



book extract

# The Quest for Truth

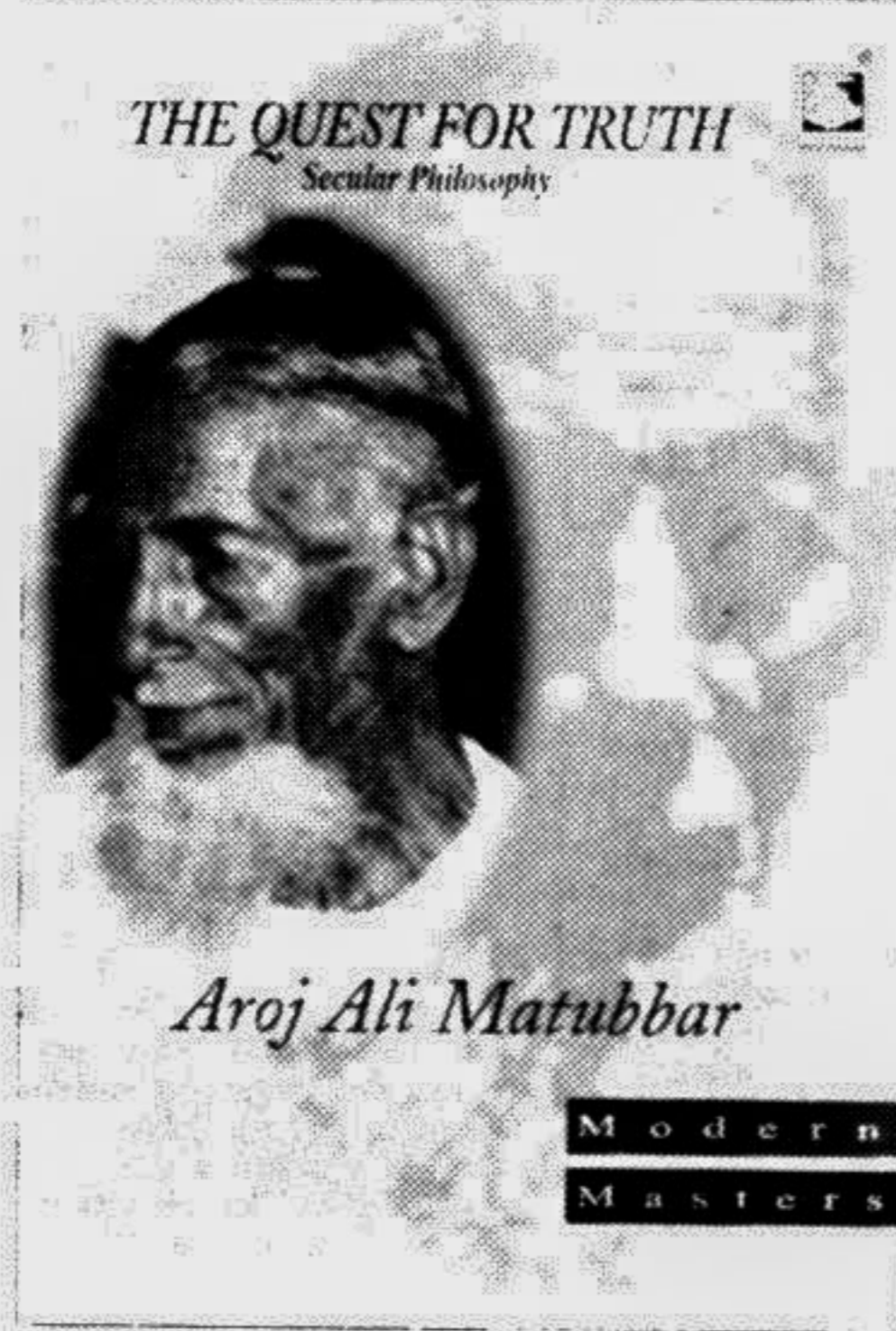
by Aroj Ali Matubbar

Aroj Ali Matubbar is the Socrates of Bangladesh. He 'took it as a mission to strike at the roots of all superstitions and fanatic half-beliefs, and thereby restore the balance between science and religion,' writes Syed Manzoorul Islam. He was even incarcerated for 'corrupting' the youth with the knowledge of science. Matubbar had no formal academic training as philosopher and had practically no schooling. But the true love for wisdom has made Matubbar a priest of free thinking. His two volumes of selected writings in Bengali were well received. Now a selection from his works is available in English. The brilliance of Matubbar's prose is not lost in its English rendition. We have chosen the opening four pages of the newly released volume *The Quest for Truth*.

