

Brotherhood of Man

(Address at Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home Centenary Celebration on 15th February 2004 at Chennai)

It is a unique feature of Hinduism that the Supreme Lord takes incarnations from time to time to eliminate *Adharma* and re-establish *Dharma*. In Buddhism, Christianity, Islam or any other religion there has been no such reappearance of the Supreme Divinity to save the people from unrighteousness.

This reappearance is not confined to Avatars like Rama, Krishna or Matsya or Kurma. When the Hindu religion was distorted by ritualism, sacrifices etc., Adi Sankara appeared on the scene.

Nearer our own times Sri Ramakrishna and Ramana had come into the world to reestablish *Dharma*.

Shri Ramakrishna once said, "Jiva is Siva". Swami Vivekananda who happened to be near exclaimed that "I have listened today to a noble word of wisdom. If the opportunity ever comes I shall proclaim its great truth to the world". Sri Ramakrishna's words mean, Man is divine, the Atman and the Brahman is the same.

Isa Upanishad has said

Yastu Sarvani Boothani Atman eva anupasyathi

Sarvabuteshu Cha Atmanam tatho no vijugupsate

He who sees all beings in the very self and sees the self in all beings

Feels no hatred because of that (Realization)

The Ramakrishna Mission School put it into practice by having one kitchen for all castes of Hindu as early as 1915.

The History Ramakrishna Mission school at the beginning of the 19th Century is nothing but a tale of woe of the poor students. Boys without resources used to seek charity of one meal once a week from seven households and engage themselves in study. In those days there were no schools in villages and boys had to walk a mile or more to reach the schools. Orphanages were few if any and their intake capacity was limited to a single digit.

The plight of the poor boys was pathetic beyond description. I told you earlier that God incarnates or sends succour when dire distress overtakes humanity. This time God sent help through C Ramaswami Iyengar a petty clerk in the Madras secretariat. He was moved by the plight of four Andhra boys who drifted into Madras in the hope of getting free boarding and education from some trust.

As they were not successful, they were sitting by the way side starving and helpless. Shri C Ramaswami Iyengar melted and he took charge of these boys. Then he took initiative to get

an old dilapidated house and started the first Ramakrishna Students Home with 7 boys depending on precarious collection of donations.

Please compare it with the grandiose buildings and faculties, hostel and other amenities, sports and entertainment. We have today. Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home is one of the premier institutions in India.

What lesson do you draw from this?

The answer is that "nothing is beyond human endeavour"

We excelled in Atomic Science without any external assistance.

President Kalam and his team broke the monopoly of a few superpowers and produced a missile without help, may I say in spite of hostility, of the advanced countries. It is said, that "Not a grain of sand lies in the beach but infinite knowledge knows how to utilize it. You are the inheritors of this tradition and you must gain that infinite knowledge.

Imagine what could have happened had Shri C Ramaswami Iyengar despaired of starting a boarding House in 1905 and went his way like most people.

I do not propose to narrate the heartrending tale of financial difficulties and problems from 1905 to 1921 when the new buildings were inaugurated. Shri C Ramaswami Iyengar in his reminiscences has given all details but on an occasion like the centenary we should remember a few of the good donors who had enabled this temple of learning to come up. Notable Among them were Justice V Krishnaswami Iyer, Justice P R Sundara Iyer, Congress President and eminent lawyer S Srinivasa Iyengar, Sir C P Ramaswami Iyer. His Highness The Maharaja of Mysore Diwan Bahadur C Arunachala Mudaliar, the Zamindar of Chunampet Mr. Pethachi Chettiar and a host of others far too numerous to recount. The management of the Home did not show any discrimination in the selection of students or in treatment of students and won the appreciation of all communities. The Governor of Madras Presidency Lord Willingdon wrote "Lady Willingdon and I visited Ramakrishna Home and were immensely struck with its excellence. There were many things which struck me, among others the fact that here at all events the communal spirit is entirely absent, for I find that both the subscribers and the students belong to many different castes and creeds...." S Ellappa Chettiar of Salem said "I am glad that I am able to tell those that are under the impression that Brahmin boys are preferred to Non Brahmin, that they are wrong".

This brings me to the theme of my centenary address namely the "*Brotherhood of Man*".

It is no exaggeration to say that the whole world is in turmoil today. Violence, hatred, bitter animosities, armed conflicts within and between nations, mar peace and harmony of the entire globe. Crimes such as robberies, decoities, arson, loot and murders are ever growing and spreading widely. Poverty and hunger do not show any signs of abating; on the contrary the gap between the rich and poor within countries and between countries is widening. Organized terrorism where innocent people in market places, public transports and congregations are massacred is becoming a global menace.

