

## Freethinking Demands Objective Analysis of Facts

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In response to post: [http://www.vinnomot.com/Anika/NurulIslam\\_files/AvijitShujog.pdf](http://www.vinnomot.com/Anika/NurulIslam_files/AvijitShujog.pdf)

I read Mr. Avijit Roy's sketchy rebuttal to the conjectures of Ms. Setara Hashem with great interest and the thought that crossed my mind is aptly coined by the Bengali phrase "bou pitiye jhee ke sikkha deowa"! In my opinion, it was not necessary to "enlighten" Ms. Setara Hashem regarding the efficacy of "religion bashing" to explain the evolution of discriminatory social orders. The essay raises questions associated with the fact that all the atrocities attributed to Hinduism do not necessarily apply to traditional Hinduism that is practiced in India today. Let me make it clear that it is not my intention to defend Hinduism in any manner. I have never been culturally, socially or religiously attracted to the doctrine of Hinduism and have always been vocal in decrying the hypocrisies associated with the religion and its social practices, including caste system, dowry system, female infanticide, oppression of women, corruption, and all other social ills induced by the Hindu dominated political and social system prevalent in India. Likewise, I have been equally critical of Islam and its doctrines that have left a billion plus people in darkness. I attribute most of the illness within human society to the peddlers of religion, who have not only divided our societies but also created the atmosphere of intolerance and bigotry.

Mr. Roy may not be aware that the general term "Hinduism" does not encompass all the rituals and religious practices across the entire Indian landscape. It can be argued that only a tiny segment of the people of India today are practitioners of Sanatani Hinduism and very few people if any, adhere to the dictums prescribed by Manusanghita or Rigveda or Atharvaveda. It is also true that other than the one isolated incidence cited by Mr. Roy on Sati in 1987, there has been no other incidence of the practice of "Sati Pratha" in contemporary India; as such it may be treated as an exceptional event (which is a criminal offence by law for the past 100+ years, Mr. Roy may NOT be aware of that, though). Constitutional provisions and laws enacted by the successive governments of India have addressed most of the issues associated with religion induced segregation or oppression, including the exploitation of women using the "Devdasi Pratha", or other forms of subjugation of human beings using the caste system. The religious authorities whether they liked those laws or not had to comply and they had to adapt to changed circumstances, facing the realities of modern India.

Given that social practices are hard to eradicate, especially when the vast majority of the Indian population are illiterate, one will have to concede that major advancements have been made in the post independence era. This is not to say that all ills from the society have been eliminated, and no individual will claim that. However, credit out to be given where it is due. A case can be made that Indians have made steady progress in discarding many of the evil practices prescribed by the "samajpatis" (society leaders) of the bygone era. Mr. Roy elucidated the mechanisms through which the leaders of the societies enslaved the common people and used their uncompensated labor for personal gains. Thus, the concept of reincarnation and other divine indoctrinations were merely a ploy to deprive the people of their rights, and religion was used to deceive them. This practice is common across all societies, though the roots of this type of "divine exploitation" can be attributed to ignorance and lack of education.

Therefore, a case can be made that Hinduism per Mr. Roy's observation was a social order put in place by the leaders to establish their hegemony over the rest of the people. Clearly, ample evidence exists to conclude that the leaders colluded with the Brahmins to enact measures that allowed for the establishment of a multi-tiered social structure, benefiting those of the privileged class. This was possible because unlike other religions, Hinduism is not based on a fixed set of doctrines, nor were there any one single source of enumerated doctrines that could be attributed to one single god. The fact is Hinduism is quite different from any other religion, not only because it has 330 million gods, but also major differences in the way it has been practiced by the people. Lacking a specific path that lead to the so-called god, a large set of doctrines often contradicting one another evolved from the fragmented societies in ancient India. There was no single unifying factor such as language or culture that existed in the past and to a great extent does not exist even today. A good example of the contradictions within Hinduism can be seen in the way Ravana is depicted by the north Indians vis-à-vis south Indians. While the people in the north consider Ravana as a demon, he is revered in the south as a god incarnate. Above all the Ramayana and

Mahabharata are neither religious scriptures nor guidelines prescribing a uniform Hindu way of life. These are at best mythological fictions based on hearsay and concocted over many years of efforts, which have undergone several interpretations and refinements.

