally proved”. (*The Age of Reason Begins*, by Will Durant, p.586). If Copernicus and Kepler and Galileo had accepted the biblical belief which they were bound to as devoted Christians that it was the sun that revolved round the earth, then no progress in astronomy could have been made and the landing of the man on the moon would never have been achieved.

One example might be given to illustrate the role played by Reason in the progress of mankind. Today many of you are not aware of the dreaded disease of small-pox which in my younger days used to disfigure the face of many and take the lives of not a few. Vaccination as a means of combating that disease was the product of a man applying his reason to a fact which would have normally been ignored by other persons and that man was Edward Jenner, a doctor of Scotland. One day when his milkmaid came to him, he found that though she belonged to a poor class where small-pox would have normally affected her she had not acquired the same. When he asked her as to how she was able to remain free from this disease, she replied “Doctor, I will not get small pox because I have cow-pox “. In one sense Sarah Nelmes, that was the name of the milkmaid; she displayed an unusual rational frame of mind. It was believed in that country, as in every other country, that the disease of small-pox was a curse which was visited upon the mankind by the fury of Gods, but Sarah Nelmes ruled out this possibility because she had observed that those who had suffered from cow-pox would not get small-pox. This set Dr. Jenner to think as to how she was so sure about her immunity to small-pox. His mind started working and he took some of the matter from her infected hand and inserted it in the arm of a boy named James Fibs. Thereafter it was found that the boy James Fibs also became immune to smallpox. By a process of intensive reasoning based upon the observation of Sarah Nelmes and the experiment conducted by him on James Fibs, Dr. Jenner came to the conclusion that a person who has suffered from a milder disease becomes immune to a more severe disease of similar type.

Conducting his experiment further he found that if a person is exposed to milder degree of the same disease he may become immune to the severe degree of the same disease. It is said thus that Dr. Jenner discovered the principle of vaccination. It may be noted

that the word vaccination is derived from “Vacca”, which means cow in Latin. Dr. Jenner thus demolished the superstition that smallpox was the visitation of the curse of God upon mankind. If you make an elementary study of medicine and other science, you will find that all supernatural explanations will be found to be untrue. In this sense rationalism leads to progress.

I cannot help at this stage from making a reference to the widespread existence of astrology not only in this country but in many so-called progressive countries. An elementary knowledge of astronomy which you may acquire from any ordinary standard book will convince you that this universe is made of several system, each system having its own sun and several planets. Of these systems, solar system is one of which this earth is a part. Upon this earth which is situated millions and millions of miles from its nearest planet there are billions and billions of living being including human being and animals. Of these billions of billions, you are one. Astrology claims that the movement of the planets affects the destiny of a particular person. Is it possible for you to believe that such an insignificant person as yourself and me is likely to be affected in any manner by the movement of a planet which is several billions of miles away from this earth which at least 600 crores of human beings are inhabiting? If it is possible, the burden of proving the same is upon the persons who claim a place for astrology. No empirical study has been made of the validity of the astrological claims though on a priori principles and on the basis of the knowledge of the universe the claims of astrology are absurd. The burden of proving that its claims are true is upon the protagonists of astrology and this burden has not been discharged.

Apart from the futility of the astrology, there is a great danger in accepting its claim. If the planetary movement inexorably affects the destiny of a person then there is no escape from the fate which is thus ordained. The planetary movements themselves are fixed and follow a particular pattern due to the laws of gravitation which themselves have been discovered by Kepler and Newton. If this is so, there is a pattern already set for the life of a man. This postulates the futility of human activity and disables a man from exercising any free choice. If, therefore, a person has contracted some disease, it must be due to some planetary influence. His ultimate end must also be predetermined by the planetary movement. Then naturally a question is asked as to why one should take medicine at all. No

sensible answer has been provided by the astrologers to this question as indeed they will never be able to do so.

If people had accepted and followed unquestioningly and blindly the ancient original beliefs, tenets and doctrines and had made no effort to examine them in the light of further experience and without conducting experiments, no progress of mankind could have taken place. We would have been still reaching in the wild jungles; we would not have known the civilisation of today at all. It is in this sense that rationalism which, to repeat, is an attitude of mind and which accepts Reason as the main source of knowledge that provides the impulse towards progress.

Some misconceptions about rationalism may be at this stage dispelled, in the first place, as it has already been mentioned that rationalists themselves do believe in certain things and they unnecessarily and irrationally object to the faith of others. Here the confusion is between faith and belief. Rationalists object to faith and not to belief. That all crows are black is believed by rationalist because all the crows that rationalists are seeing are black. On a preponderance of probability, therefore, a rationalist believes that all crows are black.

If, however, he comes across a white crow he is prepared to discard that belief. But if a person has faith in a particular thing, he will not give up that faith despite proof coming to the contrary because faith is by definition a belief in the absence of evidence. Faith is the explanation of a fact for which there is no evidence. Indeed in the words of Paul the Apostle: "Now faith is the substance hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (*New Testament Hebrews 11 - 1*).

It has been mentioned that everything cannot be known to Reason or Reason cannot be the "open sesame" to the entire knowledge of the world. I unreservedly accept this criticism. But I insist that without Reason nothing can be known. The search for truth is eternal. "Great as the advance of scientific knowledge has been, it has not been greater than the growth of the material to be dealt with. The goal of science is clear - it is nothing short of the complete interpretation of the universe. But the goal is an ideal one - it marks the direction in which we move and strive, but never a stage that we shall actually reach. The universe grows ever larger as we learn to understand more of our corner of it. (*Grammar of Science* by Karl Pearson, p18). In this sense a scientist always says "I know, therefore, that I

am ignorant". What I have stated now is also consistent with what I have already mentioned above, namely the self-corrective character of a theory which scientist adopts in the pursuit of knowledge.

Another serious charge which is leveled against rationalists is that they lack totally imagination. In my opinion, this charge is wholly unfounded. Rationalism only insists that your imagination should be guided by Reason and should not be unbridled. I even proceed further and say that it is only rationalists who have got proper imagination because it is the rationalist in a scientist who makes the discoveries and the inventions and this discovery and invention would not have been possible but for the imaginative mind of a rationalist. In fact the greater the rationalist, the greater imaginative he is. At this stage it would not be inappropriate to quote the following from the famous scientist namely Faraday:-

“The world little knows how many of the thoughts and theories which have passed through the mind of a scientific investigator have been crushed in silence and secrecy by his own severe criticism and adverse examination; that in the most successful instances not a tenth of the suggestions, the hopes, the wishes, the preliminary conclusions have been realised.”

It is equally untrue to say that rationalists are unemotional, unsentimental and incapable of such finer feelings such as love, sympathy etc. Emotions are necessarily a function of the brain. They are not the function of the heart, though one is always instinctively referring to the heart. The emotions vary from man to man depending upon the experience to which that man has been subjected. Siddhartha, who had not been exposed to any suffering of mankind, reacted in a particular manner when he saw the sick, the aged and the dead for the first time in his life. A person who is working in a Coroners office will not react in the same manner. In this respect rationalists are not different from other human beings. They experience emotions and feelings in the same manner as other human beings. Rationalists like Bertrand Russell did fall in love as other human beings. Feelings such as love are ultimately biological functions and rationalists being human beings cannot be free from the same.

A more serious charge against rationalism has been made, namely that rationalists have no concept of morality. There cannot be a greater ignorance on this count. In my opinion, it is the rationalists

alone who can provide lasting morality. What is morality? Morality is a code of the rules of good conduct. Now the next question is what is good conduct? If you look to the different religions you will find that the concept of good conduct is different among different religions. As far as the rationalist is concerned, it is only on the touchstone of what is beneficial to mankind that the rules of good conduct can be evolved. In this sense, the rules of good conduct by way of morality evolved by rationalists are universal and hold good for all mankind and for members of all religions unlike the rules of conduct propounded by different religions. Therefore rationalism is a unifying force unlike religions which have done nothing but divide mankind into different tribes. Hundreds of wars have been fought in the name of religion; not one has been fought on behalf of rationalism. A rationalist accepts the possibility of his being in the wrong; no Pope or Bhagwan will, however, accept this possibility. The worst crimes have been committed in the name of religion. The dacoits of Chambal valley not only believe in religion but believe in certain Gods and Goddesses whom they worship before they go on their depredations. The worst adulterators of food will be found worshipping the portrait of some God or Sai Baba hung in their shops. It is, therefore, hopelessly incorrect to say that religion based upon the concept of god can give better morality than the rules of conduct which are given by rationalism.

It is impossible to give within a short time the details of all those great experiments of mankind where rationalism has played a crucial role and contributed towards human progress. I have already mentioned above that rationalism and science are inseparable. If this is so then all the technological and other progress which has been made by science must be attributed to the impulse which rationalism gave. A question can pertinently be asked, namely whether rationalism necessarily leads to progress. You may ask a further question as to whether progress has been real in the sense as to whether all that has occurred has contributed to the happiness and welfare of mankind. Francis Bacon said knowledge is power. Ultimately for which purpose knowledge is used as also for which purpose power is used that is important. That knowledge which is made possible by the use of Reason has contributed in several directions to the progress of mankind cannot for a moment be denied. But I will not pretend that everything that has taken place in the history of mankind is in the direction of progress. But without rationalism progress is impossible. With rationalism progress is

always assured. This is the claim that could be made on behalf of rationalism.

Since you are among the privileged few who have got the opportunity of higher education in a country where even one person in a thousand does not get the opportunity to go to the primary school, let alone to the College, the importance of rationalism must be fully understood by you. Do not consider education merely as a faithful accumulation of facts and dates and reigns. Do not consider education merely as a means to earn your livelihood in the world. Ultimately education is the building up of your mental attitude of your character, of your personality. It is the transmission of mental, moral, technical and aesthetic heritage from one generation to another generation to as many as possible. This is for the purpose of enlarging man's understanding of life leading thereby to the better enjoyment of life.

Rationalism for the Layman

The common man is often unnecessarily perplexed by the word rationalism. Rationalism is not any esoteric philosophy though unfortunately some persons who propagate rationalism unnecessarily make it appear to be so. For persons who are living in the second half of the 20th century rationalism or rationalist attitude must become part of their mental equipment. That it is not so is a tragedy which has led and which will lead to further tragedies.

I am myself not a philosopher and will not pretend to hold forth on rationalism as a philosophy. There are different schools of rationalism, a word which sounds sweet and some times means different things to different people. Rationalism can be defined as "a mental attitude which unreservedly accepts the supremacy of reason and aims at establishing a system of philosophy and ethics verifiable by experience, independent of all arbitrary assumptions or authority". For our purpose it is sufficient if we understand rationalism to mean a philosophical view or an attitude of mind that reason is the chief source and test of knowledge. In this age of science where man has landed man on the moon and has sent manmade satellites into cosmos, one need not be apologetic when one says that science is the basis and source of all knowledge. It is the light of reason aided by experiment that has guided the progress of science from its earliest days. Knowledge required by experience which the human mind has assimilated is of course in the rationalist tradition. As I have already mentioned above there are different types of schools of rationalism. The differences are not fundamental but are based upon the relative emphasis upon reason and experience.

Despite the apparent differences there are in my opinion certain fundamentals to all schools of rationalism. Reason, man's capacity to deduce and to arrive at truth, can be regarded as one of such fundamentals. Faith as a source of knowledge is denied by rationalism. If reason and experience (and in one sense experiments) are the source of the knowledge, they are also the instruments of proof. If something cannot be proved or perceived by a process of reasoning, assisted or otherwise by experience and experiment, that thing cannot be proved by anything else - definitely not by faith. Indeed faith is the very negation of proof. Even the discovery of Archimedes principle, though sudden, was the result of observation, experience and intense reasoning.

The second most important tenet of rationalism is that the universe is a law-governed universe. This is now established beyond a shadow of doubt by science. Though there is a movement of the universe, that movement is rhythmic. It is the rhythm of cosmos, not the rhythm of “tandav nritya”. The rhythm of cosmos is discoverable by finding out the laws of nature and that is what has been done by the scientists. Ptolemy believed that the sun went round the earth. Copernicus and Galileo demolished this belief and demonstrated that it is the earth that went the sun round and we are only a part and not the centre of the solar system. This science of astronomy has given us a comprehensive picture of the universe and has shown how insignificant a human being is physically in the context of the entire universe. The earth is only a part of the solar system consisting of several planets. In the universe there are other systems each of which may be consisting of several planets. A particular individual is one of billions of living beings upon one of such planets. From this it should not be difficult to see that this movement of another planet cannot have the slightest influence upon the destiny of a human being upon the earth.

Newton discovered the law of gravitation by observing the apple fall from the tree. The discovery of the law of gravitation was not an act of faith. The law of gravitation applies to all things and persons. No man can except by mechanical aid escape the gravitational force of the earth. If some one claims that a man can lift himself up and hold himself up by spiritual force, he is challenging the law of gravitation. He must prove it by demonstrating the act in front of people who do not share his faith.

It is also a part of rationalist approach that similar causes produce similar effects. This is in fact another facet of the principle that the universe is a law governed universe. For example ash can be got only by burning matter. This is the law of chemistry. If ash is the effect of burning of matter, which is the cause, then that effect cannot follow without that specific cause. In other words, ash cannot come out of thin air. Any one pretending to disprove the law of chemistry must not be afraid of demonstrating that the law is not true.

There is a rule of law in the universe in a true sense than there is a rule of law in a democracy. The laws of nature, of physics, chemistry, and mechanics are inexorable laws disobedience of which entails serious consequences. Laws made by legislatures can be defied or contravened by some persons with impunity. You may

contravene traffic rule and get away with it by tipping the constable. There might be persons who are given rightly or wrongly special privileges and installed in a position above the law. In such a case we say that there is no rule of law, though there is a law. Such thing can never happen in the physical world. There is no one who is above the laws that govern the universe. Any one who pretends to be above the laws of the universe will dearly pay for his pretention. There are no supermen who can defy the laws of nature; there are no supernatural powers that bend the natural laws. I have always wondered why even one of the scores of miracle men going up and down this country has not demonstrated his power of miracle by walking out of the window of any room on the 20th floor of a building in Bombay. Only those acrobatics will succeed who like those in circus strictly adhere to the rules.

I should have prefaced my talk by saying that what I am telling you today is not anything profound but something which is commonly known. But what is commonly known is not always commonly remembered and that is the provocation for my talk today. If the principles of rationalism are so elementary and simple, it is not surprising and unfortunate that a large number of people are following a course of conduct which is patently opposed by rationalist principles and hence irrational? The attitudes, behavior, thoughts which are a negation of rules of rationalism can be compendiously called irrationalism. Irrationalism is not an organized, systematic or consistent philosophy. It is a bundle of dogmas, attitudes, rites, rituals, beliefs not all of them consistent with each other. The only thing common to all of them is their refusal to recognize the primacy of reason in the accumulation and acquisition of human knowledge and then dependence upon unproved, unseen, nonexistent powers and factors of guidance.

Superstitions form the major part of irrational beliefs and it would not, therefore, be inappropriate to deal with them in some details. Superstition has been in the dictionary defined as an ignorant and irrational belief in supernatural agency, in omens, divination or a practice proceeding from such belief. It is usually based upon fear of the unknown and is resorted to as a means of escaping from that fear. Superstitions can be of a large variety but I would, with the author of that subject in Encyclopedia Britannica, divide them into mainly three types.

The first and the most dominant type consist of religious superstitions. In my opinion all religion is organized superstition.

Test any tenet of religion today on the anvil of present day knowledge and you will find it hollow. The story of genesis in the Bible stands condemned by the theory of evolution and the nature of the universe as found by science today. As J.B. Bury has mentioned "If the story of Noah's Ark and the flood is true, how is it that beasts unable to swim or fly inhabit Africa and the islands of the Ocean? And what about the new species which were constantly being found in the New World and did not exist in the old? Where did the Kangaroos of Australia drop from? (A History of Freedom of Thought, 1982 Edition, pp 141). The Bible which is supposed to be a product of divine revelation is found to be ignorant of the origin and nature of the universe. In Bhagavad Gita in chapter XI, Lord Krishna gives the picture of the universe (*Vishwaroopdarshan*) which is grotesquely inaccurate considering the universe we know. If Krishna was God and therefore the creator of the universe how it is that he did not know the solar system and the laws governing it? All Hindu mythology speaks of Devas and Danavas and of planetary Gods. Even a school boy today knows that Saturn is not a god and Surya is not Narayan. The entire religious system, whether Hindu, Christian or any other, based upon divine revelation will and must collapse in view of the present day knowledge.

One may also refer to some of the religious practices which are nothing but superstitions. It is well known that many people before taking any important decision open their religious book – Bible, Quran or Gita and seek guidance from the page which lies before them. Can you imagine a more absurd thing? How can a sentence or two from a page opened at random be of any value if a person has to decide whether he has to marry Kamala or Vimala? Or whether he has to invest in National machinery or Indian Dyestuffs?

No less superstitions are such practices as fasting to achieve desired results. Yadna is a common superstitious practice in this country. Different religions have developed different superstitions. They have been characterized as peripheral beliefs because they are not central to the teachings of these religions.

The second set of superstitions fall in the category of cultural superstitions which are unlimited in number and variety. They vary from country to country, from region to region, from community to community. Some of them may be common; in some cases what is regarded as a good omen in some community may be regarded as evil in another. Number "13" is regarded inauspicious in Western

countries and westernized easterners. Many hotels and buildings avoid using the number for their rooms and floors and use instead “12A”. I do not see how using “12A”, “13” ceases to be “13”.

In Western countries “3” is not auspicious whereas in India it is. In all temples you are supposed to do circumambulation three times. You are also supposed to take “teerth” three times.

A cultural superstition which is very commonly followed is the evidence of going under the ladder. May be this has the basis in someone’s experience. A hammer may have fallen on him from the hands of a worker who was on the ladder.

Lord Denning in his “the Due Process of Law” mentions the case of a Chief Justice in the England of 1631 at whom a prisoner threw a brickbat. The judge had his head on one side and his hand at the brickbat whizzed past. If the judge was upright, he would not have survived, says Denning. From this the superstitious amongst might develop the practice of not sitting upright.

Among the cultural superstitions may be sanctioned the performance for stones of a particular colour, not travelling an “*amavasya*” wearing amulets, the dread of “*Mangal*” in the horoscope. As I have said earlier, the number of cultural superstitions is unlimited.

So also is the number of superstitions peculiar to persons. Theoretically each person can have and often has superstitions of his own colour of the clothes, a particular pen. An individual may believe in a particular “guru” or “Bhagavan” or “Sadhu” whose blessings he will seek whenever a contest in which he is participating approaches.

What is wrong in this? You may ask why should any one object to a person avoiding the ladder? If a motorist or a driver going through the ghats flings a coin towards a temple, why should not one regard as innocuous? He may be thinking in his mind that the God in the temple may not necessarily determine the safety of his travel, there is no harm in spending ten – paise or twenty five paise. The motorist will ask the rationalist, “Why do you object to this innocent practice? Is it “rational” to criticize as for this simple thing? Similar questions will be asked by other people who go to Siddhi Vinayak for success in their enterprises. The objections of this rationalist to these apparently innocuous practices are many and are serious. In the first place the practices are not innocent as the persons following

the same, tin them to be. These practices are normally no doubt indulged in by the individuals, but since they are indulged in by a large number of individuals collectively, they pose a grave threat to the rational basis of human personality. When a practice which can be seen to be irrational is repeated on a large scale it poses grave danger to the society as a whole. The greatest hazard lies in the erosion of reasoning capacity of the human beings who compose the society. When society which is composed of individuals bids goodbye to reason which is an essential attribute of man, one cannot help feeling that it will necessarily hinder the progress of the society. It cannot be gainsaid that whatever scientific, social, economical and cultural progress of mankind has taken place is due to the fact that certain individuals in the society questioned the basic assumptions which had made men their prisoners and also relied upon greatest attribute, namely the power to reason and to question, which broke the shackles of superstition and blind faith. If the unscientific attitude is shared by a large number of people, as it is bound to be shared if it is not checked within time and within limits, then the clock of human progress will be put back.

The second danger in the repetitive acceptance of superstitions is that for interpreting the superstitions you will require some guide. Obviously you will go after the sadhus and sanyasins whose only qualification is their ability to exploit gullible people. We see nowadays heads of religious denominations taking active and to some extent unwarranted part in affairs which are not properly their concern. Neither by experience nor by knowledge are they qualified to guide the society in its search for solutions for economic or social problems. Still they project their personalities into politics and economics and because men accept their leadership they exercise influence which is totally unwarranted. The rise of priesthood and its interference in human affairs which is taking place on a large scale in several countries poses one of the greatest threats to the secular ordering of the societies.

One question may be asked, and indeed can be rightly asked, as to why despite the admitted position of scientific progress being made possible by the reasoning capacity of mankind so many people still resort to superstition. The reason is obvious. They are not able to perceive the futility of following the superstitions or of invoking the supernatural aid for natural problems. If an individual suffering from some sickness prays to God for a cure and trusts God alone entirely and does not also simultaneously go to his doctor for medicine, it will not take much time of him to realize the futility of the trust in

supernatural power. But tragically or comically, no one except a totally lunatic person totally surrenders to God. His prayer to God is always coupled with his dependence upon the men of medicine. As a result when he does not get deliverance from his disease he is not able to or he is not honest to attribute it to the medicine that he has taken. There always remains lurking in his mind a feeling that there was a divine helping hand. It is for the rationalist to disabuse the minds of the people of these various ideas which are exposed to the known and well established principles of science and reason.

I would like to dwell on another aspect of irrationalism. When the elections are nearing, several candidates contesting for the same, start praying to God or Peer or some Durgah or some other Baba allegedly having powers of divine dispensation. It is a matter of common knowledge that rivals in the same contest may be going to the same deity or to the same Baba or they may even go to different deities and different Babas. In view of the fact that in election only one person is elected, it necessarily follows that providence has failed to favour one of them. Nobody knows on what ground the providence chose its candidate. Is it the character of the candidate that weighed with providence or did providence know that majority of the people wanted that particular candidate and therefore providence favoured him? In the latter case there was hardly any reason for providence to interfere because ultimately in a democracy the choice of the people must prevail. One can work out the different implications of these practices followed by the candidates in elections or participants in tournaments and it will not be difficult to see the whole absurdity of these exercises. It is precisely this type of exercise that is being indulged in generally by people in other walks of life.

When I proceed to give some examples of the superstitious practices I have no doubt that you all realize why it is necessary to become positively rational in one's approach towards life. I have refrained so far, and I will refrain again, from discussing the question of the existence of God or otherwise. But even those of you are not atheists must realize the futility of irrational practices indulged in by the people. It is elementary that if you are suffering from any sickness, serious or otherwise, you must take medicine. Without medicine sickness can not be cured because it is the scheme of the nature itself. If this is so, then one wonders why it is necessary to pray to God for deliverance from sickness. Yet, thousands of people flock to temples with prayers for curing their diseases. Unfortunately no organization has made any empirical study of the result of these

prayers. But for you and me it is not difficult to see that prayers would not have helped those people. While going to the temple people offer fruits and flowers to the deities. Is it conceivable that the deities whom they worship are likely to be pleased with such offerings? If sophisticated and cultured people make such offerings, how can one blame tribal people when they make sacrifices of human beings? When such things are done by the tribal people, we are aghast and recoil from the horror of the action. Yet we fail to recognize the absurdity of our own action because we are doing the same thing, though on a more sophisticated level. The dacoits of Chambal valley worship their Gods or Goddesses every day and invariably before they launch their heinous depredations; so also the black marketers and adulterators of food. It is tragic that invocation of the blessings of God may be common to all people honest, dishonest and downright scoundrels.

It is now fairly well established by the progress in psychological science that mental disorders have no supernatural origins and are not induced by witches and ghosts. Mental diseases must be attended to by psychiatrists. There are well tried medicines which can control and in most of the cases cure mental diseases. Yet, examples are not wanting even in educated and so-called cultured circles where mental diseases are handled by people who dispense their treatment by uttering some so-called sacred words. A milkman whose milch cattle are giving spoiled milk or that turns sour immediately after heating feeds Brahmins to cure his milch cattle of the disease instead of going to a veterinary doctor. He is no different from those of us who depend upon the intervention of some supernatural agency to handle our natural problems. I can give another example where even the highly educated amongst us are likely to commit mistakes. Towards the determination of the sex of the child, the wife's contribution is nil. It is a question of chance depending upon which of the sex chromosome is carried by the sperm that fertilizes the egg. (See Encyclopedia Britannica Vol. 16. pp.591). Yet you will see at least some examples where a husband takes a second wife on the ground that his first wife has not given him a son.

Examples can be multiplied, but it is not necessary, to show the need for the rational approach to all problems. As I have said earlier, superstitions are unlimited in number and in fact every individual may have a peculiar superstition of his own. Once the basic nature of the universe and of the laws governing the same is recognized, then it is easy to see the futility of invoking any supernatural

intervention. It may be that science has not found a solution to every problem in the universe. But no other system can find a solution where science has not found it. When people say that mysticism and metaphysics or other type of pseudo-spiritualism has answers to problems to which science has not found answers, you should be slow in accepting their claims. We have seen that since time immemorial such spiritual or mystical answers had been given and they have all been exploded by the progress made by science. There is no alternative to rationalism.

The Life and Death of Socrates

The title of the article looks – and indeed it is – strange. Normally, when one writes a biographical note about a person, the emphasis is on the life of that person; the death is incidentally mentioned. The details of the life of Socrates are not easily available in the extant literature, but his unusual death is dealt with in great details. In America, a society of voluntary euthanasia is named Hemlock after the fact that Socrates voluntarily (?) took Hemlock to die. His death is regarded as noble, befitting a philosopher of principles.

Socrates did not leave behind an autography; we have no authoritative biography. Whatever we know about him is from what other people have written of him. He was a philosopher, but what he said has to be gathered from what Plato, his student, has written. His accuracy has often been doubted. Socrates himself bemoaned that Plato was not accurate. It is said that he has set down many things as having been said by Socrates, though Socrates has not said those things. Nevertheless, a clear picture of Socrates emerges from the writings of Plato.

Father of Socrates was a sculptor who had carved some prominent statues in Athens. His mother was a midwife. Socrates himself joked that he himself was a midwife, but in ideas. His father was a sculptor but Socrates was not a sculptor of ideas. He did not write anything; he did not propound any ideas or philosophy. He questioned, but did not answer. Whatever we know that Socrates thought is derived from Plato who has told what Socrates thought or taught. Socrates never preached or discussed but put other's ideas to test. He taught his listeners to think and think logically and clearly.

