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Ever-smiling?
On The False Birthday - 1926 November

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Guest Editorial : Canadian Prime Minister's Apology of June 11, 2008

When considering who owes apologies to those victims who suffered mistreatment in the Canadian residential schools, one has to remember that even if financed by the government, the schools had been run by the churches. Therefore, as I see it, it is primarily the churches who must be held accountable for this betrayal of the public trust. The government bears responsibility for the general push for assimilation and for neglect to exercise control over the church practices in residential schools-for this the government apology was overdue. But in fairness, even much more, the apology is urgently needed from the churches, as it is a sheer absurdity to directly hold the government responsible for sexual and physical abuse, for unloving, uncaring conditions created by the church people in the residential schools. It was the priests, who under the misguidance of the churches directly perpetrated grave abuses on defenseless children and taught the native people that they and their culture were 'inferior.'

Last but not least, that is why the minimum \$1 billion out of \$2 billion, allocated to the survivors, justifiably ought to come from the churches, not from the taxpayers of Canada.

It was different with the Jews. On May 13, 1939, the St. Louis, a boat with 937 mostly Jewish refugees, left Hamburg, Germany, for Havana, Cuba, where they had been granted temporary asylum. But upon arrival, the St. Louis' passengers were denied entry. The rejection caused suicide attempts on the boat. They asked everywhere; all the Caribbean countries, save the Dominican Republic, as well as the U.S. and Canada, rejected their appeal. The captain fully expected mass suicides. The St. Louis returned to Hamburg on June 7, 1939, delivering defenseless people back to the Nazis and to violent death.

After September, 1935, when the anti-Jewish racial 'denaturalization' Nuremberg laws were passed in Nazi Germany, the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Jews began. They were not fleeing forced conversion, or attempting to save their property. These innocent people, born and raised in Germany, who having generously contributed to the German and world culture, were running from the 'Final Solution' -literally for their lives and the lives of their children. For the next 12 years the U.S. accepted 200,000 Jewish refugees, Palestine 125,000, Britain 70,000, Argentina 50,000, and Canada 5,000.

According to Wikipedia: "Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King did little, as he did not want to upset the anti-Jewish attitudes of (Catholic) Quebec....."

Immigration has always created a lot of "red tape" " problems, but it is one thing when it is about people fleeing oppression and economic depravity; it is an entirely different thing when it is literally a matter of life and death for those refugees, as it was for Germany's Jews. It was the Canadian government who denied entry to these Jews, knowing that denial was their death sentence. Therefore, it is the governmental apology to the Canadian Jews that is long overdue.

SOPHIE SHULMAN
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Sophie Shulman lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She and her husband Boris, both M.D.s, came to Canada from Moscow, U.S.S.R., in 1980, where they continued their medical practice. Dr. B. Shulman passed away in 2005. Dr. Sophie retired in 2004. She is a long-time member of Humanist Association of Canada and also on the Executive of the Humanist Association of Manitoba.

What about Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, 3 chief Justices of India and the Present Union Home Minister etc., who called people thousands of Judases who complained about the self proclaimed God-Ratnakaram Satyanarayana Raju against sexual abuse of students without any investigation and murders in his bedroom?

The guardians of morality - Narendra Nayak

- Two teenage girls, their mother and maternal aunts were shot and buried when still breathing- their crime? The girls were proclaiming that they would marry persons of their choice- their mother and aunt supported them.
- A married woman in her twenties was shot dead after being pulled out of her lawyer's office, the lawyer was also shot at but had a providential escape. Reason- the victim had gone to consult her about divorcing her husband who was inflicting cruelty after cruelty on her. The only eye witness who had seen her being shot by her husband's people was her mother who later on testified that she did not see anything, hear anything or do anything! The dead woman's father justified his daughter's murder on the grounds of family honor!
- A married woman was escorted by her friends her son nearly half her age. That was construed as spending time with an alien man. The punishment? The boy's sisters were raped by the woman's husband and his brothers.
- Genital mutilation is carried out on many pre-pubertal Muslim girls in some African countries to prevent them from "enjoying" sex! Since it is forbidden in all civilized countries some parents try to take their girls back to the 'home' country where it can be performed.
- A couple was ordered to be separated by their caste panchayath. Reason? According to some ancient rule they are of the same gothra and hence are considered as brother and sister and hence their marriage amounts to incest.
- A girl commits suicide as she is harassed by a local "sena" for speaking to her neighbor who belongs to another community. Her pleas that he is twice her age and had got her a job fell on deaf ears.
- An auto rickshaw driver is assaulted with deadly weapons because he was transporting a woman belonging to another community at night. Her pleas that she was being taken to a hospital in an emergency were ignored.
- A boy and a girl belonging to different minority communities were going together. They were attacked by a boy belonging to the girl's community who was supported by a local sena, whose members belong to the majority community!

The only thing in common with all these happenings is that the cause for each of these is treatment of women as a commodity. The more barbaric of the incidents as we would have already guessed have happened in Islamic states where the state is in support of such happenings. When the incident of murders of the girls, their mother and aunt was brought up in the Pakistan parliament the MP of that constituency was protective of the murderers and said that tribal customs should not be interfered with!

We are not far from such situations in our district. The constitution of India which is a secular democratic republic guarantees fundamental rights to all the citizens. The right to follow a religion of one's choice or not to have one. The right to marry any one of one's choice (though same sex marriages are not allowed!). The right to live with any one whom one chooses to live with whether married to that person or not. These do exist on paper and for those who can afford the due process of law. But, according to the various Senas and Dals belonging to various religions the constitution of India has been suspended in our district.

The impression created by the authorities is that they are not upholders of law and order or the rights of the individuals, but are servants of the various communal organizations. The highest police official of the district has gone on record that the moral policing is a social problem and not a law and order issue! Well Mr. Superintendent of police, when a person's constitutional rights are infringed it is a law and order problem. The role of the police is to uphold law and order. They are not social reformers or moral authorities. That reminds us of an incident which had taken place a few years back when another person was occupying the same chair. In Puttur a huge crowd of the local sena had assembled outside a cinema theatre to "catch" a couple who were inside. They were waiting for the show to be over and when it was, the offending couple was brought to the police station nearby. As to be expected the woman was belonging to the community of the sena and the man of a minority community. The woman admitted that she was a major, in love with him and had gone to see the movie out of her own free will. But, the crowd was not satisfied with that. They were baying for the man's blood and wanted the police to book a case. The superintendent of police who had then arrived on the spot told the members of the sena that if a case was to be booked, it was against them and not the couple. He told them that the couple was well within their rights to see a movie of their choice. He also informed the goons of the sena that it was the duty of the police to protect the couple and that it would be done at any cost. The heroes of the sena beat a hasty retreat when they were replied to in the very same language which they were fond of using!

The so called moral police had also got one couple of their own community arrested for staying together in a hotel room. The so called 'arrest' was accompanied by media publicity. When it turned out that the couple were engaged to be married and were staying together with consent of all concerned the 'bold exposure' became a damp squib! Even if the couple were not engaged to be married, even if they were belonging to different communities, they had not committed any offence under any law of the land. There is no law which considers sexual activity between two consenting adults of the opposite sex as an offence, unless the woman is married. In that case it would be adultery. Even if that were to be an offence, the complainant should be her husband and not any sena or dal which claims to be guardians of the morals of the society.

These guardians of morality have been very selective. When the offenders belong to their cadre or leadership, they are not to be seen any where. If the male happens to belong to their community then there is not a whimper of protest as if the morality is only for women. There have been many embarrassing incidents which have been swept under the carpet. Once the members of a sena, saw a boy and girl sitting and talking in a restaurant, gathered their lumpen cadres and attacked the boy for corrupting an innocent female belonging to their community! It turned out that they were members of the same minority community and it was not the one whose interests were being 'protected' by the sena! But, the protectors of the interests of their community also have a tendency to protect purity of lineage of others too! For example a Christian lady was attacked for having dinner with a Muslim, not by the members of her community but by the cadre of a Hindu sena! Again, the selectivity of these organizations has many other limitations. While they have no qualms about

attacking the lower middle class and the economically backward sections, all their moral posturing disappears when it comes to dealing with the rich and the powerful.

While there are any number of such romances and marriages and even liaisons among the so called elite, to which all these guardians of morality and religious interests turn a convenient blind eye. While revealing the names of such in our area would be an infringement of their privacy, there are well known cases at the national level of many celebrities. There are quite a few Khans of Bollywood who have married Hindu women. There is Mansur Ali Khan also called the Nawab of Pataudi who has married a Hindu, Sharmila Tagore and probably converted her to Islam. Again, the popular BJP MP and film star Dharmendra is supposed to have converted to Islam to marry Hema Malini who is a BJP star campaigner. So, all the bravado of these guardians of morality is directed at the powerless ordinary people who have no money or muscle power.

The situation has gone to such a state that some Christian youth have ganged up with a Hindu organization to organize a sena attack female members of their community who are seen with men of other communities! If one observes the members of these communal organizations it is mainly the lumpen elements and the unemployed young men. They are all out to vent their frustration on easily identifiable targets unable to defend themselves. Some sections of the media are hand in glove with such elements because we find that the media is very conveniently present to report on these events. The defenders of morality seem to thrive on this publicity.

How can this situation be tackled? The talibanis of all communities have to be made accountable for their actions. They cannot take the law into their hands. The police and the district authorities are to be vigilant of such and a few cases booked for those breaking the law will be enough to make them see sense. While one community is being blamed for bomb blasts, which is understandable as the organizations claim to be belonging to that, it is not that others are angels. Like members of the banned Students Islamic Movement of India who have been preparing bombs, the Bajrang Dal has been also implicated in the same. It is for all citizens who uphold the democratic, secular values to make it clear to these misguided youth that they are being misled by vested interests out to exploit them. Once their usefulness is over, they are dropped like the proverbial hot potato and left to their fate!

As this goes to press there have been attacks on places of worship under the guise of prevention of conversions and alleged insults to gods of a particular religion. One of the main reasons for this is the tolerance shown to the behavior of these hooligans by the decent, law abiding citizens of Mangalore who are "good" and want to remain so! I would like to add a quotation from a parliamentarian of repute, Edmund Burke "All that is needed for the dark forces of evil to take over this world is enough number of good men who want to do nothing". In the interest of the future of our children and coming generations who are not going to excuse us for non involvement when something could be have been done let us get out our cocoons and illusions of grandeur and start doing something about this sorry state of affairs. Let us remember how Hitler with his small band of Nazis brought Germany to the brink of annihilation by the techniques of systematic spread of lies and the co-operation of the large number of decent people, the silent majority who did not want to get "involved". Replace the word Jew by minorities and we have the same propaganda that is going on today.

CHAPTER XI

EVEN IF IT HAPPENED....

(SWAMI RAMA)

(This article/chapter is excerpted from Stripping the Gurus by Geoffrey D. Falk.)

SWAMI RAMA WAS SUPPOSEDLY BORN in 1925, and allegedly grew up as an orphan in northern India. He was soon reportedly adopted there by "one of the greatest masters of the Himalayas," Bengali Baba.

At the age of twenty-four, the story goes that he was given the position of Shankaracharya of Karvirpitham—one of four "popes" in the Hindu religious hierarchy. A mere two years later, however, he apparently simply abandoned that position, leaving without notice to meditate in the mountains instead.

Rama also claimed to have later studied in Hamburg, Utrecht and at Oxford University. It turns out (Webster, 1990), however, that significant elements in the official biography of the swami may well have been merely "pulled out of thin air."

In any case, Rama definitely came to the United States in 1969, and was soon participating in biofeedback demonstrations under Elmer and Alyce Green, at the Menninger Foundation in Topeka, Kansas. There, he showed the ability to consciously control various aspects of his autonomic (involuntary) nervous system.

In 1971, the swami founded the Himalayan International Institute—"HI," publisher of *Yoga International* magazine—in Illinois, with the goal of translating ancient spiritual wisdom into contemporary terms. By 1977, that organization had moved to an ashram in the Pocono Mountains of northeastern Pennsylvania, capable of housing more than one hundred residents and guests, along with their Institute headquarters.

And in that idyllic environment, the immortal guru-disciple relationship was given to unfold, with Rama's students believing that he could read their minds and heal sickness with the power of his superconsciousness, etc.

That, though, is exactly par for the course: for the disciples to think any less of the guru would make them "disloyal," riddled with *mayic* doubt.

