



## Science Reporter

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## ON THE PATH OF REASON

*Lack of knowledge and awareness give rise to unscientific notions. With time these notions get firmly entrenched in the psyche and are passed on from generation to generation, unquestioningly. And, often, it is this blind faith that gives rise to irrational beliefs and behaviour.*

*For instance, in Jharkhand, children are gored with red-hot iron rods to cure them of illness. In Karnataka, newborns are thrown from atop a temple to bring good luck and mentally challenged children are buried neck-deep for six*

*hours during a solar eclipse. In Chhattisgarh, suspected tribal women are branded "witches" and tortured to death. In others parts of the country, those suspected of being possessed by spirits are beaten brutally and children are often sacrificed to bring luck. These are not instances from long back. Such incidents are being reported almost on a daily basis from different parts of the country. One shudders to think of innumerable other instances that go unreported.*

*People whose mindsets are attuned to accepting irrational ideas unquestioningly are the ones who are at risk of being manipulated by clever minds. In Madhya Pradesh, for instance, 40 villages of Betul district celebrated Diwali in August this year driven by rumours that if anyone failed to celebrate Diwali during the rains, the family would lose its eldest son or face calamity. The rumours were fuelled by clever businessmen who simply saw a great business opportunity in times of recession. In Uttar Pradesh, some time back, women were misled into dumping wheat and rice into a river if they wished to have a son or wanted success for their sons.*

*However, the most damage is wrought when shrewd yet intelligent people with criminal tendencies are able to easily draw the gullible into their fold preying on their false beliefs and illiteracy. Apart from pandering to established traditional notions, such fake babas, tantriks and charlatans further firm up their place in the minds of the gullible by demonstrating simple scientific phenomena and passing them off as miracles. They ply their trade secure in the knowledge that the people they target will never question their deeds. Exploiting the poor and the uninformed, such thugs build up empires and hobnob with people in power giving them more sanctity. But for those who get sucked into this cesspool, loss of wealth, loss of dignity and even loss of life are just waiting to happen.*

*One person who subjected such godmen to intense scrutiny – Narendra Dabholkar – was recently silenced forever. Crusading against obscurantism for the past many years, Dabholkar was an active member of the Maharashtra Andhshradha Nirmulan Samiti. It is indeed ironical that while godmen and tantriks are lionised, rationalists like Dabholkar who work towards extricating innocent people from the clutches of such criminals are killed.*

*We are all duty-bound by the Constitution of India to promote scientific temper among the citizens of the country. We need to empower people in the grip of unfounded beliefs with knowledge to prevent them from being exploited by unscrupulous people and also so they may contribute to the progress of the country more effectively.*

Hasan Jawaid Khan

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