

## 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

*Continuation from the previous month edition...*

*Mokṣa* is not a word which is equivalent to salvation. It is derived from the root *muc* = *mokṣaṇe*. 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!

I would like to illustrate this:

You must have heard about the 'Godfather'. You know the Mafia don is called the Godfather. He makes an offer that you cannot refuse.

He comes and tells you: "I am buying your house".

You may say, "I am not selling".

He says, "You are selling".

This type of approach was existing in Madras for some time, I am told. I hope it does not come back again. (Loud laughter and applause)

The fellow comes and tells: "I am buying your house!"

And you reply, "This is my house and I am not selling".

He says, "You are selling it and you are selling it at this price".

He decides the price also and then tells you, "I know exactly where your children are studying and when they are coming home also".

He threatens you and buys the house.

Thus, a Godfather is one who makes an offer that you cannot refuse.

Now, what about God, the Father? He is worse, I tell you, because he says either you fol-

low this person or I will condemn you eternally to hell. This is worse than the offer of the Mafia don! This too is an offer, which I cannot refuse. And it is worse.

In the other case at least, I can do something. But here he is not even visible. He is sitting in a safe place in Dubai! I cannot do anything about him. This is the non-verifiable belief on which their religion is based.

He has the right to follow that religion. Let him follow his religion. All that I say is he does not have anything much to offer to me. If he thinks he has something to offer to me, let him have the freedom to think so. But he has no freedom to intrude into my privacy.

He converts the Hindus by any means—by marriage, by some enticement or by some preaching which creates a fear. He talks about the goodies available in heaven—if you go to heaven, you will enjoy this and that. You will have beatitude and be saved. Otherwise, you will go to hell. It will be too hot etc. So, more out of fear of hell, one may choose to go to heaven.

He says and does all this to convert others to his religion. I say, this is wrong because if one Hindu or Jew or a Parsi is converted, and the other members of the family are not converted, they are all hurt. Even the converted one must be hurt underneath. He will be debating whether he was right in getting converted. It takes sometime for him to heal that. He is also hurt. All other members are definitely hurt. The community that comes to know of this conversion is hurt.

Please tell me, what is violence? What do you call this act that hurts? I call it violence. It is not ordinary violence. It is violence to the deepest person, the core person, in the human being. The religious person is the deepest. And if that person is hurt, I say, it is violence, rank and simple.

It is pure violence. And what does it do? It wipes out cultures.

I would like to go to Greece and see the live culture of the people who lived there. Where is that culture now? I have to imagine how they might have lived. I only see the huge monuments that are behind.

And like this, many other cultures have been totally destroyed. The native cultures of South America, North America and Australia have all been destroyed. What about the Hawaiian culture? Gone! All the tribal cultures in Africa have been destroyed. How many cultures, for the past two thousand years, are methodically destroyed? The humanity is the sufferer and is poorer for it.

We need all the cultures. And let the humanity enjoy the riches of the different cultures. It is a mosaic of cultures. Each one has got some beauty. With the destruction of religion comes the destruction of culture. When a new religion replaces the old, a culture is destroyed.

After converting, they may try to preserve the art forms like *Bharatanāṭyam* with the themes of the new religion. But without *Naṭarāja* where is *Bharatanāṭyam*, without de-

votion, where is *nr̥tyam*?

And therefore, the culture cannot be retained if the religion is destroyed. It is true with reference to all other cultures also. But definitely it is true with reference to our culture, because, you cannot separate culture from religion.

Our religion and culture are intertwined. The religion has gone into the fabric of the culture. When I say ‘Namaste’ to you, it is culture. It is religion. When you are throwing *raṅgoli*, it is religion; it is culture. There is a vision behind all that. Every form of culture is connected to religion and the religion itself is rooted in the spiritual wisdom. This is because we have a spiritual tradition.

And therefore there is no cultural form unconnected to religion. Destruction of culture is destruction of religion. Destruction of religion is destruction of culture. If this destruction is not violence, what is violence? I would like to know?

I say CONVERSION IS VIOLENCE. (Thunderous applause) It is rank violence. It is the deepest violence.

Not only that, in our *dharmā-sāstra*, it is said that if somebody forcefully occupies another’s piece of land, he is called an *ātatāyī*. For an *ātatāyī*, in our *sāstra*, there is capital punishment.