* * *

In December of 1990, *Yoga Journal* published an exposé detailing allegations of misbehavior, including sexual abuse, against Rama.

One of the women involved further described a public, non-sexual encounter with the sage. There, the swami allegedly put a dog collar and leash around a woman's neck, walking her around for the amusement of the other loyal followers present. He was also accused of kicking other women in the buttocks when they were weeding, already down on their hands and knees (Webster, 1990).

Pandit Rajmani Tigunait, at the time the resident spiritual director of the Honesdale ashram and a member of the Institute's teaching staff, reportedly responded (in Webster, 1990) to the allegations of sexual abuse in this way:

Even if it happened, what's the big deal? People say that Mahatma Gandhi slept with women. God knows whether it was true or not, and even if it was true, this is a normal phenomenon....

Even if I found out—how can I find out? Because I do not want to find out. There's no need for finding out, if I know it is completely wrong.

The reported reaction of Swami Rama's community to the women asserting improprieties on his part was further exactly as one would expect. That is, they were allegedly discounted as being "emotionally disturbed," or otherwise reportedly regarded as "liars" (Webster, 1990).

* * *

As Tigunait noted above, Mahatma Gandhi was indeed sleeping with teenage girls (including his cousin's granddaughter) toward the end of his life. As odd as it may sound, however, all reports are that the two parties were literally just sleeping beside each other, for him to test his resistance to sexual desire.

In explaining his position, Gandhiji said that it was indeed true that he permitted women workers to use his bed, this being undertaken as a spiritual experiment at times. Even if there were no trace of passion in him of which he was conscious, it was not unlikely that a residue might be left over, and that would make trouble for the girls who took part in his experiment [cf. "In the presence of one perfected in non-violence, enmity (in any creature) does not arise"—Patanjali, *Yoga Sutras*] (Bose, 1974).

The possible psychological effects of that on the girls themselves, even without any breach of his *brahmacharya* celibacy vow, does not seem to have concerned the Mahatma.

Of course, Gandhi's very human displays of (non-righteous) temper alone would have been enough to demonstrate to him or anyone else that he was not yet perfected in *ahimsa*. Those eruptions were indeed reported by his one-time secretary, N. K. Bose, a distinguished anthropologist who resigned the former secretarial position in part because of his objections to the Mahatma's above "experiments." Gandhi's own admitted "detestation of sensual connection," too, is a type of psychological

violence upon himself. For, when it comes to metaphysical questions regarding attachment, repulsion is no better than is attraction.

Both Chapter XVIII of Bose's (1974) *My Days with Gandhi* and Chapter 4 in Koestler's (1960) *The Lotus and the Robot* give reasonable analyses of the all-too-human psychological reasons behind Gandhi's emphasis on celibacy. Included in those is the Mahatma's abandoning of his father on the latter's deathbed to be with his young wife sexually, thus being absent from the old man's death, for which he never forgave himself.

Koestler also covers Gandhi's disappointing treatment of his children, in the same book. That handling included the Mahatma's denying of a professional education to his oldest sons, in the attempt to mold them in his image. The eldest was later disowned by the "Great Soul" for having gotten married against his father's prohibitions; and died an alcoholic wreck, after having been publicly attacked by Gandhi for his involvement in a business scandal.

Why then are the stories of the Mahatma's "experiments with teenage girls" not more widely known?

The Gandhians were so thorough in effacing every trace of the scandal that Bose's book is unobtainable not only in India, but also at the British Museum (Koestler, 1960).

* * *

Swami Rama passed away in 1996, being survived by, it has been suggested, at least one child (Webster, 1990).

In the autumn of 1997, Pennsylvania jurors awarded \$1.875 million in damages to a former female resident of the Himalayan Institute in Honesdale, PA. The woman in question claimed to have been sexually assaulted by Rama a full thirty times over a Yogic Summer of Love in the early '90s. At the time, she was a nineteen-year-old virgin, just out of high school. Yet, as reported by Phelps (1997), the Institute allegedly "did nothing to stop" that claimed abuse, even though having reportedly been informed not only of those alleged assaults but of similar complaints registered by other female disciples.

Pandit Tigunait, who accepted Rama as his guru when just a child in India, is now the "spiritual head of the Himalayan Institute," and the acknowledged "spiritual successor" to Swami Rama there.

"Even if it happened...."

The Case against Swami Rama of the Himalayas

Yoga Journal Magazine/December 1990

By Katharine Webster

Since the early 1970s, women have been claiming sexual abuse at the hands of this prominent spiritual teacher. No one had thoroughly investigated, until journalist Katharine Webster decided to spend two years researching their allegations. Here is her report.

"Unpurified ego is an evil which obstructs one's own progress. But the purified ego is a means in discriminating real Self from not-self-real Self from mere self. No one can expand his consciousness if he remains egotistical. Those who build boundaries around themselves because of their ego problems create suffering for themselves." — Swami Rama, "Living With the Himalayan Masters"

Carolyn,* an old friend, called me collect. She sounded unhappy, so I made plans to visit her at the Himalayan International Institute of Yoga Science and Philosophy in Honesdale, Pennsylvania, where she had been a resident for more than four years. But a deeper anxiety also motivated my visit: I'd heard a rumor that several women, ex-members of the Institute, were taking Carolyn's guru to court on charges of sexual misconduct. And I feared that Carolyn—young beautiful, idealistic, and worshipful of Swami Rama, the Institute's founder and spiritual leader—could be vulnerable to such exploitation.

During my weekend visit, Carolyn and I took long walks on the Institute's wooded grounds while talking about her compulsive eating patterns and her disastrous relationships with men suggested as possible husbands by Swami Rama. In the

presence of others, we spoke only of positive or spiritual matters, in the deliberately modulated tones all the residents used. When Carolyn had to work, I attended classes in Hatha yoga or read. Together we ate superb vegetarian meals in the Institute's dining commons and chanted evening prayers. At some point, we ran into Swami Rama in a hallway. Tall and imposing, he had the sleek look of a successful man in his late 50s, at the peak of his power.

Finally I found an opportunity to broach the topic of the lawsuit with Carolyn. I told her what I'd heard, and that I wasn't sure the rumor was true-as a beginning student of yoga and meditation at the Institute's East West Books in New York City, I was reluctant to believe it myself. To my relief, I could detect no flash of recognition, guilt, fear, or anger in Carolyn's eyes. She listened calmly as I admitted that I'd worried she might be a victim. She thanked me, but assured me I had no reason for concern.

Years later, Carolyn told me that four years of discipleship under Swami Rama had taught her to be a successful liar.

Most rapists threaten women with physical violence. But the victims of what Jungian analyst Peter Rutter, M.D., has termed "sex in the forbidden zone" (in his book of the same name) submit to sexual advances because of a powerful psychological threat. Many people, including the victims themselves, have trouble understanding how damaging such sexual contact can be, because the women are adults and no one is holding a gun to their heads.

As Rutter explains in his book, a sexual relationship between a man in a position of power-doctor, psychologist, mentor, or priest-and a woman who is dependent on him-as patient, student, client, or troubled soul-almost always involves an element of coercion and a betrayal of trust. Such a relationship, instead of giving the woman the healing or validation she seeks,

reinforces her feeling that the only thing of value she has to offer a man with worldly power is her body.

In recent years, the harm caused to women by "sex in the forbidden zone" has been recognized in their codes of ethics by most universities and professional associations, including the American Medical Association and the American Psychological Association. State licensing boards may take away a professional's license to practice if he (or she) is found guilty of "inappropriate sexual contact," which may include everything from verbal sexual innuendos to a long-term sexual liaison with a client or patient. In some states, a patient has the right to sue her doctor or psychotherapist for malpractice even if she originally consented to sex, because people under psychological or medical treatment are considered too vulnerable and dependent to give free and full consent.

The Catholic Church may discipline a priest who has sex with a parishioner, not only because it violates his vow of celibacy, but because his parishioners must be able to confide in him without worrying that he will exploit their trust for his own gratification. Similarly, gurus in the Buddhist and Hindu traditions are supposed to be examples of self-mastery and right living.

But sexual contact between a guru and his disciples is not regulated by any professional association of religious hierarchy. In the United States, far from the strong cultural morality of the guru's country of origin, it is not regulated at all.

Within a sect the guru's authority is often absolute: he rules from the pinnacle of the institutional hierarchy. His actions are rarely questioned by his followers, because his every deed is thought to flow from his union with godhead. As an enlightened being, he is thought to be beyond the judgment of ordinary mortals, their laws and morality. He is held accountable only to the higher spiritual laws, which he is uniquely able to comprehend. His American followers hear the spiritual teachings from his mouth, with his interpretation, and they rarely have the exposure to a variety of gurus, which would teach them to be skeptical of their own guru.

Sexual contract between gurus and their American disciples is not a new or rare phenomenon. Over the past 15 or 20 years, numerous spiritual teachers have admitted to, or been charged with, having sexually exploitative relationships with their female students. But the followers of such "enlightened" men are usually reluctant to find fault with them, since to do so could invalidate the students' own years of study and devotion. Instead they deny the experience of the "unenlightened" women who are the guru's victims. The victim's confusion and loss of trust are compounded when her community refuses to acknowledge her suffering.

Sex with a guru is a form of spiritual incest. In the mythology of the ashram, the guru is the all-powerful, all-knowing father and the disciples are his spiritual children. Many disciples come from alcoholic and dysfunctional families where they have learned how to deny emotional abuse directed against them or their siblings, in order to believe that their parents really love them and are acting in their best interests. Like incest victims, women who say they have been sexually abused by their gurus are sworn to silence by their abusers. They know, usually without being told, that if they break the taboo of silence they will be blamed for destroying their spiritual families and the "higher" good those families purportedly do in the world.

Carolyn says she spent years blaming herself and trying to rationalize away what she now regards as sexual abuse. It was years more before she felt she had the right to be angry at her spiritual family, the staff and residents of the Institute who, she says, denied the signs of abuse all around them. Only recently has she acknowledged her anger at Swami Rama. Now she says that those who have allowed the abuses to continue unchecked are responsible for destroying the Institute's integrity. Yet she is vulnerable to feeling re-victimized every time her experience is denied or distorted.

Carolyn is not alone. Numerous former students say they left the Institute because they were sexually exploited by Swami Rama or knew someone who was. Most of the women who say they were abused by Swami Rama express feelings of fear, frustration, and betrayal. When they have contacted their friends and former colleagues at the Institute, they have been discounted as liars or labeled "emotionally disturbed." So far, none of their attempts to communicate their experiences has been met by official Institute willingness to investigate their charges.

The accumulated testimony of their personal experiences through the years exhibits a pattern typical of "sex in the forbidden zone," coupled with institutional mechanisms of defense and denial. Two women wrote statements, which said they had discovered that Swami Rama was attempting to "seduce" both of them contemporaneously. Those statements are on file with the cult Awareness network (formerly the citizen's Freedom Foundation) in New York. Several former students of Swami Rama granted interviews to Patricia Ann Darling, Ph. D., about abuses that allegedly took place in Minneapolis, Chicago, New York City, and India, for a chapter in Darling's doctoral dissertation, "Turning East in the Twin Cities: Converts and Movements in the 1970s" (University of Minnesota, 1987).

The women's fears have aborted projects intended to expose possible exploitation to a wider audience. A producer for "60 Minutes" was reportedly unable to complete her documentary on Swami Rama when the women involved backed out and refused to appear on camera. The lawsuit I heard rumors about in New York City never materialized. The two women who wrote statements for the Cult Awareness Movement were among those involved: One stated that she was a patient at the Institute's holistic health center in New York City, and the other stated she was 17 years old when Swami Rama initiated a sexual relationship with her. Patricia Trescelli, and attorney with Parker, Chapin, Flattau, and Klimpel, agreed to consult with the women concerning possible legal action on a pro bono basis. But one by one, Trescelli says, the women backed down and decided not to pursue legal action.

Most of the former members of the Institute who agreed to be interviewed for this article were also afraid to have their identities revealed; they appear under pseudonyms, marked with an asterisk. Some were afraid of Institute retaliation; most were afraid of hurting their families, who in some cases do not know about the abuses the women suffered; still others were worried that their professional reputations would be harmed. But all of them, whether they appear here under a pseudonym or as a background source, understand that if this article provokes a libel suit they can be called to testify in court.

