

Sanal Edamaruku

President Rationalist International



Sanal Edamaruku is the president of the **Indian Rationalist Association** (IRA). He is a well known author, columnist and speaker at conferences and universities in India and abroad, appears frequently in various Indian TV channels and is considered to be the most prominent and outspoken advocate of rationalism in India.

He is the founder president of *Rationalist International*, a body associated with the top international rationalists of our times like Richard Dawkins, James Randi, Paul Kurtz, Richard Leakey and Taslima Nasreen. He has been appointed an Honorary Associate of the *Rationalist Press Association* (RPA) of Britain and the New Zealand Association of Rationalists and Humanists (NZARH) in 2000.

Sanal Edamaruku was born in 1955 in Kerala, as son of the veteran rationalist leader and author Joseph Edamaruku and his wife Soley. He studied Political Science and International Relations at the University of Kerala and Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi, and got his M.Phil. degree from the Centre for South Asian Studies of JNU. From the age of 15, he was active in the rationalist movement. In 1983, he became the secretary general of the IRA. He edited the organization's flagship publications *Therali* and *Modern Freethinker*, and built up Indian Atheist

Publishers - meantime Asia's largest freethought publishing house.

During the Eighties and Nineties, he exposed India's leading godmen and godwomen (Satya Sai Baba, Pilot Baba, Balti Baba, Chandra Swami, Swami Sadachari, Mata Amritanandamayi, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar etc.) and sharpened the eyes of the public for their fraudulent tricks and their mechanisms of functioning. With his dynamic anti-superstition campaigns, he launched a silent revolution in Indian villages. In the Eighties, hundreds of rationalist volunteers of the "Edamaruku School" started challenging claims of the paranormal all over India and in several other countries. Sanal Edamaruku's special brand of campaigns attracted wide national and international media attention and was featured by TV channels like Discovery, BBC, Channel IV and CNN, in the international print media (including New York Times, Washington Post, The Independent, The Times, The Guardian, The Telegraph, Time, Newsweek, Asia Week) and all major Indian newspapers. The famous documentary film "Guru Busters" by Britain's Channel IV, featuring Edamaruku and his team on one of their anti-superstition journeys, was telecast in 30 countries.

Sanal Edamaruku describes his programme as "bringing about a social and intellectual climate change by strengthening reason, scientific temper, pursuit for knowledge and personal confidence and reducing the influence of superstition, irrational fear, blind obedience and hysteria." He demands an improvement of the basic education system in outreach and quality to provide "scientific literacy" to India's large rural population. He warns of the massive re-enforcement of superstition in a section of the media and proposes a responsible new media policy that supports the development of scientific temperament – as it is enshrined in the Indian Constitution – and the eradication of superstition rather than boosting viewership rates by miracle mongering. And last not least, he demands strict regimentation of unscrupulous politicians who try and milk their vote banks by using communalism, bigotry and superstition.

In his highly educative and popular TV appearances, Sanal Edamaruku is answering telephonic questions of viewers, encounters godmen, tantrics, astrologers, healers, bigot politicians and fraudulent "modern" therapists, tackles the deep-rooted Indian belief in re-incarnation, astrology and tantric power, and gives rational and scientific explanations for a wide range of "miracles" and alleged power demonstrations of supernatural forces, setting to rest all rumours, confusion and panic attached to them. In several cases, his direct TV interventions have proven very effective in stopping mass "miracles" (most prominently the so-called milk miracle) and controlling dangerous outbreaks of mass hysteria (for example the urban legends like monkey man of Delhi, the face scratcher in Uttar Pradesh and the sweet sea water in the Mahim Creek of Mumbai).

Some of his TV programmes have created great sensations. In 1995, he challenged one of India's leading astrologers to have his capacities tested

under fraud-proof conditions in a popular TV show. The astrologer failed and made himself a laughing stock. In March 2008, a famous tantric claimed he was able to kill any person within three minutes by chanting special mantras. Sanal Edamaruku challenged him on live TV to demonstrate his powers on him. India TV broadcast the breath-taking event live over several hours, gluing millions of viewers till midnight to their TV sets. The tantric suffered a humiliating defeat. Sanal's real-time exposure of the tantric humbug did not only shake India, but was celebrated for several months all over the Internet, sparking many articles and interviews in the international media.

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