

Letter to the Editor**BODY DONATION IN INDIA: MYTHS VERSUS FACTS****Anitha Guru, Naveen Kumar***Department of Anatomy, Melaka Manipal Medical College (Manipal Campus), Manipal University, Karnataka State, India*

Dear editor,

In the debate section of "Revista Argentina de Anatomía Clínica" about Human body to teach Anatomy: Importance and procurement – Experience with cadaver donation (Part II) by Biasutto et al, (2014) Dr. Vidya S. Kharat has rightly mentioned how myths are spread by various social media and engulf the act of body donation in India. We would like to add some facts to the best of our knowledge.

India today stands at the forefront of research and development. Despite reaching out to the outer space, India still remains engulfed by its blind beliefs and superstitions. An average Indian, working in an urban set up, driving flashy cars, although experimenting with the western lifestyle chooses not to let go of the blind beliefs and superstitions being followed for centuries. This attitude is also seen when the topic of body donation arises. Medical schools suffer from a shortage of cadavers to tutor its budding doctors. A country with a population of 1.25 billion fails to meet the cadaveric requirements of its medical colleges.

Coming from the land where Lord Dhanavantari and Sage Sushrutha walked the earth, Hindus in India seem to seek out the religion to shelter them from donating their bodies even though the religion never forbids Hindus from body donation. Amongst the 10 Niyamas (Yamas and Niyamas are the Hinduism code of conduct as given in Upanishads), the third Niyama is "Dana" which prophesizes the act of giving. In order to attain "Mukthi", one has to be liberated from the act of rebirth (Potter, 1958). It is believed that the act of body or organ donation may damage the soul and thus the soul is restrained from attaining mukthi. Thus in the case of body donation, Hindus hesitate to practice the "Dana" Niyama (Hinduism's code of conduct, 2007). Certain superstitions such as body donation brings ill fate

on the entire family also stop a person from pledging his/her body for medical education and research purposes.

The great Hindu philosopher Sage Shankaracharya in his teachings says "Death is not the end, it is the beginning", "Body is for the use of others". With such revered sages hailing from 8th century AD supporting body donation, the modern day Hindu should try to crawl out of the blanket of superstitions and beliefs that prevent them from performing such a noble act. In India, the Anatomy Act of 1949 provides for collection of unclaimed bodies in state and public hospitals for medical education and research purposes. But still there is a shortage faced by Indian medical colleges. Awareness programs need to be conducted to educate the society about body donation. The act of body donation should be promoted as a very noble act of "Dana, act of giving".

References

- Biasutto SN, Sharma N, Weiglein AH, Martinez, Benia F, McBride J, Bueno-Lopez JL, Kramer B, Blyth P, Barros MD, Ashiru O, Ballesteros LE, Moxham BJ, Krishnan S. 2014. Human Bodies To Teach Anatomy: Importance And Procurement – Experience With Cadaver Donation. *Rev Arg de Anat Clin*.6: 72-86
- Potter KH. 1958. Dharma and Moksa from a conversational point of view. *Philosophy East and West*. 8: 49-63
- Hinduism's Code of Conduct*. 2007. <http://www.hinduismtoday.com/modules/smartsection/item.php?itemid=1659>

* Correspondence to: **Naveen Kumar**. Department of Anatomy, Melaka Manipal Medical College (Manipal Campus), Manipal University, Manipal, Karnataka, India. naveentonse@gmail.com