Swami Rama, whose legal name is Brij Keshore Kumar, was born in 1925 in Uttar Pradesh, according to his official biography, parts of which appeared in the March/April 1990 issue of *Yoga Journal*. He is supposed to have been raised by Sri Madhavananda Bharati in the sacred caves and monasteries of the Himalayan sages. At a young age, Swami Rama is supposed to have been appointed Shankaracharya of Karvirpitham, an exalted spiritual post. He is also supposed to have graduated from a homeopathic medical school in India, and studied at Hamburg University, the University of Utrecht, and Oxford University.

Swami Rama's claims to this spiritual background have been questioned by some of his former students. Two of the guru's most devoted disciples left the Institute three years ago because they had learned while in India as part of an Institute tour group that parts of Swami Rama's official biography were fabricated. One of them, along with the other women from the tour group, attended the wedding of Swami Rama's son, although the guru is officially supposed to have been celibate since taking his Swami's vows. Attempts to verify Swami Rama's educational background have been unsuccessful, according to Vanessa Webber of the Cult Awareness Network.

Despite the questions about his background, there is no denying that Swami Rama made a terrific impact on western thinking when he served as a research subject at the Menninger Foundation in Topeka, Kansas. During a series of biofeedback experiments in 1970 and 1971, Drs. Elmer and Alyce Green observed that Swami Rama could produce different brain waves at will, including theta and delta (sleep) waves, while remaining aware of his environment. He voluntarily stopped his heart from pumping blood for 17 seconds, and he reportedly demonstrated his telekinetic powers, moving a knitting needle with mental force.

The Greens' experiments caused a furor in the scientific community because they gave powerful support to autogenic biofeedback research, which 10 years earlier had begun demonstrating that body functions which had formerly been considered involuntary could be controlled. A rash of articles featuring Swami Rama appeared in national magazines, including *Time*, *People*, and *Playboy*. His early American followers had been spiritual seekers of the counterculture who found their guru at his ashram on the banks of the sacred Ganges in Rishikesh, India. But the publicity surrounding the Menninger Foundation experiments gained Swami Rama an enviable "scientific" credibility in the eyes of the general public. He rapidly attracted a following that included many graduate and professional students.

Following on the wave of favorable publicity, Swami Rama founded the Himalayan Institute in Illinois in 1971. Its mission, according to the Articles of Incorporation, was "to make known to the members and people in general the real, synthetic, and harmonious view of world religions and philosophy in terms of modern scientific achievements and undertake researches for all around ethical, social, economical, and spiritual development of humanity to attain world peace, international integration, understanding, and spiritual awakening of the human race." Or, in the words of Rudolph Ballentine, M.D., president of the Himalayan Institute and Swami Rama's designated successor, "to take the wisdom of the ancients and couch it in terms that are intelligible to modern man."

From its beginnings 20 years ago, the Institute has expanded steadily to include some 25 branches and affiliated yoga and holistic health centers in the Midwest, the Northeast, Texas, California, and abroad. By 1977, the Institute was able to purchase the Honesdale ashram, a former Catholic seminary in the rural Pocono Mountains, which now houses more than 100 residents and guests. Residents staff the Institute's administration, bookstores, and other small businesses, including Himalayan Publishers and Distributors and an elementary school.

The Institute's "scientific" approach to yoga has made it a success, attracting long-term spiritual disciples as well as large numbers of people who merely want a boost for their psychological or physical well being. Most of the Institute's programs are open to the general public. Well-to-do New Yorkers flock to Honesdale on weekends for seminars in stress reduction, meditation, and diet and nutrition. Some stay longer, for a few weeks or months in the Self-Transformation retreat program. The annual congress, held each June, offers a smorgasbord of lectures and "new age" workshops.

The Institute also offers a dizzying array of education programs, including a diploma program for hatha yoga teachers. The Institute used to offer an accredited masters program in Eastern Studies and Comparative Psychology through an affiliation with the University of Scranton. The Combined Therapy program and the outpatient branches of the Institute for Holistic Medicine combine Western medicine, homeopathy, Eastern medicine, psychotherapy, nutrition, yoga, and meditation to treat people with a variety of physical and emotional problems. The Institute also offers instruction to counselors and psychotherapists in the application of yoga and meditation techniques to therapy. To judge by their price tags, these and other Institute programs must bring in a considerable income.

Yet the Institute's success comes at a high cost for many of those involved. Residents are expected to donate a large portion of their labor, and they must sacrifice personal freedoms and privacy. They are instructed to have "no emotional relationship inside or outside the Institute," and residential program directors are charged with monitoring disciple's behavior and attitudes to make sure they conform to Institute expectations. Long-term residents must get administration approval for any overnight absences; permission may be denied if their destination is judged inappropriate. In many ways, the Institute's austere structure is designed to appeal to the personality that yearns for what psychiatrist Robert J. Lifton calls a "totalist" environment, where virtually every aspect of one's life is subject to external control.

Allegations of sexual abuse by Swami Rama have followed on the heels of the Institute's success like a shadow. Megan*, a former graduate student in the Eastern Studies program, wrote a letter to the Jesuit administration of the University of Scranton saying that Swami Rama was subjecting women students to sexual exploitation. The Institute's program is no longer accredited by the University of Scranton.

Dr. Elmer Green says that he and his wife have heard from a number of women who said they were sexually exploited by Swami Rama. "If someone is a saint, celibacy would be his normal condition," Dr. Green comments. "A lot of people have confused the siddhis-the powers to control body, emotions, and mind-with spirituality. But the siddhis can be an ego trap. A saint is a person who does what he says." Rather than being a saint, according to Green, Swami Rama is an advanced yogi and "a mortal with some ego problems."

Carolyn was raised Catholic, and during high school she explored Transcendental Meditation, Zen Buddhism, Hinduism, and the "Jesus freak" movement. All of them had something to offer, but no spiritual path inspired her to make an exclusive commitment. The daughter of an alcoholic, she longed for guidance from a spiritual authority figure. She took a meditation class at the alternative high school program she attended, and one evening her teachers invited her to a lecture by their guru, Swami Rama, who was visiting the Chicago area. They introduced her to the guru, and she remembers he made a fuss over her, slapping her cheek lightly and calling her a good girl.

Carolyn went away to college at the end of that year, as her parents expected. But after two unsatisfying years, she left college and returned to the Chicago area. She renewed her acquaintance with her former meditation teachers and started taking classes in Glenview, Illinois, at the Institute's original headquarters. There she learned Swami Rama's style of "super-conscious" meditation, which she describes as a basic, impersonal training in mental concentration.

In March 1978, she says, Swami Rama came to Glenview and initiated her. Given a mantra but little guidance, Carolyn dutifully performed her assigned practices, hoping that Swami Rama's "scientific" approach to yoga would eventually yield results. From her childhood Carolyn had been steeped in Catholic faith and educated in scientific skepticism; now it seemed the Institute could help her harmonize these two seemingly contradictory ways of perceiving the world. At about the same time, Carolyn was accepted into the residential program at East West Books Chicago, the Institute's downtown branch. The program seemed to provide the ideal family she'd never had, where everyone shared her values and spiritual goals.

In May, Swami Rama visited the area again. Carolyn says he called her out to Glenview for a special appointment, at which he invited her to come live and work at his new ashram in Honesdale-and told her he would waive the usual residential program fees. When she shared her news with the other residents at East West Books, they told her she should feel honored: She had been chosen, while long-time devotees had been denied the privilege. A few weeks later she moved to Honesdale. Once there, Carolyn devoted herself to her yoga practices and threw herself into her assigned jobs.

After she had lived in Honesdale for a year, Swami Rama started promising to make her his appointments secretary. She was thrilled; it was commonly believed at the Institute that the fastest way to reach enlightenment was to spend as much time as possible in the presence of the guru. At the same time, she felt anxious, because she'd seen how severe Swami Rama could be with those closest to him.

Meanwhile, Carolyn says, Swami Rama began singling her out for special attention. He would call her to his office for a private audience, and as she hung anxiously on his

words he would paint a flattering picture of her future with the Institute. She recalls that he would repeat a series of affirmations and commands in a hypnotic monotone: She had done very well organizing the book distribution operation, Carolyn says he would tell her. Since she had taken over, everything had been put in order. Perfect. That was why he wanted her to be his secretary. She would start with handling the appointments and then she would make his plane reservations, scheduling lecture tours. In a few months time she would handle his bank account, income taxes, everything. Become more involved with the projects of the ashram-seminars, residents, the patient program-in time she would be in charge of the whole thing. They would travel together to England. He would take her to the Orient-Japan and India. She would live with him in the house he was buying. And she would help him write books.

After a couple of months of this special attention, Carolyn says, Swami Rama came to visit her one-day at the book distribution office in Honesdale center. After dismissing the other workers, she says he repeated the familiar litany, but this time he slipped in a new message. She recalls that he said they would become very close, their bodies would come together, and then they would part. During that time, neither of them would see any other, and she should never tell anyone. Then, later on, when the right man came along, she would marry and be very happy.

Carolyn remembers being amazed: Could Swami Rama possibly be talking about sex? Hadn't he taken vows of celibacy? Gurus were supposed to have conquered their desires, but in the spiritual literature they were often portrayed as contradictory, tricking their disciples into enlightenment. Carolyn rationalized: Swamiji was her guru, so even though the prospect of having sex with him seemed morally wrong and physically revolting, he must be doing it for her own good. "I thought: 'Maybe it's the only way he can break through some stubborn barrier in my ego. Or maybe he needs to have sex just to release energy so he can meditate better. Anyway, he said that our relationship would be exclusive, I'd be like a spiritual courtesan. Maybe it's an honor that this great yogi asked me of all his students to serve him in this way. He must see something special in me.'" At bottom, however, she believed her feelings didn't matter. Everyone said you had to surrender to the guru, so she would simply have to follow through with whatever he ordered her to do.

In August, Carolyn says, Swami Rama told her to meet him in New York City for the next step in her spiritual training. He promised her he'd set up a complete, personalized yoga program for her there-a prescribed diet, special yoga postures and meditation practices-as well as a game plan for her higher education and future career. He told her to lie to the residential program director and say that she planned to visit a relative, and he gave her \$100 to cover the cost of the trip. She says he arranged for her to meet him at the Gramercy Park Hotel and instructed her not to call him Swami in public. After he had, as she describes it, "had sex on my body," she took a blanket into the other room and slept on the floor. Early the next morning, she says, he announced to her that she was going to leave; he never set up the promised program. She walked around New York City for hours, until it was time for her bus to return to Honesdale.

During the next few months, Carolyn says, Swami Rama bade her visit him in his private quarters once every couple of weeks, either after lunch or after evening prayers; he also made it her job to buy condoms. Swami Rama, she says, would extol his own sexual abilities but tell her she was bad at making love. She says he instructed her in how to give him pleasure and admonished her to always tell him that she had received pleasure, even though she never did. Carolyn says she experienced their sexual encounters as brief and rough, and that she performed her sexual duties mechanically: "I numbed myself in order to survive."

Swami Rama made Carolyn his appointments secretary in August also. But she says his attitude toward her underwent a dramatic change; he began to make her a target for his anger, issuing contradictory orders and then screaming at her for her incompetence in front of the other secretaries and disciples and gossiping about her behind her back. She became paralyzed by her fear of angering him. In three months, Carolyn says, she gained 20 pounds.

In mid-autumn, the day came for Swami Rama's annual trip to India. His devotees hovered near the ashram's entrance, hoping for final instructions or a blessing from the guru. Carolyn felt important, entitled to be there because she was one of his secretaries. As the other disciples looked on with envy, Swami Rama called her aside

for a final, intimate word: She should work on herself, he reportedly told her—lose some weight and learn to admire herself.

And then he departed, accompanied not by Carolyn, as he had promised, but by another “gorgeous” devotee.

In my interviews with current and former members of the Institute, I heard an almost unvarying litany of beliefs about Swami Rama’s abilities. Many of those beliefs are based on Hindu and Buddhist teachings about the nature of the guru.

Swami Rama is supposed to have freed himself from the bonds of karma. His disciples generally agree that the only reason his soul still inhabits a physical body is because he wants to help others achieve liberation from maya, the realm of illusion. In his enlightened state, they believe, he could never commit any selfish acts, which would create new karmic burdens.

