

SPIRITUAL CONFERENCE
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Lama Doboomb Tulku

Sree Narayana Guru was an embodiment of all virtues, values and rare qualities. He was a mystic, a teacher, a philosopher, a visionary, a rationalist, a saint, a social reformer, a great humanist and a poet, all blended into one.

This passage I just read is from the Sri V. V. Chandran's article entitled "Social revolution through temples" published in a book called the legacy of Sree Narayana Guru.

I would like to restrict my talk today to only two points:

The first is on Caste...

Sree Narayana Guru's contribution towards a eradication of social evil called caste system is tremendous. He has enthused self-respect among the low caste people.

He challenged the monopoly of the high caste people over temples and their divine right to officiate as priests, by creating a parallel system of temples. He trained and appointed low caste people as priests. He established the first such temple in Kerala in 1888.

On the wall of the temple it was written, "Here is a model abode, where men live like brothers, bereft of prejudices of caste or the rancour of religious differences".

As a Buddhist monk, I firmly believe that there is only one race, that is human race; Human beings have different colours of skin, different sizes of nose, different lengths of ear flap etc. but if you pierce thin skin of any human being, only red blood comes out, not blue or green ones. So, they all have one colour of blood.

There is only one caste, there are categories of educated or uneducated, rich and poor etc. but nobody is born as educated; and poor can become rich and rich can become poor. All the people have a potential of becoming intelligent, potential of becoming prosperous, potential of becoming enlightened.

The founder of Buddhism, Gautama the Buddha was perhaps the first revolutionary thinker in the world in his time. He said that in my system, caste is inconsequential but act is the criterion deciding the real level of a person.

In Buddha's immediate circle of disciples, there were hundreds of individuals belonging to what was considered those times as lower social category. One of the three editors who collected and edited the Buddha's words and were amongst seven successors was Upagupta who belonged to category of barber, and another monk, Chunda came from iron smith category.

My second point is on inter-religious harmony or acceptance of others' religions.

The Guru organised the first-ever All Religions Conference in Asia and only the second in the world after the first Parliament of the World's Religions held in Chicago USA, in Alwaye in 1924. Swami Vivekananda delivered his famous speech by saying "Brothers and Sisters, Our Gurudev made the essential message at the Alwaye "We meet here not to argue and win but to know and be known".

His Holiness the Dalai Lama always points out that all the religions of the world are basically methods for turning the living beings towards positive and creative ways. Each religion has its own particular characteristics, and therefore it is important for all of us to learn from each other.

Sree Narayana Guru said...

"Religion is a matter of the mind. Nobody should say my religion is true; all other religions are false. There is truth in every religion. All of them have been established with good intentions. Let everybody study and know all religions with balanced mind, balanced devotion and exchange the knowledge thus acquired among each other with love and affection. Then, people will understand that competition is not because of religion but because of arrogance... To end these religious rivalries, all of us should study and know all religions. The need of India today is liberation from rivalry and conflicts between castes and religions."

The purpose of religion is to guide us towards harmony and high realisation. There is no point to be obsessed by a religion, just as after crossing the river by boat you go ahead on your way; you don't cling to the boat saying that is my boat.

Swami Vivekananda says "We want to lead humankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Quran...we must learn that religions are but varied expressions of The Religion, which is Oneness, so that each may choose the path that suits him best."

What is the essential of religion? Religion exists in the temple of our mind; external temples are there only to help us for activating the positive qualities of our mind. The external traditions and practices which sometimes look so glamorous and sometimes bizarre are not essential, what is important for us is to understand and follow the basic messages of the main teachers of the religions.

As the Guru became the undisputed leader and spiritual preceptor of the downtrodden people, his followers wanted to go on an annual pilgrimage to his abode. They felt that all others have their holy places to go: the Hindus have Kashi, the Muslims have Mecca and Madina, the Christians have Jerusalem, and only the untouchables of India have no such place to go. They wanted to have a special place, and why not? They decided to make their Guru's abode -Sivagiri- their holy land.

The Guru counted the goals of the pilgrimage

I will mention just three goals. They are the promotion of:

- *Education
- *Cleanliness
- *Handicrafts

Near the Aruvippuram temple, the Guru inscribed,
"Devoid of the dividing walls of caste and race,
or hatred of rival faith, we all live here in brotherhood"

The common enemy of all religious disciplines, the target of all the moral precepts laid down by the great teachers of mankind, is selfish instinct of mind. It is again ignorance that leads to selfishness, anger and passion, which lie at the root of all the troubles of man and the world. The great teachers wanted to wean their followers away from the path of negative deeds caused by ignorance, and to introduce them to the path of righteousness.

Before I conclude my speech, let me repeat the two quotations I cited above.

The first quotation: "We meet here not to argue and win but to know and be known". This is what Guru said at the first-ever All Religions Conference in Asia he organised in a place called Alwaye in 1924. This in my opinion gives the essential message for inter-religious harmony.

The second quotation is "Here is a model abode, where men live like brothers, bereft of prejudices of caste or the rancour of religious differences". In these days it is extremely difficult to find model abode or model conduct. Wherever we go, things are either too glamorous or too bizarre.

This occasion, this place, this gathering, the warm reception is very inspiring to me. I thank you all and specially Swamiji.