Occupying another’s land or another’s house or flat, against the will of the owner is a grave *pāpa* according to our *dharmā*. Many times, when the owner asks, “Give me back my house”, the tenant invariably replies, “I am sorry. I cannot give you the house, because my children are going to the school in this area. Please find a similar house for me. Then I will move”. When the owner finds such a house for him, the tenant says, “It is too far away for the children to go to school. Please find something in the same neighbourhood”. It means, “I would like to be here”. If you go to the court, twenty five years would be gone. But occupying another’s land is not *dharmā* as per our culture.

Another’s *kṣetra* is another’s *kṣetra*. It has nothing to do with me. *Kṣetra-apahāri* is an *ātatāyī*. The one who does arson or poisons somebody is an *ātatāyī*, and there is capital punishment for him. One who kidnaps another’s wife is an *ātatāyī* and there is capital punishment for him. All these actions deserve capital punishment. And if simply for occupation of a land of another, there is capital punishment, think of what would be the punishment for the destruction of a culture.

Suppose somebody is *āsastrapāṇi* and you kill him, it is not correct. *Karṇa* in the *Mahābhārata* uses this argument when he was completely unarmed. Talking to *Arjuna*, he said, I am an *āsastrapāṇi*; you should not hit me now. *Kṛṣṇa* had to tell him that *Karṇa* was not unarmed, but he was duly disarmed. There is a lot of difference between the two. *Kṛṣṇa* had to convince him.

So here, a Hindu is an *āsastrapāṇi*. A Jewish person is an *āsastrapāṇi*. A Buddhist is an

*aśastrapāṇi*. A Parsi is an *aśastrapāṇi*. That is, they are all non-aggressive. When you try to convert them, it is like hurting an *aśastrapāṇi*.

You cannot ask me to change the genius of my culture, the genius of my religion. It is the tradition of my culture and religion that I do not convert. It is not a situation where, you convert and I convert. And the one who has a better organisation is going to convert more number of people. It is not a percentage game of the market.

Here it is one sided. I cannot change the genius of my culture because I do not believe in conversion. I allow you to be a Christian. I allow you to be a Muslim. You be a Christian; you be a Muslim. You pray; it is fine for us. Even though I do not say “All religions lead to the same goal”. I don’t commit that ubiquitous mistake. (Cheers) I let you be a Muslim or a Christian.

But I give you the freedom. You please follow your religion. Don’t ask me to convert others to my religion like you, because I cannot convert. It is because I do not believe in it. My parents did not believe in it. My grand parents did not believe in it. My *ṛṣis* did not believe in it. And I don’t believe in it. You cannot change a culture in order to be on par with the others. It is against the genius of our culture.

It is not only our culture, which is like this; there are other cultures too. The number of the Parsis is dwindling. I loathe to see the destruction of the Parsi culture. They are harmless good people. But now they are the losers.

Jewish people are also the losers; their numbers are also dwindling. They are fighting to preserve their culture and religion. They are not converting. There is no evangelism in Judaism. There is no proselytization. There were never any inquisition. They were the sufferers; they were the victims of aggression, and planned aggression for ages.

And therefore, conversion is not merely violence against people; it is violence against people, who are committed to non-violence. (Prolonged cheers)

I don’t say Hindus do not fight. They can fight very well. You don’t tell me, “You put your house in order”. I will put my house in order, in my own time and in my own way.

If two brothers are fighting over an empty piece of land that is there next door, and a third man occupies the land saying, “Because you two are fighting, I am occupying this piece of land”, what is this logic? Some people advance this logic to me and say that we are all fighting and therefore they are in. We may be fighting amongst ourselves but we have to settle that among ourselves. That does not mean YOU can be violent. (Applause)

Somebody says we must have ecumenical dialogue. I had attended some of these dialogues. And I stopped attending them. Because I don’t see any use in it. On one such occasion, I said, “I can have a dialogue with a Christian, if he is ready to change, if convinced, after the dialogue”. Is he going to change his stand? Is he going to stop conversion? Don’t ask me to have a dialogue with you when you are standing on my toes. You just move away. Then we can have a dialogue.

The world religious conferences that are held are only meant to neutralise any protest against conversion. That is all. (Cheers) Because they don't want to stop conversion. So what is the use of saying, "We are all same. We are all going to the same God". It is something like saying, you know, your property is my property; my property is your property; your money is my money; my money is your money. Therefore, let my money be with me and let your money also be with me! (Laughter) So this is all wrong thinking.

