

V. R. Krishna Iyer
Satgamaya, Kochi

HINDU - MUSLIM CAMARADERIE - AN APPEAL

Two great Hindus who lived and died in this century and command respect even posthumously by the whole world are Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi. Vivekanand, made a critical assessment of his religion and challenged the Hindu faith even like agnostics and materialists would have done. He condemned the evils of the Hindu faith and insisted on the dialectics and dynamics of human history.

Harken to Vivekananda who opposed superstition and occult practices and urged:

I would rather see everyone of you rank atheists than superstitious fools, for the atheist is alive, and you can make something of him. But if superstition enters, the brain is gone, the brain is softening, degradation has seized upon the life ... Mystery-mongering and superstition are always signs of weakness.¹

Indeed, for Vivekananda religion is the manifestation of the *divinity already in man*. All religions reveal the Truth with different perceptions, emphases and at different stages. So it is that a unitive understanding and cosmic vision become the inalienable essence of Hinduism.

Hinduism, therefore, is not against any other religion but is all for freedom and fearlessness of the human spirit in its search for Truth; and Truth itself has a materialist and a spiritual dimension. That is why Vivekananda was able to assert as a militant Hindu:

"The peasant, the shoe makers, the sweeper, and such other lower classes of India have much greater capacity for work and

1. Jawaharlal Nehru; Discovery of India - Page 339.

self-reliance than you. They have been silently working through long ages, and producing the entire wealth of the land, without a word of complaint. Very soon they will get above you in position. You have so long oppressed these forbearing masses; now is the time for their retribution . . .²

But times have changed. The lower classes are gradually awakening to this fact and making a united front against this, determined to exact their legitimate dues. The masses of Europe and America have been the first to awaken and have already begun the fight. Signs of this awakening have shown themselves in India too, as is evident from the number of strikes among the lower classes now-a-days. The upper classes will no longer be able to repress the lower, try they ever so much.³

I consider that the great national sin is the neglect of the masses, and that is one of the causes of our downfall. No amount of politics would be of any avail until the masses in India are once more well educated, well fed and well cared for. They pay for our education, they build our temples, but in return they get kicks. They are practically our slaves. If we want to regenerate India, we must work for them.⁴

In short, he urged in rage for *dalit* raj.

On whose side are you? On the side of the millions of down-trodden, exploited, uneducated, superstitious, ignorant or on the side of the exploiting few?⁵

Inspirational and prophetic was Vivekananda when he addressed the working class:

Our proletariat are doing their duty . . . is there no heroism in it? Many turn out to be heroes, when they have some great task to perform . . . and it is you who are actually doing this, ye ever trampled upon labouring classes of India; I bow to you.⁶

2. Binoy K Roy: "Political Views of Vivekananda" - 1979 Edn. - Page 32-33.

3. Ibid. Page 33.

4. Ibid. Page 28, 29.

5. Ibid. Page 29.

6. Ibid. Page 34.

We thus grasp the Hindu fundamental, stripped of scriptural verbiage and tantric trickery, of sublime humanism, of compassionate identity with Creation.

Mahatma Gandhi also was a devout Hindu but not a fundamentalist fanatic. For him too God was Truth and Truth was God. Therefore, all religions had Truth, different facets of Truth and were to be revered by those who search for the perennial philosophy of 'Thou art That'. Thus every true Hindu finds unity of Advaita and at the same respects every other religion as holding different dimensions of divinity. It is in this vistic spirit that Vivekananda asserted that practical Advaita was found in Islam which believed in world brotherhood. In his letter to a Muslim friend he wrote :

My dear Friend,

I appreciate your letter very much and am extremely happy to learn that the Lord is silently preparing wonderful things for our motherland.

Whether we call it Vedantism or any ism, the truth is that Advaitism is the last word of religion and thought and the only position from which one can look upon all religions and sects with love. I believe it is the religion of the future enlightened humanity. The Hindus may get the credit of arriving at it earlier than other races, they being an older race than either the Hebrew or the Arab; yet practical Advaitism, which looks upon and behaves to all mankind as one's own soul, was never developed among the Hindus universally.

On the other hand, my experience is that if ever any religion approached to this equality in an appreciable manner, it is Islam and Islam alone.

Therefore I am firmly persuaded that without the help of practical Islam, theories of Vedantism, however fine and wonderful they may be, are entirely valueless to the vast mass of mankind. We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran;

yet this has to be done by harmonising the Vedas, the Bible, and the Koran. Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION, which is Oneness, so that each may choose the path that suits him best.