Often people consulted the oracle whose answer was accepted by them. Oracle was a place at which advice or prophecy was sought from the gods in Greece. The Greeks were intelligent people who left behind an intellectual legacy, but were not free from superstitions. They believed that events in life depended upon the will of demons and gods. Usually a maiden used to sit in the hollow of the earth below a temple and inhaled a gas generated by decomposed matter. Often she consumed narcotics. She fell into deliriums and uttered what the superstitious regarded as divinations or answers to questions. Sometimes what was uttered was not even clear. So there were specialists in the interpretations of these prophesies.

In our case, someone asked the oracle (at Delphi) as to who was the wisest person. "Socrates" was the answer because he knew that he did not know, but other people believed that they had knowledge. It must be remembered that the oracle was often manipulated. J.D. Burg in his "A History of Greece" says that the motive of the oracle concerning the wisdom of Socrates is an unsolved problem.

Burg should not have been so skeptical because Athens was, in those days, generally philosophical. Mass of the people admired the learned men. Scholars were adulated. A philosopher of the time said:

"Athens has distanced the rest of the world in power of thought and speech that her disciples have become the teachers of all other men. She has brought it pass the name of Greek should be thought no longer a better of race but a matter of intelligence; and should be given to the participators in our culture rather than to the shares of our common origin."

No diplomas or degrees were awarded, but learning, knowledge and learned men were recognised. Sophists earned their living. But the age of Sophism was coming to an end. People were getting dissatisfied with sophistry. They longed for wisdom or knowledge. The Sophists were the beneficiaries of this longing of Athenians because they charged fees for their students. Socrates, not a Sophist, was still a good teacher of philosophy. He had students of whom the greatest was Plato who became the most famous.

Prof. J.M. Bury, in his "History of Greece", suggests that Socrates was a utilitarian. Utilitarianism did not raise its head till Bentham in 18th Century. His peculiar method of teaching, especially the young Socrates, did create some enemies. He was regarded as a dangerous free thinker because he thought that he spent his life in diffusing ideas which were of subversive order. Socrates was a democrat but did not believe in democracy. Prince ought to be a philosopher and a philosopher a king. According to his critics, Socrates spoiled the morals of young men. Socrates described himself as a gadfly. Trial of Socrates thus became inevitable. It should, however, be added that he was physically a strong man and had bravely fought in two battles on behalf of Athens – a city which he loved.

The indictment was brought by a religious fanatic, Meletus, supported by the politician Anytus and by the orator Lycon. For some reasons, Meletus was the leading accuser. The indictment read as follows:-

“Socrates is a public offender in that he does not recognise the gods which the State recognises, but introduces new gods of his own.”

Socrates was tried as per law of the land and not by the fiat of a king or despot or a dictator. Here was for the first time in history a Government of laws, not of men. But the system of laws was peculiar. Now in the U.S.A., Judges are elected; in India they are appointed by the Governments but on the recommendations. In Athens of Socrates’ time, Courts were popular Courts. A man was tried by jurors by majority – not by Judges or Magistrates. That was the concept of democratic jurisprudence. There were usually 300 jurors who were called. Important cases, like that of Socrates, may be tried before jurors numbering upto twelve hundred.

It was 399 B.C. and Socrates was nearly 70 years. The trial was before a popular Court (a people’s Court as in former communist countries). The jurors were mostly of the less educated class – common people who could be easily swayed. The charge against Socrates was not that he was an atheist but that he did not believe in gods in which the State believed.

The defence of Socrates had been made available to posterity by his disciple, Plato, in “Apology”. Plato was present at the trial. Hence it can be assumed that “Apology” is reasonably accurate. From “Apology” and other available literature, it seems that Meletus was the main accuser and he insisted that Socrates was an atheist. Socrates points out that he does believe in godhead of the moon and sun. Anaxagoras had said that was stone and the moon was earth. Meletus was reminded of this historical fact. At one place in “Apology” Socrates says: “For I believe that these are gods, and in a sense higher than that in which many of my accusers believe in them. And to you and to God I commit my cause, to be determined by you as best for you and me.”

Socrates compared himself with gadfly given to the State by God. He believed in the oracle of Delphi which told that Socrates was wiser than anyone in Athens. Briefly referring to one person in Athens, he says”... I am better off than he is, for he knows nothing and thinks he knows; I neither know nor think I know. In this latter particular, then, I seem to have slightly the advantage of him.”

Several methods were suggested to Socrates to escape conviction. He could have bargained for approval. But Socrates was defiant. He loved Athens and did not want to leave the city. “Men of

Athens,” said Socrates, “I honour and love you but I shall obey God rather than you, and while I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching philosophy.” In the same paragraph he challenges Athenians ... “Athenians, either acquit me or not; but whatever you do, understand that I shall never alter my ways, not even if I have to die many times”. He was seeking martyrdom. Farther he said, “The difficulty, my friends, is not to avoid death, but to avoid righteousness, for that runs faster than death.” He took leave of his accusers by saying “The hour of departure has arrived, and we go our ways; I to die and you to live. Which is better God only knows.”

The language was throughout defiant, almost arrogant. Does this explain – he was found guilty by a majority of 280 to 220, but he was sentenced to death by a larger majority of 360 to 140.

Cicero said of Socrates, “He called down philosophy from heaven, settled it in cities, and introduced it into houses, made it necessary for inquiries to be made on life and morals, good and evil.”

Not all persons were of praise for Socrates. There was at least one dissenting voice. Lacey Baldwin Smith said:

“As a corpus of evidence the Socratic sources engender little confidence, and the personality which emerges is so infuriatingly improbable the reader begins to suspect that the father of martyrdom was too noble by half and deserved the hemlock twice over; for his insufferable arrogance as well as his caustic humour and irritating logic.”

Socrates was, however, honest. He refused to escape from the prison. His wife came to see him in the cell. He reminded the debts he owed and asked her to settle them.

Socrates was 70 years old at the time of his trial. After his death, the citizens of Athens regretted their action. They realized that a Golden Age has ended. They ultimately put his accusers to death. Meletus was stoned to death. Others were boycotted to such an extent that they were forced to commit suicide.

To conclude, in the words of Will Durant:

“All in all he was fortunate; he lived without working, read without writing; taught without routine; drank without dizziness, and died before serenity almost without pain.”

(“The Life of Greece, p.366)

Mill “On Liberty”

“If all mankind minus one were of one opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person than he, if he had the power in silencing mankind”.

This is the central theme of “On Liberty” by John Stuart Mill, the nineteenth century philosopher of England. The book was published in February 1859 thus 2009 marking its 150th anniversary. It saw six editions in the life time of Mill and has been issued in several editions later; it may have not have formed a subject in college or university curriculum those days. But it has been almost a compulsory reading and study for political philosophers.

Mill never went to school or college but was educated entirely at home by his father, an eminent Utilitarian of his time. The experiment of domestic education has been characteristically described by Mill in his *Autobiography* which was unfortunately published after his death. The sheer precocity of Mill can be gathered from this autobiography. He read Greek by the age of three, had assimilated considerable body of classical literature before he was eight. By the time he was twelve years old he had mastered philosophy, political economy and mathematics. He was not only educated; he also educated his younger siblings. Though he modestly said that what he did could have been done by any boy or girl of average capacity and healthy physical constitution” (p.7 of *Autobiography*), it gave him a quarter of century advantage over most of his contemporaries. By the time he was twenty he was a recognized philosopher of his time.

“On Liberty” was, as Mill has maintained in his ‘Autobiography’ a joint product of his wife and himself. No discussion of “On Liberty” is possible or at any rate will be incomplete without describing Mill’s relationship with Harriet Taylor.

Harriet Taylor was happily married to John Taylor, a prosperous businessman. He had no intellectual pretensions and as a result could not give intellectual companionship to Harriet. Harriet wrote for *Westminster Review* articles of philosophical import,

She confided in a friend that she was worried about some philosophical problems which she wanted to discuss with some one. She was advised to meet Mill who by this time had already an established reputation.

They met in 1830. The introduction developed into companionship which in turn blossomed into friendship. When they first met, Mill was 24 years old, while Harriet was 23 and mother of two children, an year later she gave birth to one more child. But the intimate friendship with Mill continued. She went out with him; she travelled with him alone, some times with her daughter. Taylor acquiesced in all this, though cautioning her about a possible scandal. In those days divorce was not permissible.

Taylor died in 1849. Two years later John Mill and Harriet married—twenty-one years after he had met and several years after he had fallen in love with her. Their marriage lasted only 7 years — though it was a very happy marriage. They interacted intellectually. On Liberty’ was one of the twenty essays to be brought out in a book. That did not materialize. Mill has mentioned that the subject occurred to him when he was climbing the steps of the Capitol at Rome. Edward Gibbon also got the inspiration to write *Decline and Fail of Roman Empire* when he was at “Capitol”.

Harriet approved of the manuscript of “On Liberty” which was readied by Mill. As mentioned earlier, it was a joint product. Mill and Harriet left for France where she was taken ill and she died on 3rd November 1858. “On Liberty” was published in February 1859. The cover page of the book mentions only John Stuart Mill’s name. The book was dedicated to Harriet in superlative terms. Even in his Autobiography which appeared after his death, there are glowing tributes to her which were deemed extravagant by some. That she must have contributed to the thought though not to the writing, of “On Liberty” is a possibility because she herself had written an essay earlier on varieties of conformity - religious, political, moral and social - which are imposed by the society.

Mill argued that liberty must be absolute except where it caused harm to others. On any other ground except *harm to others* no individual or society could presume to interfere with an individual. “The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent

harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant". (Introductory note to 'On Liberty') Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign. This thought has become very familiar to us. But in Mill's time, it was a bold assertion.

A couple of things ought to be remembered. "On Liberty" is a philosophical dissertation, not a topical treatise. The book does not deal with violation of liberty of the individual. It does not give any instances.

Secondly, though Mill was a Utilitarian and to some extent echoes libertarian views, it is not an essay on Utilitarianism. It is of much wider amplitude. Both in Mill's time and later, "On Liberty" has been commented upon analysed, criticized, admired. Because it is philosophical, it is of relevance today. 'That Liberty is likely to survive longer than anything I have written - because of the conjunction of her (Harriet's) mind with mine has rendered it a kind of philosophic text book of a single truth ---'. Thus Mill writes in his Autobiography. Whatever the reason, "On Liberty" has survived longer than anything Mill wrote.

Mill divides his book into five parts

- (1) Introductory,
- (2) Liberty of discussion,
- (3) Individuality,
- (4) Of the limits of Authority of Society
- (5) Applications

One hundred and fifty years after "On Liberty" and more than hundred years after Mill's death in 1873, society and the world has changed a great deal. Mill was a moral *laisse-fairist*. Today liberalism has become different. While the liberals of an early stage wanted the State to interfere in lesser and lesser areas of society, those of a later vintage saw the inevitability of the State legislating on a number of social areas and they did not think that it curtailed individual liberty significantly. Even if it did, it was regarded as worthwhile. Dickens's novels cannot be left here. In "On Liberty" Mill asserts to its own good, the society cannot exercise authority - called coercion - on an individual. Addiction to drugs, hours of work for women and children etc. will have to be tackled by the State. We may however remember that Mill dealt with social coercion and

interference rather than those of the State. In his days the State had not become the leviathan that it is today.

“On Liberty” has been criticized by lawyers and judges. James Fitzjames Stephens - then a judge of the High Court, though critical - later was first attracted by the book. He praised Mill for recalling Englishmen to the principle of Liberty which they had thought “established beyond the reach of controversy” Later in his book *Liberty, Equality and Fraternity* he attacks Mill for confusing individuality with eccentricity. Stephen urges that there is nothing wrong with punishing immorality as such through law or by public opinion even if it involves no breach of assignable duties to others. Professor H.L.A. Hart has criticized Stephen’s approach though he is quite ‘willing to grant that Mill erred in making self-protection the only ground of interference. Mill abhorred the idea of interference even for a person’s own good.

Whatever may be the criticism of “On Liberty” in the light of present conditions, one must concede that Mill has rendered great service to mankind by pointing out the value of liberty. One sentence from “On Liberty” has been reproduced in the beginning of this article. There are similar gems scattered throughout the book which the present generation of students, professors, and politicians will do well to read and remember in daily personal and public life.

Robert Ingersoll - Immortal Infidel

Robert Green Ingersoll was born on 11th August 1833 in Dresden, New York, State of U.S.A. The United States had been free for over 50 years and Ingersoll grew up in an atmosphere of political freedom. But he was born in an orthodox religious family which was in those days respectfully referred to as the “God-fearing” and ‘pious’ family. The orthodox, religious atmosphere in which he lived under the tutelage of a conservative father probably stirred his intellectual curiosity which led him to make a deep study of the scriptures. It has been said that best cure for the blind faith in a religion is a study of the scriptures in depth which would inevitably lead you to the realization of the absurdities, contradictions and superfluities of the religions. Hindus in India know *Ramayana* from ‘*Kritankars*’ and worship Rama as a perfect person (Maryada Purush). Ambedkar read (not heard) *Ramayana* and found several riddles in it which were wholly inconsistent with the divine character of Rama. And our self-appointed moral and religious police in the Shiv-Sena called for a bar on Ambedkar’s book.

Ingersoll had very little formal education and the great scholarship and knowledge you find in the 12 Volumes collection of his writings (The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll - 1902: Ed. Clinton P Farrell) was the fruit of a free, fearless search and study done on his own. His speeches and writings disclose a mind that is liberated - a mind that is also constantly seeking the expanding horizons of truth.

Though, as mentioned above, he had little formal education, Ingersoll was, as an exception, admitted to the Illinois Bar in 1854 when he was barely 21 years old. His innate intelligence, mastery of the English language and eloquence brought him quick and continued success at the bar. He built up a lucrative practice at Peoria, Ill., New York City, and Washington D.C.

The love of liberty in him made him naturally a combatant on the side of the Unionists in the Civil War 1861-65; in the army he rose to the rank of Colonel. After the war he became a staunch Republican and championed the causes of the blacks. His oratory was always pressed into service by the Republican Party in its election campaigns, especially Presidential Campaigns. With so much intellectual and moral equipment, those who do not have a proper understanding of the minds of the Americans have wondered

why Ingersoll did not stay in politics and why he did not choose the path which would have led him to the White House.

Obvious Reasons

The reasons were obvious then and are obvious now. The Republicans used him for his brilliance and eloquence. But they did not nominate him as a Presidential candidate for the reason that he was an agnostic - a fact that would have been unacceptable to the voters of the 19th Century and would be unacceptable even to the voters of the 20th and 21st Centuries in U.S.A. It is true that in the infancy of the Republic, a religious non-conformist like Thomas Jefferson (a Unitarian) could obtain a nomination without difficulty. But Jefferson was one of the founding fathers of the American Constitution. He was the most learned man that ever occupied and probably that would ever occupy the American Presidency. President John Kennedy told a gathering of Nobel Laureates that had come for a dinner at White House that it was the largest ever assembly of learning in the White House except when Thomas Jefferson dined alone.

Adlai Stevenson could not, for his lack of religious conviction, get elected as a President in his two attempts and Eisenhower, not a member of any Church or as a soldier, had to quickly embrace an organised Church to procure nomination from his party. If this is to in the 20th Century, one cannot, in retrospect, blame the Republican Party of the 19th Century for not nominating Robert Ingersoll as its candidate for Presidency.

The Choice

Ingersoll himself was aware of his handicap and never advanced his claim. He knew that in order to successfully run for the Presidency he would have to renounce his religious agnosticism and, as an intellectually honest person, he could not do it. The choice between the political plum and the integrity of mind was obvious.

American writers - scholars or otherwise - who have written millions of words on the presidential candidates, elections and the Presidents have not, to the knowledge of this writer, made any serious study of the crippling effect the lack of religious conformism has on the quality of American political standards. America boasts of religious freedom. Doesn't religious freedom also mean freedom not to have a religion?

The closure of political offices to Ingersoll was, in retrospect, a blessing in disguise. He was free to write and to speak. He was nationally known as a great orator. Though Americans did not give him their votes, they lent him their ears. In fact, they paid to hear him. Ingersoll received as much as \$ 3,500 for a single evening's performance. And what a performance it used to be! With brilliant wit and oratory he exposed the orthodox superstitions of the times. It has been estimated that if 100,000 people attended Ingersoll's speeches during the last ten years of his career by paying per head one dollar, Ingersoll earned \$ 100,000 during that period - in the 19th Century.

Some accounts of Ingersoll's speeches are available from contemporary papers. In the Republican Convention held in Cincinnati, Ohio, in June 1876, Robert Ingersoll had made an impassioned appeal for the nomination of James G. Blaine as the Party's candidate for President. His speech did not carry the day and the Convention nominated Rutherford B. Hayes. Despite this, what could be regarded as a rebuff, Ingersoll tirelessly campaigned for the official candidate. At an election meeting held on 20th October, 1876, in a gigantic hall in New York N.Y., 50,000 people came to hear the great orator - but did they all hear when there was no public address system, no microphones, and no loud-speakers? The booming voice emanating from the massive personality probably ensured that his words were carried over to the large audience. The estimate of the audience was made by the Chicago Tribune which said in its front page story that there was an immense crowd of at least fifty thousand in number". On 8th October 1896 Robert Ingersoll appeared again in Chicago where, according to Chicago Tribune for the next day, Robert G. Ingersoll preached a sermon last night to almost twenty thousand people".

Charles Bradlaugh

Robert Ingersoll was the contemporary of Charles Bradlaugh of England. Ingersoll's posthumous fame has not been comparable to that of Charles Bradlaugh. This is somewhat surprising because during their lifetimes, both were equally well-known and equally hated or admired, depending upon the viewers' outlook. Ingersoll was heard by more people than Bradlaugh. Bradlaugh's struggles were more fierce and more in number. However, the literary output of Ingersoll was much larger than that of Bradlaugh. These comparisons are in physical terms. It cannot, however, be said that

contribution to the cause of free thought of one was lesser than that of the other.

Charles Bradlaugh was an atheist - he dwelt at length on the humanity's gains from unbelief. Ingersoll regarded himself as an agnostic. In his "Why I am Agnostic" (1896), he preaches practically what would be regarded as atheism. However, his utterances clearly marked him as one who maintained that "God is unknown and unknowable", rather than one who declares absolutely 'there is no God'. The believers did not see any distinction between the two. According to them, the one who does not accept that God exists is an atheist and an agnostic is no better than him.

God Exists?

The large mass of knowledge of the universe that has become available during the 20th Century has made the position of a believer's belief in a God untenable - so also the position of agnostics. In my opinion, the distinction between an atheist and an agnostic is without a difference. Who believes in the existence of God is by definition a theist - one who says God exists. To the question "Do you believe in the existence of God?", the atheist answers in the negative - No. Does the agnostic answer in the positive? Even if he says he does not know, it means he does not believe in the existence of God. A rationalist - an atheist is a rationalist - cannot say that God does not exist. He can legitimately say that there is nothing to show that God exists - howsoever one defines God.

When one examines the writings of Ingersoll on agnosticism, one can clearly see that he equates it with atheism and he equates both with secularism.

See this: "The Agnostic ... occupies himself with this world, with things that can be ascertained and understood. He turns his attention to the sciences, to the solutions of questions that touch the well being of man". What is this but secularism?

Proceeding further, Ingersoll says: "The Agnostic believes in developing the brain, in cultivating the affections, the tastes, the conscience, the judgement, to the end that the man be happy in this world". This is secularism at its clearest.

Reacting to the then legal position that declared atheists could not give testimony in legal proceedings (a position also in Eng and then, which brought financial ruin to Bradlaugh), Ingersoll said:

“In most of the States of the Union, I could not give testimony. Christianity has such a contemptible opinion of human nature that it does not believe that a man tells the truth unless frightened by a belief in God.”

Is this not atheism?

(These quotations have been taken from “The Best of Robert Ingersoll”, Ed. Roger E. Greeley: Published by Prometheus Books).

In “The Gods”, Robert Ingersoll wrote an analytical essay in which he showed his deep knowledge of the scriptures - a knowledge that helped him to expose the absurdities and contradictions in the scriptures. With intense anguish he recalls the commands of the Old Testament God to his believers to conquer cities and smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword. Worse still, “of the cities of these people which the Lord thy God does give thee for an inheritance, thou shall save alive nothing that breatheth.” (From “The Gods”).

A Humanist

Ingersoll was a rationalist, in fact an atheist and a secularist. He was also a humanist. His compassion for the suffering humanity, his concern for the convicts in prison (he wrote on the crime against the criminals), and his abhorrence of capital punishment anticipated many of the components of human rights movement of the 20th Century.

“I regard criminals as unfortunates. Most people regard those who violate the law with hatred. Society has no right to take revenge; no right to torture a convict; no right to do wrong because some individual has done wrong.”

He repeatedly spoke and wrote against all corporal punishments in prisons and said that he was against everything that degraded a criminal. Implicit in this is the recognition that a man sentenced to imprisonment does not cease to be a human being. This is what our Supreme Court said in Sunil Batro’s case in the year 1980.

“Capital punishment”, he said “does not prevent murder, but sets an example - by the State - that is followed by its citizens. The State murders its enemies and the citizen murders his’.

Death Penalty

He was aware that the Constitutions of U.S.A. and of the States did not prohibit the death penalty and, therefore, he pleaded that if death penalty is to be inflicted, it should be done in a humane way. The criminal, he said, should be removed with the same care and with the same mercy with which a surgical operation is performed. “Why inflict pain? Who wants it inflicted? What good can it, by any possibility, do?”

It is not known whether, while expressing these thoughts, Ingersoll was aware of the prohibition contained in the US Constitution against “cruel and unusual punishment”. Of this provision, even the Supreme Court became aware only somewhat late - in the 20th Century while debating the Constitutional validity of the death penalty.

An incident relating to Theodore Roosevelt who was at the relevant time the Governor of a State needs to be recalled. A petition had been presented to him to commute the sentence of one Mrs. Place (sentenced to death) and Roosevelt refused. Ingersoll was indignant enough to say that this refusal “is a disgrace to the State. What a spectacle of a man killing a woman - taking a poor, pallid and frightened woman, strapping her to a chair and then arranging the apparatus so she can be shocked to death”.

This was the same Theodore Roosevelt who called Thomas Paine “filthy little atheist”. - it was Thomas Paine who ignited the American Colonies’ desire for independence which in turn made it possible for Roosevelt to enjoy freedom of speech which he could abuse. It was an ungrateful nation which did not accept the place of Thomas Paine in American history till 1945. It was in that year that Paine entered the Hall of Fame of Great Americans, 136 years after his death. When will Ingersoll enter this Hall?

Robert Ingersoll wrote an excellent essay on “Thomas Paine” which began with the words:

‘With His Name Left Out, the History of Liberty cannot be written’

How true! He inspired the American Colonies for independence, he accelerated the French Revolution, he made the Christians uncomfortable with ‘The Age of Reason’ and disconcerted Edmund Burke with ‘The Rights of Man’.

Moral Authority

Ingersoll was an advocate of human rights and a defender of unpopular causes - including the rights of the poor, the blacks, the women, and the dispossessed. Ingersoll was not a trained philosopher or a scholar. But he was the greatest communicator and thus educated a whole generation of Americans. Paul Kurtz has mentioned that many nineteenth century intellectual leaders and social activists looked to him for moral authority. Thomas Alva Edison, Mark Twain and Andrew Carnegie were among them. So were Margaret Sanger and Walt Whitman. (See preface to ‘On the Gods and Other Essays’, Prometheus Books). Margaret Sanger was jailed many times for merely seeking to extend the right to birth control information to all who sought it.

Walt Whitman and Robert Ingersoll were not only admirers of each other; they were sincere friends. When Whitman immortalized by ‘Leaves of Grass’ died, Ingersoll was far away and arrived at the funeral traveling day and night to pay the following tribute to him: “Long after we are dead the brave words he has spoken will sound like trumpets to the dying.”

Walt Whitman’s ‘Leaves of Grass’ has instructed generations of Americans to love nature and humanity. Whitman was a poet of life, a poet of love, a poet of the nature. He was above all a poet of democracy. The name of Walt Whitman may sound, at this moment, familiar to Indian readers as the one whose book ‘Leaves of Grass’ was given as a present by President Clinton to Monica Lewnskey.

Ingersoll was of course not afraid of death. He knew, as the Bheigwadgita says, the death must come to one who is born (Jatasya hi dhruvo mrityu). But he did not and could not rationally accept that one who is dead will be born again. (Mritasyahi dhruvo janmah). When he was once asked what was worse than death, he quickly replied “Oh, a great many things; to be dishonored; to be worthless; to feel you are a failure; to be insane; to be constantly afraid of the future”. He understood the human desire, aspiration for life beyond the grave, the life eternal. But he said “Life does not become eternal simply because we wish it to be”.

Robert Ingersoll died on 21st July 1899 in Dobbs Ferry, New York. He had not converted America or even a large part of it to free thought. But he left a legacy which is the prized possession of later generations. On the title page of Volume 8 of his writings, it is written:

“This is my creed;
Happiness is the only good;
Reason the only torch;
Justice the only worship,
humanity the only religion,
and love the only priest.”

The prestigious New York Times writing a long editorial on him on 22nd July 1899 summed up as follows:-

“The lack of respect in which he exalted was his bane, that by reason of it and of his free exhibition of it he never took the place in the social, the professional, or the public life of his country to which, by his talents, he otherwise would have been eminently entitled.” George Holyoake, the English secularist and a contemporary said:

“It is as though a light had gone out of the world or a guiding star had fallen from the firmament to learn of Colonel Ingersoll’s death.”

Emile Zola

Despite a vast number of books written by him, Emile Zola is not and was not known by many people outside France as his works, naturally, were in French. He became famous because of his novel “Nana”, a study of prostitution. But he achieved international fame by his articles on the trial of Capt. Alfred Dreyfus. He waged an epic battle for truth and justice. He was fighting against the French military and well entrenched prejudice against the Jews.

Emile Zola was born at Aix in 1840. His father was a person of mixed race – partly Italian and partly Greek; his mother was, however, French. Zola grew up as a Frenchman and was a French citizen. He grew up in great poverty and hardship. Because of the innate intelligence and of the stuff as a great writer he was made of, he surmounted all the difficulties.

He was a patient and industrious observer and noted the nuances of life around him. He wrote a number of novels about French life dealing with its several aspects. His novels did not achieve greatness for a long time. Some novels, nevertheless, were famous and brought him fame and wealth.

A man of great discipline, he wrote everyday some pages. By the time Dreyfus affair occupied him, he had become a great writer of international fame. Though many critics did not like Zola’s realism, Zola stuck to his art of holding a mirror to nature. His literary skill was generally admitted, and earned him immense public esteem. But for the passion of storm raised by the Dreyfus affair, he would have probably won a seat in the Assembly.

The French Revolution of 1789 proclaimed “liberty, equality and fraternity”. The Jews, however, did not get liberty. It was not as if the Jews were handicapped in France alone. For centuries, the Jews were not citizens all over Europe. Two years after the Revolution, however, the disabilities of the Jews were removed. They could even become members of the Assembly.