Secular Philosophy  
The Basic Premise  
(The Reasons for Inquiry)

**T**O know the unknown is an eternal desire of man. With the first utterance of words, a child starts asking questions — What is this? What is that? As he grows up, similar questions continue at school, college and his place of work — What is this? What is that? Why is it like this? Why isn't like that? In this manner, making enquiries about the whys and wherefores, man has built up the massive structure of science today.

The questioner always wants to know the answer to the questions, what is truth? In fact, there will be no further questions once the truth is known. An object or an incident cannot be true in two different ways. When an incident is described in two different ways then perhaps one of them is true and the other is false or both are equally false. Both of them cannot be true simultaneously — the truth perhaps remains unknown. Suppose a man calls a metal gold and another man calls it brass. In this case, is it true that the metal is gold as well as brass? If one says about a particular even that it took place at 12 noon on 15 April and another says it took place at 3 pm on 16 March, are both the speakers telling the truth? In this circumstance, the audience may not believe either of them. It is probable that somebody would believe one of them and similarly somebody else would believe the other one. Thus, what one accepts as true another rejects as false. Thereby, differences of opinion occur between man and man in deter-



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mining the truth of the matter. And like these differences of opinion regarding particular subjects, there are conflicting views among people on matters social and political from time immemorial. The consequence of it is communal riots and nations at war which we see today before our very eyes. There are many subjects in the world about which philosophy, science and religion do not tell us the same thing. Again, there is no end of differences of opinion in the sphere of religion. If two contradictory

opinions cannot be true at one and the same time, how can hundreds of opinions solemnly stated by hundreds of religions be true? If it is said that only one of them will be true then the question will arise — which one and why? In other words, what is the criterion of truth? What is the test of truth? And what is the nature of truth?

We will not enter into an investigation of these philosophical speculations. We will only discuss briefly the conflicting views in the sphere of religion.

We know from our experience that there is a universal instinct or natural tendency in mankind. In this world everybody wants to live happily, to have good food and enjoyment and preserve his lineage so that he may be immortal through his descendants. For the fulfilment of this instinctive productivity in man, the world sees the invention and perpetuation of agriculture, trade and commerce, industry, society, politics and State. In this way this world of knowledge and science has been built. A bit of thinking will show that man, irrespective of this occupation, is bent on pursuing his instinctive natural tendency stated above. Nobody needs to be instigated to celebrate this pious mission and there is no controversy among men about following this 'religion.'

This propensity is not the whole of the religion of man. Even the term 'religion' in its conventional sense does not signify this propensity. Although it is admitted that animals, birds, worms, insects and even water, wind, fire etc. have their own properties, yet an international religion indicating the religion of mankind or 'human religion' is not recognised. Generally that which we call religion is an imaginary religion of

man. Through the ages the learned and the sage have attempted to determine man's duties to the creator of the universe. Has man no duties to this creator? Certainly he has. Led by this line of thought they enjoined upon man his duties to God. Moreover, these highly learned and very wise men also showed the path to be followed by the people in their social and practical life. In this manner there was the advent of imaginary religion. But different sages or religious leaders propagated different theologies, ideologies and isms.

With the advent of this imaginary religion there arose differences of opinion regarding it. As a result we hear of controversies about this imaginary religion between father and son, brother and brother, and even between husband and wife. In order to dispel these controversies, discussions were held at first and then ensued disputes and quarrels and eventually untold bloodshed took place. History itself is a witness to it. But has mankind been able to reach a consensus about religion?

It is not as if different religious propound different tenets. There are endless controversies concerning the same religion, too. In Hinduism the Vedas and the Upanishads do not say the same thing in every respect. Again, the teachings of the Hindu mythologies are different on many occasions. There is a lot of difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament of the Bible. And there are many differences between Protestant and Roman Catholic beliefs into the bargain.

Conflicting opinions are no less noticeable among the followers of the Holy Quran. Religious communities like the Sunnis, Mutajillas, Wahabis, Quadianis and Karjis do not see eye to eye with

one another. Besides, the four Sunni sects — Hanafi, Shafi etc. — are not unanimous in their views. Even religious preceptors within the same sect of Hanafi for instance Jainpuri, Furfura, Sarsina etc. have different ways. The modern Brahmoism too, of Mahatma Raja Ram Mohan Roy, recently split into two groups.

