

DEMOCRATIC RESEARCH SERVICE

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(1380)

*Discussed
Raju
78/1/82*

December 29, 1981

My dear Raju,

Thank you for your New Year greetings which I heartily reciprocate.

It may interest you to know that we have a new Hon. Treasurer from 1st January 1982 in the person of Mr. Khandelwal who you will recall was one of the alumni at the Leslie Sawhny Programme Follow-Up Course at the Grand Hotel. Mr. Khandelwal is trying to restore some sort of order in the keeping of the accounts of the DRS and for that purpose I arranged for Mr. Khandelwal to meet Mr. P.N. Subramanian our auditor.

We cannot find any file containing the letter of appointment of Mr. P.N. Subramanian setting out the functions and the terms of his appointment. *He* You think you could guide us in this matter so that we may find the appropriate papers? Do let me know.

Yesterday we had a meeting at the Indian Merchants Chamber for Solidarity in Poland at which I was in the chair. So you will see that we are doing our little bit.

Happy to
We shall take a final decision whether or not to close down Freedom First from 31st March, 1982. How are your travel plans scheduled, and when can we expect you here? It is always such a pleasure to have you back even though so briefly.

Once again a Happy New Year,

Yours sincerely,

Masani

(M.R. Masani)

Mr. S.V. Raju
L/9/72, Tilaknagar
BOMBAY 400 089.

P.S. Since I have just heard that you might be in Bombay early January, I am getting this letter posted to your Bombay address and not to Saudi Arabia.

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SOCIETY FOR THE RIGHT TO DIE WITH DIGNITY

DECEMBER 1981.

NEWSLETTER NO. 1

The Society For The Right To Die With Dignity, which is the first of its kind in India, was established on May 29, 1981.

The initial response, including that from doctors and lawyers, has been encouraging. Hundreds of letters received by the Society have shown that the establishment of the Society has met a long felt need.

Naturally, certain doubts and difficulties have also been raised, dealing mainly with the need for proper safeguards in any law that may be enacted.

The Society is headed by a number of eminent people, including doctors and lawyers, and others who wish to be actively involved in public service. The members of the Executive Committee are :

Mr. M. R. Masani	Chairman
Mr. Fredoon P. Antia	Vice-Chairman
Mr. P. C. Manaktala	Hon. Secretary
Mr. A. N. Parekh	Hon. Treasurer
Dr. R. H. Dastur	
Mr. T. Godiwala	
Mr. Cyrus Guzder	
Mr. S. P. Jain	
Mrs. Dolly Masani	
Mr. M. H. Mody	

Mr. S. P. Jain is the Secretary-Treasurer of the Calcutta branch and has been doing excellent work there.

Though interest in the Society has been widespread, membership, as is usual in India, has gone up somewhat slowly. This is probably due to the fact that the Life Membership fee is as high Rs. 1000/- and the Annual Subscription anything between Rs. 25/- and Rs. 100/-. By the end of October, the Society had 168 members on its rolls, of whom 51 belonged to the Bengal Branch of the Society.

ADVICE TO MEMBERS

On 3rd October 1981, the Society circulated to its members a draft Declaration and draft Power of Attorney by the use of which someone in sound mind might ensure that his or her wishes in respect of the withdrawal of artificial medical treatment would be respected in the event of his or her being incapacitated at the relevant time.

28TH MEMBER OF INTERNATIONAL FAMILY

Our Society is the 28th of its kind in the world as a whole. The Chairman of our Society has been in touch with various international organisations who have warmly welcomed the coming into existence of our Society.

In this connection, members will be glad to know that the world renowned author, Arthur Koestler, has also welcomed the formation of the Society. Reproduced below is his personal letter to Mr. Masani :

"Dear Minoo,

Just a line to thank you for your kind Birthday letter. We are all getting on.

I am glad to hear that you are starting EXIT in India. It will be a long and hard way until charity and commonsense will do their work.

With best wishes to you and all mutual friends.

Yours ever,

Arthur ..

OUR CAMPAIGN

A lively controversy about voluntary euthanasia has raged in the press since the establishment of the Society.

