

The Conversion is Violence Swami Dayananda Saraswati

The Citizen's Committee for Dharma Rakshana Sammelan, Chennai, convened a Seminar on "Violence to Hindu Heritage" on Saturday, the 17th of July, 1999, at Satguru Gnanananda Hall (Narada Gana Sabha), TTK Road, Chennai. Reproduced below is an excerpt of the Key Note Address delivered by

Pujya Sri Swami Dayananda Saraswati

Mahadbhyo NamaÅ

Friends,

I have been thinking on this topic for a long time. It is very clear to me, and perhaps to many of you, that there are two distinct religious traditions in the world. Some of them have a good following. Some others may not have.

One tradition does not believe in conversion. A Jewish person is born of a Jewish mother. A Zoroastrian is born of Zoroastrian parents. A Hindu is born of Hindu parents. And so too are the followers of Shintoism, Taoism and many other tribal religious groups all over the world. They are born to be the followers of their religions. In other words, they do not want to convert anybody. In India, when the Parsis, Zoroastrians, came as refugees, being driven from Iran, they came to Bombay, they were received and allowed to settle down in India. They were very faithful to their religion and they lived their religion. They did not cause any problem to others. Hindus accommodated them as even they accommodated the Christians, the Muslims and many other small tribal traditions. Our vision of God allows that. We generally accept various forms of worship. We accept many forms of prayers; one more really does not matter to us. In fact, some of our Hindu friends in their *pūjā* rooms have a picture of Jesus and they don't see anything wrong about it, nor do I feel anything wrong about it.

I would call the Jewish, the Zoroastrian and the Hindu traditions as non-aggressive traditions. For me, aggression is not just a physical one. It need not be the Kargil type. There are varieties of aggression. You can emotionally be aggressive. In the United States, it is a crime to be aggressive towards the children. Simple abuse is looked upon as aggression. Verbally you can be aggressive. Physically you can be aggressive. Economically you can be very aggressive. And the worst aggression, which I consider more than physical aggression, is cultural aggression or religious aggression.

Hurt is born of many sources. I am hurt if somebody encroaches upon my piece of land that is vacant, and the court supports that person and gives me the responsibility of finding a new house for him; it is an aggression. I get hurt. That he encroached upon my property is itself a good source of hurt. It is enough to hurt. That the law protects the one who encroached makes me more hurt. That hurt cannot be easily healed, because it leaves you

helpless and the helplessness is a source of great hurt. If somebody physically hurts you, of course, it is very well known that it is a hurt. It is treated as a crime and there is a penalty for it.

If I am emotionally abused, then, that also is a great hurt. For example, people in authority can abuse you. The employer can abuse you emotionally. Husband can abuse. Wife also can abuse the husband. In-laws can abuse. For these, I can seek some redress somewhere.

But the worst hurt, I would say, is the hurt of a religious person — whether what the person believes has a basis or not. It is not my domain of enquiry to say whether it has a basis or not. Each one is free to follow his or her religion. Everybody would have a certain belief system. Either the person is convinced or the person needs to be convinced. On the whole, he believes in the whole theology and follows that theology. He has the freedom to follow that theology. That is human freedom.

What is it that one is connected to as a religious person? He is connected not to any particular person here, who is the member of the contemporary society or his family. I am connected to my parents as their son. I cannot take myself as just a son; I am connected to other people too. I am son to my parents. I am also the father to my children and husband to my wife. I am uncle, cousin, neighbour, employer, employee and citizen. I have a number of hats to wear every day. As the religious 'I', I have different roles to play, day after day.

A son is related to a person outside. A brother is related to a person outside. A citizen is related to a country, a state. As a religious person, who am I related to?

Let us for the sake of convenience call that religious person a devotee. To whom is that devotee connected? Definitely, not to anyone here. I may be a religious son. I may be a religious father, religious brother, religious husband. In fact, if I am religious, the religious 'me' is going to pervade every role I play.