All forms of prayer are valid. That I can accept. They don't accept that. I can accept because of my understanding of the *śāstra*. The Lord will understand, definitely, if I pray in Tamil or Latin or Greek. There is nothing Latin and Greek to the Lord. He will understand in whichever language the prayer is made. If I pray in *saṃskṛtam*, definitely, he will understand because it is His language anyway. (Laughter) I am very Catholic, understand! I don't have this kind of silly notions that it has got to be in one language and it has got to be in one form etc.

But we have certain special forms of rituals—Vedic rituals—which cannot be compromised with. Because we do not know how they can be different. We have no other pramāṇa for it. We do not have a means of knowledge to prove that this can be different.

They do not accept any of that. And they preach. It is not that they preach their own religion. They preach against other religions. And I consider that kind of preaching is violence. It breeds violence. I have a genius which does not permit me to convert. I cannot be asked to convert.

Therefore, the violence against me is a one-sided violence. It is a rank one-sided violence. They have gotten away with it for two thousand years. I want them to know that this is violence. Let them prove conversion is non-violence.

I am hurt and many others like me are hurt. Millions are hurt. There are so many other issues to be discussed with reference to conversion. But I have only one to discuss here. It is the violence that is allowed to be perpetrated against humanity, against cultures, against religions. That is the only issue here; there is no other issue. (Applause).

Violence is the only issue. Humanity should not stand with hands down and allow violence to be continued against a person who is non-violent.

There is another important fact in the Indian context, I tell you. I am a Swami committed to *ahiṃsā*. A *sannyāsi's* vow is *ahiṃsā*, really. It is nothing but *ahiṃsā*—*sarva-bhūtēbhyo abhayam*. I am taking this *sannyāsa* and offer a complete assurance to all the beings and to all the *devatās*, that I am not a competitor to any of them and that I will not hurt any of them — *kāyena vācā manasā*. That is *sannyāsa*. I am aware of this. I am a *sannyāsi*.

Now I sit in Rishikesh. These two people come to me. One is a Padiri and the other is a Moulvi. I invite both of them. They are religious people. I respect them. I give them

seats. They try to argue with me about something. Generally, I do not argue with them. You can argue with people whom you can convince. I don't want to argue with people who only want to convince me.

So I don't argue. I enjoy their company. I sit with them and talk to them. They pick up a quarrel with me. And then they begin to beat me. Please note that, this is just an imaginary tale. And there is a policeman standing there. They go on beating me black and blue. I implore to the policeman, "Please stop them. I am committed to *ahimsā*. I don't want to fight them back. You please do something". I appeal to him.

He says, "This is a matter between religious people. I am secular. (Prolonged cheers) I am supposed not to interfere". I appeal to him. Twice, thrice I request him. He does not respond to me positively. Then I think I have to protect myself. My *śāstra* will forgive me. Even though I am given to *ahimsā*, still I can protect myself.

And therefore I thought I will take care of myself. I am not just a weakling. I have got enough strength. And therefore, I can take care of these two fellows plus one more. I began to defend myself. The best form of defence is offence. That is what every husband does. And therefore, you defend yourself. (Laughter)

But the policeman stops me and says, "They are minorities. They have to be protected and you should not fight against them". (Prolonged cheers)

"Hey, policeman, you are supposed to protect me. You are the Government. You are the State. You are supposed to protect me. You cannot be like this.

This is the situation that prevails in India.

You have to change the whole blessed thing here. If the constitution has to be changed, let it be changed for good. (Prolonged cheers) My *dharma* is not violence. It does not allow conversion. And that *dharma* has to be protected. The State has to protect. If the protector does not protect, people should have a new protector to protect. That is all. (Prolonged cheers)

Conversion is violence. And it breeds violence. Don't convert because, by this, you are converting the non-violent to be violent. (Applause) You are doing something wrong. This is drastically wrong. This error has to be realised. The sooner it is corrected, the better it is for all of us  $\frac{3}{4}$  even for Christians and even for Muslims.

I want the Islamic culture to be there. I want the Christian culture to be there. I want the Hindu culture and every other culture to be there. Every culture is to be protected. That is secularism.

Thank you. (Prolonged cheers)

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