

Communalism and Love at Loggerheads

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"Fr. Varghese, have you written anything about communalism?" a well known writer and critic Dr. Kanubhai Jani asked me. Then he added, "Communalism is the curse of our country." Communalism as I understand is a kind of religious fanaticism, say terrorism inspired by blind religious faith. In other words, communalism is the absence of true faith expressed in its cruelest form. So I told my friend Kanubhai, "I have not written anything on communalism but I have written much about love. I still continue to write about love. For, where there is true love, there is no possibility of communalism to exist."

As I see it, there are three reasons for communalism or rather there are three forces at work behind communalism. First, ignorance of one's own religion and of the religions of others. Second, prejudices, ignorance and misunderstanding and third, absence of genuine love, absence of real love-experience.

First, ignorance of one's own and others' religions. I see that often deeply religious persons are also ignorant about their own religion and of other people's religions. This ignorance is seen also in educated and well placed persons.

Recently I read two articles holding mutually opposing and contradictory views about religion. One view says that there is only one religion and that religion is the eternal Hindu religion. All others are religious sects or cults. Opposing this view another writer says that Hinduism is no religion in its true sense but a social way of life; it is a culture; it is a way of life. We see that those upholding Hinduism believe in God. Still even those who deny the existence of God and do not follow any religion are also considered Hindus or followers of Hindu religion!

All people know in the heart of hearts that there is a power beyond oneself. People may call this power God, Allah or Bhagavan. Most people accept that there is one creator of all who made us all. So we say in Hindi "Sabka Malik Ek" meaning "the Lord of all is One."

We can say only one thing for certain about the Divine Power or Bhagavan. That is to say, we do not know anything definitely about God. Bible says that no one has seen God. So St. Paul says, Jesus Christ is the true image of God (Col, 1, 15). All our talks about God are expressed in our limited human language. They are the expression of human ideas and human beliefs. All our talks about God are just signs pointing to God.

The people who understand this much about God and religions will have only one response: loving respect both for one's own religion and for the other religions and their followers. When we truly love and respect one's own religion and the religion of other people there will be no sign of communalism and religious terrorism in our midst.

But unfortunately religious fanatic do not understand this. So they hate other religion and their followers and see them as enemies! We see deep rooted prejudices and ignorance in these types of people.

Second, to understand this attitude of ignorance and prejudices of people let me quote an author-journalist from Mumbai. He writes, "The Christian missionaries do not wish to mingle with the local (Indian) culture while they use words about adoring Jesus Christ in the place Ma Amba in traditional Navratri garbha dances and build church structures with (Hindu) temple-like domes".

The well known (prabudh) writer of such things displays both his ignorance of Christian religion and also his communal mind set. Christianity is a world religion. But there is so to say no culture of its own. There is no monopoly of church architecture. Rig-Veda says, let all good and beneficial ideas and thoughts come from all directions. The Christian religions follow this saying of Rig-Veda and accept and lives local culture as its own culture and way of living. So in India Christians accepts the temple architecture and builds churches which may look like temples. But in Japan the Christians there build their churches like pagodas, god's abode of the Japanese people. There is nothing new or exceptional in it.

I have been privileged to be elected a council member of the International Catholic Union of Press (UCIP) for twenty four years and to participate council meetings, World Congresses and seminars visiting 37 countries covering all continents. Everywhere I have seen that the Christian culture is indeed the culture and the language of the country in which the Christians live their faith. So as the Mumbai writer says, there is no question of abandoning or robbing any one culture.

Recently a man asked me, "Fr. Varghese, to accept Christian religion do I have to eat meat?" I told him, "Here in Ahmedabad Bishop Thomas Macwan is strictly vegetarian. Eating meat and Christian religion are not directly related."

Third, one main reason for communalism is the absence of love. The people who have love, selfless love in their hearts are able to love all people. But those who are unable to love others genuinely and selflessly have no genuine experience of love. They experience emptiness in their hearts.

Such hearts are fertile ground for various 'ism's like nationalism, fanaticism and communalism. When these 'ism's take fanatical forms the concern persons are led to fanaticism and they become dangerous to the society and nation. For, they are completely in the grip of their 'ism'. They are the slaves of their 'ism'. Such fanatical people are ever ready to give their lives to their fanatical beliefs. They are the martyrs or saints to the people who are fanatic in their 'ism'. But for the rest of the people the so called martyrs or saints are terrorists, criminals and fanatics!

Take the example of Swami Aseemanand. Swami Aseemanand was once a promising young man by name Jiten Chaterji. The writer from Mumbai who keeps away from truth and morality writes, "The made-in-Italy Government of Sonia Gandhi implicated Swami Aseemanand and in a bomb explosion case and arrested him. The crime against Swami Aseemanand is not proved yet. From 19, November 2010 he is in jail till today".

Swami Aseemanand established "Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram" in Dangs and was running it for many years. Many tribal people in Dangs know him as a hard core Hindutva fanatic. But the

writer portrays a different picture of the Swami in his article. "After the missionaries have converted the tribal people of Dangs Swami Aseemanand started a movement to bring the tribals back to Hindu Religion. He was successful in bring back 30,000 people in Hinduism".

Is it possible that the writer who wrote these things about Swami Aseemanand does not know the true facts about the Swami? According to reports in newspapers and magazines five crimes of terrorist attacks are registered against Swami Aseemanand. In these five terrorist attacks 119 people have died. A journalist Leena Geeta Raghunath wrote in "The Caravan" dated February 1, 2014: "Today Aseemanand is perhaps the most prominent face of Hindu extremist terrorism".

According to the information which Leena Geeta Raghunath got by meeting personally Swami Aseemanand twice in December 2010 and in January 2011 and Swami Aseemanand voluntarily acknowledged his crimes in Ambala and Delhi courts. In the court confession Swami Aseemanand denied any force and torture by the police. When CBI took over the case Swami Aseemanand decided that it was the appropriate time to own up all crimes. So Swami Aseemanand clearly told Leena Geeta Raghunath: "I know that for this (confession of crimes) it is possible that I get capital punishment. But come what may, I am an old man".

Swami Aseemanand had refused to take the help of any advocate before owning up his crimes in the court. According to new reports, Swami was moved to make the confession seeing the suffering of an innocent young Muslim youth accused and punished for the terrorist attack for which the Swami Aseemanand himself was responsible.

But after his confessional statement was known world-wide on 28 March 2014 he took help of advocate of Sangh Praivar and on the next day he made it known that under torture and force he acknowledged his crimes!

Leena Geeta Raghunath has written that during her interview with Swami Aseemanand there were no signs of any force or torture on him. But the Swami Aseemanand had acknowledged before journalist for his terrorist activities he had the approval of top office-bearers of Sangh Parivar!

This is only the story of Hindutva extremism. But I believe that, when any 'ism' or ideas has recourse to extremism, man is led to terrorism. Any extreme form of ideas or 'ism' results in terrorism. History has witnessed such terrorism also in Islam and Christian religions. But terrorism has no real religion. No humanity. No true spirituality. No genuine love. There is only terrorism. This terrorism is the enemy of man. The enemy of humanity.