Our Chairman, Mr. M. R. Masani, has written articles for the **Statesman**, **Hindustan Times**, **Bombay Samachar**, **Dharmayug** and **Sunday Magazine** and has been interviewed by **Sunday Mid-Day** and **Eve's Weekly**.

He has also addressed meetings of the Rotary Clubs in Bombay, Calcutta, and Pune; the Progressives Group and Giants Club in Bombay; the Public Relations Society of India in Calcutta, and a public meeting in Calcutta.

TELEVISION

Bombay Television put on an interesting show in their programme entitled 'Focus' on 14th September. A very lively discussion ensued between the participants Mr. M. R. Masani, Dr. B. Colabawala and Justice Sujata Manohar. Mr. A. S. Abraham compered this highly successful programme which has elicited many enquiries about our Society from members of the public.

COMMENTS IN THE PRESS : EDITORIALS

These have ranged from total acceptance to outright rejection. But the majority, as usual, took the middle path; the "It's good, but..." attitude. Excerpted below are some of the wideranging reactions of the press :

The EXAMINER is a Catholic newspaper which has dealt with this problem in two issues : (Aug. 15 and Aug. 29). The first editorial is rather sceptical about the entire idea; but the Aug. 29 editorial has conceded that passive euthanasia may be justified.

The article quotes from the declaration on euthanasia by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith :

"When inevitable death is imminent in spite of the means used, it is permitted in conscience to take the decision to refuse forms of treatment that would only secure a precarious and burdensome prolongation of life so long as the normal care due to the sick person in similar cases is not interrupted".

The declaration further states that the use of painkillers is quite lawful "even though these may cause as a secondary effect semiconsciousness and reduced lucidity."

THE SUNDAY STATESMAN — (July 26th, 1981)

"In spite of possible abuse, the case for euthanasia cannot easily be dismissed. A person should, in theory at least, have the right to choose death rather than the excruciating mental and physical agony of a hopeless illness. The argument seems stronger in the case of those who are reduced to a vegetable existence. It seems as absurd and inhuman to prolong this kind of 'life' in the hope of the discovery of a cure as to deep-freeze the dead for the same reason".

SUNDAY MID-DAY — (Aug. 16, 1981)

Concluding an interview with our Chairman, Mr. M. R. Masani, Ms. Tara Patel writes :

"That at this stage of time there is a need to legalise euthanasia and mercy killing in a rational form is undeniable. The great Dr. Christian Barnard himself, in his book A Good Life, A Good Death, says that he has on several occasions withdrawn treatment to hopeless patients..... The real work of the Society for the Right to Die with Dignity will begin not before but after euthanasia and mercy killing is legalised. If it can act as a vigilant body to check

out and prevent such a law from being abused, its existence would then be justified."

MIRROR (September 1981)

"I am willing to raise my hand in sympathy for Mr. Masani's group if they could answer my one reservation : how are we going to stop avaricious relatives from exploiting the situation and speeding rich old men and women to their deaths?"

Once this obstacle has been taken care of, mercy-killing would be the best thing that happened to human society for a long, long time. If we can't choose our lives, we must at least have the right to choose our deaths".

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Whereas the Press has been cautious, individuals seem to have more decided views on the matter. Many feel that death, like abortion, should be legalised. As Mr. N. C. Tejpal in a letter to the editor of the **Indian Express** dated 6.8.81 puts it :

"The person who feels that he is a burden to himself, his family, and to Society, should have the freedom to die without fear of the law".

A lady, Ms. Sheila Sumant, from Karnataka, writes :

"We are born without our consent and so it is our fundamental right to commit suicide, if we have no desire to live in this world."

GOING

(We are happy to reproduce below from "Imprint" a verse by Colonel C. L. Proudfoot)

Since the Going is inevitable
Fear not the Time, but rather
The Manner of departure;
For me, the grace of a quick
Exit, with no long-drawn agony
Of helplessness to plague loved
Ones, demanding time, money and
Endless heartbreak, an object
Of pity and despair, praying
Mutely for the end. For me, a
Swift clean getaway with bother
To none, stealing silently into
The night; quietly, without fuss
Or fanfare; a kindness to loved
Ones; the ultimate act of charity."