In spite of so many divergences, to the devotees and worshippers the particular religion they belong to is the best of all, sanctified by tradition and God, the only means of salvation. Needless to say, such an idea is to be found in every religion. No religion ever admits that any other religion is true or that the followers of other religions will attain salvation and go to heaven. On the contrary, priests of all communities assert that their own religion is the only true religion and no other religion is true. Those who believe in other religions will not be saved. They will neither go to heaven nor will they attain nirvana. The whole show is like the dairy-men on the market place — everybody calls his own yogurt sweet.

In this age almost all the religions of the world are theistic, especially monotheistic. If it is so, that is if all the people of the world are monotheistic, then there ought to be a feeling of brotherhood among them. But is it there? There are all sorts of ill will like envy, hatred, dispute and malice. The hatred nursed by the people of one community against the people of other communities is not to be found even among beasts. Cowdung is sacred to the Hindus, yet the non-Hindus are unholy to them. On the other hand, the Muslims consider the excrement of pigeons holy but they consider a non-Muslim unholy. Snakes and frogs rotting in a pond do not make

its water impure but it becomes impure if a non-believer touches it. There are people who go to the extent of saying that it is a great sin to sell banana, arum, and uncastrated male goat on the occasion of a non-Muslim festival, and that it is also sinful to buy anything from a Hindu shop-owner if there is a shop owned by a Muslim. Is this the religion of man? Or is it communalism in the name of religion?

In accordance with the standard of humanity, men are brothers to each other, worthy of love and fellow-feeling, sharers of happiness and sorrow, in a word, very close to one another but they are driven asunder by religion.

Man naturally desires truth, not falsehood. That is why he has been seeking truth through the ages. Exercises in the different branches of knowledge like philosophy, science, geography, history and mathematics are meant to keep one away from falsehood. Therefore, no philosopher or scientist, no historian or logician consciously introduces anything untrue into his book. Especially, he never asserts in the preface to his book that there are no errors anywhere in his work or that if there are any he will not correct them. On the contrary, if an author is proved erroneous or mistaken in any respect he frankly acknowledges it and takes measures to rectify it. Similarly, posterity rectifies the mistakes and errors made by their predecessors. Thus in every age whenever anything wrong is found in the past knowledge, it is immediately made right. The scientific truth of one age is proved wrong in another and whenever this happens the scientific world discards it like worn out clothes and readily accepts the proven new truth.

fiction

# From Tenderness to Betrayal

by Saeif Morshed

**R**HEA concluded that it was worth defying her father's pleas to remain at home and complete her exam revision in order for the night to be enjoyed here. The bar thrived with an iridescent ambience drenched in redolences of alcohol and cigarette smoke, coalescing with vociferous walls of insouciant dialogue between companions and friends. The jukebox throbbled out licentious cadences to enliven the rhythm of conversation and to allure lovers into swaying their hips to the mesmeric beat. Arms would be enfolded around each other with ruminations of wanton debauchery coming into play.

Of course some of the throng chose to act repulsively in this sanctuary of exultation, by becoming too intoxicated with streams of whiskey cascading down their veins resulting in boorishness and often violent attempts to start a fracas.

Rhea was revelling in the emotionally charged atmosphere even though throes of guilt were gnawing at the back of her head, punching in images of a father waiting by the front door for a prodigal daughter who dared to transgress his vitriolic commands. She pondered upon what reprisals lay in store for her when she returned home at some unfeasible early hour in the morning.

This torment of wrongdoing would not be so if she believed her father to be a Westerner's generalised, stereotypical view of an Asian parent vehemently depriving his daughter any attainment of pleasure and instead confining her to the bedroom to be permanently immersed in study.

One justification for this not being the case lay in the way he put up with her putrid breath reeking of alcohol consumption. Rhea also suspected that he knew about the decomposing marijuana joints that were camouflaged within the shrubberies of their luscious back garden.

All he asked for was that she persevered with her education in order that a honourable degree could be achieved from some University of notable distinction.

Was this demand for purely conceived gratification; so that he could exhibit to his friends to what a respectable daughter he had raised. Rhea comprehended that this was not so either. He just requested her to utilise her talents to their maximum potential. The auspicious talent in her case was in architecture, which according to her father alighted the futuristic leanings of Richard Rogers with the grand-scale zeal of Norman Foster and Le Corbusier.