Law might have helped the Jews but popular prejudice prevailed against them. It was prevalent till Hitler’s time. Now that they were full-fledged citizens, they could even join the Army. Capt. Alfred Dreyfus was, at the relevant time, an officer of the French General Staff, but he was a Jew. He was convicted of passing secret military information to Germans and was sentenced to confinement on the

notorious Devil's Island. His attempts to prove his innocence failed. The real culprit, as disclosed subsequently, was one Major Esterhazy but the fact that Capt. Dreyfus was a Jew coloured the proceedings and minds of the authorities. In fact, facts later disclosed that anti-Semitism was the factor that condemned Dreyfus.

The case caused a great stir in France. Fortunately, many thoughtful people were disturbed about the verdict. Initially Zola himself had misgivings, but he proceeded to examine all the aspects of the case and after doing so he was convinced of the innocence of Capt. Dreyfus. The powerful clique of French Army was difficult to challenge. So Zola went to publish an article, now famous as "J' accuse" (I accuse). It was a long indictment, every paragraph, of which began with "J" accuse. It was a strong denunciation of those involved in the scandalous trial and conviction. Leading politicians and high military officers came under the fiery accusation of Zola. They were naturally stung by Zola's fury.

It required great courage on the part of Zola to take on the establishment as he did. But Zola's object in mounting the attack on the military was not libelous; it was done with a view to compel a new judicial inquiry in the whole affair. Though he knew the power of the ruling class and of the military to influence the course of justice, he went ahead with the publicity, with the fond hope of getting the wrong righted. The result was expected. The nation which admired the great literary figure was in ferment. The army fell and in fact, was humiliated. The army could not take the humiliation and it decided to prosecute Zola himself. At the trial a fresh flood of light was thrown. But Zola was convicted of libeling various staff officers. Zola carried the matter in appeal and succeeded. The proceedings were quashed and a new trial ordered. A new trial took place and before the final order was passed, Zola fled to England.

"Truth was on March" – wrote Zola. Changes had taken place in the establishment, especially in the military. One of the staff members involved in the conspiracy committed suicide. Major Esterhazy, the real culprit and traitor, ran away. That was the time when the French Army was known for its strength, discipline and chivalry. It was naturally a great scandal that two officers should be a part of a conspiracy against one of the army's own officers.

A revision of the trial took place, but Capt. Dreyfus, thought innocent, suffered the stigma of having been to Devil's Island – a sort of “Kala Pani”. Zola, however, returned from his voluntary exile in England. Capt. Dreyfus, though only 35 years of age, looked an aged man having white hair. Capt. Dreyfus was given pardon and was obliged to continue to clear his name.

Zola, some thought, should have been prudent and should not have fame and popularity by taking up the cause of Capt. Dreyfus. But Zola who had been preaching justice and truth in his literal works found it necessary to do this work for a cause.

Emile Zola died in 1902 but France was little slow in paying adequate tribute to this great son of the country. Zola did not survive to see the complete vindication of Dreyfus's cause. But at least as a result of his efforts Dreyfus was snatched from Devil's Island and returned to his family. This must have been great comfort to Zola.

The fierce controversy raised by Dreyfus affair took some time to subside. Six years after Zola's death, his body was conveyed to Pantheon where the great and famous of the country rest in peace. On this occasion in the presence of the gathering, which included Capt. (now Major) Dreyfus, Anatole France delivered an oration which included the following words:

“There is no place anywhere save in justice, no repose save in truth. He was a moment of the conscience of mankind”.

Annie Besant

Not exactly like the proverbial cat, but Annie Besant had nine lives. Her biographer, Arther Nethercot, has written two books on her life (or rather lives). They are “The First Five Lives of Annie Besant” and “The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant”.

The first five lives were ‘The Christian Mother’, ‘The Atheist Mother’, ‘The Martyr of Science’, ‘The Socialist Labour Agitator’, and ‘The Chela of the Mahatmas’.

The next four were “Indian Educator, Propagandist and Mystic”, “President of The Indian National Congress”, “Deserted Leader” and “Life in Death”.

These diverse, and almost bizarre, lives are in one sense interwoven. Annie Wood (that was her maiden name) was curious, sensitive and eager to learn. Joseph Symes, a contemporary free thinker, commented on her:

“Mrs. Besant is clever, earnest (too much in some respects), emotional, but totally lacking in independence. We mean independence of thought.”

Though the nine lives are interwoven by the common thread of Annie’s continuous endeavour to take part in social and political activities, we can easily separate the first five which concern mainly with her career as a free-thinker. The last four begin with her conversion to Theosophy and her participation in the Indian political life. We need not, for the present, dwell on the latter part of her career.

Annie was born on 1st October 1847. Her mother, Emily Morris, was Irish and it is suggested that the fierce, volatile Irish blood was inherited by Annie from her mother. Even her father, William Burton Wood, was half-Irish in as much as his mother was Irish. Popularly, this connection of Irish blood has been used by writers about Annie to explain her interest in the then Irish problems and her admiration for Irish personalities such as George Bernard Shaw.

But from her father, a poor relation of an otherwise well-to-do English family, she inherited love for scholarship and capacity for intensive study. Her father, William, died in 1852 when Annie was just five years old. Yet in her *Autobiography* (1893), she speaks of him admiringly as follows:

“Deeply read in philosophy, he had outgrown the orthodox beliefs of his day, and his wife, who loved him too much to criticise, was wont to reconcile her piety and his scepticism by holding that ‘women ought to be religious’, while men had a right to read everything and think as they would, provided that they were upright and honourable in their lives”.

Annie was the middle of three children of the Woods. Henry was slightly older than Annie who had another brother, three years younger. Henry later became a lawyer and had some role to play in support of his sister in her legal battles with her estranged husband.

Awakening

The mother, with her limited resources, brought up the children as well as she could. Annie was given some informal education of which she made good use. At home, she studied the early Christian Church fathers and some contemporary philosophers. This led to a religious awakening in her. But her following of the Catholic practices such as fasting, using the sign of the Cross and going to weekly communion were not appreciated by the members of the Anglican Church who included, naturally, her family members. Intellectually Annie thought that the Church of England was a Catholic Church, though non-Roman.

It was at this time, when she was enveloped in religion, she came in contact with or brought into contact with Frank Besant, a clergyman, seven years older than Annie. Annie’s mother was willing, though not necessarily overanxious, that Annie should marry a man of religion. Appropriate encouragement was given to both the young persons. However, when Frank proposed to Annie, she was not ready for responding, though she did not reject the proposal. So on 21st December 1867, at the age of 20 (not an early age for a Victorian girl), she married Frank Besant.

From all external appearances, the marriage ought to have been happy and successful. It was not. ‘Temperamental incompatibility’ may well sum up the whole situation. Frank was not to be wholly

blamed, though he showed insensitiveness to Annie's reluctance to have any more children after two. She explained in her autobiography that her husband and she were ill-matched pair from the very outset. He had his high ideas of husband's authority and wife's submission. He was easily angered and was appeased with great difficulty.

She was on the other hand, accustomed to freedom and respect She had not been trained to be a good wife. Her intellectual make-up was probably repulsive to the clergyman. She confesses that “.. I must have been inexpressibly tiring of Rev. Frank Besant”.

They had two children -Arthur Digby (born Jan.1869) and Mabel (born Aug.187D). After the marriage had “irretrievably broken down” (in modern juristic diction), there were legal proceedings for the custody of the children. It is not necessary to follow any further the course of those proceedings or the relationship between the estranged couple, except to note one stage in those proceedings where the atheism of Anne was powerfully held against her.

Jews in England

The question of custody of her daughter, Mabel, came up before Sir George Jessel. Her husband had contended that Annie, lacking religious views, was unfit to be the daughter's guardian. The case was unique in one sense - Sir George was the first Jew judge of England. This was a sort of landmark, because even in England, the land of liberty and tolerance, Jews were not treated kindly. (See Lord Denning's “Landmarks in the Law” Part Eleven). It was alleged that Annie was under the influence of Bradlaugh, the ‘bellowing blasphemer’.

When Annie appeared to conduct here defence in person, Sir George said: “Appear in person? Never heard of such a thing.” Sir George warned her that she would not be allowed to go into irrelevant matters as persons who argue their case usually do. More than hundred years later, many judges would endorse that remark about parties appearing in person. Ultimately, while giving a decision against Annie, the Judge denounced her infidel opinion. She not only ignored religion, not merely to believe in no religion, but to publish that belief. Annie had written to the authorities of Mabel's school to exempt Mabel from religious instruction. On this, the Judge said:

“Not only does Mrs. Besant entertain those opinions which are reprobated by the great mass of mankind ... but she carries these speculative opinions into practice as regards the education of the child”.

Court of Appeal

These and other remarks of Sir George gave judicial sanction to the view that Annie was an outcast from society. Annie was burning with anger, and in that anger, condemned Sir George as an evil person. The old brutal Jewish spirit regarding women as the mere slaves of men breaks out in the coarse language that disgraces him rather than the woman at whom it is aimed”, she wrote in *National Reformer*. Annie may be right about that judge, but she was not fair to him as a Jew. Christians treated their wives hardly better. She learned her lesson when the Court of Appeal c nsisting of three Christian Judges damned her for her infidel opinions. The Court of Appeal said that Annie’s conduct in propagating those opinions would be regarded with disgust by English men and women. How could they allow such a woman to bring up her daughter? The court said:

“The Court cannot allow (the girl) to be brought up in opposition to the view of mankind generally as to what is moral, what is decent, what is womanly, or proper, merely because her mother differs from these views .. The child might even grow up to write such things herself”

In Revolt

To return to her intellectual career, Annie continued to read books and hear lectures of freethinkers of the day. In particular, she was impressed by the eloquent sermons of Charles Voysey, a Vicar. But he was a clergyman in revolt who questioned some of the fundamentals of the Anglican Church. He disagreed with the guidelines issued by the Church, and by publishing “*The Sling and the Stone*”, a collection of his essays, made known his opposition to Thirty Nine Articles of Doctrine to which every priest of the Anglican Church was obliged to subscribe. He was deprived of his livelihood. He appealed to the higher authorities. Offers of a compromise, with assurances of regular income and some land, were unceremoniously rejected by Voysey who thundered: “I shall be an explosive shell among the Articles and Creeds if I have to burst and

die in the attempt". But Charles Voysey was not an atheist. In fact, he later set up Theistic Church.

Under the influence of Voysey, Annie developed the sceptical habit. She resolved, as she tells her in her memoirs, "to take Christianity as it had been taught in the Churches, and carefully and thoroughly examine its dogmas one by one so that I should never again say "I believe" where I had not proved ... It was the uprising of an outraged conscience that made me a rebel against the Churches and finally an unbeliever in God".

In the meantime, she had become separated from her husband. She soon faced a dilemma which confronts the non-believers in a religious family. Her mother, Emily Wood, was on her deathbed and wanted to receive the sacrament. But she insisted that she would receive it only if her daughter Annie received it with her. "I would rather be lost with her than saved without her", said the dying but adamant mother. But clergyman after clergyman refused Annie, the infidel, the sacrament - as Charles Bradlaugh the atheist, was later to be refused permission to take oath before taking his seat in the House of Commons.

Honest Search

Annie decided to approach Dean Arthur Stanley of Westminster who, she thought, would be sympathetic. Stanley accepted her unbelief as her honest attitude of mind and convinced Annie's mother that the honest search for truth would never be displeasing in God's eyes. Thus he administered sacrament to both the mother and the daughter - while fully recognising the latter's disbelief in it. Stanley was known, even among his colleagues, as an ultra-liberal. They did not always relish his views and actions. Even then, his administering sacrament to an atheist woman would have shocked his contemporaries - as indeed it did shock when the episode was disclosed by Annie three years after Stanley's death. There is reason to believe that Stanley wanted it remain private because there was no trace of this incident among his letters and papers.

It was at this time that she came in contact with the Scotts couple - an alliance which gave Annie great mental relief and intellectual help. Thomas Scott, a man of considerable means, had wandered over Europe and the American continent - and after settling down in England, had started publishing pamphlets on diverse unorthodox subjects. Some of these were written by scholars of the time

including Francis Newman, a rationalist and brother of Cardinal Newman. Thomas Scott also helped financially Charles Voysey in the latter's fight against the Church. It was but natural that Annie enjoyed Scott's company where she found "the joy of freedom, the joy of speaking out frankly and honestly each thought". She gratefully acknowledged Scott's help in the shaping of her personality.

"Mr. Scott's valuable library was at my service; his keen brain challenged my opinions, probed my assertions, and suggested phases of thought hitherto untouched. I studied harder than ever, and the study now was unchecked by any fear of possible consequences".

The restless stirrings had begun in Annie's brain. She made herself bold to ask Scott whether she could write a tract on the nature and the existence of God. The encouragement was clear and swift. "Ah, little lady, you are facing that problem at last? I thought it must come. Write away".

Turning Point

Before she did it, an event occurred that changed her life. That event was meeting Charles Bradlaugh. Annie was persuaded by Mrs. Conway to attend a lecture by Bradlaugh. Annie bought an issue of *National Reformer*, edited by Bradlaugh and published weekly by the National Secular Society, and read it. In a letter to its editor, Annie asked whether "it was necessary for a person to profess atheism before being admitted to the (National Secular) Society. Though replying that it was not necessary to do so, Bradlaugh added: "Candidly, we can see no logical resting- place between the entire acceptance of authority, as in the Roman Catholic Church, and the most extreme Rationalism". This was, incidentally, an appropriate reply to agnosticism which was becoming fashionable in those days.

Annie attended Bradlaugh's lecture for the first time on 2nd August 1874 in the Hall of Science and was completely swept off her feet by Bradlaugh's oratory, supported by his depth of knowledge and mastery of facts. There was eloquence, fire, sarcasm, pathos, passion — all that constituted the power in spoken words. After the address was over, Bradlaugh came down into the audience to hand over certificate of membership of the society to the new members. He

picked her out at once and smiling at her asked: "Mrs. Besant?" It was instant recognition.

Legends

The last part is probably by way of a legend built up to show that two "kindered souls" were united at once. Bradlaugh might have recognised her by her unusual presence in the crowd - especially because he had some correspondence with her. A similar story is told of her meeting with Madame Blavatsky in 1887. When Annie went to see Blavatsky, "a figure in a large chair before a table, a voice, vibrant, compelling, "My dear Mrs. Besant, I have so long wished to see you" ...met her. A still similar story is told about Ramkrishna Paramhans telling Narendranath (later to become Vivekanand), when the latter went to see him: "I have been waiting for you". Lo and behold, the conversion took place. Legends must be built up; they do help in investing heroes (or heroines) with charisma.

Thereafter, she constantly worked with Bradlaugh and was in her own right a persuasive speaker and writer. Space does not permit a detailed account of the course her life took till she became a convert to Theosophy after her meeting with Madame Blavatsky. However, a brief account of the famous trial in which Bradlaugh and Besant were prosecuted for publishing an 'obscene' book viz. "Fruits of Philosophy" written by one Charles Knowlton of America needs to be given. The book was intended to educate married couples on how to limit their families. Charles Watts, famous freethinker and close associate of Bradlaugh, was the original publisher and had been successfully prosecuted and convicted earlier on a plea of guilty.

Annie Besant was convinced that this was a challenge of free thought movement and insisted that the book must be republished in order to test the correctness of the earlier conviction. This was much against the better judgement of Bradlaugh who, as a lawyer, was doubtful whether the book was defensible in the light of law as it then stood. He yielded to Annie's insistence and together they republished the book. While doing so, they explained:

"The pamphlet has been withdrawn from circulation in consequence of the prosecution instituted against Mr. Charles Watts, but the question of its legality or illegality has not been tried; a plea of 'Guilty' was put in by the publisher, and the book, therefore, was not examined nor was any judgement passed upon it, no jury

registered a verdict and the judge stated that he had not read the book”.

Obscenity

On an application made by Bradlaugh, the case came to be tried by the Queen’s Bench with a jury. Bradlaugh and Besant got a sympathetic judge in Sir Alexander Cockburn, the Chief Justice, who decided to try the case himself. There were some misapprehensions because Sir Alexander had laid down the test of obscenity in 1868 - in the following words: “I think the test of obscenity is this. Whether the tendency of the matter charged as obscenity is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences, and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall”.

This legal definition was to hamstring the courts till the Obscene Publications Act, 1959. The Judge was more than fair in the trial and at one stage observed that a more misconceived prosecution had never been brought in an English court. Both Bradlaugh and Besant conducted their own defences. Paying compliments to Annie, the Chief Justice said she conducted her defence with great ability and tact, earning the respect and sympathy of the court. Her presentation of the case challenged one of the most formidable assumptions upholding Victorian society - that knowledge was too dangerous a thing for women to possess. The Judge’s summing up to the jury was, if any thing, favourable to the defence. Despite this, the jury returned an ambiguous verdict as follows:

“We are unanimously of the opinion that the book in question as calculated to deprave public morals but at the same time, we entirely exonerate the defendants from any corrupt motive in publishing it”.

After some arguments and further questioning of the jury, the verdict was taken to be one of guilty and the proceedings were adjourned by a week.

Defect In Charge

As it often happens in the cases of banned books, the sale of *Fruits of Philosophy* increased ten-fold in one week. Found guilty, both Bradlaugh and Besant were each sentenced to six months’ imprisonment and a fine of £200 each. The Court of Appeal quashed the conviction on the ground that the words relied upon by the prosecution ought to have been expressly set out in the charge. (An

excellent study of the trial is to be found in “The Trial of Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh” by Roger Manvell).

In 1889, Annie was asked to review Blavatsky’s book “Secret Doctrine” for a contemporary journal and on reading it, she was attracted to Theosophy, and later meeting Madame Blavatsky, she embraced the Secret Doctrine Then follow her remaining four lives spent mostly in India They should form a subject for separate study. Bradlaugh did not harbor any bitterness despite her desertion of the cause of atheism and in fact praised the splendid work she did for the cause while she was engaged in it. In her farewell address at the Hall of Science, before leaving for India in 1893, she explained her change of mind There are problems in the Universe which Materialism not only does not solve but which it declares are insoluble”

She, therefore, set out on what she thought was a search for the solutions of those problems.

Charles Bradlaugh

The year 1986 marks the centenary of Charles Bradlaugh being allowed to take seat in the House of Commons having been returned fifth time after being excluded on four previous occasions though duly elected by the law of the land. The reasons for his exclusion on the previous occasions have not been spelt out in any official resolution or record. The House of Commons in exercise of what was later recognized as its absolute sovereignty in the management of its internal affairs passed resolution after resolution prohibiting Bradlaugh from being sworn in as its member. His elections were not impeached on any ground. Indeed, it was accepted that he was elected in accordance with the law. The question which the House raised and answered against Bradlaugh was whether despite being elected he should be allowed to take oath as required by the Parliamentary Oaths Act 1866. That Act itself did not spell out that any person was not competent to take the oath. It only required that a person elected to the Parliament should take the oath in a particular form before he takes his seat in the Parliament.

It is impossible to understand the controversy that raged in the in England for nearly six years from 1880 to 1886, without knowing the character of the central figure of that controversy and without knowing the general atmosphere of England at that time. Charles Bradlaugh was born on 26th of September 1833 in what can be called a lower middle class family. His father Charles Bradlaugh, Senior, was a solicitor's clerk. Charles Bradlaugh was the eldest child of a family of seven. Like all members of middle class families, Charles Bradlaugh was also devout in his childhood and had probably attended the prayers both at the family and at the church. He was undoubtedly an extraordinarily brilliant child with an intense curiosity to know about not only religion but also the contemporary events. At the age of 12, he was engaged as an errand boy in the office of the solicitor where his father was working. Two years later, he joined a firm of coal merchants, Bradlaugh's intelligent mind and his religious belief and practice attracted the attention of the Rev. J.G. Packer of St. Peter, Hackney. St. Peter was the church which was attended by the Bradlaugh family. Rev. Packer selected Charles Bradlaugh as a teacher in his Sunday School.

During the course of his work at the Sunday School, Bradlaugh naturally studied, among other things, the Thirty - nine Articles of the Church of England and the Gospels. At this time Bradlaugh was

a believer and sometimes he engaged himself in arguments with members of that class of people known as free thinkers. During one of such discussions with a free thinker in 1849, Bradlaugh was visited with doubts about the truth of the Thirty nine Articles. In all good faith he approached Rev. Packer to dispel those doubts and suggesting to the latter that a book on the subject written by a free thinker ought to be read. The reaction of the Reverend was quick and sharp. Bradlaugh was asked to change his opinion or lose his situation. Bradlaugh lost his situation.

It has some time been suggested that Rev. Packer, the man of the church, was responsible for the conversion of Charles Bradlaugh into an atheist. This suggestion has been strongly resented by Chapman Cohen who later became the President of the National Secular Society. "The attribution of Bradlaugh's ultimate atheism", says Cohen, "to his treatment by Rev. J.G. Packer - the clergyman under whom he sat as a boy - is quite in line with the popular explanation of the drift of men and women away from churches as a consequence of their being so many 'bad' Christians. The Christian who is bad theologically, morally, or socially, is so common and so longstanding a phenomenon that if there had been any truth whatsoever in the explanation, Christianity would long since have ceased to exist". Cohen regards that Bradlaugh had already taken the first step to declare heresy by asking questions concerning the prayer book and the Bible even before Rev. Packer held out his ultimatum. This assessment is not wholly accurate because even after his expulsion from the Sunday School, there is nothing to indicate that Bradlaugh renounced his belief in God immediately.

However, the questioning attitude displayed by Bradlaugh was bound to lead him to the position of a free thinker sooner than later. It was not by an emotional reaction to the order of expulsion that Bradlaugh became an atheist. It was only by continuous questioning the correctness and validity of the religious beliefs in general and of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England in particular that Bradlaugh traveled towards the position of an atheist. But before he did that and even after his expulsion from the Sunday school he did still attend open air speeches at Bonar Fields where he is said to have heckled the speakers of free thought. He attempted to defend Christianity in those encounters with free thinkers.

After his expulsion from the school, Bradlaugh was also forced to leave his parental house. After taking shelter with some friendly families he joined the army which offered a bounty of £ 6, 10 s on

recruitment - an amount which enabled him to pay all the debts which he had incurred in the meantime. Between 1851 and 1853 he was stationed in Ireland where he studied Hebrew and Arabic languages with the help of dictionaries. He was not fond of the frolics indulged in by the soldiers at that time, though he was physically a strong person. He took the opportunity of his being stationed in Ireland to study the problems of the Irish peasants. He was also a great believer in teetotalism on which subject he addressed several meetings.

In October 1853 he returned to England after buying his freedom from the army with the help of some money left by his aunt. Thereafter he came in contact with G. J. Holyoake, the founder of the London Secular Society. Subsequently Charles Bradlaugh himself became the President of the Secular Society and started a weekly called National Secular Reformer to which he regularly contributed. This paper was the vehicle of free thought in England. The name "atheism" had not gained wide currency at that time.

Bradlaugh worked for some time with a lawyer though he himself did not possess any legal qualification. However he studied law in depth in order to enable him to fight several suits for and against him. In these suits he was not allowed to depose on his behalf because being an atheist he could not take the oath. This resulted in Bradlaugh losing some suits. This also enabled the "pious scoundrels" to resist the just claims of Bradlaugh by insisting that he must swear on oath his case though they did not have any defense to his claims. Ultimately in 1869 the Evidence Act was amended which permitted non-believers to affirm instead of to swear.

By this time the reputation of Charles Bradlaugh as a free thinker, social reformer, and friend of the poor had been firmly established. He was in his early thirties when he achieved national reputation. This prompted him to contest an election to the Parliament in 1868 from Northampton constituency. It was a borough which had strong radical tradition among its skilled workers. Bradlaugh obviously over estimated the chances of his success which were not enhanced by his election manifesto in which he, with remarkable lack of tact, introduced the cause of secularism which was to some extent identified with atheism. He promised "a complete separation of the church from the State; including in this the removal of the Bishops from the position they at present occupy as legislators in the House of Lords". He was defeated securing about 1,000 votes. The two sitting liberals retained their seats. In the election of 1874 he

improved his position by obtaining 1653 votes though failing to secure the seat. A further improvement was made by him in the bye-election of 1875 when he obtained 1766 votes, though not a seat in the Parliament.

The political life of England at that time was divided between the Liberals and the Tories. The Liberals for obvious reasons were nearer to the radicals. It is possible that with the support of the Liberals, Bradlaugh was ultimately elected in the general elections of 1880 from Northampton constituency which was entitled to send two members to the Parliament. The other member sent by Northampton was Mr. Labouchere. At this stage the battle between the House of Commons and Bradlaugh began. On 3rd of May 1880 Bradlaugh reported himself at the Parliament and handed over a note to the Speaker of the House of Commons, begging "respectfully to claim to be allowed to affirm as a person for the time being by law permitted to make a solemn affirmation or declaration instead of taking an oath". In support of his claim to be allowed to affirm, Bradlaugh contended that the Evidence Amendment Act 1869 and the Evidence Amendment Act 1870 had permitted him to affirm in the highest Courts of England and the Parliamentary Oaths Act 1866 also allowed him to affirm. The matter could not be resolved by the Speaker alone who consulted his legal advisors. The latter gave an opinion strongly adverse to the claim of Bradlaugh. The Speaker decided to leave the question to the House by making a practical suggestion that a Select Committee of the House should be appointed, which was done. That Committee of Seventeen reported by majority of one that the claim to affirm was not a good claim.

Bradlaugh, despite his radicalism and strong atheism, had respect for law and the institution of Parliament. It was not his intention to forego the right to sit in the Parliament merely on the ground that the oath which he had to take before sitting in the Parliament was inconsistent with his beliefs. He, therefore, intimated to the Speaker his intention to take the oath and presented himself at the table of the House to do so. A motion was made at this stage that Bradlaugh should not be allowed to take oath because he had on an earlier occasion declared that an oath was not binding on his conscience. It has been strongly denied by Bradlaugh himself that he ever made such a declaration. On the other hand, what he had stated was that he was prepared to take the oath if his position in regard to oath was understood. On a motion made by Gladstone, the claim to take oath was referred to a Select Committee by 289 votes to 214. On 16th of June 1880, the Committee reported that Bradlaugh could not

properly take the oath but recommended that he may be allowed to affirm at his legal peril. A motion to allow Bradlaugh to do so was moved by Labouchere but it was defeated by 275 votes to 230. Next day Bradlaugh presented himself before the House claiming to be sworn. He made a speech from the Bar explaining his position. He reminded the House that he has been sent to the House by an election which has not been impeached. Therefore he had a right to sit in the House after taking the oath which the Parliamentary Oaths Act 1866 permitted him to do. There was no disqualification attached to him before his election nor was there any disqualification attaching to him after his election, it is clear from this speech that Bradlaugh did not intend to disobey the Parliamentary Oaths Act 1866. In this speech also he has not stated that the oath taken in accordance with law was not binding upon him. When Bradlaugh refused to withdraw from the House, on a motion made by Sir Stafford Northcote he was taken into custody and later released. A cartoon published in "Punch" shows Charles Bradlaugh being "kicked out" from the House.