Dr. Ballentine, the Institute’s president and director of the Combined Therapy Program, explains that human beings have the potential to do “all kinds of things, like move our bodies at will from one place to another, or be aware of what people are thinking on the other side of the earth, or inner states of consciousness that take us to the future and the past.” The yogis, he says, have demonstrated these abilities in the past and continue to do so. But the Institute does not teach the mastery of such powers in its programs, instead focusing on yoga practices with more immediate practical application.

Swami Rama has a reputation among his followers as an incredible psychologist who uses his insights to help others. His students believe he is able to read minds and manipulate physical reality with his advanced yogic powers; thus they believe he can heal sickness with the power of the “superconscious” mind. His disciples believe he knows them better than they know themselves, and that if they want to achieve their spiritual goals they should do exactly as he says. Obedience to the guru’s commands is implicitly expected of all long-term residents; former students describe him walking through the main dining room and ordering one person to move to the New York branch, another to change jobs. In private sessions, ex-disciples say, Swami Rama has arranged marriages and instructed disciples to break off relationships.

Ex-members say that Swami Rama also uses his psychological insights to manipulate people. Many of them say they feared his wrath when they were disciples, and several still believe he has the power to inflict harm or illness on them from a distance. Each of the women I interviewed described how he would discern her particular needs and self-doubts and manipulate her spiritual beliefs or naiveté in order to exploit her sexually—he has an uncanny ability to suit his approach to each victim, they say.

Pandit Rajmani Tigunait is the resident spiritual director of the Honesdale ashram, as well as a member of the Institute’s teaching staff. He says that Swami Rama has been his guru since he was a child in India, and that he came to the U.S. at Swami Rama’s request to head up the Honesdale ashram. Rajmani explains the basic goals of the Institute’s tradition of yoga: “The most important part of the practice is nonattachment.” Swamis, he explains, are renunciates who take vows of abstinence which include giving up sex, wine, and red meat, as well as other stimulants to the physical senses. A Swami, or monk, is supposed to be “one who is master of oneself: senses, body, mind.” He must also vow that he will not harm any living being.

But Swami Rama’s disciples do not hold him to these standards. In order to believe in his perfection, they must rationalize behavior that others would judge to be tyrannical, cruel, or self-indulgent. According to ex-members, Swami Rama often acts in ways his disciples find humiliating, but they tell each other he is humbling their stubborn egos to help them reach enlightenment faster. He reportedly smokes cigarettes, watches television for hours every day, and gossips, but his disciples rationalize this non-abstinent behavior: “Oh, Swamiji just smokes to bring himself down to the earth plane,” or, “The TV is on incessantly just to give the student one more distraction to challenge his ability to maintain yogic balance,” or, “all the stories Swamiji tells about other people are just to give the disciple the opportunity to develop objectivity and not get caught up in the meaningless gossip.”

Dr. Ballentine says it is “presumptuous” to judge whether or not someone is perfected. He and Pandit Rajmani say that a guru is “that which dispels darkness.” “The real guru is within,” Dr. Ballentine says, “that still small voice within you.” It is a mistake to judge the external guru’s worthiness by his behavior; instead, the student

should look inside and determine whether that person is helping dispel the darkness of her ignorance.

A guru has the wisdom of experience and the ancient teachings, so he can provide guidance, Dr. Ballantine says, but students should "judge every [practice] on the basis of your own experience." The teachings contained in the sacred texts cannot play any meaningful part in judging who is a good guru and who is not: "How could they? I mean, he's giving you the teachings and you're going to use the teachings to evaluate him? You're bound to get mixed up. I just don't know that it makes sense to go run around trying to evaluate other people, when you haven't evaluated yourself."

Swami Rama is held by his disciples to be a kind of god: He makes up the rules of the game, he can change them at will, and he cannot be judged by them. Ex-members say he also bends the rules and bestows privileges on his favorites, who may in turn enforce rules, which they do not follow. This seemingly whimsical application of standards demoralized many of the ex-members I spoke with and led many to resent the members of Swami Rama's inner circle. Both women and men say they blamed themselves and their own spiritual obtuseness when they repeatedly failed to discern and follow the shifting rules.

A system that rewards a particular behavior or person and then arbitrarily ignores or punishes that same behavior or person can quickly lead even healthy individuals to develop profound anxiety and uncertainty-the antithesis of self-confidence. Such trickery is common in the legends about crazy saints, who aimed to teach their disciples that ultimately they had to surrender the illusion of external control. But it is also common in the thought-control techniques of totalitarian states. Surrender only leads to enlightenment if the "guru within" is strong and well developed. Many of Swami Rama's followers are still young and naïve, unskilled in comprehending and interpreting their own "inner experience"-and they entrust their spiritual yearnings to his care. A system that encourages such vulnerable individuals to give up their own "egotistical" judgment to the arbitrary whims of one person is one of the key features of a totalist organization, or "cult."

Terry* and Brian* say they were recruited into the Himalayan Institute's inner circle for their wealth and social connections. Both came from prominent Midwestern families; each had an alcoholic parent, and they now believe they were seeking not only spiritual growth, but also a strong parental figure. Shortly after they started studying with Pandit Usharbudh Arya at the Meditation Center in Minneapolis, he introduced them to his guru, Swami Rama. The guru spoiled them, they say, calling them his spiritual son and daughter, and soon invited them to come live in Pennsylvania.

They resided in their own house in Honesdale, unencumbered by the strict rules of the residential program. Swami Rama frequently invited them to parties in his private quarters, where they say he entertained them with funny stories and racy gossip. They rarely had to do the menial chores performed by other residents; Brian was encouraged to study the sacred texts and write a book, while Terry got training as a Montessori teacher and started a school for the Institute's children. "We were Brahmins in the Institute's caste system," Terry recalls.

But in 1980, they say, they returned to Honesdale after a brief vacation to learn that their friend Rose* had allegedly been sexually assaulted by Swami Rama during their absence and had fled the Institute for New York City. Rose, they explain, was not a disciple of Swami Rama, but had been invited by family members in the Institute's administration to come to Honesdale for medical treatment. According to the story Terry and Brian say Rose later told them, late one night Swami Rama tapped at the door of her room and then walked in on her. He reportedly sat down on a chair next to her bed and proceeded to make sexual advances. Rose said that she struggled, but the guru physically overpowered her, throwing himself on top of her on the bed and forcing her to perform oral sex. Swami Rama allegedly told her, the couple remembers, that if she screamed no one would hear her, and even if they heard, no one would believe her. When he was finished, Rose told them, Swami Rama left her room, saying he will be back the next day.

Rose told Brian and Terry that she was afraid to seek help from the family members who'd invited her to the Institute-they were unquestioningly loyal to Swami Rama-and she knew no one else there. She was afraid to stay in her room, which had no lock on

the door, or to use the hall telephone, because all calls had to be routed through the main switchboard. And she was afraid to leave in her old car because a freezing rainstorm had covered all the roads with ice. After a sleepless night, she said she snuck out at 5:00 or 6:00 a.m. and drove to Brian and Terry's empty house in Honesdale. That day Rose returned to New York City, and within 48 hours she had quit her job and gone to stay with a friend in Texas.

Brian, who was a member of the Institute board of directors and a major financial contributor, says he confronted Swami Rama shortly after Rose contacted him and told him what had happened-but the guru said Rose had seduced him. Brian didn't believe his teacher, and he spoke with several other Institute administrators and board members about Rose's claim of abuse. He also sent out a letter resigning from the board. Initially, Brian says, most of the other directors responded with concern. However, after Swami Rama talked with them, they either told Brian and Terry that the guru should be allowed a "mistake" or they shunned the couple altogether.

Swami Rama called a meeting to defend himself. At the meeting, Brian says, Dr. Ballentine presented letters from another woman, Karen,* who also claimed to have been sexually exploited by Swami Rama. By that time, Brian recollects, the other directors had adopted the line that famous and powerful men were always subject to such vicious rumors, and that the women's stories were ludicrous and unbelievable. Brian says he refused to tell Rose's story in such an atmosphere. Instead, he told the other board members that he believed Rose, and that they should investigate the incident for themselves.

As the couple started making arrangements to move to England, they received another blow. A pearl necklace that Brian had bought from Swami Rama as an "investment" was appraised at roughly one-third of the \$100,000 he had paid for it. Brian says he felt betrayed, but the knowledge that Swami Rama had financially exploited him made it easier for the couple to cut their ties to the Institute. Brian sued Swami Rama, and eventually the guru settled out of court for the full amount. Brian says he did not realize at the time that a conviction for fraud could have lost the Institute its federal tax-exempt status as an educational institution.

Meanwhile Janet,* a Honesdale woman who worked as the couple's babysitter and housekeeper at the time, says she received threatening phone calls at Brian and Terry's house, asking if she was alone with the children. For a time, she says, she considered getting a pistol to carry to work. Brian also received a threat, he says: a note telling him he "might get hurt," which was accidentally shoved under the door of a lawyer who rented the office next door to his in a Honesdale office building.

Rose spent the next six months moving from place to place, terrified that the Institute network would track her down. Brian and Terry say her family members at the Institute harassed her by mail and by telephone, with accusations that she had "a habit of inducing this sort of behavior from men."

Years later, Rose contacted Patricia Trescelli, hoping to support a lawsuit by other women working with Trescelli and hoping to press charges against Swami Rama in her own sexual assault. But Trescelli says she had to discourage her. Under New York State law, according to Trescelli, a woman who does not get a medical exam or report the incident to police within a limited period of time has little chance of obtaining a conviction.

Terry, who is now a practicing psychotherapist, says she believes Swami Rama's behavior is compulsive-he can't help it." She loved him like "a second father," she says, "and the real tragedy is that this is how our relationship ended. I like to believe that somewhere inside of him, he is the good person I believed him to be. It is sad for him, and for those who cared and were so deeply hurt by him, that his behavior has been allowed to continue with such devastating results to people just looking for help." In such a situation, she says, the whole system becomes sick and no one can see the light: "There's no truth allowed; it's a no-talk rule."

Each time the Institute's top professionals have been confronted with complaints that Swami Rama is abusing his position, institutional mechanisms of denial have come to the guru's aid. Karen, the woman whose claims were ridiculed at the meeting where Swami Rama and the other directors responded to Brian's charges, was one of the first ex-members to confront top Institute administrators. In the mid-1970s, she and her husband George,* both students of Swami Rama, traveled to India and stayed at the guru's ashram in Rishikesh. When another married couple who were their friends

and fellow students left the ashram suddenly, Karen wrote to them asking why. She never received a response.

Several months later, the two couples met up again. Karen and George say their friends told them that the woman had been pressured to have sex with Swami Rama even after their marriage, which the guru had arranged. Ultimately, the woman had revealed the liaison to her husband. When the couple confided their resulting marital troubles to Karen and George, Karen confirmed her friend's experience by revealing that she, too, had had a supposedly exclusive and spiritual sexual relationship with Swami Rama before her marriage.

Fortified by their mutual discovery, Karen says, the two couples undertook to inform their fellow students back home in Minneapolis. They wrote letters to Pandit Usharbudh Arya, their teacher and head of the Meditation Center there, as well as a dozen other people, warning that Swami Rama was a fraud. Shortly after they returned to the U.S., Karen and George say that they and all their correspondents received a bizarre, defamatory letter containing an implicit death threat.

Meanwhile, the couple says, they discovered more evidence of illicit activity. A former disciple of their acquaintance wrote and signed a statement alleging that he had procured illegal drugs-including mescaline, psilocibin, and LSD-for Swami Rama in 1971. The two couples referred to this statement in a petition to the FBI: they asked the FBI to investigate the threat letter and argued that Swami Rama could be deported by the Immigration and Naturalization Service as an undesirable alien on four grounds: possession of narcotics, sexual immorality, fraudulent financial dealings, and "affliction with [a] psychopathic personality." Friends of the two couples set up a "truth booth" outside the entrance of the Institute's first annual congress in 1976.

The FBI has confirmed the existence of a file documenting the agency's investigation, but at the time of publication the file had not yet been released under the Freedom of Information Act. According to Karen and George, no legal action resulted.

Following on the heels of Karen's and her friend's revelations, several other women and men left the Meditation Center in Minneapolis. Pandit Arya reportedly alternated between disbelieving and believing the growing number of his female students who told him that Swami Rama had sexually harassed or abused them. But ultimately he chose to believe Swami Rama. The chapter on the Meditation Center in Patricia Darling's dissertation details the growth of the center and the subsequent disillusionment of many of Pandit Arya's students with his new guru. Arya, however, says that much of Darling's information is inaccurate.