Basically, first and last, I am a religious person, if I am one. That religious person is the basic person not related to anything empirical. He is related, of course, to a force beyond $\frac{3}{4}$ whatever that force may be. One may say that force is God, and He is in heaven. Another one may say, He is in *Kailāśa*. Another may say, He is in *Vaikunṭha*. Another may say, He is in *Goloka Br̥ndāvan*. And another may say, He is elsewhere, elsewhere and elsewhere. But the person related to that force is the one whom we call a devotee, and that person has an altar. That person is not an empirical person in the sense he is the father or son or daughter. He is the basic person.

The hurt of a basic person is going to be a hurt, which is deep, and true. There is no healing power which can heal that hurt. That is the reason why any religious sentiment, if it is violated, in anyway, will produce a martyr. There is a martyr ready to be born in that basic person. And thus the religious sentiment seems to be the most sensitive.

Whenever a religious sentiment is hurt, you will find that, in the Indian press, there is a

complete black out, in terms of who did what. Even the names are not given. They will say one community fought with another community. I think it is correct because it prevents further escalation. We generally do guess work and say it must be this community or that community.

This is so because, that sentiment is very deep and has to be respected — whether it is a Muslim sentiment or a Christian sentiment or a Hindu sentiment or a Jewish sentiment. That sentiment has got to be respected. If that respect is not shown, then the State has to protect that sentiment. You tell me whether it is correct or not! The State has got the responsibility to protect the religious sentiment of all the people. That I consider is secularism.

In America, the religious sentiment of every individual is protected. You can go to the court and get an answer, if there is something wrong done to you as a religious person. There is justice. They respect. In fact, if you register an institution as a “religious church”, they take it as a religious church. You don’t require to submit even an income-tax return. Until there is a public complaint, they respect it. They give you the freedom. Here, if an institution is said to be “Hindu Religious”, there is no tax exemption for the donor. It is entirely a different thing altogether.

A religious sentiment has got to be respected by every one, whether he believes in my religion or not. Just because I don’t believe in your ideas, you can’t stand on my toes! If you don’t like my nose, it is your problem. I don’t have any problem. If my ideas and my belief systems are not acceptable to you, I give you the freedom not to accept them. But you don’t have any business to stand on my toes to hurt me in any manner. (Long cheers)

In fact I will fight for your freedom to think differently. You must be free enough to differ from me. *Bhagavān* has given us the faculty of thinking, of discrimination. We are not shy of enquiries. Our whole method of enquiry is to invite *pūrvapakṣa*—objections. We will create objections that cannot even be imagined by you and then answer them. We welcome them because we are not shy. We want to explore and find out what the truth is. But that is entirely a different thing. I am citing this much here — you have the freedom to differ from me; I have the freedom to differ from you. This is what I am telling you. This is the attitude of the non-aggressive traditions. On the other hand, the second category of religions, by their theologies, is committed to conversion.

Conversion is not only sanctioned by their theologies but also is practised by their followers. And that is their theology. They have got a right to have their own belief systems. But they don’t have a right to thrust them on you. They are free to believe that unless one is a Christian, one will not go to heaven. They have a system, a set of non-verifiable beliefs — *nitya-parokṣa* — on which they base their theology. (Applause)

Someone says, “I have been sent by God to save you”. I can also say the same thing. I will have ten people with me, because I can talk. If I don’t talk and be a mouni baba, still

there will be ten people. It is easy to get ten people anywhere, especially in India. I can say, “God sent me down to save all of you!”

Once, I went to Kilpauk Mental Hospital. Just for a visit, of course. (Laughter) It is my own imagination. It is not true. The Kilpauk Hospital is one of the most ancient mental hospitals in this country. Next one is in Agra. We have got the number one status in many things and this is one!