Later, on 1st of July 1880, Gladstone moved that members elected be allowed at their choice to affirm at their legal peril. On this motion being carried by 303 votes to 249, Bradlaugh made affirmation of allegiance and took his seat. After he gave his vote on 2nd of July, he was served with a writ suing for penalty. This was at the instance of one Henry Clarke who, it transpired, was a stooge of C.N. Newdegate, regarded as an inveterate foe of Bradlaugh. Judgment in this suit went against Bradlaugh both in the trial Court and in the appeal Court as a result of which the seat occupied by him was rendered vacant. However the House of Lords allowed Bradlaugh's appeal on the ground that action did not lie at the instance of a private party for violation of the Parliamentary Oaths Act. This happened on 9th April 1883. In the meantime parallel developments were taking place in the Parliament. In April 1881, Bradlaugh was re-elected from Northampton and presented himself to be sworn. He was not allowed to do so. The Northampton constituency was again called upon to elect a member in March 1882 and Charles Bradlaugh was elected again by a larger number of votes. Attempts by some to enable Bradlaugh to take the oath and the seat failed. A motion by Northcote who always took the leading part in excluding Bradlaugh from the House was carried by majority of votes, on 9th July 1883. Bradlaugh was forcibly removed from the House by the Sergeant-at-Arms whereupon Bradlaugh brought an action against that officer. This is the famous

case of *Bradlaugh v. Gossett* (1884-12 Q.B.D.271). The resolution of 9th July 1883 was challenged by Bradlaugh.

The question which the Queen's Bench Division addressed itself in this case was not whether the Parliamentary Oaths Act 1866 permitted a person duly elected to take oath as required by Section 4 of that Act; the question to which the Queen's Bench addressed itself was whether the resolution of 9th July 1883 was within the competence of the House of Commons. The leading judgment given by Stephen J. noticed that the Parliamentary Oaths Act prescribed the course of proceeding to be followed on the occasion of the election of a Member of Parliament. Proceeding further he noted: "In order to raise the question now before us, it is necessary to assume that the House of Commons has come to a resolution inconsistent with the Act; for if the resolution and the Act are not inconsistent the plaintiff has obviously no grievance". The Court, therefore, proceeded on the assumption that the resolution was inconsistent with the Act and held that "the House of Commons has exclusive power of interpreting the statute so far as the regulation of its own proceedings within its own walls is concerned; and that even if that interpretation should be erroneous this Court has no power to interfere with it directly or indirectly". While so holding the Court thought that the House of Commons might have read an implied exception to the Act. The implied exception obviously referred to the fact that Bradlaugh was a proclaimed atheist and it could never have been intended by this Act that such persons should swear by the name of God. In other words, though Bradlaugh was willing to abide by the provisions of the Parliamentary Oaths Act 1866 and to swear instead of affirming before taking the seat, the House of Commons could in apparent defiance of an Act passed by itself exclude him by an ordinary resolution. The Parliamentary sovereignty was thus held to include the power to interpret the law in so far as that law had bearing with the regulation of the proceedings in the House.

Despite this judgment, given on 9th February 1884, Bradlaugh presented himself before the table of the House and administered the oath to himself. The Government brought action against him for this.

Thereafter again election was held and Bradlaugh was re-elected by a still larger number of votes on 19th of February 1884. Bradlaugh shed some part of his militancy this time and undertook not to present himself till the decision was given in the action brought

against him by the Government for his last oath-taking. Nevertheless, Northcote moved a fresh motion for the complete exclusion of Bradlaugh from the proceedings of the House and this motion again was carried by an overwhelming majority. Unfortunately, in January 1885, judgment was given against Bradlaugh in Government's action which had the result of holding that Bradlaugh was incapable of taking oath in law. An attempt in the House of Commons to make a declaration that in order to prevent a person from taking the oath under the Parliamentary Oaths Act legislation was necessary, failed.

A cartoon published around this time in the paper "Vanity Fair" was captioned: "The Great question of the day: Can they get him out?" It showed Bradlaugh as an elephant with the Speaker of the House waving the mace of the House and another person with a whip trying to prevent Bradlaugh from entering the house. Another cartoon in a magazine called "Judy" was captioned as "Battledore and Shuttle cock". It showed Bradlaugh being tossed between the Speaker of the House with a mace in his hand and a voter of Northampton constituency with a bat in his hand. With his colourful life and the many causes which he fought, it was inevitable that Bradlaugh would be the subject of several cartoons in those days. It must be said that not all of them were unfair to him. In fact some of them were very much favourable to him, showing him as a giant as against the bigots who were assailing him for his heretical views.

In November 1885, General Election took place and both Bradlaugh and Labouchere were again elected, Bradlaugh with a still larger number of votes. The new Speaker, Mr. Peel, refused every interference and allowed Bradlaugh to take the oath. General elections took place again in July 1886 and Bradlaugh was again elected from Northampton and in August he took the oath as he had done in January 1886, but without any demur from anyone. It can thus be said that August 1886 marked the peaceful end of a great fight which Bradlaugh carried for a seat in the Parliament. In this fight he was continuously backed by the faithful electors of Northampton who refused to be cowed down by the power of the House of Commons to exclude their beloved elected leader from exercising their legitimate right of sending a man of their choice to the House and of the legitimate right of Bradlaugh to take seat in the House of Commons in accordance with law.

Oliver Cromwell had said: "The State in choosing the men to serve it takes no notice of their opinions. If they be willing faithfully to

serve it that satisfies...". This was the view which was endorsed by Gladstone when in 1880 Charles Bradlaugh was returned to the House of Commons for the first time. The Bradlaugh case has been named as an episode in tolerance in the life of Gladstone by John Morley who has, however, not been otherwise totally fair to Bradlaugh. Gladstone himself was a man of deep religious convictions. Despite this when he made an attempt to get Bradlaugh admitted in the House of Commons the Tories turned the occasion into an ignoble party account and "were not ashamed in their prints and elsewhere to level the charge of open patronage of unbelief, Malthusianism, Bradlaugh and blasphemy against a Government that contained the three most conspicuously devout men to be found in England, namely Gladstone, Bright and Selbourne". (John Morley)

The indignation feigned or real, felt by the members of the House of Commons against Charles Bradlaugh can be understood, though not appreciated, if one notices some aspects of the contemporary scene in England and some aspects of the personality of Bradlaugh. The basic religious tenets had received a jolt by the theories of Malthus and Darwin and also by the spread of scientific knowledge in the country. The religious orthodoxy was fighting a bitter battle against the several consequences that ensued from the scientific knowledge and the nascent atheism which was personified in Charles Bradlaugh's life. Bradlaugh was a proclaimed atheist, not merely a secularist like Holyoake. He refused to acknowledge any middle position between Christianity and total atheism. Both by his writings and his speeches, which were well attended, he had become extremely popular with the masses and the working class in particular, but unpopular with the middle class orthodoxy well represented in the House of Commons. Predictably Charles Bradlaugh was repeatedly elected from the Northampton Borough which contained a large number of voters belonging to the radical working class. In collaboration with the Liberals, Charles Bradlaugh thrice returned to the House of Commons along with a Liberal candidate; thrice alone in the bye-elections.

Shortly before the first election which he won, Charles Bradlaugh had been prosecuted for "unlawfully and wickedly devising to corrupt the morals of the youth of Her Majesty's subject and to incite them to indecent, obscene, unnatural and immoral practices". The charge was based upon the fact, a fact which was never denied, that Charles Bradlaugh along with Annie Besant, who was his close associate in the National Secular Society for several years, had

published a book - "Fruits of Philosophy". That book itself had been originally issued in America in the year 1832 by Charles Knowlton, an American doctor identified with Free-thought Movement. The book did not preach free sex nor did it contain what would be regarded as any obscene material. In the then prevalent state of knowledge the book sought to give advice to the newly married couples as to how they should conduct themselves in their marital life with a view to control the birth of unwanted children. The charge leveled against Bradlaugh and Besant reflected the current prejudice against any knowledge about sex being distributed in an open manner as was done by the Knowlton pamphlet. The trial fortunately for Bradlaugh ended in acquittal, though on a technical point. It was, therefore, not necessarily a triumph for the cause which was espoused by Bradlaugh and Besant by the publication of that book, but the publication and the subsequent trial did help Bradlaugh to acquire certain notoriety among the orthodox circles.

About 9 years earlier in the year 1871 Bradlaugh had published a book called "Impeachment of the House of Brunswick". It was undoubtedly a controversial book and attacked the monarchy. The republican views of Bradlaugh thus were proclaimed. By this time republican supporters were organising small groups throughout Britain. On one occasion Bradlaugh spoke against the possible accession to the throne of the Prince of Wales after Queen Victoria. He used unusually strong language by saying "that worthy representative of an unworthy race will never be King of England". On another occasion he expressed his dislike of the monarchy in the following words

"I loathe these small breast-bested wanderers whose only merit is their loving hatred of one another. In their own land they vegetate and wither unnoticed. Here we pay them highly to marry and perpetuate a pauper prince race. If they do nothing they are good. If they do ill, loyalty gilts the vice till it looks like virtue."

It is no wonder, therefore, that Queen Victoria considered the potential presence in the House of Commons of this "most heavy desperate sort of character a disgrace".

Bradlaugh's assistant Annie Besant, with Bradlaugh's active support, organised a mass petition to Parliament during 1875 opposing its vote of £ 142,000 to the Prince of Wales for his forthcoming visit to India. When the Prince of Wales had fallen seriously ill, in November 1871, the traditional British love for monarchy had revived, but Charles Bradlaugh criticised the prayers

held in the churches of England for the recovery of the Prince. His republicanism was in fact so well known that it was believed that if a republic were established in Britain, Bradlaugh would become the first President.

It was not, therefore, surprising that there was an unconcealed dislike and hatred for Bradlaugh among people who regarded themselves as the defenders of religion and the morals of the Victorian society. A country which not only tolerated monarchy for historical reasons but also held it in great awe could not obviously take a man like Charles Bradlaugh to its heart. Though national franchise had been extended as a result of the Chartist Movement with which Bradlaugh was at some stage associated, the House of Commons did not receive representatives who could sympathise with unorthodox views. Liberals such as Gladstone and Bradlaugh's co-member from Northampton, namely Labouchere, made some well-intentioned efforts to see that Bradlaugh was allowed to sit in the House unmolested. But the opposition to him cut across party lines. Several among Gladstone's own party were arrayed against Bradlaugh while the Conservatives led the battle and were unanimous in their opposition.

Did Charles Bradlaugh refuse to take the oath as required by the Parliamentary Oaths Act 1866 when he came to the House of Commons after his first election? An impression undoubtedly became current that he did refuse to do so leading to the subsequently stormy events. There is, however, no support for this in the contemporary records. If anything, all the contemporary material shows that Bradlaugh did not refuse to take the oath. Labouchere had recalled that on the day of the assembly of the Parliament of 1880 Bradlaugh had told him that he proposed to make affirmation of allegiance instead of taking the oath because he thought the former more decorous. He also believed that affirmation could be done safely as per the legal advisors whom he had consulted. Some criticism has been made that Charles Bradlaugh had an exaggerated opinion of his own legal knowledge because of his successfully conducting several cases in which he was involved. He was not a trained lawyer like Ingersoll of America, but having worked in a solicitor's firm he had taken the opportunity of studying some branches of law in depth. He gave legal advice to poor people who came to consult him from time to time. This legal advice he gave freely. The Parliamentary Oaths Act 1866 required a member to take an oath. Bradlaugh, however, believed that the Evidence Amendment Act 1869 and 1871 allowed a person like him to make

affirmation instead of taking oath. He had, in the several cases in which he was a witness on his own behalf including the famous trial in connection with the Knowlton Pamphlet, been allowed to affirm. Bradlaugh was probably wrong in believing that the law which applied to the proceedings in the Court could be legitimately extended to the proceedings in the House of Commons. If, however, the legal advisors had given an opinion to Bradlaugh that he could safely make affirmation, he could not naturally be blamed.

On the question whether the Parliamentary Oaths Act 1866 debarred a person from making an affirmation, Bradlaugh was probably on a stronger ground. It may be recalled that the Committee of Seventeen, which was appointed by the House of Commons on 11th May 1880 to consider Bradlaugh's claim to make affirmation of allegiance, reported by majority of 9 to 8 against the claim to affirm. The casting vote had been given by the Chairman. The minority of 8, however, included the Attorney General and the Solicitor General. It can, therefore, be safely stated that Bradlaugh's claim was not wholly unsupportable.

Returning to the question whether Bradlaugh refused to take the oath, it can be emphatically stated that at no stage did he refuse to discharge the obligation imposed upon him by the Parliamentary Oaths Act 1866. Hypatia Bradlaugh-Bonar, daughter of Charles Bradlaugh, has collected 21 instances of publications of the false story spread by historians, biographers, journalists and others that Bradlaugh had refused to take the Parliamentary Oath. Among those guilty of such false representation are Winston Churchill and John Morley. None of the reports of the committees which went into the question connected with the Bradlaugh incident has recorded any statement by Bradlaugh refusing to take the oath. On the other hand, Bradlaugh reminded in his speech to the House from the bar that he had not only not made such a refusal, but had stated "that the essential part of the oath is in the fullest and most complete degree binding upon my honour and conscience and that the repeating of the words 'asseveration' does not in the slightest degree weaken the binding of the allegiance on me". On another occasion again he told the House of Commons "I consider when I take an oath it is binding upon my honour and upon my conscience". The exclusion of Bradlaugh from the House of Commons from time to time was, therefore, not on the ground that he refused to take the oath. On the other hand, as an elected member of the House of Commons, Bradlaugh accepted his obligation to take the oath since it was required by law. He assured the members that the oath taken by him

in the name of God was no less binding upon him than the affirmation if he had been allowed to make one. Another quotation from what he told the committee appointed on 11th March 1880 is worth noting:

“Any form that I went through, any oath that I took, I shall regard as binding upon my conscience in the fullest degree, and I would go through no form and take no oath unless I meant it to be so binding”.

If Charles Bradlaugh was a proclaimed atheist, a question naturally is asked as to why he agreed to take the oath. Consistent with his convictions, he should have insisted that he will make a solemn affirmation and not take the oath which is done in the name of a deity. The question is relevant. But one should not forget that Bradlaugh had fought all the elections for a seat in the House of Commons. Northampton, his beloved constituency, elected him again and again after Bradlaugh had been expelled from the House on a ground which was wholly untenable. The opportunities for public service which a seat in the House of Commons offered had not been sought in vain by Bradlaugh. If he had been elected by a constituency and the election was not tainted by any illegality or corrupt practice, which it was not, then it was not only his right to sit in the Parliament but it was also his duty to his constituency. What was required in substance of a member newly elected to the House of Commons was to make binding declaration which according to Bradlaugh could have been made by making a solemn affirmation. The House of Commons thought otherwise. A man of intense honesty and integrity as he was, Bradlaugh proclaimed that even an oath which he went through would be binding upon him. He never dreamt of a declaration made in the name of God as not binding upon him. On the other hand, he repeatedly proclaimed that he would go through no form of oath unless he regarded it as binding upon him. The ambition to become a member of the Parliament, the right to sit in the House of Commons having been duly elected, the duty owed by him to his constituency to represent them in the House and the irrelevance of the nature of oath to its binding nature - all these things explained the conduct of Bradlaugh apparently inconsistent with his proclaimed principles. In this battle which he faced for six years he could not succeed in removing the disabilities on the atheists. In this sense Bradlaugh was not successful as O'Connell had forced forward the civil equality of Catholics and Rothschild and others had forced the Civil equality of Jews. The Jews and Catholics were allowed to sit in the House of Commons

because they believed in some sort of God though that God was not necessarily the one dear to the Church of England. The culmination of the fight of Bradlaugh, therefore, should not be regarded as a victory for atheism. At best it was a victory of an atheist. Bradlaugh again returned to the seat in the House of Commons in July 1886, about a century ago without any dissent from the members. He was, however, successful in removing the disabilities on the atheists by sponsoring an Affirmation Bill which ultimately became law in August 1888.

The election of Bradlaugh, the first infidel to be elected to the House of Commons, was celebrated on 6th of November 1886 by the radicals of the village Coalsworth by holding a public tea and entertainment programme. Pointed reference must be made to “tea” because Bradlaugh was a teetotaler though it is not known whether he objected to be in the company of persons who partook of alcohols. It was a great personal tragedy of Bradlaugh’s life that he, a teetotaler, had to face alcoholism in his family. His wife who loved Charles intensely became a chronic alcoholic which ultimately led to her death. Her alcoholism in fact had estranged Bradlaugh from her and he had been for some time staying separately from her on that account. The meeting which was held on 6th of November 1886 passed a resolution congratulating “Mr. Bradlaugh on the termination of the litigation so long pending and on carrying his law cases to a successful and triumphant issue” and thanking him “for his efforts to establish once and forever the right of each constituency to send its own representative to the Commons House of Parliament”.

In the Parliament itself Charles Bradlaugh plunged himself into all activities and was member of several committees in which he distinguished himself by his characteristic industry and thoroughness in mastering the subject which came his way. The objectivity with which Bradlaugh could approach the problems without bearing any malice towards people who regarded themselves as his enemies was illustrated repeatedly in his conduct as the member of the Parliament. Among his bitterest opponents in his struggle for admission into the House of Commons was the Parnellite Party. The course adopted by the Parnellite Party was an act of ingratitude because Bradlaugh had always been one of the warmest advocates of Irish freedom, but the Parnellites were blind by religious bigotry. After his election Bradlaugh again reiterated his view on the home rule issue despite the fact that the Irish Parnellites had been unfair and unjust to him. It is at this stage that

one leading Nationalist told Bradlaugh "You are the best Christian of us all, Mr. Bradlaugh".

The interest which Bradlaugh took in matters affecting India was well-known. Early in his political career Bradlaugh was already regarded as a friend of India because he had advocated dominion status for this country. Prof. Fawcett was regarded "as a member for India" in the Parliament After his death Bradlaugh was similarly described. He assiduously and effectively watched over all matters affecting the rights and interests of Her Majesty's subjects in India. At one time he exposed the utilisation of the famine fund to meet the military expenditure. This put the Government on a permanent guard and it has been stated that this abuse was never repeated. In a speech he also condemned the arbitrary action of the Government of India in deposing the Maharajah of Kashmir. Partly at least the strictures of Bradlaugh resulted in the restoration of the deposed Prince. It is no wonder, therefore, that Bradlaugh was invited to attend and address the Indian National Congress in Bombay in December 1889. The invitation came at a time when Bradlaugh was in bad health, but he did not refuse the invitation. On 29th December 1889 he made a memorable speech before the Indian National Congress which was punctuated by repeated cheers. In a book on Charles Bradlaugh published by G.A. Natesan & Company in the Friends of India Series the following tribute has been deservedly paid.

"India never had a firmer, truer and sincere friend. Since Bradlaugh's death, several Englishmen have taken up the cause of India. It is, however, a fact that not one of them - nay not even all of them combined - could make the impression that he, single handed, produced on Parliament and on his countrymen as 'member for India'".

The hectic public life, the frequent travels even in the small country which was his home, the various legal battles and the final Parliamentary struggle - all these things took a very heavy toll of Bradlaugh's health. Bradlaugh was a man of strong physique, foundation of which had been to some extent laid during the three years which he spent in the army before he was 20 years of age. Even thereafter, because of the disciplined life which he led and abstinence from all debilitating vices he was a man of almost massive strength. Several instances of his physical prowess have been noted by his biographers. One example was the fact that it required nearly fourteen people along with the Sergeant-at-Arms to

remove him from the House of Commons after that body passed a resolution for his removal from the House. Bradlaugh himself confessed at some stage that he had “burnt the candle at both ends and in the middle”. The seat in the Parliament was not a bed of roses for him. On the other hand, he took upon himself increasing volume of work. The voyage to India which had been prescribed as a possible remedy for his malady did not help. He died on 30th of January 1891 at the age of 57, not an advanced age even in those days. Forty of those 57 years had been packed with intense activities in the service of his nation as he understood it. Whether it was due to the English fair sense of justice or whether it was due to the great impact Bradlaugh made on the Parliament during those years he sat there, a resolution was moved on 27th of January 1891 by one W.A. Hunter supported by Gladstone expunging from the journal of the House the resolutions excluding Bradlaugh in the former years. When this was done, Bradlaugh was already on his death bed though fortunately he was conscious of what was being done in the Parliament. A few days later Gladstone moved a bill of his own called “Religious Disabilities Removal Bill” and while piloting the same made a reference to Bradlaugh as follows:

“A distinguished man, an admirable member of this House was laid yesterday in his mother earth. He was the subject of a long controversy in this House - a controversy the beginning of which we collect and the ending of which we recollect. We remember with what zeal it was prosecuted; we remember how summarily it was dropped; we remember also what reparation has been done within the last few days to the distinguished man who was the immediate object of that controversy. But does anybody who hears me believe that the controversy, so prosecuted and so abandoned, was beneficial to the Christian religion?”

A memorial ceremony was held at the Hall of Science which was used by the National Secular Society for its meetings and other activities. There were many Indians present at that time. Among them was a young law student. His name was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

“I've a Dream”

That is how the speech given by Martin Luther King Jr. is known all over the world. Probably that speech changed the ethos of the world. He was almost like Nelson Mandela, a black who changed the hearts of his enemies. The speech was delivered in front of nearly 200,000 black people on 28th August, 1963, five years before his assassination. Like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther Jr. was also assassinated. His dream became fulfilled; Gandhi's was not.

In the western countries there is a system under which the father's name is given to the son. If George Bernard has a son and the father is also named George Bernard, then the father is known as George Bernard Sr., while the son will be called George Bernard Jr. In our case, Martin Luther King Sr. was the father. Our hero became Martin Luther King Jr. They belonged to the State of Georgia. When we refer to Martin Luther King Jr., we shall simply refer to him as King.

King was born in 1929 and was assassinated in 1968, before he completed 40 years. His father was a pastor at Atlanta. King completed his doctorate in 1954, when he was just 25 years old. It opened a door for a good academic career. He did pastorage of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, a place in the State of Alabama. Baptism is a sect in Christianity. Christianity is not one religion. It has got sects such as Baptism, Presbyterian etc. Baptism is actually a method of initiating one into a Church. St. Paul was the inventor of this method.

In 1957, King, with others, founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, briefly known as SCLC. The object of this organisation consisting of black priests was to follow a non-violent direct action against segregation. Actually, it was unnecessary to start a new organisation because in the celebrated judgment (unanimous), the US Supreme Court in *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954 held that “segregation was illegal”. It held in the opinion, which was unanimous, that separation and segregation were inconsistent. Incidentally, Chief Justice Warren and Chief Justice Gajendragadkar were contemporaries. Later also they worked together in the International Labour Organisation at Geneva. King spent some valuable time with Nehru, though King was not holder of office. Tragically Nehru passed away in May, 1964.

The fight for desegregation in US was not over. King came to India in 1959 to study the method used by Mahatma Gandhi and study Indian conditions. This was also in one sense unnecessary because a Satyagraha had been started prior to that in U.S. itself. One Miss Rosa Park, a seamstress by profession, refused to vacate a seat in the bus reserved for white people. She was arrested and jailed. Later she died in 2006. Her action applauded by people in the US encouraged others to boycott the Montgomery bus service. The segregation in the bus was withdrawn. In 1964, Lyndon Johnson who had succeeded Kennedy, signed the Civil Rights Act, though the black Americans got the voting rights in 1965.

Going back a little in history, King kept up the activity of SCLC to change the public opinion and to strengthen the legal challenges to segregation being made by the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured people. At one time, it was thought that segregation of equal and separation was legal and legitimate. Enlightened opinion was of the view that what is separate is not equal. Brown had given a deathblow to that theory. What is separate can never be equal.

In the meantime the fight for desegregation was going on. King and SCLC organised a number of protests and meetings. In one instance in 1963, the Police Commissioner unleashed police dogs and strong water against peaceful demonstrations. King was in Birmingham Jail. From there he argued that one who breaks an unjust law to arouse the consciousness of his community is in reality expressing his regard of law. This is now the opinion of a political philosopher John Rawls. It is also in tune with what Thoreau said in 1859. This was the thought Mahatma tried to inculcate among Indians. King was also the leading fund raiser for his organisations.

Once the desegregation was accepted and the Civil Rights Act came into force, King started other activities for his people. He started campaigns for the elimination of poverty and education of the people. King did not withdraw from peaceful demonstration where it was necessary. On a similar occasion, he had been to Memphis in Tennessee State to take part in garbage workers union when on April 4, 1968 an unknown person assassinated him.

King was a Nobel Prize winner; he was a noble man. In a speech reminiscent of “what you have done for your country” by John Kennedy and “Tryst with Destiny” of Nehru. King delivered a

speech before an audience of more than 2 lakh people, a speech known as “I have a dream”. In that speech he spoke of non-violence, equality of people. He said:

“When the architects of our people wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note where American was to fall heir.”

The speech which he delivered standing on the Potomac River and between the Jefferson and Lincoln Memorials is worth committing to heart by at least the present generation.

He said:

“When we allow freedom to ring, when we ring from every village and every hamlet, from every State and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all God's children, Black men and White men, Jews and gentiles, protestants and Catholics, all be able to join hands to sing in the words of the Old Negro spiritual. Free at last; free at last, free at last “

Earlier, in the speech king had orated:

“I have a dream that our children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of the skins, but by the contents of their character.”

Americans have woken up to the greatness of King. He will not be forgotten. A big museum is planned for him where opera and gospel will be sung, poets and their lines will be recited. And last all his “I have a dream” will be sketched. His memorial is expected in the national mall. When the memorial is complete, about one million are expected to visit each year.

In 1964 he was given the Nobel Prize for peace. As I have told you, he was assassinated on 4th April, 1968. So the grateful American nation is observing on 4th April, every year as King's Day.