Of all the Institute's swamis and teachers, Pandit Arya is by far the most scholarly. Trained to meditate and educated in the scriptures from early childhood, he was able to translate and interpret any of the 20,000 verses from the Vedas by the age of 13, according to a biographical pamphlet put out by the Meditation Center. After teaching, studying, and traveling throughout India and Europe, he came to the University of Minnesota in the 1960s, where he taught Sanskrit and Indian religions. There he founded the Meditation Center.

In 1969, Pandit Arya met Swami Rama, who gave him "one of the highest meditation initiations," in which he experienced himself "as a being of light." The Meditation Center became affiliated with the Himalayan Institute, and eventually Pandit Arya achieved his dream of having his own ashram in India, when Swami Rama made him president of his Rishikesh ashram. He is also head of the Institute's Holistic Studies (formerly Eastern Studies) program and has written a number of scholarly books on yoga philosophy.

Pandit Arya has many profound and beautiful things to say about his relationship to his guru when I interviewed him at the Divya Jyoti yoga center in Napa, California, in May 1989. He says it is a relationship that goes beyond religions, the purest relationship possible, "the relationship of water flowing from a hill and filling a hollow at the bottom-the hollow has nothing to give in return, but only to accept that grace in gratitude."

Pandit Arya is not so reluctant as Dr. Ballentine to articulate is how one can recognize a worthy guru. "By their fruits you shall know them," he says, paraphrasing the Bible. "If the guru's instruction leads to a deeper peace, freedom from conflict, a deepening of meditation, harmony in relationships - all of these. Relationships are the first test of spirituality. Wisdom must show itself in action and lovingness." Pandit Arya

radiates calm as he speaks. He warns against relying too heavily on the inner voice: "When we look for the guru within, we only end up finding our own samskaras-vagaries of the unconscious mind are mistaken for directions from the superconscious. Is it not better to follow someone who has charted the path?"

When I asked Pandit Arya about the allegations of sexual abuse, he admits that he was very disturbed when he first heard them. He also has the integrity to admit that if they were true, it would be very terrible, and a violation of the teaching that says one should treat all women as daughters. But for a man of Pandit Arya's background and beliefs, the relationship with one's guru is more momentous than any merely temporal bond. He cannot disbelieve his guru.

Minneapolis was the site of another Institute-related scandal in 1981. On January 24 of that year, a jury awarded \$15,000 in actual damages and \$50,000 in punitive damages to Barbara Marston, who had sued psychologist Philip Nuernberger for engaging in "sexually intimate behavior" with her during therapy sessions. Shortly after Marston filed her suit in 1978, Nuernberger moved to Honesdale, where he is currently a member of the Institute's teaching staff. Ex-members say he has counseled patients in the Combined Therapy Program, although he lost his license to practice psychology in Minnesota in 1979. According to Marston's attorney, Philip W. Getts, his client never recovered the \$50,000 in punitive damages Nuernberger owed her, because Pennsylvania is one of the few states that does not allow the court to garnish wages.

I ask Dr. Ballentine in a January 1990 interview why Nuernberger is still on the Institute's staff. Dr. Ballentine, who says he studied psychology at the Sorbonne and completed his training in psychiatry at Louisiana State University, defends Nuernberger. He explains that Nuernberger was just a graduate student, inexperienced and lacking in professional judgment, when the incident with Marston occurred: "At a time when he was learning to be a therapist and thought that someone is asking for you to reach out, you reach out and you touch them and you let them see your feelings, and I think that was very bad." Marston, however, testified that Nuernberger had "hugged and kissed her and fondled her breasts," according to an article in the Minneapolis Tribune (Jan. 24, 1981).

Dr. Ballentine says he has good reason to think that Marston "was very anxious for [Nuernberger] to go further, and he didn't. And there is a statement, 'Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.'" Marston's lawsuit, he says, was an act of revenge. He says that Nuernberger's one mistake has "ruined his life, in essence, which is really too bad."

What Ballentine does not mention is that a second jury judged Nuernberger guilty of unprofessional conduct in his treatment of Nancy E. Williams, another former client, on February 17, 1981. Williams, however, did not sue Nuernberger himself; she sued the clinic where he worked, alleging that the clinic "knew or should have known" that Nuernberger was engaging in harmful sexual activity while treating her. Although the jury entered a judgment against Nuernberger, it also found that the clinic was not liable for his actions, so Williams failed to recover damages.

Nor does Dr. Ballentine mention that in 1977 Nuernberger was formally reprimanded by the Minnesota Board of Psychology for unethical practices stemming from his relationship with a third woman patient. According to the stipulation he signed with the Board's Ethics Review Panel, Nuernberger admitted that he terminated a counseling relationship with "Victoria S." during the third session in order to enter into a "personal relationship - such relationship to include sexual contact."

Megan* started the Institute's graduate program in Eastern studies in the fall of 1982. She opted to forego pursuing a Ph.D. in clinical psychology because the Institute's program allowed her to earn a degree in a related field while studying Eastern philosophy and meditation with Pandit Rajmani, who had initiated her in Chicago. During her first eight months at the Institute, Megan was able to pursue her studies, but her situation altered dramatically when Swami Rama returned to take up summer residence.

Megan recalls that in one of her first encounters with Swami Rama, she watched as he humiliated a quiet, withdrawn woman resident. The Swami, she says, bragged to a crowd of disciples that the woman would do whatever he told her, then put his dog's collar and leash around her neck and walked her back and forth, while the others laughed. Megan says she squelched an urge to speak out, instead deciding, like most of the Institute's residents, to suspend judgment so she could "understand and learn"

from this "great master." But during the next three weeks, she says, she saw the Swami mistreating his disciples, especially the women, on a daily basis-yelling at them, ridiculing them, ordering them around, and occasionally kicking a woman in the buttocks when she was on her hands and knees weeding.

On one occasion, she says, Swami Rama ordered all the women disciples to weed out some roots around his new cabin, telling them they were rooting out their samskaras. He laughed, Megan says, and told her that the women didn't know what they were weeding. Later, many of the women broke out in head-to-toe swelling and rashes from what had in fact been poison ivy roots. When she questioned him, Megan says, he became angry and dismissed the women's suffering, saying that a little poison ivy could be good for them.

Yet the women never seemed to complain about such treatment, Megan says. On the contrary, they sought opportunities to serve the guru's every whim, or even to be abused by him: Megan remembers one woman saying she wished the guru would kick her. In daily lectures by the Institute's teachers and in conversation with Swami Rama's disciples, she frequently heard that Swami Rama had a "greater purpose that we couldn't understand," and that he was "beyond morality and judgment."

Shortly after Pandit Rajmani introduced her to Swami Rama, Megan says, the guru called her into his private quarters and told her that they'd been together in a past life, that he'd waited to meet her again in this lifetime, and that now they were reunited. During this spiel, she says, he put his hand on her buttocks, but she told him she wasn't buying it. He backed off, Megan says, while telling her that sex wasn't necessary-she could be his special student. After a bit, she was inclined to dismiss his behavior as a joke or a "test."

But as she spent more time around Swami Rama and his inner circle, Megan says, the guru subjected her to a barrage of sexual harassment. At the same time, she says, he offered her money and told her he wanted to put her in his will. He bragged about his sumptuous homes in India and Japan and about his shopping sprees for designer clothes, she says. He told her he was writing a book of poetry for her, and he offered to find her a husband. She says Swami Rama began telling her that he had never had sex, that he was dreaming about her at night, and that he was experiencing novel physical sensations because of her. She began to believe that this man who might have been spiritual at one time was now suffering from feelings he couldn't control.

Megan remembers asking him why he was trying all this on her. She couldn't make sense out of his behavior, because she found it impossible to believe that it was really about sex-and she repeatedly told him so. Megan says her feelings told her that something was amiss, but because of the social environment, she began to entertain the notion that the Swami's motives might not be what they appeared to be, and that his attempts at a con job might be a spiritual test. Through her sympathy for what appeared to be his plight, and disarmed by his jokes, she says she allowed him to cajole her until she let her defenses down.

Now Megan says that in a different atmosphere, she would have immediately recognized Swami Rama's behavior as sexual harassment or "sadistic manipulation." But within the Institute, she says, everyone else seemed to accept the guru's sexually suggestive behavior and humiliation of women. Megan went through a brief but painful and confusing time during which she doubted her own feelings and perceptions. How could she be the only one who realized what was going on? she wondered. Then he started giving her practices without any spiritual meaning, she says, and telling her she wasn't doing them right. When the manipulation started to involve her meditation and spiritual practices, she says, she decided to confide in one man who had been at the Institute for a long time and who was planning to leave. The man, she says, informed her of Swami Rama's long history of alleged sexual misconduct.

"I only needed one person to corroborate my experience," Megan says now. She became outraged at the residents and the professional staff who enable and legitimized the Swami's behavior. She began talking about Swami Rama's exploitative behavior with anyone who would listen, especially women who she thought were being victimized.

Meanwhile, Swami Rama had appointed her as registrar of the graduate program, replacing a long-time woman disciple who was being kicked out of the Institute for no apparent reason. But to accept a tuition-free second year, or even to leave the

Institute quietly, Megan says, would have meant giving tacit approval to the continuing exploitation. She believes Swami Rama was trying to buy her collusion, as he had bought the collusion of the Institute's staff and many residents. Before leaving, Megan says, she tried to confront Swami Rama publicly-but he went into seclusion, claiming illness.

Carolyn and others say Megan caused a scandal in the Honesdale ashram by breaking the silence surrounding Swami Rama's sexual behavior. Two other women left the Institute shortly afterwards. The scandal convinced Carolyn not to reveal her own secret, she says; she was learning that the Institute administration dealt with such accusations by smearing the women's reputations. Carolyn had sought a consultation with Pandit Rajmani, who told her that Megan was either lying because she was "on an ego trip," or fantasizing a sexual encounter that had never taken place. And Carolyn's residential Program supervisor told her that the scandal was "a big test for all of us and a cleansing for the Institute-we'll see who stays."

In retrospect, Megan says, she believes that Swami Rama was indifferent to the problems that his behavior might cause the Institute, but was using such scandals to purge it of anyone who questioned his authority.

Pandit Rajmani cannot entertain the notion that the women's stories could be true. "Anyone who lives a public life can go through such remarks; & you have heard about all that blackmailing" of famous, rich athletes, he explains to me in the spring of 1989 at the Honesdale ashram. "Before [these women] started saying these things, I also had a very good feeling that these people were wonderful people and they would never lie and they were trustworthy people. But after they started saying all these things, I never trusted them anymore."

Why would the women want to blackmail Swami Rama? I ask him. "The person wanted something, and the other person did not agree to fulfill their desires," he says. "This sudden animosity indicates that there is something fishy in the statement of this person. Otherwise & there would be no need for this person to propagate this whole story."

Pandit Rajmani says he also has concrete reasons to know that Swami Rama could not be sleeping with his disciples. He says he spends most evenings with the guru until midnight or 2 a.m., and that he knows better than anyone who is with Swami Rama late at night and who isn't. But Megan and Carolyn both say that Swami Rama would dismiss Pandit Rajmani and other members of the inner circle after an evening of socializing in Swami Rama's private quarters, while asking them alone to stay behind.

Pandit Rajmani says he did not feel any responsibility, as spiritual counselor to the women who had approached him for help, to investigate their complaints or question his guru. I informed him that I had interviewed women who sought him out because they respected him and trusted him to be interested in the truth. His response: "Listen, there are certain things which are based on witnesses-those are facts. But something, which is truth, cannot be falsified by having one hundred witnesses. If a hundred people come and say that the day is night and I know that it's not, the voting system doesn't do it here, you know?"

"Believing such stories means disbelieving in myself. Because that's my whole life & My relationship with [Swami Rama] is purely divine and spiritual-there cannot be impurity in it, and there is no room for such thoughts. I might doubt my own perception, I might doubt my own eyes, but I cannot doubt that strength which has given me everything."

If somehow Pandit Rajmani were forced to acknowledge that the women were telling the truth, would this shatter his faith in the guru? No, he says: "Even if it happened, what's the big deal? & People say that Mahatma Gandhi slept with women. God knows whether it was true or not, and even if it was true, this is a normal phenomenon. And that did not undermine Mahatma Gandhi's work! & No, this would not be shattering, certainly not. My father certainly had sex, and that's why I was born, so will I lose faith in my father?"