Religious and ethnic conflicts also take a heavy toll of human lives. Instead of preaching peace and harmony, fundamentalists of some religions, fan the fire of hatred and bitterness and lead their followers into the path of senseless violence.

In my opinion, the answer to the chaotic conditions in the world should be found in moral and spiritual reformation and not through counter violence. State terrorism is no answer to public terrorism. Let us go back into the past. The primordial man was no better than the beast.

He hunted for his food, killing animals including his own species and ate them. He drank and slept like any other animal. While the strongest animal elephant has remained an elephant and the most beautiful bird Peacock has remained the same, Man has advanced in science and technology, in art and culture, in social behaviour and in noble qualities like kindness, compassion, service and sacrifice. This great change has been brought about by religion - whichever it is. Each religion inculcated in Man virtues that would enable a harmonious existence with his fellow beings. Religions also state that if Man violated codes of good conduct and behaviour, he would be committing a sin for which he will be answerable on the day reckoning after death.

Every religion forbids murder, cheating, falsehood, robbery, injury to others and all antisocial activities as sins. They also preach that the sinless go to heaven and the sinners go to hell. There is no religion in the world that approves of misdeeds. Thus, all religions had reformed the lives of primitive man and made him a civilized being.

The history of civilization is nothing but the transformation of a bestial man into a social being, living in harmony with his fellowmen. Laws, more laws and many more laws are powerless to control these inhuman killings. The world community must awake to the situation and find a solution to the growing chaos all-round.

What holds society together is the voluntary observance of moral and physical laws by the vast majority of the people? A government is able to maintain order only because the law-breakers are few and the law-abiders are many. If the situation were reversed, then society would fall apart and disintegrate. What makes the majority observe the moral and secular laws? Is it fear of State action or punishment?

Everyone is aware of the dictum that justice could allow nine criminals to escape but not one innocent person to be punished. What would be the state of society if nine criminals escape every time, for one conviction?

It is not, therefore, the fear of administrative punishment that makes one observe the laws but a subjective check, the reproval from conscience that holds one back from misdeeds. Every human being has experienced that inner voice to a smaller or greater degree. The one who blunts his conscience by repeated rejection of the reproof soon grows immune to it and ceases to experience it. But the generality of people feel it, heed it and desist from doing wrong.

This conscience or inner voice is developed by faith in divinity and in the Supreme Being. You may call the Supreme Being by whatever name you like, Allah, Brahma or Christ, but accept we must the reality of the ultimate Supreme Being.

Swami Vivekananda in his world-renowned address to the Parliament of Religions, thundered to the world that all the religions are paths to divinity and are therefore entitled equal respect. He further pointed out that just as the drops of rain falling from the Sky, ultimately reaches the Sea all the prayers to whatever God ultimately reaches only the Supreme Being.

*Aakasath pratitanthoyam
Usha gacchachu sagaram
Sarva Deva namaskaraha*

Sri Kesavam pratigachati

Swami Vivekananda also quoted the Gita Chapter IV verse 11.

*Ye yatha mam prapadyante
Tams that thai va bhajami aham
Mama vartama anuvartante manushya
Manushyah Partha Sarvesah*

In whatever way men worship me in the same way do I fulfill the desires (It is) My path
O son of partha (that) men tread in all ways.

It is obvious from the foregoing that all religions preach morality, kindness and compassion and that if each one practices truthfully, faithfully and scrupulously his religion, there would be no disharmony in life. The fact is that no one follows his religion honestly but uses religion for creating discord.

Former President of India, Dr. Zakir Hussain, a protagonist of religious harmony said: "If the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount, Buddha's philosophy of Compassion, the Hindu concept of Ahimsa and the passion of Islam for obedience to the will of God *can* combine then we would have succeeded in generating the most potent influence for world peace".

The problems of ethnic conflict, terrorism and disharmony among the peoples and nations of the world cannot be solved by disarmament conferences, conventions and treaties but only by a change of heart. Religions which have tamed the bestial man into civilised beings can alone bring about a psychological and spiritual transformation of Man.

I shall conclude with a poem

I sought my soul
The soul I could not see
I sought my God
The God eluded me
I sought my Brother
I found all the three.

Therefore see a Brother in every other person in the world and we can achieve Universal Peace and Harmony.

I have great pleasure in inaugurating the Centenary celebrations of Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home and wish it perpetuity and prosperity.