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar

The history of social reforms in India, particularly of the 19th century, would be an empty shell without the narration of the struggles and achievements of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. Raja Rammohan Roy had, no doubt, in the early part of the 19th century, successfully campaigned for the abolition of the pernicious practice of Sati - a campaign that had culminated in the passing of the Regulation XVIII on 4th December 1829. The achievement was regarded as spectacular. The achievement was, however, made less difficult because of several factors. The practice of Sati was spectacularly obnoxious and had touched the sensitive chords in the hearts of even the orthodox Hindus. Secondly, the cause of abolition of Sati was taken up by men of influence and wealth, led by Rammohan Roy. Thirdly, and this is equally important, Lord Willima Bentinck came to India as the Governor-General with instructions from the court of Directors of the East India Company to take definite measures for the immediate or gradual abolition of Sati. But there were other social abuses festering the Hindu society which, from a long term point of view, required immediate attention. Rammohan Roy, if he had returned to India, from his visit to England, would have lent his support to the movement for further social reforms. In his absence, the causes were taken up by Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and others.

All the important social reforms of the 19th century centred around women. This was as it should be because the intelligentsia that came in contact with the English rulers realised the stark contrast between the status reputedly enjoyed by women in English society and the status of women in India. The status of English women in the 19th century was, of course, not the ideal one. But the practices such as the prohibition of widow remarriage and polygamy were unknown to that society.

The rising middle-class of the 19th century India started looking at wider horizons and deeper into the customs which specifically affected the women. Many of the men who took part in the social reforms movement did soon account of the sufferings of their own sisters and mothers which they witnessed.

To Calcutta

The contribution of Ishwar Chandra to the social reforms in the 19th century must be regarded as highly significant because he did not

enjoy wealth or influence associated with Rammohan Roy or Debendranath Tagore. He was born in a poor Brahmin family on 26th September 1820. He would have probably continued to remain in the village of his birth (Birsingha in Midnapore district) but for the suggestion of the village teacher that Ishwar Chandra, possessed of high degree of intelligence, should be educated at Calcutta.

So, at the age of 8, in 1828, Ishwar Chandra and his father set on foot to go to Calcutta - a distance of 60 miles which they covered in 3 days. On the way, the numerals on the milestones were read out to him and Ishwar Chandra mastered the English numerals by the time he reached Calcutta.

The academic career of Ishwar Chandra, both as a student and as a teacher, is full of interesting events. In those days, education to Indians was given mostly in Sanskrit language and in the mother tongue. There were Sanskrit pathshalas in one of which Ishwar Chandra was enrolled. Ishwar Charidra joined in 1829 the Government Sanskrit College where he remained for 12 years till 1841.

“Vidyasagar”

There was a body known as Hindu Law Committee which conducted examinations success in which qualified a candidate for the post of a Hindu Law Officer whose services were utilised by European judges in matters relating to Hindu Law. Ishwar Chandra passed such an examination in 1839, but declined the offer of a post in order to complete his studies in the Sanskrit college. It may be mentioned here that the title “Vidyasagar” by which he came to be known later in his life and to future generations was first mentioned in the certificate given to him by the Hindu Law Committee; “Vidyasagar” was not his family name.

Vidyasagar started his career in 1841 as a Head Pandit of Bengali in Fort William College which had been started by Marquis Wellesley. Capt. Marshall, the Secretary of the college, was greatly impressed by the scholarship and competence of Ishwar Chandra. During his tenure in this college, Vidyasagar started studying English - earlier he had no formal education in that language. In April 1846, he accepted the post of Assistance Secretary to the Sanskrit College - a post he relinquished when his plan for reforming Sanskrit education was rejected by the authorities. This event showed that Ishwar Chandra was not interested in merely occupying a post for earning

his livelihood. The opportunities given to him by every post that he occupied later were utilised by him to study the subject related to the institution and to suggest improvements.

After a brief spell again in Fort William College, Ishwar Candra returned to the Sanskrit College as a Professor in 1850 and in 1851, he was appointed Principal of the College. In this capacity, he introduced several changes in the syllabus, evolved a simpler method of teaching Sanskrit grammar and made the study of English compulsory. Above all, he introduced regular hours of work and insisted upon punctuality and discipline on the part of teachers. Some of them had been earlier teachers of Ishwar Chandra himself. Though initially they resented being “put in their place” by their former student, but later, realising the beneficial effects of Vidyasagar’s steps, they fully cooperated with him.

An incident which took place around this time and which showed the erudition of Vidyasagar, his independence of mind and the strength of his character needs to be recalled. The Council of Education which controlled the Sanskrit College at Calcutta (of which Vidyasagar was the Principal) invited Dr. J. R. Ballantyne, Principal of Benares Sanskrit College, to study and report on the Calcutta Sanskrit College. It was done with the good intention of securing an independent opinion - a step which Vidyasagar does not seem to have objected to. Mill’s Logic.

Dr. Ballantyne’s report submitted to the authorities was in no way critical of Vidyasagar but contained certain suggestions regarding the textbook and syllabus which were unacceptable to Vidyasagar. Dr. Ballantyne had himself written a book - “Abstract of Mill’s Logic” and he recommended that this should be used as a textbook instead of the original one because, said Dr. Ballantyne, the original was highly priced. Vidyasagar retorted: “Our students are now in the habit of purchasing standard works at high prices, so we need not be deterred from the adoption of this great work”.

Another suggestion of Dr. Ballantyne was that Bishop Berkeley’s Inquirer should be prescribed for the philosophy class. Unfortunately for Dr. Ballantyne, Vidyasagar was fully acquainted with the contents of Bishop Berkeley’s book, he was also aware of the status it enjoyed in European academics. This is remarkable because Vidyasagar had started learning English in late 1841 (when he was over 20) and by 1853, when the controversy consequent to

Dr. Ballantyne's report arose, Vidyasagar had apparently mastered at least the major works of philosophy in English. That is how he was bold enough to say, commenting on Dr. Ballantyne's suggestion, that Bishop Berkeley's book would beget more mischief than advantage. Bishop Berkeley's book was said to be useful because it contained syllogisms and conclusions analogous to those in Vedanta and Sankhya. Referring to this aspect, Vidyasagar said that Bishop Berkeley's *Inquirer* was no more considered in Europe as a sound philosophy. He was afraid that our students, thinking that the Indian systems of philosophy have been corroborated by Western scholarship, may come to have exaggerated reverence for Vedanta and Sankhya which they did not deserve. They, he said, may be sacred to the Hindus but were not sound philosophy.

28 Tatvas

Vidyasagar's basic education was in Sanskrit and Indian philosophy. He acquired knowledge of western philosophy on his own in an informal way but mastered the subjects. He did not have blind reverence for the Indian system of philosophy. He recognised and accepted the abiding truths in other systems of knowledge. It has been mentioned earlier that Vidyasagar had in July 1847 resigned from the post of the Assistance Secretary of the Sanskrit College because his plan for reforming the Sanskrit syllabus had been rejected. In that plan of reform, he had, among other things, suggested that while teaching *Smriti* or Law Class the *28 Tatvas* should be discontinued as "though they are of use to the Brahmins as a class of priests, they are not at all fitted for an academical course".

This was a remarkable intellectual honesty for a Brahmin in the 19th century. In the closing years of the 20th century, our scholars are digging out Vedic mathematics and Islamic science. You may ever find scholars who would not hesitate to say that there is nothing in modern science which is not there in our sacred texts - we only have to find them. Why, indeed, study the modern sciences?

Vidyasagar, very early in life, recognised the value of education in vernacular, though he also insisted upon the study of English as one of the subjects. It must be said to the credit of the then foreign rulers that they not only recognised the wise counsel of Vidyasagar in matters relating to education; going out of the way, they sought it. He took leading part in spreading education by starting and inspecting vernacular schools and schools for girls. In one of these

ventures, Vidyasagar suffered financially but, fortunately, he was bailed out by the Government. Around this time, one Miss Mary Carpenter, an enthusiast of female education, had arrived in Bengal with a scheme for starting schools - for teaching female teachers. Despite his intense concern for female education, Vidyasagar was cold in his reception to Miss Carpenter's scheme. He said it might be going too far against the tide of public opinion. The contemporary society was so blindly tradition-bound that no body would agree to send his grown-up female daughter or sister to receive teacher's training. A noble cause should not be lost through over-enthusiasm. This was idealism bowing to realism. In fact, Miss Carpenter's scheme was, to use a modern phrase, a 'flop show'.

Cause of Women

There were other causes also, alas, relating to women which were calling for attention and solution. Why did they all centre round women. "The reason is not far to speak. The most important characteristic that marked the decadence of Hindu society was the gradual but steady degradation in the position of women and the lower castes, especially the untouchables. Both these features were eating into the vitality of the society and contributed not a little to the general degradation of the body politic. It was inevitable, therefore, that the attention of the Indians should be drawn to these evils by the impact of western civilisation, which held out a much higher ideal in both these respects. Of the two great evils, those associated with women claimed greater attention in the nineteenth century, while the other was to figure equally prominently in the twentieth". (R. C. Majumdar - *The History and Culture of Indian People*, Vol.10, p.260).

Daunting Task

R. C. Majumdar has also offered an explanation as to why the attention of the English-educated Indians was first drawn to the urgent necessity of reforms in the status of women. It is because "it affected their own kith and kin, whose vivid, real and manifold miseries profoundly stirred their emotions as soon as they had freed their minds from the age-long shackles of superstition". It was a long string of indignities and sufferings of women from birth to death - from the cradle to the cremation. Infanticide, child marriage, child widows, ban on remarriage of widows, polygamy, illiteracy, precarious dependence on male members of the family for food, shelter and clothing - this was daunting for any social reformer with even a brave heart.

A letter purportedly written by “Women of Chinsurah”, a place about 30 miles from Calcutta was published in “*Samachardarpana*” in its issue of 21st March 1835. It was an appeal by these women to their fathers and brothers in the form of 6 questions which highlighted the miseries of women in the nineteenth century. It was doubted whether any ladies wrote that letter but it could not be doubted that the problems posed were real. It is worthwhile to read those questions because they sharply define the problems and their contours. The questions were:

1. Why are no arrangements made for our education as is done for women of civilised countries?
2. Why are we not allowed to mix freely with other men and women like the women of other countries?
3. Why are we transferred like cattle, at the tender age of 4, 5, 10 or 12 to unknown men, who have no education, wealth or beauty and denied the right of choosing our own husbands?
4. Why in the name of marriage are you selling us to the highest bidders so that our husbands, who purchase us by money, regard us as mere chattels?
5. Why do you marry us to a person who has already many wives? Is it possible for a husband to do his duty to a number of wives?
6. If a husband may marry after the death of his wife, why is a wife debarred from marrying after her husband’s death? Does not a woman possess the same desire for a conjugal life as a man? Can you prevent the evils arising from such unnatural laws?

Seeds of Reform

Broadly, these questions focus upon the lack of education, child marriage, polygamy and bar; against widow remarriage as the main problem of the women in the nineteenth century Bengal. They were also the problems of women in other parts of India. The seeds of social reforms were being sown in the minds of men in different parts of India, but the reforms movement was most prominent in Bengal and Maharashtra.

Before considering the contribution of Vidyasagar in the field of social reforms, it would be interesting to note the attitude of the social and political leaders in the 19th century. Some of these leaders not unpredictably opposed the reforms on the ground that they were against Hindu religion. The author of Vande Mataram and the apostle of nationalism was one of them. Later in the 19th century, when the Age of Consent Bill was on the anvil, a meeting was held in Calcutta and handbills announcing the meeting screamed:

“Brethern! The danger is serious! Total destruction is imminent. Government, without understanding the Hindu religion, are about to interfere with, it! The honour of our mothers and wives is about to be destroyed!”

Tilak

Bal Gangadhar Tilak, hero of Maharashtra and respected by the people (Lok Manya), attacked the bonafides of Behramji Malabari a Parsi journalist, who had taken the initiative for the reforms in the age of consent. Who was he, a Parsi, thundered Tilak, to tell the Hindus what was good for them? He also disputed the competence of a foreign government to legislate on social and religious issues. The orthodox Hindu in him did not pause to ask whether there was an evil at all and whether it had to be removed. If you had a physical malady, would you not take medical remedy from a non-Hindu or from a dispensary run by a foreign government?

But reason is never the leading light of religious obscurantist. Tilak did not hesitate to indulge in abuses and charged the Hindu reformers with ignorance of the scriptures. Among these reformers were RG Bhandarkar and MG Ranade. When Bhandarkar, the orientalist, affirmed that marriages after puberty did not violate the Hindu religious law, Tilak retorted: “If you don’t know how to interpret the Shastras correctly, then at least try to remain silent” (See “Gokhale” by B. R. Nanda, p.76). This was Bal Gangadhar Tilak whose voice was described by Gandhi as that of a lion. Ranade, the sage of Maharashtra, originally tried to support the social reforms by relying upon Shastric authorities. In fact, even in Bengal, those who espoused the cause of widow remarriage, including Vidyasagar, pressed into service a forgotten quotation from Parasar Samhita. Ranade had reverence for the scriptures and regarded the evil customs such as the dependent status of women,

infant marriage, ban on remarriage of widows, as contrary to the practices observed in old times. Did this not mean that the old customs, if they could be properly discovered, should be revived? Ranade, in later years, realised that this expediency would not carry the social reforms movement far. Moreover, the sleeping giant of revivalism, if woken up, would destroy all prospects of progress.

Therefore, Ranade returned to reason. Revivalism was no good. "Shall we", he asked in one of his later speeches, "revive the twelve forms of sons or eight forms of marriage?" Revivalism would bring "Niyoga" system of marriage, infanticide, and even Sati. Ranade was compelled to come to the view that the only basis of social reforms was the real need of the country as rationally conceived. (The standard book of reference for M. G. Ranade's views is: Religious and Social Reforms -A Collection of Essays and Speeches by M. G Ranade" compiled by A. B. Kolaskar.)

Agarkar

Rationalism and not mere erudition is an unflinching guide on the path of social reforms. A person of shining intellect like Gopal Ganesh Agarkar could never visualise the dilemmas faced by Ranade. And then there was the challenge by Tilak to the foreign interference. Ranade overcame this by pointing out that the initiative for reforms was from the Indians and all that was sought at the hands of the foreign government was that the reform should be embodied in law. Agarkar would not have to explain this need.

Vidyasagar's interest in the reform relating to women in general was the result of the anguish his heart went through witnessing the constant trials and tribulations of women- married women, child brides and widows. None of them had any life that could be called decent. Vidyasagar cried in great mental pain. "Oh, Hindu woman, why were you born in this wretched country?" We have already seen briefly Vidyasagar's contribution to the cause of education of both men and women. By the time Vidyasagar grew up, Sati had been abolished.

There were two areas in which Vidyasagar could play a crucial role. They were: widow remarriage and polygamy. Vidyasagar, more than any one else, grasped the fundamental truth that there was a close connection between these problems. The large number of widows in the society the child manages and polygamy. Vidyasagar

took keen interest in all these problems and attacked them with unabating zeal.

Plight of Widows

The problem of marriage of widows engaged the immediate attention of Vidyasagar. Some of his biographers have attributed Vidyasagar's interest in this subject to his personal experiences. When Vidyasagar came to Calcutta with his father for the first time in 1828, both father and son were given shelter in the house of a family friend - one Jagatdurlara, son of Bhagbat Charan Singha at Burrabazar. Jagatdurlara lived with his widowed mother and a widowed younger sister, Raimani. Ishwar Chandra retained permanent memories of this young widow whose image, he said in his autobiography, had been indelibly impressed upon his mind. Some years older than Ishwar Chandra, she cared for him as a mother would care.

One story tells of a girl playmate of his who became a widow at an early age with the inevitable subjection to all the indignities of Hindu widow. Then there was an instance of a woman, who, unable to stand the socially ostracised life, committed suicide. This incident took place to the knowledge of Vidyasagar, when he was in his teens.

All these incidents must have deeply affected him. But it would be simplifying things to say that they provided the only motive to Vidyasagar's efforts in the direction of getting legalised the marriages of widows. Vidyasagar was not the pioneer in this field. The social attitude for these reforms had been in formation for some years. It had probably originated even in Rammohan Roy's times. One notable effort to introduce remarriage of Hindu widows has been mentioned by R C. Mujumdar in his contribution to "The History and Culture of India" Vol.10 (p.277). Raja Rajaballabh of Dacca, a distinguished political figure at the time of Siraj-ud-daula had sought the opinion of the Pandits for getting his widowed young daughter remarried. The Pandits gave a favourable opinion relying upon some rules in Dharmasutras which permitted remarriage of a woman whose husband is dead, has become an ascetic, or has gone abroad after a period of waiting which varied according to circumstances. But Manu and Yajnavalkya had superseded these rules and hardened customs forbade such marriages.

There was also the instance of the young widowed daughter of the famous Maratha general, Parashurambhau Patwardhan, who was advised favourably even by the Pandits of Kashi, but who was defeated by his own wife's obscurantism and probably by the opposition of Nana Phadnis. (See "Nineteenth Century History of Moharashtra", by B. R. Sunthakar, Vol.1, p.514).

Pledged Faith

Though Vidyasagar was not the originator of the idea, the credit of carrying through the movement to a successful conclusion against all odds must be given to him. Unlike in the case of Sati, when there was a sympathetic Governor General, on the question of widow remarriage, the Government was totally averse to interfering in what is considered a Hindu religious custom. The then Registrar of Calcutta Sudder Court intimated that "the Court with a perfect understanding of the evils resulting from the prohibition now existing against remarriage of Hindu widows, have no hesitation in stating that it is their unqualified opinion that a law of the nature contemplated could not be passed without a direct and open violation of the pledged faith of the Government" ("Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar" by Benoy Ghose, p.78).

All this did not deter Vidyasagar. He launched a no-bar-attached attack on the evil system for the removal of which legislation was the only remedy. Fortunately, the educated middle class of Bengal was with him. There was, in those days, a remarkable group called Young Bengal (anticipating Young Turks?) consisting of young Bengalees referred to as Derozians. They were co-workers and followers of one Derozio who was a teacher in the Hindu College, at the young age of 19 years. He died, when twenty two in 1831, but in his short life, he had taught a large group of young Bengalees to reason, to question, to doubt and not to acquiesce in any authority, however hoary. They read Bacon, Locke and Tom Paine. Their ideas had a strong influence upon the minds of the younger generation of even later years. The members of this generation were behind the social reforms that were to come.

Rationalist

A favourable social atmosphere was also created by the efforts of Tatwabodhini Sabha and the Tatwabodhini Patrika both founded by Maharishi Debendranath Tagore. Akshaya Kumar, described as an invincible rationalist and materialist of his time, was the editor of Tatwabodhini Patrika which opened its columns to Viidyasagar and

which even lent editorial support to him in the cause of widow remarriage.

Vidyasagar published his first pamphlet in defense of widow remarriage in January 1855. Public debates took place on the subject. The opponents of the reform in whom was included Radhakanta Deb, a great Sanskrit scholar and a rich man, stepped up their own campaign against the reform. In his second pamphlet in October 1855, Vidyasagar cogently replied to the arguments of no-changers which had been bombarded through pamphlets and speeches. If Vidyasagar sent a petition signed by 987 persons, the opponents of the reform led by Radhakant Deb sent a petition with 36,763 signatures.

Fortunately for the cause, support was building up in other parts of the country. The Sardar of Vinchoor wrote to the Legislative Council supporting the proposed reform. Learning that there is a movement in Bengal for legalising the widow remarriage, 46 citizens of Poona sent a petition in November 1855 in support of the movement. Even some Brahmin Pandits from Secunderabad sent a memorandum in March 1856 supporting the Hindu inhabitants of Bengal. The leading role played by Vidyasagar was acknowledged by J. P Grant while moving the Widow Remarriage Bill in the Legislative Council. He referred to Vidyasagar, the learned and eminent Principal of Sanskrit College, as “the chief mover of the agitator out of which the bill had arisen”. The Bill having received the assent of the Governor General became law on 26th July 1856.

For Vidyasagar, the battle was not yet over. He strove to bring about the marriages under the new law. The first marriage under the new law took place on 7th December 1856. Vidyasagar attended this marriage and, unlike Lokahitwadi Deshmukh of Poona, attended all widow remarriages in his lifetime. He suffered substantial financial drain by providing money for many of these marriages. He refused to dissuade, as some well-wishers suggested, his son Narayan from marrying a widow. On the other hand, he has gone on record saying that “Narayan has given me a spiritual uplift by willingly agreeing to marry a widow and has proved himself the worthy son of his father”.

R. D. Karve

A Pioneer in Sex Education in India

Today, when propaganda for birth control is officially carried and sex education is available on the tap, it is difficult to imagine the hardships, humiliations and persecution through which pioneers of sex education and proponents of birth control went through in the nineteenth century and in India, even in the twentieth century. Those who championed the cause and the necessity of birth control did so with the conviction that it was good for the society and for women in particular, not in one generation, but for all generations to come. In India, even in the first half of this century, even talk of sex was a taboo with the result that the brides went to the marital bed in ignorance, and returned with physical and mental shock. Who could even think of educating the men and women on the facts of life? Any talk, at least publicly, of sex was indecent, and pictorial presentation of sex was obscene, inviting prosecution in India, under Section 292 of the Indian Penal Code. And also sale of birth control devices.

Reformer

It was during such an era that Raghunath Dhondo Karve was born and grew up. It could be legitimately said the R. D. Karve satisfied the felt necessity of that time. He was the first social reformer (one could call him even a revolutionary), who realised the importance of birth control even in the early years of this century. In his campaign for sex education and birth control, he suffered social censure and boycott, financial difficulties and even prosecutions at the hands of the bigoted.

Raghunath was born on 14th January 182. It is thought fit and proper that we should remember him in January, in which month his birthday falls. (It is planned to publish the life and achievements of an eminent person, in the Radical Humanist, in that month in which that person's birthday falls).

Raghunath was the first son of the legendary Dhondo Keshav Karve, the pioneer of women's education in India. The Karve family was not a reformist or a revolutionary family. In several respects, however, some members of the family were unorthodox. Dhondo Karve (aka Anna), though belonging to a generation of religious,

superstitious and orthodox people, did certain things which in those days were regarded as heretic, if not worse.

The thread ceremony in a Brahmin family is of great importance and significance. Even in modern times, we find thread ceremonies being celebrated with pomp and publicity. Invitation cards are sent to attend the function. Thread ceremony, traditionally and theoretically, is the initiation of a boy into the scholastic career. From that day on, the boy was supposed to go under the tutelage of a guru for the acquisition of knowledge. On the day of the initiation, he is invested with the thread, regarded as sacred, and taught certain holy recitations (mantras).

In modern times, education being institutionalised, the thread ceremony (upanayan sanskar) has wholly lost its significance. But it proclaims the superiority of one's caste. Hence, even today, the practice of this sacrament is prevalent in the Brahmin families. In Raghunath's time, however, it was a family and social necessity. The family members wanted the event to be celebrated on a large scale. Anna overruled the family members' desire and got the thread ceremony performed on a very small scale on fifteen rupees, and gave away to charity the amount that would have been otherwise spent on the thread ceremony.

Similarly, Anna did not ostentatiously indulge in meaningless expenses while performing the last rites on the death of his first wife, i.e. Raghunath's mother.

No Early Marriage

Raghunath was not forced into an early marriage by his father. Early marriages were the rule in those days. Raghunath and Gangoo Gode had fallen in love when they came into contact, which contact was continued, on a social trip. Gangoo, whose name was changed to Malati after the marriage, was 21 years old, shockingly late in that age. But happily, the path of true love ran smooth and they were married in 1911, when R. D. Karve was 29 years old.

An anecdote connected with this marriage, which shows the liberal culture of this family must be told. In the feast organised at the marriage, one guest recited some holy stanzas (shlokas) in a melodious voice. When the other guests turned in the direction of the singer, they found him to be Abdul Karim Khan. The guests were shocked that a non-Brahmin, and a Muslim, should be in their midst while taking a meal. The singing guest was, however, not thrown out, but Annasaheb made appropriate amends later.

These incidents demonstrate the attitude of the family, which was reasonably cosmopolitan, considering that age and that society. After the death of Anna's first wife, Anna decided to marry a widow - a marriage legally permissible, but socially unacceptable. The marriage with the widow, Godubai, took place in March 1893- much against the wishes of her parents. No opposition from the Karve family.

Raghunath Dhondo Karve (RD, hereafter) came from such a family. He stood first in the Matriculation examination, but his subsequent academic career was not impressive. In New English School at Pune, his contemporaries included Pandurang Mahadeo Bapat (later, Lhe famous Senapati Bapat) and L. H. Bhopatkar (later Hindu Mahasabha leader). An attempt was made, after graduation, to obtain some financial assistance from the government to go to London for higher studies. Just around this time, two persons who had gone to England had become revolutionaries. They were Senapati Bapat and V. D. Savarkar. The Government did not desire to have a trio on hand.

After graduation, RD entered into government service, where he stayed for some years. He was teaching mainly mathematics. He also taught as assistant professor in a college for some time. In order to improve his prospects, he went to Paris on his own, and obtained a diploma in mathematics, which diploma, however, did not advance his career much.

No Child - Decision

His married life was happy. RD and Malati, however, had taken a decision not to have children. They must have practised the birth control methods then available. RD was thoughtful enough to realise that it was unfair to require a woman to always take preventive measures. [Ic, therefore, sought some doctor, who could perform vasectomy operation on him. None in India came forth to help him. Later, when on a suggestion from a relative, RD had gone to Nairobi for a job, he got the operation done at the hands of a Parsee doctor. The job, however, was not secured. The stage is now set for RD to start on a career he pursued till the end. In 1921, RD opened a centre for propagating birth control and for sale of birth control devices. This was the first centre of its kind in India. In the same year, Mary Stopes who had authored "Married Love", started a similar centre in England. Margaret Sanger, who had coined the phrase 'birth rate

control', had preceded both RD and Mary Stopes in the establishment of a centre for the advice on birth control.

A remarkable fact is that Gopalrao Agarkar, the rationalist par excellence, had as early as in 1882, and advocated limited families. Writing in 'Kesari' an essay under the title of Liberation of Women from Slavery, Agarkar suggested that instead of having a dozen or so children, a couple should aim at two children. Agarkar must have been inspired to take such a stand by the example of Charles Bradlaugh, the great English infidel, who had been prosecuted, along with Annie Besant, for selling "Fruits of Philosophy", written by Charles Knowlton of the U.S.A. Both Bradlaugh and Besant had been convicted by the trial court; they were, however, acquitted in appeal, on technical grounds. (For a detailed account of this trial, see "The Trial of Annie Hesant and Charles Bradlaugh" by Roger Manvell; Horizon Press, New York). In the advanced and comparatively more enlightened societies of England and America, the advocates of a rationalistic approach to sex education and birth control, faced untold hardships and prosecution. Leader in this field were Bradlaugh, Margaret Sanger, Marie Stopes and Havelock Ellis. Misrepresenting these people as "abortionists", their opponents tried to ridicule and defame them. Birth control literature was not allowed to be sent through post. In America and England, there were groups of people to help these reforms. It is to the great credit of RD that in India, he carried on this project almost single-handedly.