"Even if I found out-how can I find out? Because I do not want to find out. There's no need for finding out, if I know it is completely wrong."

Two months after Swami Rama left for India, Carolyn went to Chicago to visit her family for Christmas. One evening she went out to dinner with Martha*, an old friend from East West Books Chicago. Halfway through their meal, Carolyn remembers,

Martha hesitantly said, "I know this will sound like a weird question, but has Swamiji ever asked you to have sex with him?" Carolyn says she feigned shock and tried to mask her distress as Martha told about a woman at the Glenview center who was confused and distraught about her alleged sexual relationship with Swami Rama.

Carolyn says she knew that Swami Rama often promised his disciples he would take them to India or appoint them to important positions within the Institute-promises that rarely materialized. Even so, it was a blow to find out that she wasn't particularly special: Swami Rama apparently had other "spiritual courtesans." But Carolyn says she stifled her doubts about the guru, transforming them into doubts about her own selfishness: "Because I'd rationalized that he was teaching me a lesson, I believed he must be teaching other women the same lesson, and I shouldn't begrudge his attention to other students."

When Swami Rama returned from India two months later, Carolyn resumed working as his appointments secretary during the day, and, she says, as his sexual servant on some nights. She remembers that Swami Rama received love letters from several women; one of two of them even mentioned "your child." When she asked him what she should do with the love letters, she says, Swami Rama would laugh and say, "Oh, these goofy women! They are crazy. Put that letter in the 'goofy file.'" Carolyn says the "goofy" letters never got answered.

By this time Carolyn had gained 25 pounds from binging on sweets. She was feeling so disgusted with her body and afraid of the guru's humiliating comments that one night she couldn't face going to his room, she says. The next day, she says, Swami Rama called her to his office and asked her if anyone had said anything to her. Carolyn says she told him no, it "just didn't feel right." A short time later, Swami Rama let her go as his secretary-because, she says he told her, she didn't really want the job. At the same time as he dismissed her, Swami Rama also gave her a Sanskrit name.

Carolyn stayed at the Institute for three more years, working at a variety of jobs. In the spring of 1983, Swami Rama began to court her again, she says: He told her that she would help him prepare a book of sacred poetry he was writing, and he assured her repeatedly that he would take her to India the following autumn. Every time he saw her, she says, he told her she was "perfect," as if she had passed some important test. When he told her to visit him at night again, Carolyn says she did not have enough self-confidence to say no, but she hoped that this time he would treat her differently, with more sensitivity and respect. But their encounters were exactly the same as before, she says-emotionally impersonal and sexually mechanical.

Soon Carolyn noticed she wasn't the only woman being favored by the guru; he was also paying attention to Megan and Nirvana.* "Nirvana was up at his cabin, walking his dog at 5:30 in the morning, and Megan was with him day and night." Still, she felt she had no right to question the guru's actions.

One evening in early June, Carolyn remembers, Swami Rama's housekeeper phoned the women's dorm and asked her to bring the manuscript she was preparing over to Swami Rama's new cabin. Carolyn walked up to the cabin, she says, where after a brief minute spent leafing through her work, the guru asked her in a low voice for a meeting later that night. She said no: She had been on a work crew Swami Rama had ordered to weed poison ivy roots for his new garden, and she was covered with oozing blisters. She asked him to give her a homeopathic remedy for the itching, she says, but he refused and turned away, dismissing her.

That one gesture unleashed a storm of long-suppressed emotions. "I felt two-dimensional, like a piece of paper, a cunt-he didn't care about me. And that was the first time I realized what all that stuff meant-the other women, the 'goofy' file, and the rumors about the lawsuit. Up to that point I had felt like he was a guru, that he cared about me at least, but no, he was just using me."

One spring evening a couple of weeks later, she says, Swami Rama called her aside to ask why she'd been avoiding him, and she tried to tell him she'd discovered his lies. She recalls that she blushed as she forced out the words: "I think you have been sleeping with other women." Who? she remembers him demanding. "Nirvana is one," Carolyn says she told him. At that, she says, he raged at her until she was sobbing, unable to speak a word in her own defense: No! Had Nirvana said anything? Why did Carolyn say these things? What a foolish woman! She was dreamy! This was not true! Had anyone spoken to her? What a foolish woman! She could not control her emotions, he could not talk to her! And he abruptly dismissed her.

Now Carolyn is more articulate: "When I finally start listening to myself, and I tell him I know he's sleeping with other women-and this is the man I came to, to help me learn how to listen to my inner voice, and then he tells me not to listen to it just as I'm starting to get some confidence in it-that's when I realized, this isn't yoga, this isn't truth, this is abuse."

A week later, Megan blew the lid off Swami Rama's private life, confirming what Carolyn already knew in her heart. But still, she was afraid to leave the community she'd been part of for so long and reenter a world that had practically forgotten her existence. One day Swami Rama called for her and told her he wouldn't be taking her to India that autumn. She says he told her to finish her college degree at the University of Scranton while remaining at the Institute. But the University of Scranton didn't offer a degree program in Carolyn's area of study, so she saw a way to rationalize leaving the Institute while still saving face; she could still be considered a good disciple if she could get the guru's blessing to go away to college. Finally, she obtained his permission.

Carolyn moved back to Chicago, found a job, returned to school, and soon met a non-Institute man she wanted to marry. Before the wedding, Carolyn and her fiancé went to see a couples counselor both separately and together. She says she confessed her secret relationship with Swami Rama for the first time, telling her counselor that she was still confused about it. "'My dear,'" she says her counselor told her, "'You sound just like a sexually abused child, a little girl whose daddy told you never to tell anyone.'"

Carolyn has been in therapy for the past five years, trying to rebuild her self-confidence and heal the damage done by what she now calls her "sexual abuse" by Swami Rama. Whenever she has communicated her experiences to former friends at the Institute, she says, they have responded with a series of rationalizations: "That's your experience, but we all have to make our own decisions based on our own experience with Swamiji, and he has positively redirected my life. Everything happens for a reason, and we can't judge him." Carolyn says she is at a loss to discern any positive reason behind Swami Rama's behavior toward her. And the secondary trauma of having every single one of her former friends turn their backs on her, she says, has scarred her and left her with a legacy of emotional distrust and feelings of betrayal.

At the same time, Carolyn is trying to understand how her family background and conditioning contributed to her victimization. Brought up by authoritarian parents-one of whom was an alcoholic-and given a strict Catholic schooling, she felt at home in the authoritarian structure of the Himalayan Institute. Conformity to others' standards was always expected of her. She had never received help in setting her own goals: "There was never the concept of self-empowerment." The rigid behavioral expectations of the Institute and its stigmatizing of emotional expression, far from validating the guru within, taught her to mistrust her own judgment and emotions. And the "devastating" experiences with Swami Rama, Carolyn says, haunt her sexual relationship with her husband today.

Carolyn says she is more committed to yoga than ever; she continues with her practices, the hatha yoga postures and a centering meditation, but she does not use the mantras Swami Rama gave her. She has studied with other teachers, but she has learned the hard way that her "inner voice" must be her guru and her guide. She has sacrificed the highs of shared group experience in favor of the freedom to authenticate her own experience, without group pressure to conform. She and some of the other women who say they have been sexually abused by Swami Rama, as well as men who feel their spiritual trust was betrayed, have organized an informal support network to help each other heal.

Carolyn says she recognizes the positive work of the Himalayan Institute and has no desire to destroy the Institute's beneficial programs. "But the most important thing," she says, "is that the abuse must stop. Women need to be informed that this could happen to them-be it with Swami Rama or any man in a position of power-so they will be able to see it coming and avoid it. And people must stop covering up for the perpetrators by ignoring or denying that it is happening. Those who do so," she says, are responsible for the continuing abuse."

I ask Dr. Ballentine how he would respond if a woman were to come to him and tell him she's been having sex with Swami Rama, and that her "inner voice" has been telling her that it isn't a positive experience. He says that it's only happened to him

once or twice, but he asked the woman, "Are you really sure about this? Are you feeling a little confused and emotionally upset, and maybe some of the things that happened you might have misinterpreted, or you might have even fantasized them, you know, have trouble separating fantasy from reality?"

Like Pandit Rajmani, Dr. Ballentine explains that Americans have weird attitudes about sex, that Americans like to knock their heroes off the pedestals they have put them on, that people with unrealistic expectations get vengeful when Swami Rama disappoints them, and that anyway, he's never seen any evidence of sexual misconduct. He says he once had a patient falsely accuse him of getting her pregnant, and that any psychologist knows that this happens frequently with emotionally disturbed women patients. He says he was only directly confronted once-the rest has been hearsay.

Dr. Ballentine doesn't believe any of the stories, and when I ask if he's ever talked to Swami Rama about them, he answers, "Oh sure, and he's shown me his file, of..." He doesn't finish the sentence. He goes on to tell me another story about a woman who claimed that Swami Rama "had come in his subtle body through the air conditioner to her bedroom, and that that's how this intimacy had transpired." When I ask him if he would recognize the truth if a genuine victim approached him, he admits that it's possible that he wouldn't: "I have yet to see a case where I've seen him do something that was for his own benefit or gratification at the expense of another person. So if someone wants to come to me and say, this man's taking advantage of me for his pleasure, I just find it hard to believe."

Since our interview, Dr. Ballentine has been sent at least two letters by women who say they were sexually abused by Swami Rama: one from Carolyn and one from Susan.* Several months earlier, he received a letter from Bob Hughes, a member of the Institute's board of directors from 1978 to 1980. Hughes, who ran East West Books Chicago and then worked as publicity and sales director of Himalayan Publishers and Distributors, now has a masters degree in counseling and hosts a successful TV series in Memphis, Tennessee: "Total Health and Relaxation: An Ounce of Prevention." Two years ago, when Hughes openly asked questions about Swami Rama's sexual activities during a weekend workshop at the Glenview Center, where he was the featured guest lecturer, he was escorted off the premises and driven to the airport.

Hughes wrote Dr. Ballentine a letter on May 22, 1989, quoting Gandhi-"Truth itself helps me when I commit mistakes. Truth alone is the real teacher and master"-and asking for an explanation of the women's stories and challenging a possible Institute "cover-up" on professional ethical grounds. He sent copies of his letter to many of his former colleagues and other professionals on the Institute's staff. Dr. Ballentine's response was reluctant: "It is only in view of your many years of association with the Institute that I have decided to take the time to reply to your letter of 22 May. Otherwise I would not deem such a letter worthy of a response."

The letter is curt in tone. "If you give more weight to rumors instigated by emotionally disturbed individuals and by those who are jealous or vindictive than you give to your own experience of dealing with Swamiji, then you are indeed in trouble." The people Bob had referred to were Carolyn, Susan, Brian and Terry, Dr. Edwin Funk, a former member of the Institute board of directors and physician on its staff, and Sister Audrey Rymar, a Catholic nun who had worked with the Institute in Glenview for 13 years. "I will not tolerate anyone propagating malicious stories about the Institute or its founder on the Institute's own property," Dr. Ballentine's letter says. "Until you get your priorities straight and your head clear, I would request that you refrain from attempting to represent the Institute or its teachings in any way."

Dr. Ballentine sent copies of his letter to the same Institute members who had received Hughes's letter. One of them reported back to Hughes that Dr. Ballentine's letter was accompanied by a private letter Hughes had written to Swami Rama in 1985. In that letter, Hughes had told Swami Rama why marriage and parenthood were probably not for him. Yet Swami Rama, knowing that Hughes was gay, had repeatedly urged him to marry various women Institute members and had insisted that his homosexuality was unnatural and unhealthy. Dr. Ballentine denies sending out copies of Hughes's letter: "I didn't do that. I don't have access to those files." Hughes is not so easily coerced into silence; he says he plans to continue to press the Institute's administration to fulfill its ethical obligations to investigate the women's complaints and put a stop to any abuse.

Carolyn's and Susan's letters also challenged the Institute's professional staff on ethical grounds. Carolyn has received no reply from the Institute. Susan's letter detailed her relationship with Swami Rama and the emotional damage she suffered; she sent it to a select group of Institute staff and members, past and present, but has not gotten an official response. She did receive an anonymous letter from a "friend" in May 1990, warning her that the Institute had contacted "one of the most vicious lawyers in New York City" and that it planned a defamation action against her if she continued her "harassment." According to her anonymous correspondent, "the Himalayan Institute and Swami Rama are one and the same," and Susan's action could destroy "the unselfish work of many people."

