

12. Amrithasya Puthraah

THE Hindu Samaaj, Rajahmundry, was established, as its President told us now, in 1903. So this can be considered the *Shashtiabda Puurthi Celebration* of this institution, which means the celebration of its attaining the sixtieth year of its life. It is the custom to have such celebrations a little time after the completion of the period, not on the exact date on which the period is completed. Therefore, this conforms to that custom also.

This rite is named a *Shaanthi* (Pacification), the attainment of an equipoise, of calm. At sixty the senses have lost their wildness and waywardness, they have become powerless to drag the individual into ruin. That is believed to be just the time to fix one's mind on God and start on the course one has missed in the confusion of material pursuits.

The Samaaj too has wandered far from the path it was set on; it was a premier institution in this town of many institutions for the encouragement and promotion of *Sanaathana Dharma*, the Eternal Religion. It held competitions in the recitation and interpretations of the Bhagavadh Geetha, the authoritative book on that *Dharma*, and it distributed copies of the Geetha itself to hundreds of high school students, just when they were stepping out of their schools into the larger world. I know that it took a leading role in the task of spreading the doctrines of *Sanaathana Dharma*.

Real form of Devotion is Divine Love

Now, owing to causes like the apathy of the people, the attractions of more showy forms of activity, and the drying up of funds for rewarding students, scholars and Pandiths, this Samaaj has been reduced to a recreation centre for office-goers and others: re-creation, not of the ideals for which India stood in the past and stands at present, but of the activity and liveliness of the body and the nerves and the mind. This Samaaj has now to take up the responsibility again, for it is as important now, as it was sixty years ago. For such service the demand is continuous; it can never become out-of-date, or superfluous. If one looks around and observes the fall in standards, the need is even greater today. This is the reason, perhaps, why the President came to Me with a prayer to bless the Samaaj and to speak to you on the work you have to do.

Devotion to God is not to be calculated on the basis of the institutions one has started or helped, the temples one has built or renovated, the donations one has given away, nor does it depend on the number of times one has written the Name of the Lord or on the time and energy one has spent in the worship of the Lord. These are not vital at all, no, not even secondary. Devotion is Divine Love, unsullied by any tinge of desire for the benefit that flows from it or the fruit or consequence of that love. It is love that knows no particular reason for its manifestation. It is of the nature of the love of the soul for the Oversoul; the river for the sea; the creeper for the tree, the star for the sky, the spring for the cliff down which it flows. It is sweet, in bad times as well as good. It is not like pepper or salt with which you savour your dishes; it is the very bread and butter, the essential substance itself. It is not the pickle, which only lends a twang to the tongue and helps you to consume a little more of the food. It is an unchanging attitude, a desirable bent of the mind, standing steady through joy and grief. For the Divine Bliss comes through knowledge of the Self; the Devotee is the true witness.

***Dharma* is a means of living**

Vaaranaasi Subrahmanya Shaasthry said now that Yudhishtira, the eldest of the Paandava Brothers, had that devotion and so, he did not falter even an inch from his faith when in exile; nor did he lose his head, when he won back his throne. Others like Dhuryodhana used *Dharma* as a handy excuse to escape the evil consequences of their acts. Righteousness is not to be treated as a means of escape; it is a means of living. Never once did Dhuryodhana observe the principles of righteousness towards the Paandava Brothers; at last, he had to face the inevitable doom, when Bheema challenged him for the duel which was to lay him low. At that moment, the author of the deceitful gambling game, the house of lac which was set on fire, the insult heaped on the honoured Queen, the slaughterer of Abhimanyu by a pack of ferocious foes who fell upon him, the dark designer of all these iniquities, took refuge in *Dharma* and started quoting texts.

Wavering and indecision affect you in the realm of *Dharma* when you are not stabilised in the knowledge of the Self, which gives you a correct sense of proportion and also a sense of direction and achievement. That is why the Geetha lays so much emphasis on the necessity to know both the *kshethra* and the *kshethrajna* (the field of knowledge and the Knower of that Field). Know both, and then, you are entitled to the title, *Amrithasya Puthraah*: "Children of Immortality." Other titles are burdens on the head that wears them. Of what benefit are they, those that vanish in a whiff, and do not deceive any one, for more than a few years?