Wilson College

One of the earlier ordeals faced by RD needs to be told. In 1922, RD was appointed as a part-time Professor of Mathematics in the Wilson College, on a salary of Rs.200/- per month. Wilson College was an institution run by a Christian Society. That RD was an advocate of birth control and sex education was a notorious fact, and it is highly unlikely that the college authorities were unaware of it. In 1924, RD was appointed a professor on full time basis.

It is at this time that a Marathi periodical published an article on birth control written by RD. Some one ill-disposed towards RD brought this to the pointed attention of the authorities of the Wilson College, who sought an explanation. RD told them that there were many persons available for teaching mathematics, and in India, atleast, apart from him, there was none who could carry on the work he was doing. He told them he would willingly quit his post; he would not at any cost give up the social work he was doing. After

some cooling period, Wilson College and RD parted company with willingness on both sides.

The fruits of unemployment were not sweet. A year earlier in 1923, RD had published his book on birth control in Marathi, with the title of "*Santatiniyaman*", which, it is needless to say, did not bring him much money. However later, many editions of this book were published. Wife Malati was employed in a school run by the Bombay Municipal Corporation. The sum of Rs.80 earned by her, as salary per month, was naturally insufficient. This income was not adequately supplemented. Private tuitions were also not forthcoming. An interesting interlude in the life of RD took place at this juncture.

French Interpreter

RD got employed in an export company on a not inconsiderable sum of Rs.200/- per month. The owner of the firm was a French man and his wife who was abroad, was English. The correspondence between them took place in their respective languages, which was not intelligible to each other. The task of translating the letter of one into the language of the other and vice versa was performed by RD, apparently with satisfaction to both sides.

It is about this time that RD started in July 1927 his Marathi monthly, "*Samaj Swasthya*". The immediate provocation for RD to start this journal was the refusal of even a progressive journal of Kirloskars to publish an article by RD on women's modesty.

"*Samaj Swasthya*" was brought into existence by RD and was nurtured and nourished literally by blood and sweat of RD. It was a path-breaking journal - for this it was welcomed by some and opposed by many. Any discussion of sex and hygiene was unthinkable in those days. Naturally, there were not many subscribers, though loose copies were sold. Many people wanted to read the journal, but did not want to be on the list of the subscribers. Those who bought this journal with the expectation of finding prurient stuff in it were disappointed. In the very first issue of the magazine, RD explained that the object of the publication was to examine and study sex and love from a scientific angle. A rational approach to the subject of love, sex and marriage would be adopted. The title of the publication itself indicated that the subject of the publication would be public health.

The subsequent issues discussed such subjects as the problems of prostitution, sexual hygiene, the need to avoid conception, avoiding the necessity of abortion. The publication also analysed the phenomenon of superstitions such as planchet and astrology. Some astrologers had forecast that the world would come to an end on 13th August 1927. RD also ran a column in which he answered questions from readers. Some ostensible readers would ask questions in such a manner as to tempt RD to give answers in a manner that would expose him to prosecution under Section 292 of the IPC. RD was aware of this trap and was cautious in replies. He did not wish to contravene law.

Prosecution

Despite this, he was prosecuted and convicted twice for publishing obscene literature. In the first case, the magistrate imposed a fine of a hundred rupees. There was no appeal for a fine of Rs.200 or below. RD, therefore, preferred a revision application to the High Court, which was dismissed by a bench of Justice Barley and Justice Wadia. In fact, it is reported that Justice Barley threw down the papers saying that free love advocated by the accused was nothing but obscene. In the second case, Dr. Ambedkar, who was RD's lawyer, pleaded with the Magistrate to impose a fine of at least Rs.201/- so that an appeal could be preferred. The Magistrate, Mr. Indravadan Mehta, who had also tried the first case, imposed a fine of Rs.200/- only. No appeal. Revision application summarily dismissed.

In 1930, some leading intellectuals of Bombay who included Dr. Gopalrao Deshmukh, Dr. George Coehlo (the first pediatrician of India), Ranchhoddas Lotwala, Syed Abdufla Brelvi (the Editor of "Bombay Chronicle") and Minoos Masani established what was initially called "Anti-priestcraft Association, but later turned into Rationalist Association of India. The Association ran a magazine called "Reason", which was edited by Dr. Charles Lionel D'Avoine, who was unsuccessfully prosecuted for outraging the religious feelings of a community, an article he wrote in the September 1933 issue of "Reason". (For details, readers may refer to "The Reason Case" edited by Prof. V. K. Sinha, published by Indian Secular Society, Pune). RD contributed to "Reason" on several subjects regularly.

In 1937, RD took over the editorship of "Reason", which had ceased publication for some time. Through the columns of "Reason" also,

RD carried on education on sex and health. In one article, he suggested that not merely children, but their parents too needed lessons on sex and hygiene. All this time, he was also taking active part in social activities and was addressing gatherings, small or large. RD was extremely well informed about social, national and international developments - which show he was also well-read.

Third Prosecution – Acquittal

RD was prosecuted for the third time for a similar offence in 1939. He conducted his own defence while Mr. Gambhir, the publisher, who was co-accused, was defended by Mr. V. B. Karnik. The main witness for the prosecution was the Oriental translator of the office Mr. Raghunath Jahagirdar. Mr. Basrekar, the trial Magistrate, acquitted RD by his order passed on 24th June 1940.

In January 1941 Mr. Abraham Solomon became the editor of “Reason”, for reasons about which there is some controversy. Mr. Solomon however, was aware of the merits of RD, whom he persuaded to contribute regularly to “Reason” which however came under the editorship of RD again in July 1941. With the uncertain situation created by the Second World War, and rising costs, “Reason” ceased publication towards the end of 1942.

But “*Samaj Swasthya*” continued against great odds. RD had set certain principles before himself in accepting advertisements. As a result, he declined to accept certain advertisements. This was naturally not helpful in improving the financial health of the magazine. Shakuntala Paranjpe, daughter of Shri R. P. Paranjape, a near relative of RD was conducting a family planning clinic in Pune. She was also regularly writing for ‘*Samaj Swasthya*’, and this enhanced the utility and prestige of the publication. In his stormy career, RD was involved in several controversies, some of which were of his own making. It is not possible to assert that he was always right. But it can be safely said that his approach was always rational, unbiased and intellectually honest.

In October 1944, his wife Malati Tai passed away. It was a great blow to RD, by whom Malati Tai had stood in thick and thin without making any demand on him. RD had still some battles to be fought - now alone.

Though he regretted that rationalism had not found acceptance among a large number of people, he was to some extent happy that

increasing number of people were recognising the importance of family planning and limiting the population. Unfortunately, successive governments failed to evolve and implement an effective population policy. On 14th January 1952, RD completed his biblical span of three score and ten years. His health was giving way and in the early hours of 14th October 1953, he passed away.

It is unfortunate that no serious and in-depth study of RD's writings has been made. RD has left behind a wealth of writings which display a keen rationalism in the handling of innumerable subjects dealt with by him. Maharashtra's eminent scholar and R. D. Karve's biographer, Mr. Y. D. Phadke has said that anyone dispassionately studying RD's writings will readily admit that Raghunath Dhondo Karve is the only true heir to Agarkar.

(I am heavily indebted to Mr. Y. D. Phadke for the material in this article).

“H.N.” I Knew

Dr. Hosur Narasimhaiah - scientist, educationist and rationalist passed away on 31 January 2005. Born 6th June 1920 in Hosur in Kolar District in the erstwhile Mysore State, his life is a saga of struggle - for his own education and living and for the education of his countrymen. He gave the title of “Horatada Hadi” (The Road of Struggle) to his biography published on his 75th birthday. We should be happy that he wrote his autobiography for it chronicles not only the events of his life but also several events and episodes in social and cultural life of Karnataka. One only regrets that Dr. Narasimhaiah (I will call him as H.N. - a name by which he was known) confined his activities to Karnataka. If he had moved on the national scene, it would have benefited the cause of rationalism and scientific attitude throughout the country.

I first came in contact with H.N. in December 1980 at the Golden Jubilee Conference of Indian Rationalist Association in the then Bombay. The Conference was inaugurated by Dr. P.M. Bhargava, the eminent cellular scientist and presided over by Justice Chinna Reddy, Judge of the Supreme Court of India. Though he was by that time known as a rationalist by virtue of his investigation into Satya Sai Baba’s ‘miracles’, for reasons not known to me he had not been given a pride of place in that conference.

H.N. came to the Golden Jubilee Celebration of I.R.A. as a humble delegate and was accommodated along with one or two delegates in one room in the Bal Mohan Vidya Mandir at Dadar in Central Bombay. It was there I met him for the first time though we rationalists in Maharashtra were fully aware of his campaign in the exposure of superstitions. He was happy to meet a person from Karnataka who was, at that time, a Judge of the High Court of Bombay. We had a friendly, informal chat during which I could easily discern flashes of a brilliant mind.

He spoke effortlessly in Kannada in simple language but the points he made were profound. He was not making a capital of the campaign he had conducted earlier in 1975 into the activities of Satya Sai Baba, more particularly in Satya Sai Baba’s attempt to nominate a boy dubbed as Sai Krishna, from Pandavpur (a small town near Mysore) as his successor. If some one has to succeed Satya Sai, that person must perform miracles. The Committee

consisting of Dr. Narasimhaiah, then Vice-Chancellor of Bangalore University, found out that the promoters of Sai Krishna were perpetrating a hoax.

He asked me whether I was related to: 'Shri Ranga' the famous playwright of Karnataka. He asked that question, as he knew that Shri Ranga's real name was Prof. R.V. Jahagirdar. When I answered in the affirmative, he spoke of the plays of Shri Ranga and made certain observations about one play called 'Shoka Chakra' a scathing criticism of the politicians of the day who were carrying on their trade under the national emblem of Ashoka Chakra. I have thought it relevant to mention this fact only to show that though literature was not the forte of H.N. who was a scientist by education and career, he was well-read in Kannada literature.

He was gracious to allow me to keep in touch with him. He had founded Bangalore Science Forum under whose auspices lectures on science and scientific attitude and rationalism were regularly held. He invited me to give a talk in the Bangalore Science Forum in 1984 - an invitation which I grabbed because it gave me an opportunity to meet H.N. I gave the talk on 'Scientific Attitude and Indian Citizenship' which has been subsequently published as a paper by Scientific Temper Promotion Trust of Bombay. The talk was followed by question and answer session. Questions on Constitution and scientific attitude were easy to answer but as it happens often in such meetings there were questions with the sole object of causing discomfiture to the speaker - in this case myself. Some questions were meant to test my knowledge of astronomy and astrology. At this stage H.N. asked me politely to allow him to deal with those questions. During the next 20 minutes or so, he gave a small talk which not only answered those questions and demonstrated how in the light of astronomy, astrology could not be called a science. In particular he pointed out the data on which astronomy is based never changes obviously because the planets, moons and stars and astronomical distances never change. There are four schools of astrology in India. How can there be different interpretations and inferences from such unchanging facts? In a discrete way he made a reference to B.V. Raman of Bangalore, the famous peddler of astrological forecasts.

Whenever I went to Bangalore I called upon him. As is well-known he was a bachelor and though he was the Head of the National Educational Society, he was staying in a room of the hostel of a

college conducted by that society. The only concession he was having was that he was occupying the corner room which had an attached bathroom. A picture of that room is printed in Horatad Hadi'. The room had no furniture such as tables and chairs. However, he had arranged for a chair brought for me when I visited him. I was not foolish enough to sit on the chair when the great man was sitting on the floor. The simplicity of this man was in one sense notorious. When he was the Vice-Chancellor of Bangalore University (1972 to 1978), he would use the official car when he was discharging the official work. On other occasions he went in a rickshaw and some times in a bus.

Though he was an atheist, as the head of the society which was running, among other institutions, National College, he had not caused the removal of Ganapati idol which had been installed in the college premises. When we were passing by I noticed a small girl standing with folded hands in front of the idol obviously engaged in prayers. I stood watching her for a few minutes when H.N. thought that I was uncomfortable. He told me: Sir, do not worry. When this girl grows up, she will be an atheist." His approach was: Do not indoctrinate any one with atheism.

All this is an account of my personal contact with H.N. The facts of his life are sometimes chilling, sometimes exhilarating. He was born to his parents - Hanumantappa and Venkatamma - when they were considerably old. The family was very poor even by the low standards of the village. H.N. says he was not sure about the level of his father's education but he had mastery over Kannada language and he could give discourses on Ramayana and Mahabharata. This brought him some income. Mother earned by doing menial work such as sweeping and washing utensils. Some times if she had been given rice and curry by her employer she would bring it home.

It is not necessary to trace the course of Narasinhaiah's education, it is sufficient to mention that it was through great hardships. He had to discontinue his studies after eighth standard as there was no high school in the village. Fortunately for him the head master of his school found a place for Narasinhaiah in the Poor Boys' Home in Bangalore where he joined the National High School in 1935. In 1936 Mahatma Gandhi visited this school when the Mahatma happened to notice this boy. There is a photograph in his autobiography in which the Mahatma has placed his left hand on Narasinhaiah's left shoulder and is apparently listening attentively to

what the boy was saying. The photograph shows Narasinhaiah was wearing a khadi half-shirt and an uncouth Gandhi cap on his head. F.I.N. places this incident as on 11th June 1936.

In 1942 he faced a big dilemma. H.N. mentions that he had been always a nationalist. In 1942 he was six months away from the B.Sc. degree. He felt the urge to jump in the Quit India Movement. But at the same time he had come up to that stage of his education after great travails. Would it be wise to do anything that would jeopardize his career forever? He decided to join the freedom struggle and in due course was arrested and jailed. Incidentally he was in Yerawada Jail in Pune where large number of satyagrahis from Mysore had been lodged.

After his release and after completing his education, he joined National College as a Lecturer. This association continued for over 50 years. He became, as mentioned earlier, the President of National Education Society which conducts several institutions. For two terms he was the Vice- Chancellor of Bangalore University. As the Vice- Chancellor he set up "The Committee to Investigate Miracles and Verifiable Superstitions" in 1976. Satya Sai Baba, predictably refused to co-operate with this Committee.

He was a rationalist since his childhood. He had refused, despite his mother's insistence, to tonsure his head while performing his father's last rites - he said he did not get convincing answer regarding the connection between the two. On the wall in his office one could notice the following quote of Albert Einstein: "Great spirits have always encountered violent opposition from mediocre minds".

Remembering J.B.H. Wadia

Jamshed Wadia (hereinafter referred to as JBH, as he was known to all) was born on 13th September 1901 and so 13th September 2001 was the day of his birth centenary. A literary figure, a lawyer who retreated from legal practice, a film producer, a rationalist (despite, or because of his study in depth of religions), and above all one of Roy's closest associates - JBH was a pillar of strength to the Royists.

Different people had come in contact with Roy because of Roy's politics. JBH came in contact with Roy and became the latter's lifelong friend in a very interesting way. In the late 30s, Roy decided to settle down in Dehra Dun where a bungalow, at 13, Mohini Road, was purchased for housing Roy and the headquarters of Royists (Radical Democratic Party was yet to be born). But Roy continued his travels all over the country and his visits to Bombay were expected to be frequent. It became necessary to make some arrangement for Roy's stay in Bombay on those occasions. It was estimated that this arrangement would cost about Rs.300 per month. If ten persons contributed Rs.30 per month, the required amount could be raised.

JBH was not a Royist; in fact in the 1930s he was a Congressman. But he was a rationalist and was interested in Royist literature. JBH had taken interest in 'Independent India' from the beginning and had given full-page advertisement in each issue. It was known that JBH was purchasing a dozen copies of each issue of Independent India and distributing them among his acquaintances. V.B. Karnik in his "drive" to find 10 persons who would give Rs.30 each per month for the expenses of Roy's stay in Bombay decided to approach JBH.

What happened next has been described by JBH himself in his contribution to 'The Radical Humanist' (May 1977). When Karnik met JBH in Wadia Movietones Studios at Lovji Castle, Parel, and broached the subject of contribution of Rs.30 per month, JBH was flabbergasted because every member of the Congress Working Committee was being given an emolument of Rs.800 per month from the Congress Treasury of which Jannalal Bajaj was in charge. Roy had decided not to accept a single rupee from the funds of the Congress, as it was being run by Gandhi on religious basis. Without dwelling on this subject, Karnik mentioned that, 'all he wanted from me was a modest sum of Rs.30 per month since he could collect an equal sum from nine other sympathizers and friends of Roy'. I was

speechless. I asked him to give me a day more to decide. Karnik left, thinking perhaps that I was afraid to associate my name with Roy's'

The next day when Karnik went to the Studio again, JBH informed Karnik that Wadias - JBH and Hilla - had decided that the Roys, whenever they came to Bombay, would stay with Wadias in their spacious bungalow - Casa da Vinci- on the beautiful Worli Sea face. "Now it was Karnik's turn to be speechless", says JBH. Karnik mentions: "Wadia confounded all Royists by offering to put up Roy at his well-appointed house. The offer was readily accepted and since then Jamshed and Hilla Wadia became permanent hosts in Bombay of Roy and Ellen." ("M.N. Roy - Political Biography" by V.B. Karnik 1978, Published by Nav Jagruti Samaj, Bombay, p.415). Instinctively JBH was inclined to do what he ultimately did but he took one day to convey his decision to Karnik. This was because playing hosts to the Roys was a family affair and he wanted Hilla's concurrence in his decision.

He almost apologetically mentioned the subject to his wife and told her that since Roy was a *bête noire* of the then establishment Wadias themselves must be prepared to be under surveillance of the police. Hilla did not require any explanation. In fact she told JBH that if he did not abide by his instinct she would hold it against him. Such was the sharing of feeling between husband and wife who were otherwise also known for their generosity.

The possession of 13, Mohini Road was lost by Indian Renaissance Institute, which was its owner, sometime after Ellen's death. This caused tremendous distress to Royists and if truth be told R.M. Pal who stayed at 13, Mohini Road for several years with the Roys was the saddest person. The possession of 13, Mohini Road is yet to be regained despite a decree by the Court.

The Roys came to stay with the Wadias for the first time in May 1937 and a lifelong friendship developed between Roys and Wadias. Whenever the Roys were in Bombay, Casa da Vinci was also the hub of Royist activity. M.N.Roy did considerable writing, with Ellen helping with taking down dictation and typing, in the room which was given to the Roys for their exclusive use. The meticulous attention with which the Wadias, more particularly Hilla, looked after the Roys was a matter of common knowledge. JBH tells that when the Roys were in Casa da Vinci, the choicest of wines - Rhine wine, White and Black, Sauterne, Medoc etc., would be displayed on the table. M.N.Roy, despite his long incarceration, was a gourmet and Wadias treated Roys and the guests (who were always there at

Wadias') with different types of food. At some stage Hilla became vegetarian and teetotaler but probably in those days she partook of all the delights of the table.

To return to the original and main business of JBH, JBH founded in 1933 the famous Wadia Movietones, which produced seventy feature films, many short films of musical value and some documentaries. This he did with his own money and thus took tremendous risk. The fearless Nadia of the thirties was discovered and launched in the film world by Wadia Movietones.

JBH was a good chess player and coming to know that Roy also played the game, JBH asked Roy with whom he played chess. Roy said it was with Alekhine of Russia (who was the world famous chess master). After this JBH never mentioned the word chess at least in the presence of the Roys who also did not invite him for a game- probably with a view to save JBH from embarrassment.

Despite his busy schedule in filmy duniya, JBH found time to read and write extensively. He was the author of three books of poems - "Dreams" (English). "Nanakadi Naav"(A Small Boat, in Gujrati) and "Tassalli-e-Shakshiyat" (in Urdu). JBH also founded 'JBH Wadia Publications', which brought out, apart from his own books, several other books. The first edition of "New Humanism - Humanist Manifesto" by M.N. Roy was published by JBH Wadia Publications.

Those who had intellectual discussions with JBH will vouchsafe for the erudition of JBH in scriptures of all religions. JBH had become a rationalist quite early in life and could boast of having read several books published by the Rationalist Press Association in Thinkers' Library.

References to some anecdotes in the life of JBH are inevitable. These illustrate his scrupulous honesty, sense of humour, and devotion to the Roys. During the Second World War, petrol was scarce. However, it could be procured in black market by those who were inclined to do so; JBH, however decided not to do so for his personal use and would go on bicycle from his house to Parel where Wadia Movietones was situated. Even in those less crowded streets of Bombay, this was extremely hazardous. Fortunately JBH was persuaded to abandon that mode of transport and an alternative acceptable arrangement was made.

The Wadias were returning from West Indies and one of the islands had an epidemic of yellow fever. The immigration officer who

recognized JBH, tried to persuade him to say that his last port of call was Jamaica which was free from that epidemic and in that case the Wadias would not be quarantined. JBH, however, preferred to be quarantined.

As is well known, the first grandson (son of Vinci) of the Wadias was named Roy - and it must be made clear, as Roy Jr. wanted it, that he was so named after M.N.Roy.

Striking a personal note I must mention one incident. It was at the time of the last visit of the Roys to Bombay. The Roys normally arrived in Bombay by Frontier Mail, the scheduled time of which used to be 8 a.m. at Bombay Central. I had gone to the Station by 7.45 a.m. and came to know that the train was late by an hour. Having no telephone at home I had not checked with the railways the expected time of arrival of the train. Within ten minutes of my reaching the platform JBH arrived and I informed him that the train was late. He decided to have breakfast in the restaurant on the first floor of the station.

However, the train arrived half an hour later than the scheduled time but half an hour earlier than the expected time. I rushed to the restaurant to inform JBH before whom a sumptuous breakfast had already been spread. Leaving it and throwing some currency notes on the table, JBH rushed down with me in tow. The Roys had alighted from the train and M.N. Roy looking at JBH said in mock anger: "Jamshed, you are late". JBH replied: "No Roy, you are ahead of time". How true, figuratively!

During the 1980s JBH was involved unfortunately in some litigation in the High Court when I was a sitting judge. I had learnt from some sources that one judge was making things uncomfortable for JBH. JBH never breathed a word about his litigation, let alone about the judge, in our meetings.

The best service JBH has done to Roy's memory is the publication of his own "M.N. Roy - The Man: An Incomplete Royana" in 1984. Many books, biographical and others have been written on Roy. The book by JBH is unique in the sense it brings out the intensely human side of Roy's personality, Roy's myriad interests, and the happy home of Ellen and M.N. Roy. I am the proud possessor of a copy of this book autographed by JBH himself.

I last saw him in Breach Candy Hospital in January 1986 where I had gone with M.A. Rane. Those were his last days. In deference to

his wishes, his family members arranged the cremation of his body, instead of disposal according to Parsee rites.

Was Veer Savarkar Really “Veer”?

For generations the Hindutvavadis have venerated Vinayak Savarkar as Veer Savarkar. The writings of Savarkar, especially in Marathi, show great valour and heroic sentiments. In language that is both beautiful and brave, the writings of Savarkar - in prose and poetry - display heroic qualities but of Hinduism. Savarkar wrote an essay, “Hindutva” (Hinduness) in which he tells us who are really Hindus. Merely by birth in India, one does not become a Hindu. Hindu is one, says Savarkar, whose land of worship (“Punya Bhumi”) is India; whose history, trials or tribulations are centred around in Hindustan. If one looks towards Mecca or Jerusalem for religious inspiration, he cannot be a Hindu as defined by Savarkar. Thus Muslims and Christians whose basic holy places are outside India are not and cannot be called Hindus. The Hindutva idea is alien to them. This is in sum, Savarkar’s idea of Hindutva – a term which is not the same as Hinduism. Buddhists and Jains whose religions are not Hindu are yet embraced by Hindutva. It is almost a mystical concept.

Savarkar did not and could not foresee Hindu Diaspora or even Muslim Diaspora. Large numbers of Hindus have migrated to U.S.A. and have acquired citizenship of America. Their ethos – is it included in Hindutva? The largest numbers of Buddhists are outside India in several East Asian countries. Can we say that they must display Hindutva? It will be an act of treason if they love India to the exclusion of the countries whose citizens they are. In his book “First War of Indian Independence” (which is about 1857) Savarkar speaks of joint Hindu-Muslim revolt. But that was long before the birth of Hindutva in Savarkar’s mind.

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, later also known as Tatyasaheb Savarkar, was born in 1883 in a town called Bhagur in Nasik District of Maharashtra. Even his biographers do not speak of his brilliance as a student. But his later writings, both prose and poetry, display of unusual command of Marathi language which continues to inspire Maharashtrians. It may be stated incidentally that on an occasion in England where he had gone for studies he wrote a poem asking the ocean “to take me to my motherland”. In song frame it has been sung by Mangeshkar siblings and it has become immortal in Maharashtra. In the song he tells, among other things, that mother’s cottage is better than a palace.

It has been recorded that once in his student days he pelted stones at a mosque in his town. He exhibited anti-Muslim feelings, even in his college days. He went to college in Pune. He organized groups of Hindus whom he inspired to be good and strong Hindus.

With the help of one Pandit Shyamji Krishna Verma, a strong believer in Hinduism, then resident of London, Savarkar went to England for education. An activist of "Abhinav Bharat", a revolutionary organization for freedom of India, Savarkar took part in several activities. Dhananjay Keer mentions that he was, in 1908, convicted for outraging the modesty of an English girl and spent four months in jail as a consequence. Savarkar also displayed strong patriotism inasmuch as he studied Mazzini and translated one book on Mazzini which came to be published in Nasik and enjoyed an uncommon popularity among Maharashtrians. That, Savarkar was a patriot is not disputed.

Madan Lal Dingra was hanged for assassinating Sir William Carzon Wylie who was the eye and brain of India House. Savarkar had inspired Dingra to do the act. Savarkar had also sent pistols clandestinely and one of them was found to have killed A.M.T. Jackson, the Collector of Nasik. The pistol which killed Jackson was traced to Savarkar who was arrested in London under Fugitives Act and brought to India. I have refrained from describing the activities of Savarkar in England. Suffice it to say that those activities show his patriotism and intelligence. One thing, however, must be noted. It was never Savarkar's hand that pulled the trigger at any time. He inspired but never acted. While Savarkar was being brought to India in a ship, he jumped in the sea through a port hole. That was in France. However, he was captured and brought back. This was the only physical act of Savarkar in the cause of freedom. What he did was undoubtedly a daring act.

Ultimately he was tried, among others, for the murder of Jackson and sentenced to life imprisonment. Also in another case he was sentenced to life imprisonment. Those days, life imprisonment meant 25 years which in Savarkar's case meant 50 years. It was a fearful prospect which would have broken any man. If it broke the courage of Savarkar, one cannot blame him.

This is where the act of so-called bravery of the person begins. He was transported to Andaman Island to serve his sentence in the

awful cellular jail. This was regarded, among the Indians, as “Kalapani”. It was the forced destination of hardened criminals.