Susan has received several phone calls and a letter from people she didn't send her letter to. One woman Institute member, who was desperate to talk with someone but afraid to give her name, called twice. Susan says the woman described her own similar experience with Swami Rama during the past two years. Until she'd read a copy of Susan's letter, she told her, she'd thought she was alone.

Dale Colton, director of public relations at the Himalayan Institute, never returned my repeated phone calls requesting an interview with Swami Rama.

Note: Katharine Webster, who recently completed her master of journalism degree at the University of California, Berkeley, is an occasional student of yoga who has had many teachers, but no guru.

* Names with asterisks are pseudonyms



Freedom of Speech and its need - An Issue

The basic difference between the human being and animal kingdom is that the human being can think and make his idea, express its feelings and thought. Not only this, it can also apply his/her thoughts into practical. If the man is deprived of freedom of thought and speech then he is not be more than an animal. For that reason today the attacks on individuals/ institutions merely due to the expression of their ideas differently from those of religious-minded persons/institutions has become a very serious matter for the progressive thinkers.

The Sangh Parivar has held the stick to attack the freedom of thought. When they attack on any person/ institution, the logic they provide is always that the thought of that very person/ institution is against their faith. So it hurts their religious emotions. Should anyone act in such a way? To understand let us take an example.

According to the learned persons in our country the number of various no us religions is near about 1700. In Rajsthan there is a Mandir (Temple) of Karni goddess. In this temple, the people deliver the sweet (Laddoo) and some grain (Bajra) to the rats due to their religious belief. Contrary to this, we kill the rats in our daily life because they damage the large amount of grain and also spread serious epidemic diseases. So if such believers ask/demand/threat us not to kill the rats as it hurts their religious feelings, how it is possible? Should we agree with their belief? And if they take the extreme and heinous step to kill the person/s who killed a rat, is it justified?

Therefore, if the tradition is settled by killing a human being about whom is said that he had hurt the religious feelings of believers, then what will be the result and what type of that society may be, everybody having a common sense can imagine.

But what the 'Sangh Parivar' is doing? Take the example of Mr. Karunanidhi, Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. He gave a statement that Shri Ram Chander was an mythical character. 'Vishwa Hindu Parishad' announced that who will get the head of Karunanidhi, will be awarded. His daughter was attacked at her house by the Sangh Parivar organisations. True, the vast masses of the people of our country believe in the godship of Shri Ram Chander. But the majority is not the basis of the truth or falsity of any thinking or belief. Why?

For example Christian Scripture "Bible" teaches that the Sun revolves round the earth. But Great Scientist Copernicus declared that it is the Earth which revolves round the Sun. At that time Copernicus was alone. But now? Now the whole world is agreed with the truth of Coperinucus. So the logic of numbers is a bad one. So far as the historicity of any person or incident is concerned, the ratification by the majority cannot be the basic condition. Rather it is illogical as we have seen in the example of Coperinucus. It is, therefore, logical that to prove something historical one should

provide factual proof and logical argument. Till then the issue concerned must be left unsettled and open for all to think over and express in their own way. In the absence of any stable fact no one should impose his/her view(s) upon others and attack and kill others only for the sake of his/her belief. No one should, under the name of religious feelings, declare verdict against those (non-believers) who do not agree with his/her belief.

In fact no criteria of hurt religious feelings has been brought forward by any religious section. We are giving the criteria.

Take an example of a bald-headed woman. She is on the way to her house:. Two persons meet her. First person calls her, "Aunty, Good wishes." But the second one calls her "bald-headed Aunty, Good wishes." So we can see from this example that though both have given "Good wishes" to their Aunty but the bad intention to pinch the feelings of Aunty of the second person is quite clear. From this example the criteria to hurt religious feeling comes out clearly that merely rejecting the traditional approach and proving new one for the human development cannot be categorised as hurting the religious feelings untill and unless there is no bad intention of mocking the religion.

Furthermore, every religion preaches that all human beings are equal. But in most major religions, killing of atheists is also justified wrongly. Are they respecting the feelings of atheists by killing them? Or are the Atheists not human beings? The religious people also must keep in mind that they should not hurt the feelings of atheists due to their different way of thinking. Atheists are outrightly against killing or cutting the head of any individual of their opposition in thought and approach. They are determined about the truthfulness of their thought, based on logic.

Atheists always respect humanity. They try to win over their opponents by persuasion by their rationalist approach. They think that if everyone adopt the course of "Sangh Parivar" then instead of contributing something in the development of society everybody will become thirsty for the blood of other human beings. Social development will stop.

Now some words about Science and Faith. What is right and what is wrong, which approach helps in social development and which not. The question of inquiry is out of the syllabus of Faith. The mentality of righteousness without inquiry is called as faith. Such as one person says that he never disagreed with the words of person wearing a saint's (saffron) dress because he may curse him and he will remain issueless. Such approach is illogical because the so-called curse have nothing to do with the birth of the child. The medical science has proved beyond any shadow of doubt that how the child takes birth. So there is not an iota of truth in the idea believing upon the words of the saint.

Now the antithesis of science in it approach. We say science to the approach which have its logical base and can be inquired or detected through a specific approach, which knowledge cannot be proved evidently, cannot be called science. Without questioning, believing upon something called faith. But scientific approach is putting some questions with logic to know the truth. So the faith and science are two oppenent and discharging each other streams of mode of thinking in the human cross system. There can be no confluence of these two streams. When one is faith believer then he must leave the science and if one has scientific approach then he have to leave faith.

But human development is never possible without science. So well wishers of human development always slogan the scientific thought, science and expression of free thinking. On the other side the fundamentalists are always bent upon to snub the bud of free thinking. The recent attacks on 'Taksheels' (Rationalists) of Fazilka City, Ferozepur Distt. (Punjab) by the 'Sangh Parivar' are the result of this approach. It is also mockery, that these people instead of caring the religious feelings even destroy them. How?

They attacked the rationalists by alleging that they mock the Hindu Avatars and goddesses. How wonderful is this. The Rationalists do not believe in the existence of any Avatars, goddesses, ghosts and any Supernatural Power. For if Rationalists will say that ghost is bad then this will prove that they believe in ghosts. The same can be said for the gods and their godly power in which they do not believe, Rationalist reject all such powers. So when they reject the existence of any god or goddess how they can write such things and how one can say that they condemn them and call with bad names?

So Sangh Parivar without any reason blame rationalists and incite the faith-believers and play with their feelings instead of respecting them. In fact they only pretend to be the propagator and defender of the religion. They play the music of hurt religious feelings on their religious Orchestra to harness the political ends.

So we must come forward to defeat the reactionary ploy of R.S.S., Bajrang Dal, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bhartiya Janta Party, to stomp down the freedom of thinking and thought. We should make clear to these fascist forces that "History repeats itself, firstly, as a reality and secondly as a farce."

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From : Pravin Sabnis

Its a Miracle!

Deccan Herald, August 3, 2008

Do you believe in miracles? A simple question. But, for the vast majority of humanity who fall somewhere in between staunch believer and die-hard sceptics, the answer isn't. Veena Pradeep & Chethana Dinesh attempt the answers nonetheless.

Statues shed tears of blood, drink milk and open their eyes in benign blessing. Crosses of light inexplicably appear around many parts of the world. Sea water in a muddy creek turns sweet. The faithful flock in piety and amazement while sceptics pull out their hair in desperation, crying foul.

Do you believe in miracles? The question is as simple as that. But, for the vast majority of humanity who fall somewhere in between staunch believer and die-hard sceptics, the answer isn't.

From time immemorial, there's been a miracle for every season and every reason. If only our senses were open to perceive it! On a hot summer afternoon, sitting in a garden, under the cool shade of a peepal tree, soaking in the beautiful sight of colourful flowers, you close your eyes and take a deep breath, saying a silent prayer to the Almighty for a spell of rain. Voila! It actually starts raining. If this isn't a miracle, what is?

For Tarun Cherian, a well-known spiritual healer, based in Bangalore, everything is a miracle. The blink of an eye, the blooming of a flower, the flight of a butterfly, the existence of the universe itself is no less miraculous than statues of gods and goddesses drinking milk or opening an eye.

Yet, we take the former for granted because our brains have understood the mystery behind these natural phenomena. Innumerable instances of mysterious things have been recorded, so nobody can discount the fact that miracles happen, he says. "For example, auras around humans have been photographed, so nobody can deny their existence."

"What we know about the universe is only the tip of an iceberg. We can just see that wee bit above the water, and a little bit below it. What lies underneath, unknown, is bigger than what most of us can even imagine," says Tarun.

"Obviously some miracles are manufactured," counters Tarun. "But where are there no scams? Science has clear biases, ignores inconvenient facts, and has its share of utter frauds."

All of us may pooh-pooh the mass hysteria whipped up either by a statue of Sai Baba opening his eye or Ganesha idols drinking milk, but, deep down don't we want to be a part of the crowd that firmly believes in such miracles? "All of us love miracles, irrespective of our community and religion. In fact, we long for them. Being born and brought up to believe that miracles do happen, we accept anything that's even mildly suggestive of a miracle. Our lives revolve around expectations that miracles can happen.

"For instance, take the recent case of the statue of Shirdi Sai Baba opening his eye in Bangalore. People thronged the place to witness it. That's human weakness. At the same time, not all of them who went there believed in it. Most of them were driven to do it only out of curiosity. But, the very fact that they wanted to be a part of the whole episode illustrates how a human mind works. They went there out of expectations —

they wanted to believe that the miracle had indeed happened," says Prof C R Chandrashekar, Department of Psychiatry, Nimhans.

It's true. Caught in the rigours of this world, all of us yearn for miracles in some form or the other. And again, who can doubt this longing for miracles when it's being felt in various pockets all over the world?

There have been instances of miracles quoted in every religious text and in the history books of every civilization. Circles of Light, Crosses of Light, Healing Waters, Signs of Allah, The Holy Mother, Buddhist Miracles, Christ Encounters... the list can be endless.

An oft-quoted instance is that of the sighting of angelic warriors by Israeli soldiers in all of Israel's wars. And in every war, there were reports from both sides of angelic intervention on Israel's behalf. Though some rationalists attempted to term it as battle fatigue, believers didn't buy the argument, considering that the angels were seen by both sides in the war.

Surprisingly, while many today believe in miracles, no modern historian fills his or her books with accounts of miraculous events. For, they are considered incredulous and nothing more than a case of collective hallucination. Experts in human psychology think otherwise.

"It is basic human tendency to desire the marvellous and the wondrous, to be deluded about them, to fabricate them, embellish them and to exaggerate them. It is a manifestation of our dislike for the mundane and the ordinary. Hence we lap up anything that is different from the ordinary," explains Prof Chandrashekar.

However, there are many philosophers and anti-supernatural thinkers like David Hume (1711-1776) and Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677) who argue against this belief in miracles. While Hume terms it an act of faith and not of reason, Spinoza says that the belief in miracles and a commitment to modern scientific methodology are incompatible.

Another much widely neglected argument against miracles is put forth by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) in his book *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*. According to Kant, miracles never occur! In other words, miracles are theoretically possible but practically impossible.

Miracles are ruled out on scientific grounds too. According to the scientific understanding of the universe, no event can be termed rational unless its occurrence is regular and repeatable. Miracles are by nature not regular and repeatable and hence there is no scientific basis for the belief in miracles.

"It's true that there is no scientific basis to miracles. But, everything cannot be explained by science right?" argues Rachna Chabria, a consultant with a software firm. To support her argument, she narrates a true life experience.

"My father was a hale and hearty person. One fine morning, we found him dead in his sleep and the doctors attributed it to a massive heart attack. My mother was devastated. Everyday she reported of having his visions, prompting her to take her BP tablets. According to her, she distinctly saw him walking in the house with his familiar and recognisable steady gait. One such day, she told us she had decided to join him. We didn't take her seriously as we thought it was just another of her emotional outpourings. But, the very same night, to our horror, she too passed away peacefully in her sleep. How do you explain this?" she questions.

"Anything we do with intensity can create miracles. When we understand it, it forms the basis of life, when it surprises us, we call it a miracle," says Tarun.