For our own motherland a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam - Vedanta brain and Islam body - is the only hope.

I see in my mind's eye the future perfect India rising out of this chaos and strife, glorious and invincible, with Vedanta brain and Islam body.

Ever praying that the Lord may make of you a great instrument for the help of mankind, and especially of our poor, poor motherland.

Yours with love,

Vivekananda⁷

Over the centuries Hindus and Muslims have lived together in this land of Bharat and a confluence of cultures has been evolved.

My conclusion is that a study of the history of India, with divi-
nised and illumined objectivity, will teach us that the Hindu -
Muslim divide is artificial and brittle and diverse cultures have flour-
ished in this land in loving embrace although marred once in a way
by the folly of some ruler or the reprisal of some community. The root
enemy of Hinduism and Islam is the terrorist, monopolist boast, mod-
ernised vulgarity, mobbist, medievalist violence and pleasure - crazy
technology which undermines our moral - spiritual values.

A perceptive Pakistani with profound insights who works as a
professor in the Cambridge University, has recently observed:

Whose fault is it? Both the Hindu majority and the Muslim
minority accuse each other. Both are partly to blame: the
Hindu majority for not understanding the deep sense of in-
security among the Muslims and the Muslims for failing to

7. Complete Works of Vivekananda, Vol., VI, Pages 416-417.

come to terms with their identity and place in modern India. Both sides must make their peace: the present state of tension and rupture cannot last. That is the lesson history teaches us; even to those who would steal it from under our very noses.

Unless the central government is prepared to take vigorous steps, unless the majority parties are prepared to reach out, unless the Indians of vision and courage speak out, unless the Muslim community itself is aware of how far it has fallen behind in education, economic development and public esteem and is prepared to completely change its attitudes and spirit, the gaps will continue to widen. As a result the Muslims will continue to sink deeper into the pools of ghetto-like existence which will make integration unlikely and eventual reconciliation difficult.

Bazaar sociology does not stop with the past; it feeds into the writing and perception of modern history also. In India, if Muslim rulers are depicted in the stereotype as alien invaders, mainly drunk and destroying temples, in Pakistan the Hindu past simply does not exist. Hindus are also dismissed as stereotypes, as cowardly and mean. History only begins in the seventh century after the advent of Islam and the Muslim invasion of Sind shortly afterwards; the impressive and pre-Islamic civilizations of Mohenjodaro, Harrapa and Taxila are hastily brushed over or altogether ignored.⁸

Let me reflect over another aspect of Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and other great religions. What we fail to notice is the glory of values which bind all these faiths together into the unity of humanity. While we are fascinated by this fundamental unity, the real danger to all the three great religions is the moral crisis, the spiritual collapse, the false chase of materialism as the ultimate in life which makes mankind, under its high-tech post-modernist pressure, a lunatic terrorist planet. It is unfortunate that the great country, the United States, with all its astonishing achievements in science and technology, is also a menace to the Hindu and Islamic faiths because it's a neurotic appetite creeps into the countries of the world.

8. "History To-day" - Vol. 43 - January '93 - Page 12 - 13.

More is better – more money, more sex, more property. It is a society with too much freedom, too many expectations. Suicide, drug abuse, depression, divorce, incest, rape and venereal diseases – herpes last year, AIDS this year are the indices, signs of insatiable self-indulgence. People appear to live only to enjoy sex and gorge food. In this direction a vital civilization has gone astray, its exuberance dissipated, its social life a parody of its phallus and palate obsessions.⁹

The grave menace must bring Hinduism and Islam together to resist the cultural Operation Downfall.

My deepest dread is of the mutual operational impact of communalism and neo-colonialism on the unity and fraternity of India, that is Bharat, and its very survival as a free country with territorial, political cohesion.

In a penultimate part let me cite the Mahatma :

My experience of all India tells me that the Hindus and the Muslims know how to live at peace among themselves. I decline to believe that people have said goodbye to their senses so as to make it impossible to live at peace with each other, as they had done for generations.

Religions are different roads converging on the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads, so long as we reach the same goal? I have striven for Hindu-Muslim unity because India cannot live free without it. We would both deny God if we considered one another as natural enemies.

My object is clear. Let us all fight back the triple menaces of communalism, colonialism, and post-modernist carnal consumerism creeping into the vein of the humanity.

9. AKBAR S. AHMED: "Discovering Islam" – Vanguard Books (Pvt.) Ltd., Lahore – P. 43-44.