Hard physical labour awaited Savarkar. He was received at Port Blair of Andaman on July 4, 1911. He was 28 years old. Within two years thereafter, Sir Reginald Craddock, Home Member Viceroy’s Executive Council, met him. Sir Reginald’s note recorded Savarkar’s plea for mercy. On November 14, 1913, Savarkar had written to the Government: “I am ready to serve the Government they like ... Where else can the prodigal son return but to the parental doors of the Government?” (Emphasis mine). In reply to a question in the Legislative Council on March 22, 1920, the Home Member, Sir William Vincent said: “Two Petitions were received from Vinayak Damodar Savarkar – one in 1914 and another in 1917 – through the Superintendent, Port Blair. In the former he offered his services to the government during the war in any capacity and prayed that general amnesty be granted to all political prisoners. The second Petition was confined to the latter proposal. In the Petition dated November 23, 1913, he wrote: “In the end, I remind your honour to be good as to go through the Petition for clemency that I had sent in 1911 and to sanction it for being forwarded to the Indian Government”. He had in the same letter said: “Therefore the Government in their manifold beneficence and mercy release me, I for one cannot be the staunchest advocate of progress and loyalty to the English which is the foremost condition of that progress.” The Government which he had decided not to serve became a Government of beneficence and mercy. The rebel became a person of loyalty. Continuing further he said: “Moreover my conversion to the Constitutional line would bring back all those misguided young men in India and abroad who were once looking at me as their guide.”

“Veer” means, brave, hero, gallant, warrior as per Sanskrit and Marathi dictionaries. This Veer gave apologies as many as five times.

After being brought back to India, Savarkar was lodged in Yaravada Jail. It was when he was in this jail that he was to be conditionally released. On January 6, 1924, he was released subject to certain conditions. Two of them were as follows:

1. Savarkar shall reside in Ratnagiri district and shall not go beyond the limits of that district without the permission of Government or in case of emergency of the District Magistrate.

2. He will not engage privately or publicly in any manner of political activities without the consent of Government for a period of five years, such restrictions being renewable at the discretion of Government at the expiry of the said period.

The option to renew the terms was with Government and not with Savarkar who accepted the conditions.

In 1937 Congress formed in Bombay. It was the same Congress upon whom Savarkar had heaped abuses all along. The Government, in their “beneficence and mercy” relaxed the conditions of detention. Savarkar was free. His followers were naturally jubilant.

But on April 4, 1950 Savarkar was arrested, unjustifiably, under Public Security Measures Act (law of detention). A habeas corpus Petition was filed by Savarkar’s son, Vishwas, and it was heard by a Bench of Chief Justice Chagla and Justice Gajendragadkar. After taking instruction from the Government, the Advocate General, C.K. Daftary, who was prosecuting Counsel in Gandhi murder case, informed the Court that the Government would release Savarkar if he gave an undertaking that he would not participate in politics. Undertaking was given by Savarkar’s Advocate on his behalf and the Court ordered the release on that undertaking. This was the last condition which Savarkar accepted.

How did he come to be known as Veer Savarkar? Who gave him that title? I am not able to find in any published literature an answer to these questions. However, personal inquiries made by me have revealed that Mrs. Bhatkar, the editor of “Bhala”, a Marathi periodical, dubbed Savarkar as Veer. Somewhere on the road, the word “Swatantrya” was added and thus Savarkar became Swatantrya Veer Savarkar – Freedom Fighter Savarkar who did not do anything for the country after 1913 till his death in 1966.

Nelson Mandela spent twenty three years in jail and refused to admit that he would not take part in politics. Still we do not call him Swatantrya Veer.

I have not dealt with other aspects of Savarkar’s life except his apologies and undertakings which are relevant to the title of Swatantrya Veer. It must be admitted that large number of Maharashtrians, especially Brahmins, adored him. In Mumbai when Sangha Pariwar was in power in Municipal Corporation, a road was

named after him. That road is one of the longest roads in Mumbai and it runs into 3 postal districts. On this road has been erected, probably the biggest memorial in India, named after Savarkar. During the time when Manohar Joshi was the Speaker, an oil portrait of Savarkar was unveiled in the Central Hall of the Parliament, but Mahatma Gandhi's statue sits in the open braving the sun and winds.

Savarkar: was he a Rationalist?

It is generally believed that Savarkar was a rationalist, despite his belief in Hindutva. He advised the general public of India, more particularly Hindus that *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and *Puranas* are good literature but not guides. They should be kept in the cupboard as pieces to look good. Even Bhagwad Gita allegedly dictated by Lord Krishna was a piece of literature and only expounded what he regarded as a good guide. It described four phases of man and we are free to follow any one as the pathway to God. In short, he did not believe in the supernatural.

On these and other grounds Maharashtra Anhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti has hailed him as a great social reformer of Maharashtra. If one reads the piece on Savarkar, he is in fact, regarded as a rationalist of Maharashtra on par with Gadge Maharaj, who tried to teach people to clean Maharashtra - even personally sweeping the land and bylanes of the city and villages. He in his own language admonished the people to lead a personal good life. Gadge Maharaj never invoked God for the social reform he preached and in fact did not personally practice any rituals. He took a broom in his hand and set an example of how and why the streets and public places be swept.

This was not the rationalism of Savarkar. Though Savarkar advocated that meat prohibited for the high caste Hindu, should be eaten by them. No food was prohibited by Savarkar. Savarkar's advocacy that Hindus should eat meat was based upon the belief that meat has strength. But it was a myth, because he forgot that an elephant, though so huge was strictly vegetarian and if an occasion was available to it, it could also lift a lion (who was a strict non-vegetarian) with his trunk and injure or kill it. The lion could attack and kill an elephant more because of his agility and mobility. But Savarkar was right in the absurdity of the ban on meat. Meat was a taboo to orthodox Hindus because it was animal food. No food was prohibited, according to Savarkar. Food should be chosen on the basis of its nutritional value and not on the basis of religious edicts. He might even have ridiculed the Muslims and Jews for prohibiting eating of pork because the people of Kodagu (Coorg in English) eat it as a regular food item. To Americans, English and even Europeans, no food is prohibited. Africans also eat almost any food, scarcely barring some. Despite being born in a Chitpawan Hindu family (a sect of Hindus), Savarkar advocated or at least did not prohibit eating meat. But should he be regarded as a rationalist for

this? It would be a very narrow conception. Hitler was a vegetarian. Akbar was a vegetarian.

In this connection, it is interesting to note that M.N. Roy, the great rationalist, persuaded Virendra Chattopadhyaya to eat beef in Germany. Roy told Chattopadhyaya that Hindus forbade eating cow's meat (beef), in India, not in Germany. So one can safely say that, Savarkar was a rationalist in matters of food.

That is not all. Because Savarkar said although *the Vedas* and *Upanishads* are Hindu scriptures, no one reads them. Therefore, it is said that Savarkar was a rationalist. Normally if a person's source of knowledge is articles in a book, he is not a rationalist. Similarly, one who regards a person or a book holy can never be a rationalist.

It is perfectly in order that a rationalist or even a common man should reject *Vedas* and *Upanishads*. *Puranas* do not teach any moral lesson. Shambhuk episode, Wali incident, Sita's totally unjust *Agnipariksha* and some other features make Ramayana unacceptable. Mahabharat is still worse. There are many persons in Mahabharat who were not born legitimately. Of course, this is imagination but the bulk of Hindu population believes in them, as they are entertaining. Due to their entertainment value and because of technical and other reasons they attracted audiences on T.V. on Sunday mornings. But Bible was a failure in this predominantly Hindu kingdom. One can speculate how a serialization of Quran would fare. Of course, the rationalists regard them as myths. The three books mentioned are no doubt figments of imagination for the rationalists. It is not mentioned that Savarkar condemned these as wrong on ethical grounds or any of the *Puranas* on any other ground. Rationalism as an appellation can hardly be applied. Ramayana, Mahabharata are good entertainment stories, as Arabian Nights but no human being should and can use them for self edification. There are so many irrational propositions in them, which no rationalist can accept. *Puranas* come in the same category. Probably they were composed in the third or fourth century to arrest Buddhism and Lokayat. *Upanishads* are a different story. Though they are attached to *Vedas*, they contain theoretical discussion and not one of them has canvassed that God exists. Even Kathopanishad and Brihadaranyak *Upanishads* do not advance the theory of theism. A rationalist cannot believe the *Vedas*. Rigved and Yajurved contain at places such unrefined passages which are not brought to the notice of the believers. Even Atharvaveda and Sam Veda do not contain any educational material. Rationalists study them but by no

stretch of imagination can accept them. Savarkar in his voluminous writings examines them but does not condemn them. As such, he might be a normal Hindu but definitely not a rationalist.

The literature to which I have made reference so far does not contain any law that might have governed the Hindus. Sometimes as Ram Shastri Prabhune says, they might have been weighed as Hadith; sometimes a story, here or there, attributable to God or Gods might have given guidance or even wrong guidance. For example, Shambuka episode earned for Rama the Sobriquet Purushottam from Agastyamuni, one of the eight Rishis who were the preceptors of Rama. Unfortunately, some of the Hindu kings thought they were following Sanatana dharma by behaving according to these irrational, incoherent and even unjust laws which endorse beheading of Shambuka (a Shudra youth) by Rama. They cannot be called rationalists.

But the book which acted as a law book for Hindus, like Savarkar, was a Smriti called Manusmriti. Even till 1956, the Courts, including Privy Council, accepted the law propounded by Manusmriti as the law of Hindus. It is the most irrational book which should not have seen the light of day. No rationalist could accept the legal propositions that the Hindus were expected to follow. Did Savarkar condemn the book? No, he even praised the book and said the weakness of the Hindus was cause of not following the book. Remember this was before 1956. There is no book in the world which treats the so-called Shudras and women as contemptible and untouchables as inhumanly as Manusmriti. I venture to think that the Hindus believed in Manusmriti and accepted it is the reason why India has not produced a single philosopher after Sankaracharya. There were only Bhaktas like Tukaram, etc. but not thinkers or philosophers. Many of the Bhaktas, it seems, were, schizophrenic. All Bhaktas were not of the same hue. But Hindus accepted all of them with equal reverence.

There is not enough space here to enumerate all the irrationalities of Manusmriti. But it is sufficient to remember that Manusmriti tells us that the woman in her childhood depends upon her parents, in her youth or adulthood on her husband and in her old age on her children. No woman deserves freedom, women's sensual pleasures must be kept under control, the man is the one to whom the woman adheres, a woman should get a loaf of bread, a seat and ornaments.

There are still more 'gems' about woman written in Manusmriti. Remember, though Manusmriti was a Smriti, it was a law, binding

upon Hindus. In 1940, Savarkar in his presidential address of Hindu Mahasabha showed his commitment to Manusmriti and said that if the lessons of Manusmriti were learnt, Hindu society will be stronger. Savarkar was bold enough to say that “our Hindu nation shall prove again unconquerable and a conquering race as we proved once (Samagra Savarkar Sangrah, published by Maharashtra Hindu Mahasabha, Pune p. 426.) I must casually mention that Hindu Mahasabha has done a great service by publishing all Savarkar works in 1960 for only Rs. 160/-

Manusmriti further said that:

- A) Shudras were born from the feet (of Brahma);
- B) God has given only one occupation to Shudra viz. serving the high caste;
- C) If a Shudra arrogantly teaches the Brahmin about the latter’s duty, the King shall cause hot oil to be poured in Shudra’s ears;
- D) If a Shudra pretends to be of a higher caste, his lips should be branded;
- E) No collection of wealth should be made by a Shudra;
- F) The son of a Brahmin from a Shudra woman inherits no property.

There are more ‘gems’ like these in Manusmriti which no rational man can endorse. But Savarkar did. Read this in Savarkar’s Samagra Sahitya (original in Hindi).

“Manusmriti is that scripture which is most worshipable after Vedas for our Hindu nation, and which from ancient times has become the basis of our culture, customs, thought and practice. The book for centuries has codified the spiritual and divine march of our nation. Even today, the rules which are followed by crores of Hindus in their lives are based upon Manusmriti. **Today Manusmriti is Hindu Law. That is fundamental.**” (Emphasis provided.) Savarkar was addressing a joint conference of Hindu Mahasabha and RSS.

Savarkar has a reputation of being the leader and mentor of Hindus. Untouchability was a part of Hindu Dharma. Ambedkar fought against it all through his life and ultimately embraced Buddhism. No religion or society in the world (except Hindus) has sanctified untouchables. Savarkar was not averse to untouchability, though later he established Patit Pavan Sangh in Ratnagiri. It has never traversed beyond Ratnagiri and Pune. Untouchability is regarded as a curse by all (except Hindu Mahasabha and RSS). Even Mahatma

Gandhi condemned it, though he could have been unwilling to exclude them from the Hindu fold. Untouchables were regarded as ati-Shudras but outside the pale of caste-system. Gandhi would have probably accepted them in the Shudra caste.

We have already seen how Manusmriti regarded untouchables. Even the shadow of an untouchable cannot fall upon a Brahmin or in his path. But he made some cosmetic changes to Hindu society. While permitting caste Hindus to dine with untouchables, he emphatically said in 1939 that the Hindu Mahasabha, “will not introduce or support compulsory legislation regarding Temple entry by untouchables, etc. in old temples beyond the limit the non-Hindus are allowed by Custom as in force today.”

Thus, he was not in favour of unqualified entry of Harijans in temples as Ambedkar had launched in Kalaram temple; Kakasaheb Gadgil participated in Parvati in Pune and Senapati Bapat, in general.

On 20th June, Savarkar again guaranteed that the Hindu Mahasabha shall not enforce any legislation regarding the entry of untouchables in the ancient temples or be compelled by law for amending any sacred ancient and moral usage or custom prevailing in those temples. In general, the Mahasabha will not support any legislation, which may be thrust upon it.

While considering the reformist views of the Savarkar brothers, so far as personal law is concerned, let alone a rationalist, was Savarkar even a reformer?

I have already mentioned above that Savarkar never made efforts to ameliorate the condition of untouchables. Though he founded the Patit Pavan Sangh but with Bhagurkars Patit Pavan Sangh untouchables remained untouchables. Hindu Mahasabha as an organisation did nothing for untouchables. Savarkar opposed, as mentioned, the entry of untouchables into temples. Gods of caste Hindu temples were surely, the Gods of untouchables too, but the latter had no access to them. Laxman Shastri clearly advised Gandhi that untouchability had no sanction of Shastras. Savarkar never endorsed this view. This is the inhumanism of the rationalist Savarkar.

A couple of matters, not pertaining strictly to rationalism need be mentioned here. He was a Hindu Nationalist believing that Hindustan belonged to Hindus and no one else. Akhand (undivided) has always been the motto of Hindu Mahasabha of which Savarkar

was the President. In fact, it was founded by him. Yet, on 15th August, 1943 (four years before partition) he said, "I have no quarrel with Mr. Jinnah's two nations theory that Hindus and Muslims are two nations. We Hindus are a nation by ourselves and it is a historical fact that Hindus and Muslims are two nations."

In the same place he mentioned that Hindus would be in the dominant position. Dominant in what, say—more taxes, more posts etc. Savarkar says nothing about it. Rest of the speech is confusing and incoherent and at least needs no examination. A nation is always based upon territory. Muslims, as a nation in Savarkar's confession, would occupy a territory. Then where is Akhand Hindustan (undivided India)?

At one time Sindh and Bengal had Coalition Ministries. Shyam Prakash Mukherjee (son of Ashutosh) was a minister in the Bengal. Savarkar's hatred for Congress was so intense that Dhananjay Keer (almost official Biographer) mentions that, "Savarkar had advised the Hindu leaders in the Muslim majority provinces to join Ministries formed by Muslim League (Keer -p.348)

This is the Hinduism or nationalism of Savarkar. That Savarkar was opposed to Quit India movement need not be held against him. Consistent with this view he advised Hindus to join armed forces "not to defeat fascism but to strengthen Hinduism." In fact, he chided Nehru for opposing fascism for, according to Savarkar, Hitler and Mussolini knew what was best for their countries.

When in Ratnagiri Jail (where he had been transferred), Savarkar wrote his magnum opus *Hindutva*, wherein he made a distinction between *Hindutva* and Hinduism. All those who come under the umbrella of Hinduism were Hindus, for according to Savarkar, those whose history, gods, *pitrubhumi* (father's home-land) and *matrubhumi* (mother's home-land) were within and from this land were Hindus; so defined, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains were Hindus but not Muslims and Christians. Muslims' attachment was for Kaba and Mecca, their holy places. Christians looked towards Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified. Their *Pitrubhumi* was India but their *Punyabhumi* (land of worship) was abroad, not Hindustan. Therefore, they are not Hindus. Savarkar's confusion and incoherence are evident here. He equated religion with nation. But see what he says elsewhere that "change of religion leads to change of nationality."

I have given enough material to show that Savarkar was not a rationalist. He was communal. I do not hold against him that he was acquitted in Gandhi murder case. The government did not appeal against him. Being a lawyer I would say, agreeing with the Supreme Court, that he was doubly innocent.

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar - Apropos of a recent film

The recent film “Veer Savarkar” is an attempt to pay homage to the memory of one who has been regarded as a great patriot who underwent untold physical and mental suffering. After the films on Gandhi, Jinnali and Ambedkar, a film on Savarkar cannot be said to be inappropriate. His admirers point out that the struggle for India’s freedom did not begin with Gandhi who, before his return to India from Africa, was engaged in wresting concessions for the Indian community from the Government of South Africa. Gandhi arrived in India in 1910 and as a loyal subject of His Majesty’s British Government co operated with the Government in the First World War. He was decorated with the Kaiser-I-Hind Medal.

Long before this, the nationalist flame had been kindled in Pune where Chapekar brothers had shot dead Rand, a British officer who was said to have indulged in excesses as the Plague Commissioner, and another British officer, Ayerst. This incident took place on 22nd June 1897, on the day of Diamond Jubilee of the Coronation of Queen Victoria who reigned too long to the discomfort of her aging son, Edward. This and other incidents had fired the imagination of Savarkar. Savarkar’s nationalism always remained Hindu nationalism.

Recent generations are almost wholly ignorant of Savarkar’s life which has been overshadowed by the present day Hindutvavadis constituting Bharatiya Janata Party (successor to Jan Sangh, founded by Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, one time a close associate of Savarkar). After the Hindu Mahasabha was wiped out in the elections of 1945, Shyama Prasad Mookerjee resigned from the Hindu Mahasabha, which he wanted to be converted into a socio-cultural organisation. Mookerjee founded the Jan Sangh on 28th April 1951 and the Sangh carried with it nationalist Hindus leaving the Mahasabha in the backwaters of Indian politics. In fact, Dr. Mookerjee thought that the Mahasabha was too communal and too militant.

To return to the life of Vinayak Savarkar, it may be noted that Savarkar was 14 years old when Rand was assassinated. That was an impressionable age. However, there were earlier impressions also. Born on 28th May 1883 (as the second of four children of Dainodar Savarkar), he spent his childhood in Bhagur, a village in

Nasik District, the village of his birth. The year 1893 witnessed large-scale Hindu- Muslim riots first in Azamgarh (U.P.) and then in Bombay — incidents which stoked the Hindu sentiment in Savarkar. The ten-year old boy, leading a batch of youngsters, marched to the local Mosque and broke its windows and tiles by throwing stones. That can be regarded as the birth of Savarkar, the Hindu nationalist.

Savarkar completed his primary education in his village and high school education at Nasik where he founded “Mitra Mandal (Friends Circle) which later grew up into Abhinav Bharat Society an organisation that figured in terrorist activities. It was the activities of this organisation, which later enmeshed Savarkar in criminal prosecution leading to his long incarceration.

In the meantime in 1902 he came to Poona for college education. He participated in Swadeshi Movement in the fashion of the day and was a regular militant speaker at several meetings. Savarkar’s leading role in bonfire of foreign cloth attracted the adverse attention of the Principal of Fergusson College, Sir R. P. Paranjape, who expelled Savarkar from the hostel, though not from the college. Having graduated in 1905, Savarkar came to Bombay to pursue legal studies which were, however, interrupted by his departure for England for higher studies by a scholarship given by a philanthropist.

His activities in London were more in the field of struggle for India’s freedom than in the academic field. He was in constant touch with several Indians in England who were engaged in what were described as revolutionary activities. His heart ached for his motherland which he wanted to be free. In one of the nostalgic moments, he composed the famous poem “*Ne majasi ne, parat, Matrubhumila*” (Take me back. ocean, to my motherland) which has been made more famous by the phenomenal Mangeshkars who have sung it in chorus.

On the homefront at Nasik, Anant Kanbere shot dead Jackson, the Collector of Nasik, on 21st December 1909. The ever-vigilant British Government and the Government of India had kept a watchful eye on Savarkar. At the Jackson murder trial, it was found that Savarkar, as a prominent member of India House in London and a leader of Abhinav Bharat Society had sent to India two Browning pistols, one of which was used in the assassination of Jackson. Provisions of Fugitive Offenders Act of 1881 were invoked with a view to bringing Savarkar to India to trial. Pursuant to a warrant

issued by a Bow Street Court Magistrate Savarkar was arrested and on 1st July 1910 was put on *S. S. Morea* for being brought to India.

Then occurred the famous escape, re-arrest on French soil and being brought to India. It is not necessary to go into too many details. For the purposes of this article, it is sufficient to mention that Savarkar was tried by a Special Tribunal which meant no jury, no appeal. The Special Tribunal consisted of Sir Basil Scott, Chief Justice of Bombay, and puisne judges Sir N. U. Chandavarkar and Sir Heaton. The prosecution was led by Mr. Jardine, the Advocate General, and the defence team was led by Mr. Joseph Baptista. The preliminary objection that the Special Tribunal had no jurisdiction to try a person who was brought before it by being arrested on foreign soil was overruled.

Savarkar was ultimately tried in two cases (along with several others) and in one case was convicted under Section 121-A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) - conspiracy to commit offence under Section 121 of IPC - of waging war against the Government and was sentenced to transportation for life. He was also convicted in the Jackson murder case and sentenced to transportation for life. For serving both these sentences, Savarkar was lodged in the infamous Cellular Jail at Port Blair (Andaman Islands). (For a good account of Savarkar's trial, see "Trials of Independence" by B. R. Agarwal, National Book Trust, which also contains an account of M.N. Roy's trial).

Without belittling the fight put up, the sacrifices made and sufferings undergone by Savarkar and his family members, it should be noted that freedom fight of Savarkar came to an end at this point. The conditions of jail in Port Blair were inhuman in the extreme and few prisoners could survive physically and mentally. Savarkar, though physically strong and mentally tough, succumbed. Subsequent to the closure of the Cellular jail, on the recon of Cardew Committee, Savarkar was brought to India and lodged in different prisons. His one sojourn was in Ratnagiri jail where he wrote "Hindutva" propounding his view that only one whose place of birth and faith is Hindustan can be legitimately called Hindu and the sentiment of being such a Hindu is Hindutva.

Friends and admirers of Savarkar had started efforts for the release of Savarkar. It was when he was in Yerwada jail that the conditions for Savarkar release were finalised and accepted. Savarkar was released on 6th January 1924 subject to the following conditions:

(1) Savarkar shall reside in Ratnaciri district and shall not go beyond the limits of that district without the permission of Government or in case of emergency, of the District Magistrate;

(2) He will not engage publicly or privately in any manner of political activities without the consent of the Government for a period of five years, such restrictions being renewable at the discretion of the Government at the expiry of the said term.”

(See “Veer Savarkar” by Dhananjay Keer, 1988 Sangarn Books, p.164; see also B. R. Aganval op.cit. p.85)

On a couple of occasions, the Government gave stern warnings to Savarkar for not complying with the conditions of release and he was able to escape rearrest by appropriate reply: “I will not do it again” type. The conditions were renewed twice but on the eve of the Second World War, the Hindu Mahasabha and Savarkar extending support to the British Government, the conditions were allowed to lapse and Savarkar became a free man. Dhananjay Keer mentions that M. N. Roy welcomed the release of Savarkar and hoped that Savarkar would devote his life again to the emancipation of India on his own line of thinking (op. cit. p.223).

Nelson Mandela had courted arrest several times for the freedom of his people and his last and longest jail term started in 1962 and ended in 1989. Most of these years were on Robben Island. During those years, there were several offers of release of Mandela provided he gave an undertaking that he would reject violence as a political instrument. He was not asked to renounce politics. Mandela’s reply was: Only free men can negotiate. Prisoners cannot enter into contracts” (“Long Walk to Freedom” by Nelson Mandela; Little Brown and Company 1994;p.511). Yet no one called him “Veer Mandela” Entering the prison at the age of 44, he came out at the age of 71.

Later arrest of Savarkar in connection with the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi and his acquittal together formed the only political incident in his life thereafter.

No account of Savarkar’s life can be complete without a proper discussion of his rationalism, his literary achievements and his enunciation of Hindutva. Present day Hindutvavadis have totally consigned Savarkar’s rationalism to the limbo and are indulging in superstitions, obscurantist practices and rituals.

Savarkar set great value on science and was an inveterate foe of superstition. Freedom from superstition was the constant refrain of many of his articles. Dhananjay Keer writes: "Savarkar holds that the greater the domination of superstition, the lesser is the tendency of the people towards science. So he raised his mighty pen against superstition from which flowed Voltaire's satire and emanated the force of Luther. Voltaire venerated nothing while Savarkar, like Swift, did his job with devastating candour. Voltaire smashed the ancient idols; Savarkar swept them into a corner as historical and cultural monuments for record and research. Voltaire disfigured the idols, Savarkar dethroned them" (op. cit. p.203).

In his younger days when the mind has not yet started on the voyage of discovery, Savarkar did worship idols and visit temples. In all probability, during his incarceration at Cellular Jail his mind became purged of theism and superstition. He brushed aside God as an unwanted concept and recommended the study of the laws of the universe as guidance for life in this world. He also found the concept of God as inconsistent with so much misery in the world the sufferings of the virtuous, the deaths of the innocent, the sinking of ships the earthquakes, pestilence, plagues etc.

For Savarkar regarded as a staunch Hindu, cow was not an animal for veneration but for preservation as much cattle. He did not oppose the slaughter of useless cattle including the progeny of cow. Hindu scriptures are good, old literature to be kept in the library, not to be worshipped or followed: there is no relationship between faith in God and social progress: worship of the phallus, trees, beasts is aberration of mind - these and several other thoughts have been expressed and discussed in great detail in his articles in Marathi in his inimitable style. His language was direct, piercing while making a point. It is difficult to translate in English. "A donkey may worship the cow as its superior but a man should not commit such donkeyism (*Gadhavpana*)". The language is analogous to that of Robert Ingersoll.