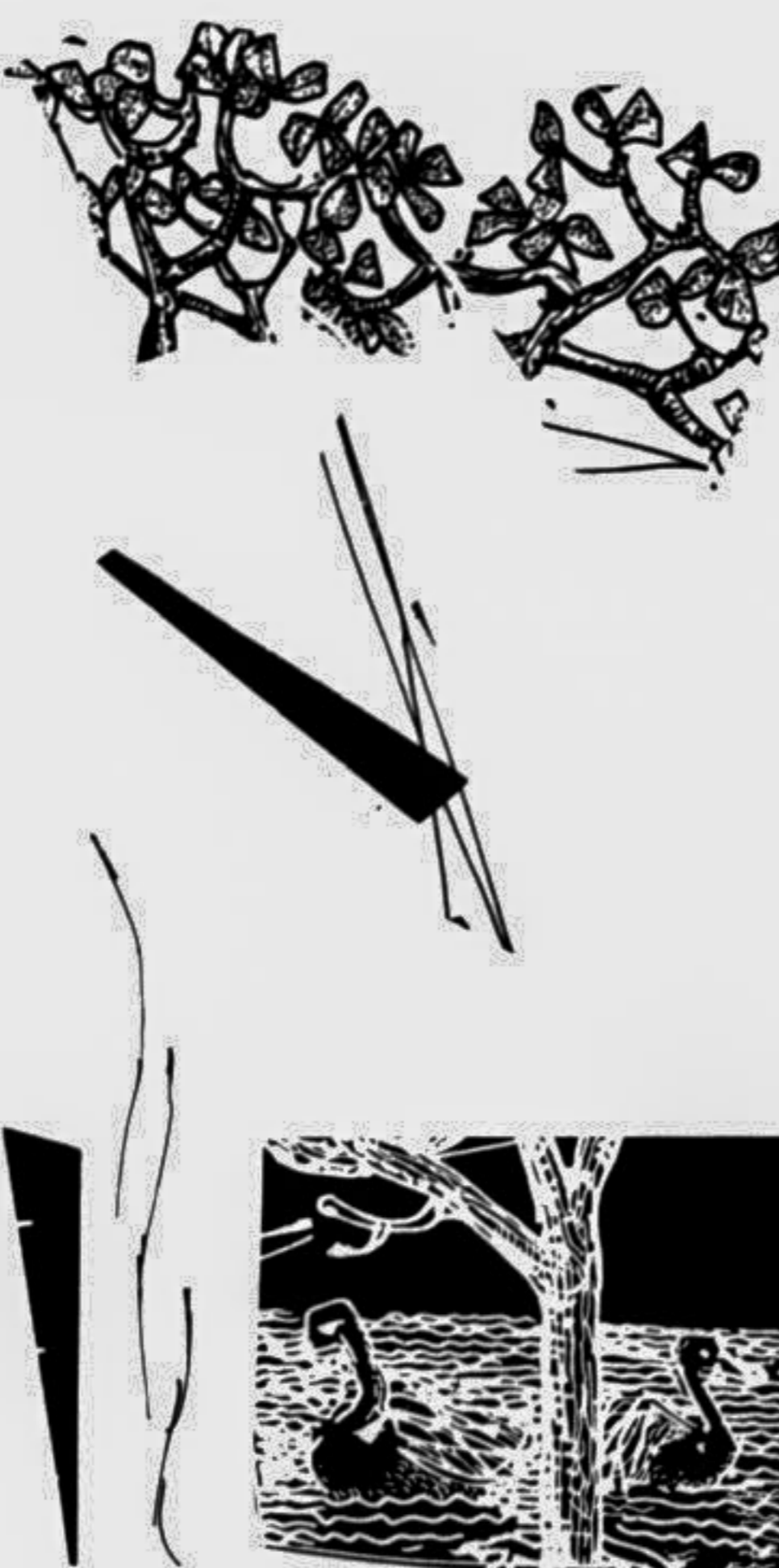
Deep down though, what was really corroding his bludgeoned soul was envisaging his daughter following the same path of failure that he undertook.

A school dropout during the sixties, opting for an audacious Jack Kerouac 'On the Road' existence, his life now consisted of playing subservience to a totalitarian entrepreneur barely out of his teens and an insipid computer screen.