The grandest things in Creation

Through devotion to God alone can that knowledge be attained. *Bhakthi* purifies the heart, elevates the feelings and universalises the vision. It also brings down the Grace of God; for, the clouds have to come over the fields and pour rain; the plants cannot rise up to drink the life-giving fluid. The mother has to bend to the cradle to fondle the child. *Bhakthi* has that power, to bring the Lord down. Once Naaradha was asked to name the most noteworthy among the things of the world. He answered that the earth was the biggest. But, he was told water has occupied three-fourths of the earth; it threatens to swallow up the balance too, bit by bit. So, water, he had to agree, was more powerful. However, water too was drunk up by the sage Agasthya and the oceans were rendered dry by him, and he, in turn is now just a star in the sky! Is the sky the biggest, then? No. For, it was covered by one single foot of the *Vaamana-avathaara* of the Lord (Vishnu's Incarnation as *Vaamana*, the Dwarf). And, the Lord? O, He enters the hearts of the devotees and resides there. So, Naaradha had to conclude that the hearts of devotees are the grandest things in Creation!

That is why I condemn all signs of weakness and call the sense of weakness itself a sin, an unpardonable sin. · it is an insult to the heritage of Immortality, the title *Amrithasya Puthraah*, which mankind deserves and must earn. Weakness, vacillation, despair, all these bring dishonour on Him who conferred on you the honour of child of Immortality; you are *Bhala-swaruupa* (of the Nature of Strength). Whenever accosted, you must declare yourself so, and not otherwise. Do not bend and cringe and barter your self-respect. Do not believe that you are this little lump of body. You are the indestructible, immortal *Aathma*, of the same nature as the Absolute Reality, *Brahman* itself.

The four resolutions to be made by everyone

Have gratitude to the Creator who poured into you the nectar that ensures immortality; He requires you to stand firm in the face of joy and grief. Even animals exhibit gratitude; not only

the pet animals, but wild ones, like the lion. Have you not heard the story of the lion suffering from a wound in the foot? A slave who was fleeing through the forest saw it and when he approached it with sympathy, the lion put out its foot. He then slowly pulled out the thorn that had caused all that pain and left the place, only to be arrested later and taken to Rome. There, they decided to throw him into the amphitheatre and let loose upon him a lion that had been recently captured. It was, however, the same lion which the slave had saved and so, its gratitude did not allow it to harm its saviour. Be grateful to the Lord for endowing you with powers of discrimination, of detachment, of evaluation.

Make four resolutions about your life hereafter :

- (1) Purity: Desist from wicked thoughts, bad habits, low activities that weaken your self-respect
- (2) Service: Serve others for they are the reflections of the same entity of which you are yourself another reflection. No one of you has any authenticity, except with reference to the One Original.
- (3) Mutuality: Feel always kinship with all creation. See the same current flowing through all the objects in the Universe.
- (4) Truth : Do not deceive yourself or others, by distorting your experience.

Respect our ancient culture

The Hindu Samaaj must set about doing the duty for which it was started, the revival in the minds of the educated classes and the students, of respect and attachment for our ancient culture. Do not be led away by the cynicism of critics; that should serve only to encourage you. There was once an incident in train that was going over the Godaavari bridge. A poor ryot searched for a naya paisa coin and he threw it into the river for he felt it as a sacred duty to honour the holy river. Immediately a fellow-traveller sitting comfortably in the corner got wild. He condemned the act as silly superstition and economic waste. "This is why this country is poor and powerless," he said, puffing his cigarette, as he poured out his wrath against the custom of throwing coins into the rivers. The ryot did not keep quiet. He said, "Look here, my man! I pass over this bridge perhaps once a year or so; I lose only one naya paisa at a time; I derive so much joy and satisfaction by that little sacrifice; but, pray, tell me, what benefit and economic gain you derive from this constant smoking which you are indulging in. The smoke you puff into the air poisons the atmosphere for all of us; it harms your health, it spoils the health of others; it wastes your money; it is a *Rajasik* habit (of passion and restless activity), which increases your pride and makes you nervous and unstable."

Examine the faults that may lie dormant in you and try to get rid of them. Do not merely declaim from platforms the excellence of such qualities as charity, Service, sympathy, equality, secularism, etc. Descend and practise a few sincerely. When your neighbour is in the throes of a serious illness, do not rest content with the idea that you are happily free. No one is free if even one is bound. Remember that the food you give to each living being reaches God Himself, the service you do to any one being fills God with joy.

Do not vulgarise devotion

Now, all worship and rituals are for *bhakti* only, for the better comfort and more luxurious consumption of the worshipper himself. Devotion has been vulgarised into a business deal. I shall give you so much, provided you give me so much in return. If that shrine promises more, this shrine is given up; if even there, you do not get quick returns, somewhere else, some other

God might be more profitable. That is the way in which worldly men wander about in their panicky rounds. "If I stand in the midst of others, God will not notice me; so, I must stand alone and shout, to attract His attention. Otherwise, He might ignore me," they argue and behave foolishly. Hold fast to the Ideal; do not try to degrade the Almighty to suit your limited vision. Rise up, strengthen your detachment, establish yourselves in discrimination. Then, your goal is brought near.

Rajahmundry, Hindu Samaaj, 25-2-1964