Mr. Roy's criticism of Hinduism from a so-called freethinker's point of view can be contested based on the fact that most of the ills he cited were practiced centuries ago. The only major leftover from past Hindu dictums is present in the caste system which Mr. Roy elaborates so succinctly and indeed was the major tool of oppression by the leaders of the social orders in the past, but is hardly an effective means of segregation in modern India. Part of the reason is that the so-called lower caste people have been able to organize themselves into large and powerful political blocks and capture powers in many states like Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and others. There are numerous documented cases where organized lower caste people participate in violence to achieve their desired goals, emulating the violence of the upper caste groups, both of which are repulsive and deplorable. Indeed the power base has changed hands and in many instances it is the Brahmins and the upper caste people who are being discriminated against. Thus, no argument by Mr. Roy is adequate enough to make a coherent case that religion induced caste system is one-way tool of oppression against the lower caste population in modern India. In states like West Bengal, the caste system is no longer a consideration even in social activities such as marriages, further exemplifying that interaction with modern trends has greatly nullified the dictums of religion-induced segregation. Similarly, the argument against Christian church induced burning of women as witches is a matter of the past, and the modern day Christian churches and congregations have significantly reformed their paths due to the resurgence of secular ideology in most nations. Coming from a minority Hindu background from Bangladesh Mr. Roy seems to be blissfully unaware of the vast social/caste reorganization that took place in Indian democratic system over past 50+ years which is quite unlike the happenings of his homeland, Bangladesh.

For this reason Mr. Roy's argument using Hinduism as a whipping boy to make a case against Ms. Hashem's confused thoughts regarding the coexistence of religion and dialectics cannot be seen as an objective analysis. It would be apt if Mr. Roy used Islam as an example to make a case against religious atrocities and hateful indoctrination. The reason I say this is because Islam is the only religion that resisted reform, and it may be argued that adherents to the religion (Islam) have further receded to embrace a literal interpretation of Islamic dictums, which I believe is the result of the lack of education, lack of democracy, and the failure of leadership among the Muslim population. The Muslims all over the world have failed to adapt to the changes brought by the Industrial Revolution and are now way behind in modern technological advancements as well. Crushing poverty, autocratic social orders imposed by illiterate Mullahs, failed political systems resulting from corrupt and self-gratifying political leaders created an economic and social order for the vast mass of the Muslim population worldwide which forces them to seek salvation through the resurrection of Islamic glory laid out in the Koran, and Hadis.

It has been my observation that Mr. Roy finds it difficult to face accusations of Islam bashing from his detractors, and indeed Ms. Hashem accused Mr. Roy of being an Islam basher. There are numerous articles written in the distant past where Mr. Roy has critiqued Islam, often in not-so-flattering language. Clearly, Muslims not attributing to the freethinking concepts of Mr. Roy may find many of his analyses to be anti-Islamic and hence identify him as an "Islam basher". It is not for me to make any determination regarding Mr. Roy's motives, but I find it a little strange that the recent tendency on his part has been to somewhat distance himself from past "karma" critical of Muhammad and Islam. On the other hand, I have equally intrigued by his readiness to "bash" India and Hinduism, even when situations have not demanded his attention. It is my opinion that Mr. Roy in trying to establish his bona fide as a "khaNti" (authentic) freethinker and an atheist, has to resort into participating into some good-old-fashioned Hinduism bashing to prove to the Muslims that he is even-handed in bashing all religions, including the one in which he was "unfortunately" born into! I am afraid that this makes one like him an "equal-opportunity-hater" of religions, but does not necessarily validate his claim of being an atheist or even a freethinker, for which he has to be more objective with respect to logic and reasoning.