Where once he sought to visualise and create paintings that depicted Miro's surrealist ingenuity, all he was able to witness were tax codes and National Insurance contributions signifying pay roll and all its prosaic procedures.

Payroll was his loathsome profession, restricted to the wearisome nine to five office routine before having to confront the distress of commuter travel hemmed in trains like maltreated chickens in a battery farm. The stench of these trains was insufferable comprising of fetid bodily odours and defiled litter of the half-devoured junk food and foot-trodden daily newspaper variety.

Closing time was encroaching and Rhea had not succeeded in suppressing her ever burgeoning pining for love. Melancholy became apparent over her despondent visage. Cracks were beginning to reveal themselves through its veneer.



Just when her one true yearning seemed to be once again entering a void, the jukebox played the ethereal timbre of Marvin Gaye's 'Sexual Healing' amongst the raucous cacophony. The mellifluous song tugged relentlessly at one's heart strings sending the victim on a voyage of rapture.

At this joyous peak, Rhea laid eyes upon him for the first time across a floor scattered with discarded beer bottles. The person in question was a vision of masculinity with a paragon torso and a square-jawed chin. His luminous, swimming pool blue eyes and fairground smile were ablazing her once love-lorn heart, solacing its desire

for tenderness.

Conversation with pre-rehearsed chat-up lines was not required as the celestial voice of Marvin Gaye had already swooned her to acquiescence.

Without inebriation from several gin and tonics, Rhea would have probably been able to see right through this charade knowing full well that all this fair-skinned male craved was a one-night stand with no strings attached. But forlornness can so easily blur one's acute vision and the prowess to recognise deception reaches its lowest ebb.

Closing time had finally drawn its curtain but the suave debonaire was not perturbed in the slightest. An overture was made suggesting a romantic walk through the nearby park. Alarm bells should have been chiming but this was a credulous woman who had already bestowed her trust on the absolute stranger. Thought of her sullen father had dissipated in this asphyxiating haze, while any feelings of remorse vanished as swift as a fawn upon sight of an avaricious deer hunter.

Outside, the night sky was thunderous in nature underlying the erotic undercurrents that lay beneath the shallow surface.

As the midnight hour loomed one would have contemplated the park being deserted. However, lovers were using the omnipresent darkness to delve further into each other's bodies. Rhea envied their lack of inhibitions and yearned to be admitted to their exclusive clique ridding herself of such unwanted tags as 'virgin' and 'frigid'.

Quixoticness laced the night air assisted by the euphonious nocturnal animals and tranquil lake with its slender ripples being danced upon by fluorescent moonbeams.

He took her hand and led her into this heart of darkness. The enticing fragrance of his aftershave invited her to get closer entwined. Everything seemed perfect for lascivious kissing to take place.

Expecting the inevitable amorous advance of lips towards each other all

Rhea actually felt was a vulgar hand dig deep inside her flimsy blouse, ripping its intricate weavings and lecherously grabbing one of her svelte breasts. Those swimming pool blue eyes now turned viscid piercing her heart not with love but extreme consternation.

The repulsive hand removed itself from the exposed blouse and mutated into a clenched fist. With all the brawn of a prize fighter the impious charlatan pummeled his victim onto the grass verge bellowing the words: "Now I've got you Paki Bitch."

Rhea did not know what was more painful, the forceful clout or the utter degradation upon hearing the abhorrent speech. She felt like an Indian maid — during the British colonisation of the subcontinent — being maliciously treated by her racist Anglo-Saxon master.

Screams attempted to disgorge themselves from her mouth, but her lungs were exasperated and struggling to even maintain breath. Moreover, there was no point in shrieking out despairing cries for help as the lovers who only moments ago she held in such high esteem merged into the darkness, leaving no trace — like a thief exiting a ransacked house under the cover of night.

Things which appeared flawless only a while ago were now revealing new identities. The night sky was no longer laying erotic undercurrents but was instead unleashing pellets of hard, bitter rain. The park that resembled a haven of tranquillity was unearthing its filth through the remnants of scattered litter. Used condoms and rumpled chip packets were implanted throughout its grassy knolls. Even the aftershave Rhea previously adored had been replaced by the rancid stench of belched out beer-gas and undigested take-away cuisine swelling from inside his stomach.

All this paled to insignificance with the dawning realisation that not even first names had been exchanged and yet she granted him both her consent and trust.

"Surely matters could not degenerate