Early morning, all the crows had flown away. Nobody was there. I saw a man standing under a huge tree talking in loud voice, “Listen to me, I have come here, sent down by God, to save all of you. You please ask for forgiveness of your sins. Those who want to be saved, please raise your hands”. Then he said, “Thank you, thank you, thank you”. He thought that from the audience many people had raised their hands. But there was no audience. I was the only one standing behind him. Not even in front of him. I was naturally amused but I was not surprised, because I knew where I was. (Laughter)

As I was enjoying this situation, well, I heard a voice from the heaven. It said, “This is God speaking. I did not send him down. (Laughter) Don’t believe him”. When I looked up, there was one more fellow $\frac{3}{4}$ sitting on the tree. (Loud laughter and applause)

This is a non-verifiable belief as you can see. In addition most of these religions, when they talk of heaven, are promoters of tourism, really speaking. (Laughter) I am interested in making my life here, right now. If there is something you have got to say to make my life different, I am ready to listen to you. If there are some pairs of ears ready to listen to some other thing, let them have the freedom.

That there is a heaven is a non-verifiable belief. That, following this person, I will go to heaven, is another non-verifiable belief. That I will survive death, is a non-verifiable belief. There is nothing wrong in believing. But we have to understand that it is a non-verifiable belief. And having gone to heaven I will enjoy heaven, minus cricket match, is another non-verifiable belief. The unfortunate thing is another fellow says: “I am the latest and the last. Don’t follow that fellow; follow me”. (Laughter) That really confuses me. He has really no argument to give that he is the last. That I am the latest, is another non-verifiable belief and what is promised is again not verifiable.

I say, let those non-verifiable beliefs be there. I want them to have those beliefs, even though I will not advocate them. I want them to have freedom. Let them enjoy the freedom to have their beliefs. But what is the basis for that person to come and convert me? If you are convinced of something, you can try to convince me and not convert me. Did you ever notice a physics professor knocking at your door, asking for your time, so that he can talk to you about the particles? Never! If you want to learn physics, you have to go to him.

But here, every day, I am bothered. At the airport I am bothered, in the street corners I am bothered, at home, I am bothered. They want to save my soul!

I say this is not merely an intrusion; this is an aggression. There are varieties of intrusions. If the sound is too much outside, with all the loud speakers, well, it is an intrusion into my privacy. One can complain; not in India, of course! Here also we have got laws. It is not that we do not have laws. But we have 'in-laws' at right places. You know! (Laughter)

So nobody has any business to intrude into my privacy. You come and tell me that I have got to save my soul. But I don't look upon myself as condemned for you to come and save. We, really, don't have a word, in Sanskrit, equivalent for salvation. Because, 'salvation' means you have been condemned. Unless you are condemned, you need not be saved.

But this man comes and tells me that I am damned. I have to believe that first. Then he appoints himself to save me. This is very interesting. This is how the union leaders work. You create a problem and then appoint yourself as a leader to solve it. (Laughter) You become inevitable thereafter.

Here, on the panel, there are many *gurus*. Instead of the word 'salvation', we have a word '*mokṣa*'. Here different *gurus*. All of them talk about *mokṣa*. If you allow them to discuss, there will be a fight. (Laughter) But all of them have a common word and that common word is *mokṣa*. Is it not true? For every one of them, it is *mokṣa*.

Mokṣa is not a word which is equivalent to salvation. It is derived from the root *muc* = *mokṣane*. It means freedom from bondage. All of them use the word *mokṣa*. Even *Sāṅkhyas* use this word. *Vaiśeṣikas*, *Naiyāyikas* and all others use this word *mokṣa*. In fact, if *mokṣa* is not an end in view, it is not a school of thought to talk about. We all have a *mokṣa*. Even *Cārvākas*, the materialist, has his own concept of *mokṣa*. 'Body goes'; that is *mokṣa* for him. He says, *bhasmībhūtasya dehasya punarāgamanam kutaḥ*.

So the word *mokṣa* does not mean salvation. It refers to freedom from bondage. On the other hand the aggressive religions have this belief system that you are condemned and you have to be saved.

When I look into these theologies, what I see is very interesting. I need not say anything to prove that they are illogical. I have to only state what they say!

To be continued...

Compiled by Swamini Agamananda. This is the fourth of nine articles based on Pujya Swamiji's talks on the said subject matter.

“The more you understand yourself, the world and God, the more you are equipped to accept yourself. You cannot have inner leisure without an understanding of these three”. - Swami Dayananda Saraswati