Miracles are anything that's beyond our realm of understanding. Nevertheless, they help us get on with our lives with hope. "They are all around us. We just have to ask the universe for it. I have prayed for miracles and they happened. The universe is very kind. It just gives all that you ask for. You may be gripped by a serious problem and not know how to get out of it. You hope against hope for it to be resolved by itself and it does! That's a miracle," says renowned tarot card reader Krishna Nath Malhotra.

A miracle definitely helps ordinary mortals like us to live on, with the fond hope that a miracle will very soon put an end to the suffering in the world.

Says model-actor Nasser Abdullah, a firm believer in miracles, "About three decades ago, I went with some friends to Satya Sai Baba, hoping to be able to rid myself off a consistently present nervous strain, and fear of living in this world. I was not disappointed, as he did rid me of that, plus a few other disturbing samskaras lurking within my being which I wasn't even aware of. That was a true miracle for me! I mean,

to be able to prevail upon the mind and transform it so completely without appearing to be doing so is a feat worthy of resting foremost in the annals of miracle workings.

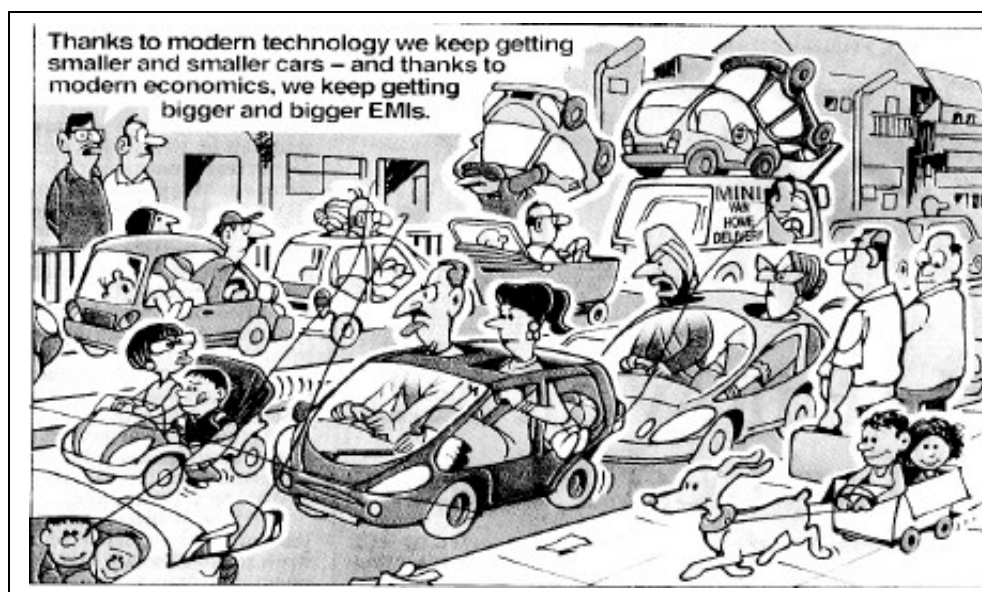
"I had also on the same trip witnessed a healing by him on a boy who was afflicted with a disease, which had left him deformed from neck to toe. When Sai Baba whispered something into his ear he dashed off, unaided towards his room, a distance of 15 metres, in a split second, and turned contorted again. A few hours later, I saw this boy walking about awkwardly but proudly around, with the most radiant smile upon his face, unaided, watched by his ecstatic mother! He was not even able to stand up on his own, prior to Sai Baba's interaction with him, until a few hours earlier! That was the other miracle I witnessed. This is for those who might want to rubbish my earlier claim of my miracle as a psychological aberration or fluke!"

Despite many miracles being explained away by rationalists and scientists, the media continues to report on strange events and happenings around the world and otherwise rational human beings continue to believe in them. "Now miracles happen most when we are desperate or troubled. And indeed we are in trouble today with an imminent collapse of the environment, and a global economy powered by skinny energy resources. Since man's very survival is threatened, the stakes are raised. Our desperation unleashes immense psychic force, and so miracles and psychic gifts are far easier to receive today than in any point in our history," says Tarun.

Both miracle-seekers and miracle busters will agree on one thing, however. Miracles are but extensions of one's belief. You believe and you will be blessed by an experience. You don't believe and you can explain the experience away. Every now and then, you read newspaper reports of potatoes or eggplants sporting the image of gods. Now, if you're religious and a believer in miracles you'll see in these divine vegetables a sign and probably worship them, but if you are a rationalist you'll just chop that freak vegetable into your curry!

LIKE THAT ONLY

JUG SURAIYA & AJIT NINAN



Child rights panel wants norms to be set for 'gurukuls'

Times of India 5.8.2008

Himanshi Dhawan | TNN

New Delhi: A day after a minor was arrested for the alleged murder of two boys at Asaram Bapu's ashram in Madhya Pradesh, gurukuls and orphanages run by religious bodies have come under the scanner.

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has demanded that norms be established for schools and orphanages run by such organisations.

Commission member Sandhya Bajaj had visited the ashram and found security lapses on the campus. The commission will be visiting more such 'gurukuls' to assess the living conditions of children.

"In our visit to the ashram, we found negligence by the authorities. The campus is huge and there appeared to be no supervision of young children," Bajaj said.

She added that there was a crying need to set standards for such schools.

"There have to be norms in place for gurukuls in terms of the educational qualification of the staff, the living conditions provided to wards in the hostels and regular monitoring," Bajaj said.

She added that states would be asked to rein in such religious organisations so that minimum requirements of a school were met and there were regular inspections.

Educationists, however, pointed out that the state education departments were usually short-staffed and unwilling to conduct field visits.

Schools were largely left unmonitored except for an annual inspection that was known well in advance. Whether states would be willing to risk irking religious sentiments that could lead to unnecessary controversy - as seen in the Asaram Bapu case - is a big question?

The commission has also expressed concern over the fact that the alleged murderer was a 14-year-old.

"The child caught by the police is a victim himself. He is supposed to be mentally unstable.

If he was unstable, why was no one aware of this child's deviant behaviour?

We have recommended that there should be a counsellor for the children so that they can be guided and helped in their trauma and problems," the NCPCR member said.

Life term for Shraddhananda

He Will Not Be Released Till He Dies : SC

Times of India 23.2.2008

NEW DELHI: Swami Shraddhananda, guilty of killing his wife Shakereh who was the grand daughter of former Diwan of Mysore Mirza Ismail and ex-wife of former Indian High Commissioner to Australia Akbar Khaleeli, will be imprisoned till his death, ordered the Supreme Court on Tuesday.



AN EXAMPLE OF GREED: Shraddhananda

A Bench comprising Justices B N Agrawal, G S Singhvi and Aftab Alam said the diabolic manner in which the murder was committed by Shraddhananda just fell short of the 'rarest of rare category', which warrants death sentence.

"What does a court do when a case falls just short of the 'rarest of rare category' but feels that the sentence of life imprisonment which for all practical purposes is 14 years, is grossly inadequate?" the Bench asked.

Considering a whole gamut of previous judgments and resisting the judicial inclination to grant death sentence, the Bench took a middle path - Shraddhananda should be in prison for the rest of his life.

The facts of the case were so intricately close to the rarest of rare category that earlier a two-judge Bench, though convinced of his guilt, had differed - one of the judges awarding death penalty while the other imposing life term. However, both the Benches, the earlier two-judge and the present three-judge, had little difficulty in convicting 63-year-old Shraddhananda alias Murali Manohar Mishra of murdering Shakereh by mixing sedatives in her tea and thereafter burying her in a coffin in the backyard of their house at Bungalow No 81, Richmond Road in 1991. The trial court had awarded death penalty to him in May 2005, which was later upheld by the Karnataka High Court. Shakereh, who was married to Akbar Khaleeli in 1964 and divorced in 1985, married Shraddhananda in 1986. After she executed a general power of attorney and a will in favour of the accused, she was murdered in 1991.

Almost a year after the murder, Shakereh's daughter from the first marriage, Sabah Khaleeli, lodged a complaint with the Bangalore police alleging that her mother was



missing since April 19, 1991. The police dug up the grave inside the house and recovered the skeleton of Shakereh in March 1994 and arrested Shraddhananda.

Lust for property drove him to murder

TIMES NEWS NETWORK - 23-7-2008

Bangalore: It was a tragedy-struck love story. A mother of four, who fell in love with a self-styled godman and divorced her husband, a former diplomat.

She even married the godman, who later buried her alive in the same house where they lived and continued to live there as if nothing had happened. The complaint was lodged one year later and the body exhumed three years after the complaint was lodged.



Shakereh Khaleeli, grand-daughter of former the Dewan of Mysore Mirza Ismail literally lived like an orphan for many years, before she vanished. Legal battles with family members and false promises of her second husband Swami Shraddhananda alias Muruli Manohar Mishra had made her life a nightmare.

Shakereh married former Indian diplomat to Australia Akbar Khaleeli in 1964. The couple had four daughters. Akbar Khaleeli was usually on tour and Shakereh stayed in Bangalore with her children.

She was introduced to Shraddhananda, a self-styled swami, who started giving her spiritual courses. Over time, she fell in love with him. Besides, he had spotted her weakness - to have a son - and exploited it.

In 1985, Shakereh divorced Khaleeli and married Shraddhananda in 1986. In the meantime, Shakereh entered into property-related legal battles with her family. Her dependence on Shraddhananda increased and she even made him the general power of attorney of the property.

Shakereh's daughters wept abroad after finishing their education. Her second daughter Sabah used to visit her mother frequently. From April 1991, Sabah could not contact her mother on telephone also. She came to Bangalore and enquired about her mother, but Shraddhananda could not give convincing answers.

He once told Sabah that her mother had delivered a baby boy and was taking rest in a farm house. Later, he said she had an abortion and the doctor had advised complete rest and no one should disturb her. In 1992, Sabah lodged a complaint with the Ashok Nagar police station about her missing mother.

Shraddhananda didn't give any clue as to what had happened. In March 1994, police constables laced Shraddhananda's servants' drink and got the truth. They narrated how the swami had drugged his wife and later buried her alive in the porch behind the palatial house on Richmond Road.

The police then exhumed the body. Investigation revealed that Shakereh's relationship with Shraddhananda had soured after she realized that the man had duped her for the property. After falling from Shakereh's grace, Shraddhananda tried hard to regain control. Around this time, Shakereh also thought of getting closer to her children.

Sensing he would lose his wife's property and be thrown out of the house, Shraddhananda laced her tea with sedatives, kept her in a coffin and buried the



Shakereh's dependence on Shraddhananda increased after marriage and she even made him the power of attorney of her property

coffin in the backyard of their house at 81, Richmond Road. During the trial, two servants - Raju and his wife - stood as witnesses in the case.

The swami was arrested and after years of trial, he was sentence to death by the high court which Was challenged in the Supreme Court. Shraddhananda is currently lodged in Belgaum prison.

toibl.r.reporter@timesgroup.com him



Godman' relieved to escape gallows

Times of India 25.7.2008

Raju Gavali | TNN

Belgaum: Shraddananda, self-proclaimed godman who has been lodged in the Central Prison at Hindalga here, is eagerly awaiting the orders of the Supreme Court that commuted his death sentence to life imprisonment.

Surrounded by piles of religious books, Shraddananda is spending his time reading and seems relaxed after he heard the news on a radio installed at the high security ward of the prison.

Shraddananda had married Shakereh, grand-daughter of Sir Mirza Ismail, the former Dewan of Mysore, in 1986. Five years later, Shakereh went missing. Her mysterious disappearance came to light only when her daughter Sabah Khaleeli filed a complaint before the Bangalore police in June 1992.

Shakereh's body was exhumed from a 100-feet deep ditch in the backyard of her house on March 30, 1994.

The Karnataka High Court had awarded the death penalty to Shraddananda after his conviction, and ever since, he has been lodged at the Hindalga prison, the only one in the state to have facilities for execution.

Shraddananda has been under constant watch at the high security section of the prison. In jail, the god man has not been allowed to mingle with other prisoners. Besides reading, he has been exercising regularly and practising yoga.

Prison superintendent K B Kadbi told The Times of India that Shraddananda's behaviour in prison had been good and that he was the first convict here to have his death sentence commuted to life.

"At four in the evening, when I met him to give the news being broadcast that his death sentence had been commuted to life, he said he had heard the news at 1 pm on radio," Kadbi said.

Shraddananda continues to remain in the high security ward as the prison authorities are yet to receive the orders from the Supreme Court. He may be moved to the Bangalore prison as the crime had taken place there, Kadbi added.

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