As an author also, Savarkar has been rightly highly eulogised. His writings are well illustrated with facts, figures and instances from history. Savarkar was a great admirer of Mazzini. He had contempt for non violence which was expressed in his play "*Sanyasta Khadga*" (Forsaken Sword). This play is a strong criticism of the doctrine of non-violence. He was not an admirer of Buddha. He thought "that Buddhism was wiped out from India because the

Buddhists of those days were traitorous to the independence of Bharat” (Dhananjay Keer, op. cit. p.450)

Before the consideration of Hindutva of Savarkar, it is worth noticing that M. N. Roy and Ellen paid a courtesy call on Savarkar in Bombay in the second week of June 1944 when Savarkar was ill. Dhananjay Keer describes this meeting as follows:

“.. The talk between the two leaders became very interesting when it touched the Muslim problem in its rational and realistic aspect. Two giants well known for their rationalism crossed swords with each other and the greatest theorist in Roy had to face hard realities respecting the Muslim problem from all points” (op.cit. p.349).

I have tried in vain to find in Royist literature any reference to the meeting of Roy and Savarkar. Dhananjay Keer mentions some facts in his book, sources of which are not always mentioned. The following to be found on page 451 seems to be of highly doubtful authenticity: “M. N. Roy described him (Savarkar) as his inspiration and a fearless man and appreciated his sacrifice and intellectual honesty.”

In V. B. Karnik's biography of M. N. Roy, the name of Savarkar does not appear anywhere. In “M.N. Roy's Memoirs” (Allied Publishers, 1964), there is a casual reference to Savarkar as one belonging to the terrorist group of which Virendranath Chattopadhyaya was the live wire. Roy refers to Savarkar's arrest and deportation to India “as a sequel to the senseless assassination of Curzon Wylie (p.287).

The constraints of the length of an article even in an accommodating journal like *The Radical Humanist*” (RH) do not permit me to make a detailed analysis of Savarkar's Hindutva which is not, however, the Hindutva of revivalists, Advanis and Murli Manohar Joshis. I will confine here to Savarkar's Hindutva and will indicate the basic fallacies in it. I will crave the hospitality of the RH for a detailed discussion at a later date.

Some years before Savarkar wrote *Hindutva*” in 1923, when he was confined to Ratnagiri District Hindu revivalism had started gathering strength in North India. Dayanand had established “Arya Samaj and had started uniting the Hindus and had launched the purificatory (“*Shuddhikaran*”) movement for reclaiming the erstwhile Hindus who had been lost to foreign religions. The Arva Samajists were loath to use the term Hindu because according to scholars, the word Hindu was coined by the Muslims - especially Persians - by

corrupting “Sindhu” which was a sacred river. The Arya Samajists, therefore, used the word “Arya”. Nobody bothered to ask and nobody bothered to answer whether the word “Arya” applied to Shudras and ati-Shudras.

Fortunately for the Arya Samajists, Savarkar solved this difficulty by discovering from deep study of ancient history that the word Hindu had been in use long before the Mogul and Muslim invaders started rolling down the Khyber Pass into the fertile lands of Hindustan. The word Hindu thus became respectable and thereafter the Arya Samajists and others of their persuasion started using that word.

Lala Lajpat Rai, a staunch Hindu leader, though a member of Servants of People’s Society, was of the opinion that Hindus were a nation in themselves because they represented, by a type of their civilisation, all their own. This concept did find a necessary ingredient in “Hindutva” of Savarkar. Hardayal, a contemporary of Lala Lajpat Rai, declared that “the future of the Hindu race, of Hinduism and the Punjab, rests on these four pillars: (1) Hindu Sanghatan, (2) Hindu Raj, (3) Shuddhi of Moslems and (4) Conquest and Shuddhi of Afghanistan and the frontiers. So long as the Hindu nation does not accomplish these four things the safety of our children and great grandchildren will be ever in danger and the safety of the Hindu race will be impossible” (Quoted by Dhananjay Keer). Mopla uprisings had taken place in Malabar in South India where thousands of Hindus had been killed.

Against this background, Savarkar started thinking of a philosophy and a philosophy of action. He was convinced, as even Ambedkar was persuaded to a large extent, that the two communities could not live in peace hereafter.

I will now summarise the Hindutva concept developed by Savarkar. I have relied almost entirely on “Hindutva” (in Vol.6 of Samagra Savarkar Sahitya; Pune Hindu Mahasabha Publisher).

As mentioned earlier, Savarkar bestowed respectability and sanctity on the word Hindu by postulating that the word had been used since time immemorial in literature and history and was in common use and it is not the corrupted expression invented by the *Mlechhas*. Savarkar then developed his thesis that the concept “Hindu” is more geographical and cultural than religious. Savarkar did not point out why in all Hindu literature, Shastras, Puranas and all, the word Hindu has not been used. It is always *Aryadharm* or *Sanatan*

dharma. But we accept Savarkar's concept because he solves this dilemma by saying Hinduism, which is never equated to Hindutva, is only an aspect of Hindutva.

Savarkar is demonstrably on strong ground when he says that *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and *Puranas* were born in this country; they are the holy scriptures of the group of people whom we call Hindu; they in turn have their holy places in this country; their heroes were of this soil; their mythologies are intimately connected with the soil, rivers, mountains and even skies of this country. Historically, over a period of time, there developed between these people and them an attachment, an inseparable, symbiotic connection. This oneness can be described as Hindutva.

It is not the geography and culture alone that binds them with this land which in fact claims them as its children. These people have had common history, struggles, tribulations, which bound them together and inculcated in them a sense of oneness, Hinduness, in other words, Hindutva. It is analogous to "Jewishness" cultivated by the Jews after the diaspora - this Jewishness kept them, their faith and their hope alive to return to the Promised Land and return they did. Savarkar condemns the Jews as the most ungrateful people upon the earth because they, despite enjoying the hospitality of several countries during their diaspora, maintain their separateness in every land they live and crave to go back to Palestine.

Apart from the geographical, cultural, historical factors, which have united the inhabitants of this subcontinent, there are in addition religious factors. The Hindu religion was born in Hindustan; it evolved in all its plulosoplucal majesty in this land; the places of pilgrimage are all in this soil. All these factors make an indissoluble bond - social, cultural, political and most important of all psychological and the awareness, consciousness, even pride of being so bound in Hi ndutva.

What about Buddhist, Jains and Sikhs? They are also Hindus and Hindutva is also their inheritance. How? Simple. They or their ancestors were born in India; their faiths are rooted in India; the sacred trees of their religions have sprouted from the sacred soil of Hindustan and people of all faiths have partaken of their trees and rested under the shades of their boughs. Their preachers and prophets were of the same flesh and blood of other inhabitants of this land; their pilgrim centres are in this sacred land. Therefore, those who do not belong to Hindu religion are still Hindu, not religiously, but historically, culturally, philosophically, by shared

experiences of trial and tribulations. Their feeling of oneness, attachment, their love of this land so envisaged and so understood is Hindutva.

In the case of Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs, their fatherland (*Pitrbhumi*) and holy land (*Punyabhumi*) are the same. What follows has not been specifically spelt out by Savarkar, but I have ventured to expand on his theme. In any religion there are four parameters: holy books - scriptures; holy person - prophet, teacher; holy places - pilgrim centres; holy periods - either for celebration or for fasting.

All those born in India for whom all the four parameters are linked with India are Hindus and the feeling that in this sense they are the products of Hindustan is "Hindutva". Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs born in India, though in religion not Hindus, share the Hindutva psyche because their four parameters are indissolubly linked to Hindustan. Together all these communities constitute Hindu Rashtra (Nation) though not on the basis of religion. In the light of these criteria and in the context of this philosophy, the Moslems in India are obviously not Hindus and they cannot share the feeling of Hindutva. The present day Moslems may be descendants of Moslems since five or six centuries, yet they cannot be Hindus and hence not proper Indians. Their holy places and the centres of faith are elsewhere and when they pray they turn in the direction of a place outside India.

A searching analysis of Savarkar's Hindutva has been made by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in "Pakistan or Partition of India" reprinted in Vol.8 of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, published by the Government of Maharashtra. With incisive force Dr. Ambedkar has demonstrated the contradictions, fallacies and difficulties involved in Savarkar's Hindutva. Caught in the web of his own making, Savarkar was forced to accept that Muslims were a nation. Speaking at the Hindu Mahasabha Session, at Ahmedabad in 1937, Savarkar said: "Let us bravely face unpleasant facts as they are. India cannot be assumed today to be a unitarian and homogeneous nation, but on the contrary these are two nations in the main - the Hindus and the Muslims in India" (Quoted by Dr. Ambedkar, *Ibid.* p.142).

Savarkar's speech at the Calcutta Session of the Hindu Mahasabha in 1939 was more forthright and was a plea for the establishment of Hindu Rashtra with Hindi as a national language in Devanagari script. With a patronisingly tolerant attitude towards the Moslem

minority “who have not obliged the Hindus by remaining in minority and therefore, they must be satisfied with the status they occupy and with the legitimate share of civic and political that is their proportionate due” (Quoted by Dr. Ambedkar)

There are several difficulties in the way of acceptance of this feeling of Hindutva by all those whom Savarkar calls Hindus. In the first place, Buddhas can never develop Hindutva mentally. They have no veneration for the great sacred scriptures which is the legacy of non-Buddhist Hindus; Buddhism was the revolt against the Vedantism and *Sanatan Dharma* which included the caste system; Buddha, though not a political leader, upset the social order sacrilegged by *Sanatan Dharma*. That was why Adya Shankaracharya's mission to re-establish Hindu Dharma in Aryavarta. The whole aim of Hindu revivalism of Adya Shankaracharya was to eclipse Buddhism. Hindus, it is said, regard Buddha as one of the Avatars (incarnation) of Vishnu. In fact this did not happen till Shankaracharya in a Dashavatara Sutra placed Buddha among the Dashavatars of Vishnu. The separate identity of Buddha as a teacher of distinct philosophy was thus sought to be obliterated. Fortunately this did not totally succeed. After the death of Ashok, who was to Buddhism what Constantine was to Christianity and after his son Kunala was blinded and incapacitated for a while, the Hindu rulers in North India slaughtered the Buddhists. They, therefore, migrated beyond the Himalayas. Theravada Buddhism had fortunately taken firm roots in Ceylon in the lifetime of Ashok himself thanks to the missionary work done by Ashok's son, Mahendra.

This apart the spirit of Hindutva (though not in its name) never animated any of the generations of Indians. Kings and Emperors fought with each other in the names of their dynasties. Not one ruler in India ever tried to unify Bharat Varsha in the name of Hindutva.

What is the place of the development of the concept of Hindutva in India's history? or in society? As we say in law: “What is the sequiter?” Even those who are traditionally regarded as Hindus are not much enamoured of the concept. Swami Vivekananda, the follower of the Hindu mystic, founded the Ramakrishna Mission for propagation of Hinduism. He is said to have given the slogan: “Garva Se Kaho Hum Hindu Hai” (Say with pride, we are Hindus). This Ramakrishna Mission fought a litigation upto the Supreme Court contending that the Mission is not a Hindu organization but an institution of minority outside the Hindu fold.

The concept of Hindutva, which is supposed to be the greatest contribution of Savarkar to Indian political thought turned out to be devoid of any practical value. It could not be the cornerstone a Hindu Rashtra; nor could it inspire any generation to higher, nobler aims. Even Savarkar's close friend, Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, deserted Savarkar to found what Mookerjee professed to be a broader party. After his release from prison, on conditions humiliating to a Swatantrya Veer Savarkar did not take part in the freedom struggle, though he participated in communal politics. It has been said, and rightly, that Muslims as a body or an organization, did not participate in the freedom struggle nor did Hindus - unless you join Jinnah in saying that the Indian National Congress was a Hindu organization. The literature of Savarkar plays, novels, historical articles, poetry however endures and will be read with avidly by generations of Maharashtrians.

Savarkar always lived modestly. His old age was often punctuated by sickness of various kinds and durations, In September 1965, his biography in Marathi "*Shartruchya Shibirat*" (In Enemy's Camp) was published. The Government of Maharashtra awarded a prize to the book posthumously in 1966.

It is not correct to say that Savarkar chose his moment of death like Sane Guruji, Vinoba, or Koestler. He underwent medical and surgical treatments which, however, were not helping him. Initially he had given up eating as he was having digestive trouble. He was getting physically weaker and weaker. The people surrounding a dying rationalist would not allow him to die rationally. On 22nd February 1966, some Brahmins were brought to chant "*Mritunjaya Maha Mantra*" (The Great Hymn for Conquering Death). Expenses for this ritualism - including presumably the fees of Brahmins - had been provided by Gulzarilal Nanda who was then Home Minister of India (See Dhananjay Keer, op.cit. p.542). In the meantime on 3rd February 1966, he had given up eating totally undertaking what is called "*Prayopveshan*" (total abstaining of food in contemplation of death). Death came at 11.30 a.m. on 26th February 1966. However, on 23rd February itself Savarkar is said to have given the farewell message to Balurao Savarkar in the famous words of Marathi Saint Tukaram:

We are going to our native place, Accept our salutations,

Now there cannot be any give and take, The voice itself is stilled"

Welcome Speech delivered at the Golden Jubilee Conference of the Indian Rationalist Association, Bombay

As the Chairman or the Reception Committee of the Golden Jubilee Conference of the Indian Rationalist Association, I have great pleasure in welcoming you all. Traditionally the Chairman of the Reception Committee is supposed to highlight the main features of the place where a conference is to be held and to impress upon those assembled the importance and the greatness of the venue of the conference. That Bombay is a great city - Urban Prima of India - is too well known to be even mentioned. It has a large population of eight million of which unfortunately at least three million are said to be living in slums. This has earned for this city the sobriquet of Bombay. Nevertheless, Bombay is a great city to which people from all parts of the country are rightly or wrongly attracted for various reasons. It has been said that this city has grown, is growing and it must now stop growing.

In the minds of the rationalists like us who have assembled here today, Bombay city evokes mixed reactions. It has been said, and not without justification, that this city is a secular city. It is secular in one sense, namely that in this city people of different religions, cultures and languages have lived together. Since the year 1947 Bombay has not witnessed a single communal riot though to our lasting shame in the year 1974 this city witnessed riots between the Scheduled Castes and the Caste Hindus. It might be reasonably said that by and large several communities have lived peacefully, though not integrally, in this city. It must, however, be accepted that it is only a coexistence and not cooperative existence of the various communities. If one takes a drive along Netaji Subhashchandra Bose Road popularly known as the Marine Drive, one will notice several gymkhanas and clubs each one of which is associated with a particular community. We have thus Hindu Gymkhana, Islam Gymkhana, Catholic Gymkhana and Parsi Gymkhana, all within a distance of 3 kilometres. There is a swimming pool to which Mohamed Ali Jinnah has made a reference as early as in 1941 when his campaign for separate homeland for the Musalmans was at its peak. He referred to the said swimming pool, which was then meant for Hindus alone, and complained that the Hindus were not willing even to swim with the Muslims in the ocean. The secular character

of this city, therefore, should not be overemphasised as it is often done.

Nevertheless we can boast that the birth of the first rationalist organisation took place in this city. As the short history prepared by Mr. A. Solomon, President of the Bombay Rationalist Association, published in the Souvenir shows, in the month of January 1930 a meeting was held for the purpose of establishing a rationalist organisation, though originally it was to be called the Anti-Priest Craft Association. In March 1930 under the presidentship of Dr. G.V. Deabmukh, an eminent surgeon after whom the Peddar Road came to be named later, an association was in fact formed. It is not necessary for me to mention any more details about those who were associated in the early stages of the rationalist movement in Bombay as the details have been given in the essay published in the Souvenir. I only wish to take some legitimate pride in the fact that this city witnessed the birth of the first rationalist organisation though not of rationalism itself.

Bombay being the capital of Maharashtra, it will not be inappropriate if I make reference to the place of Maharashtra in the rationalist movement. Though Maharashtra cannot be called the cradle of Indian rationalism, it has produced some outstanding rationalists, especially in the 19th century. Earlier, Maharashtra had produced some of the greatest saints. However, in the 19th Century, some great rationalists were born and they made great impact on the social life of Maharashtra. The earliest of the three rationalists of the 19th century produced by Maharashtra was Gopalrao Deahmukh known as Lokhitwadi, the penname he used for his writings. By that can be called the pamphleteering, Deshamukh attacked the superstitious beliefs of the people and in particular the caste system which had great hold over the people. It can be safely said that Lokhitwadi Deshmukh was a rationalist in the sense in which it is understood today because he was not attacking the caste system and other social evils in the name of religion; he was indeed asking for a reconstruction of the society without invoking the Shastrik sanctions for reforms as was done by other reformers. The impact of the English education upon the intelligentsia of India had different results in different parts of the country. There was one reaction of trying to save everything that was Hindu against the influence of the West. The birth of the Arya Samaj was one result of such reaction. Then there was another type of reaction which tried to reform the Hindu society in the light of what were regarded as the liberal influences from the West. This movement embraced the

establishment of Bramho Samaj and Prarthana Samaj and the reformist movement of Ranade in Maharashtra. The third reaction was reflected in the activities of people like Lokhitwadi Deshniukh who infused modernism in Indian society.

A luminous personality which shone in the firmament of Maharashtra round about the same time when Lokhitvadi Deshmuich was giving the clarion call for social reformation was Mahatma Jyotiba Phule. Though Deshmukh had attacked religion itself, Jyotiba Phule does not seem to have subjected religion to any serious attack. Nevertheless his contribution to the social reform in Maharashtra is unmatched even to this day. He attacked the caste system with a well-merited ferocity and. taught the masses the futility and irrationality of the distinction between the so-called higher castes and the lower castes. Though ho does not seem to have displayed any tendency towards atheism or agnosticism, he established an organisation called *Satya Shodhak Samaj* (A Society in search of Truth) which spear-headed the social reform in the 19th century. It was because of the liberating influence of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule's teaching that the masses in Maharashtra awoke to the realisation of their potentialities and questioned the basis of which the Hindu society had been formed.

Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, the last of the three rationalists of Maharashtra in the 19th century, was a great crusader. Though in the early years of his life he was associated with Tilak he did not in the later years hesitate to start a campaign against Tilak on various issues. Agarkar died at the young age of 39 years. If he had lived for a few years more his influence on the social life not only of Maharashtra but of India as a whole would have been immeasurably great. Agarkar was not only a thinker but also a teacher and a journalist. Though he was a double graduate (M.A.) he refused to accept service under the Government which would have brought him great comfort and worldly gains. He preferred the life of an ascetic though not of a religious ascetic and worked in the educational institutions on a meager salary. He died, as already mentioned, at the young age of 39 years leaving behind him just enough money for his funeral expenses.

Gopal Krishna Gokhale, who has been regarded as the Guru of Mahatma Gandhi, appeared on the horizon of Maharashtra sometime in the later years of the 19th century and wielded great influence both in and outside Maharashtra till his death at the age of 49 years. The three persons, namely Lokhitvadi Deshinnkh, Mahatma Jyotiba

Phule and Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, had confined their activities mostly to Maharashtra and there also to the social and cultural fields. It was Gopal Krishna Gokhale who not only crossed the borders of Maharashtra but also stepped into the larger field of politics. He was an agnostic and it will be noticed that in none of his several speeches and writings is there any reference to Providence or to the Almighty God. Every one of his speeches and writings bears the imprint of a rational approach to the problem with which that writing or speech was concerned. Though in politics he was regarded as a moderate, in philosophy he could be regarded as a revolutionary. He displayed great faith in the capacity of the Indians to govern themselves and it can be safely said that despite the great fiery speeches and articles of Tilak it was Gopal Krishna Gokhale who by his patient and persistent efforts, both in word and deed, made the Indians realise that they were capable of self government. He brought into everything that he said or wrote a masterly knowledge of the subject with which he was dealing.

Thereafter Maharashtra has given birth to several movements and persons that can legitimately be included in the class of rationalists. Therefore I have great pleasure in welcoming you to this City of Bombay which, as I have already mentioned, gave birth to the first rationalist organization in India and which is also the capital of Maharashtra which has a reasonably long tradition of rationalism.

To this Conference have come Mr. Justice Chinnappa Reddy, Judge of the Supreme Court, who will deliver the inaugural address. Mr. Justice Chinnappa Reddy was born in the year 1922 and was educated in Madras. In the year 1944 he was enrolled as an Advocate of the High Court of Madras. He was appointed as the Judge of the High Court of Andhra Pradesh in August 1967. In June 1976 the President of India sent him to the Punjab and Haryana High Court from where Justice Chinnappa Reddy returned to Andhra Pradesh in September 1977. One year later he was appointed as a Judge of the Supreme Court. He is a confirmed, if I may use such a word, rationalist. Similarly we have in our midst Dr. Pushpa Mitra Bhargava, Director of the R.R.Laboratories at Hyderabad. Born in 1928 at Ajmer, he had his education at Varanasi and Lucknow. He has taught and guided research in several universities. He has also worked in Institute of Radium at Paris as an Eleanor Roosevelt International Cancer Research Fellow. He is an eminent Biologist. The story about an exhibition which he had organised is well known to all of us and I do not wish to recount the same because such recounting is not happy. That the first rationalist

organization was born in Bombay can be regarded as a chance; therefore the holding of the Golden Jubilee Celebration in Bombay can also be regarded as a chance. But that these two eminent rationalists should be associated with the celebrations can be regarded as a necessity. On behalf of the Indian Rationalist Association and also on behalf of the Bombay Rationalist Association I convey my sincere thanks to Mr. Justice Chinnappa Reddy and Dr. Bhargawa for having accepted our invitation to attend this function. I have also great pleasure in welcoming you all for participating in the deliberations of this Conference.

Normally my task being that of a Chairman of the Reception Committee should come to an end at this point. However, I am taking the liberty of mentioning a few points which, in my opinion, should rightly engage the attention of those who are going to participate in the deliberations to follow. What are the tasks before the rationalists today? All over the world there is a decline of rationalism and the rise of the influence of religious and of religious leaders. This is so especially after the Second World War. This problem is shared by India also. The unwarranted interference of religious leaders in the secular affairs of the society must cause grave concern to the rationalists all over the world. How to combat this invasion of religious influence over secular sphere must be one of the subjects for discussion. In India this problem is particularly heightened by the existence of rivalry among different religions. This paradox of unimaginable scientific progress on the one hand and social reaction on the other has got to be properly analysed.

I also cannot help referring to a most disturbing event that took place in the capital recently. As you are all aware, the pernicious practice of self-immolation of a Hindu widow on the pyre of her husband had been going on in this country for centuries. Historians have mentioned that even in the 4th century B.C. this practice was prevalent in at least some parts of India. I have read in history books that Aurangzeb, though not a very great admirer of Hinduism, tried to put an end to this by passing an order in 1663 forbidding the practice of Sati though it has been further mentioned that this prohibition was seldom observed. The British rule which brought several modern influences on the life of the people in this country refused to put an end to this obnoxious practice in the earlier years on the ground that it would amount to interference in the religious affairs of the natives. Fortunately, several reformers, notable among them being Raja Rammohan Roy, built up strong Indian opinion which enabled Lord William Bentinck, the then Governor General,

to take drastic steps in this matter. Ultimately on 4th of December 1829 the famous Regulation XVII was passed. That Regulation declared Sati illegal and punishable by Courts. Earlier attempts in this direction made by the Government were only towards prohibiting the people from compelling widows to commit Sati, but Regulation XVII of 1829 brought within its fold not only the persons who used inducement or compulsion of any kind but even those who were associated in any way with the voluntary act of Sati. One hundred and fifty one years after this Act was passed middle-class women took out a procession in the capital of this country propounding the revival of the cult of Sati. This is an incident which indicates the tendency towards the revival of atavistic practices and should be an eye-opener to those who think that India has made great progress after independence.

The failure of the Parliament to bring about a uniform Civil Code for all the communities in India must also engage the attention of the rationalists. In such matters as marriage and maintenance, there is no interference with the religious practices of any community if a uniform Code is brought into existence. For example, no religion compels an individual to have a particular number of wives though it may permit him to have more than one wife. What is permissive is not compulsive. If, therefore, a law is passed prohibiting bigamy I do not see how any mandate of any religion is interfered with. Similarly a religion may compel payment of minimum amount of maintenance on the dissolution of marriage. No religion says that you cannot pay higher maintenance. If, therefore, the Parliament steps in and considering the present social and a economic circumstances passes a law providing for minimum maintenance, I do not see again how the religious tenets of any community are contravened. As you are all aware, hundreds of children in this country are being adopted by foreigners and taken out of the country. A secular law of adoption making adoption permissive should be welcomed by all. Unfortunately even such an innocuous measure has been opposed by obscurantists on the ground that it is interference in the internal affairs of religion of a particular community. It is impossible to understand such opposition because the law of adoption that is envisaged does not compel any religious community to start adopting children; it only permits those individuals of that community who want to adopt to adopt. In a Conference which is occupying only two days it would naturally be difficult to cover several problems facing the rationalists in this country. I, however, hope that one or two problems at least will be

dealt with in depth and the Conference will, if necessary, appoint some committees of scholars who will study the problems and bring out reports for the edification of the people.

Justice R.A. Jahagirdar (Retd)

Justice RAJahagirdar (Retd) studied economics and politics for his graduation and post graduation. During his college days he took part in dramas, debates, and elocution and Students ' Union activities. He studied Law while in employment and passed Law examinations meritoriously in 1959. Having passed the I.A.S. examination, he chose not to join the Civil Service. He served as Government Pleader, Professor of Labour Law in K.C. College and in the University of BomIn 1976 he was appointed Judge in the Bombay High Court and retired from there in 1990. After retirement he was appointed Chairman of Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission but did not continue for long for personal reasons. He was also Chairman of the Committee for Fixing the Fee of Higher Education in Maharashtra.

In addition to his qualifications in Economics and Law, Justice Jahagirdar is a student of Philosophy, History and Religion. A voracious reader, Jahagirdar is fond of Will Durant and his wife Ariel, the famous philosopher-historian couple and quotes them often. His personal library, containing all the volumes of "The History of Civilization" written by this couple, is huge. Recently he has donated all his books toAcademy of Political and Social Studies and SM Joshi Foundation Library, in Pune. bay.

He is connected with free thoughtmovement and organisations and has spoken and written extensively on rationalism and secularism. He had been the Chairman of Indian Rationalist Association, President of Maharashtra RationalistAssociation and Editor of "The Radical Humanist". As a Founder-Trustee of the Rationalist Foundation he has contributed Rs. 5 lakhs towards its corpus.

Dr. (Mrs.) Sharad Jahagirdar, daughter of Late Justice P.B. Gajendragadakar (whom Mharashtrians know very well), is a well known and an extremely successful gynecologist. Together, Dr. Sharad and Justice Jahagirdar have very generously donated to the cause of Rationalism, Secularism, Humanism, Social Justice and Freedom of Expression.



Rationalist Foundation